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Rock of Ages / Cleft For Me:

An Analysis of Journeys in Christian Feminism

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Thesis submitted to fulfill the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Addendum

P 4 para 3, line
P 8 line 6: "compared" for "relevantise"
P 12 para 1, line 6 "As interviews unfolded, respondents indicated that even women's inner selves have been imposed upon and regarded as 'its' of male objectivity. Men have dictated beliefs and set axioms of spirituality" for "As interviews unfolded, respondents indicated that even women's inner selves have been imposed upon as 'its' of male objectivity, as men have dictated beliefs and set axioms of spirituality (Daly, 1975; 1979; Hageman, 1974)."
P 13 para 2 line 7 insert "this" after "beyond"
P 12 para 2, line 8 quotation mark after "me" delete after "(p.173)"
P 13 para 2, line 17 "more authentic" for "truer"
P 14 para 3, line 3 delete "corporate"
P 15 para 1, line 21 omit the words "even enlightened"; para 2 after "void" insert "of written material".
P 16 para 2, line 7 after the word "critiqued" add "traditional Christian tenets and hermeneutics"; line 8 "methods" for "method"
P 18 para 2, line 8 insert the word "focuses" after "These"
P 19 para 2, line 3 "1949" for "1953"
P 20 line 24: "render women inferior" for "inferiorise women"
P 20 para 3, line 2 'problematic" for "problemantec"
P 21 para 2, line 8 delete "coping"
P 25 para 1, line 4 insert full stop; para 3, line 11 insert "women as victims of" before "evil and suffering."
P 27 para 2, line 10 "standpoint" insert (Fiorenza, 1983; 1993; 1995; Ruether, 1977; 1990; Trible, 1973)
P 29 para 1, line 6 delete quotation mark after "Fiorenza"
P 30 line 31: "render the cross event relevant" for "relevantise the cross event"
P 30 line 12: "similarly, talks about the 'scandal of particularity', that is, the hermeneutics that teach Jesus within a particular gender, culture and time, as the only God-human. She suggests a faith without models." for "on the other hand, talks about 'the scandal of particularity', that is, regarding Jesus as the only God-human and advocates a faith without models."
P 32 para 1, line 1 insert the words "and is" after "traditions"; para 2 line 6 after "tradition" insert (Johnson, E. A., 1996)
P 34 para 1, line 4 full stop after "Sophia"; "She sometimes has male and white, middle-class overlays (pp.77-80)" for "as sometimes male and white middle-class feminist defined (pp.77-80)."
P 34 para 2, line 20 delete quotation mark after "feminist"
P 35 para 1, line 8 after "role" insert "in the faith journeys of respondents"
P 35 line 3: "rendering the Bible relevant" for "relevantising the Bible"
P 35 para 4, line 1 insert comma after "that"
P 36 para 1, line 12 insert "a" after "for"

P 36 para 3, line 4 "As mentioned above, and in similar mode to Blumenthal (1993), some theorists have connected texts to women's social struggles." for "Some theorists have connected texts to women's social struggles in similar mode to Blumenthal (1993) as mentioned above."
P 37 para 2, line 1 after "approaches" insert "to new hermeneutics"
P 40 para 1, line 1 "Feminists" for "Feminist"
P 41 para 1, line 3 "ekklesia" for "ekklsia"
P 41 para 2, line 4 Footnote needed, to read, "The Sheffield Report is a record of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order consultation held in Sheffield, England in the summer of 1981."
P 41 para 2, line 12 insert "a" after "identifies"
P 41 para 3, line 5 "positions" for "position"
P 42 para 1, line 1 "concentrates" for "majors"
P 42 para 2, line 6 "the church's" for "church"
P 42 para 3, line 4 "ecclesiastical" for "ecclesiastic"
P 42 para 1, line 1: "concentrates" for "majors"
P 43 para 2 after "denominations" insert "in this respect"
P 43 para 3, line 1 after "topic" insert "of women's ordination"
P 46 para 1, line 7 "the essential impact of women's ordination" for "its essential impact"
P 46 para 2, line 4 "(see Gray & McPhillips, 2001)" for "(see McPhillips, 2001)"
P 46 para 2, line 7 delete comma after the word "dialogue"
P 47 para 2, line 3 insert "of" after "core"
P 47 para 2, line 4 insert "a" after "refigure"
P 48 para 3, line 13 after "'post-Christian feminist.'" insert "Daly's later memoir, *Outercourse: the Bedazzling Voyage* (1993) is a further work that plots her specific journey as a 'voyage'."
P 49 para 2, line 1 after "researchers" insert "The Australian Women-Church Journal has made a significant contribution to this area."
P 50 para 2, line 3 insert "is" after "aim"
P 53 para 3, line 4 after "respondents" insert "in this study"
P 55 para 3, line 3 "perspectives" for "perspective"
P 56 insert at the end of para 1, "However, notwithstanding friendships and past shared experiences, care has been taken, throughout the research process, to maintain distance between personal associations, and the transcript subject matter. There was minimal contact with respondents after the interviews and no discussion on the analysis of material. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002:47-57) have identified the issues in the subjectivity/objectivity debate in the quest for what is 'true'. With respect to both scientific distance, *and* a valuing of personal stories as legitimate knowledge, this thesis has sought to recognize and affirm the similar social locations of researcher and respondent. The motivating impetus has been to highlight the richness of memories and stories by honouring these with the distance required for sound analysis."
P 59 para 3, line 3 "criteria" for "criterion"
P 60 para 2, line 2 after "women" insert "The theory may be understood and embraced both intellectually and at heart, but socially difficult to practice."
P 61 para 2, line 15 add full stop

P 63 para 1, line 1 after "methodology" insert "as advocated by Acker et al (1983)"
P 66 para 1, line 3 after "scholarship" insert ", something that rose above the limitations of the church and"; para 2, line 2 "Audrey" for "She" and line 3 after "commonality," insert "an experience of the Holy Spirit,"
P 73 para 3, line 1 "made obvious" for "obviated"
P 77 para 2, line 7 "Although boys may also have felt guilty, they" for "Boys"
P 82 para 3, line 4 "cited" for "sighted"
P 85 para 1, line 9 after "was" insert "a"
P 86 para 2 heading "Fathers Preferred to Mothers" for "Fathers Over Mothers"; para 3, line 2 "records" for "record"
P 87 para 2, line 1 after "Some" insert "of my"; para 3, line 14 "most respondents" for "women"; line 16 after "research" insert given the opportunity afforded in the interviews"
P 88 para 1, line 1 delete "Parsonian"; after "mother's" insert "confinement to an"; line 2 after "family" insert "as theorised by Talcott Parsons"
P 96 para 1, line 3 "inherited" for "inherent"
P 105 para 2, line 5 after "thesis" insert "(Theresa, Mary and Joan)"
P 107 para 2, line 6 delete comma after "parents'"
P 118 para 2, lines 9 and 11 "Power" for "Powers"
P 122 heading "The Effects of Male-Led Spirituality" for "Male-Led Spirituality"
P 122 para 2, line 2 "as if" for "in parabolic mode,"
P 123 para 3, line 1 after "similarity" insert "to Audreys'"
P124 para 2, line 5 delete "(Porter, 1989:74)"
P 130 quote no. 1, line 5 "(see also Johnson, E.A., 1996:50-51)" for "(see also Johnson, E.A., 1996:5051)"
P 136 para 2, line 1 "some christians perceive as unchanging" for "it is perceived, does not change
P 141 para 2, line 1 "perspectives acknowledge" for "perspective acknowledges"
P 143 para 3 line 8 "caused" for "cause"
P 144 para after "level" insert "participation"
P 145 para 3, line 3 "(1993:70)" for "1993:70"
P146 para 1, line 7 after "Both respondents" insert "(Kath and Margaret)"
P 151 para 4, line 1 "Willis' work" for "Willis"
P 152 para 1, line 5 delete "M***"
P 154 para 2, line 2 before "Eva" insert "a tangible implication of this was evident when"
P 154 para 3, line 3 full stop after "them"; before "by" insert "She did this"; line 9 delete "the" after "on"
P 155 para 2, line 5 comma after "colleagues"
P 157 para 2 line 2 delete comma after the word "model"
P 160 para 4, line 2 "that" for "on"
P 161 para 2, line 4 "aesthetics" for "ascetics"
P 172 para 1, line 7 "concludes" for "conclude"
P 178 para 3, line 7 "dislodges" for "dislodgess"
P 181 para 2, line 5 "respondents" for "participants"
P 196 para 2, line 1 footnote "The Episcopal Church is the American sister church to the Anglican Church"

P 200 para 2, line 3 "throes" for "throws"
P 204 para 1, line 12 "re-redact" for "re-redaction"
P 226 para 2, line 2 "non-scholarly" for "non-scholastic"
P 227 para 3, line 5 "courage to face" for "courage face"
P 229 para 4, line 1 delete comma after the word "observes"
P 228 delete symbol in front of the word "Cannon"
P 231 para 3, line 7 insert full stop
P 240 para 1, line 7 "1962-65" for "1943"
P 243 para 1, line 4 "principle" for "ideology"
P 246 para 3, line 16 delete "or covered up"
P 250 para 1, line 6 "aesthetically" for "ascetically"
P 272 para 3, line 2 "communal" for "corporate"
P 278 para 2, line 5 after "Soul" insert "that is, a vision of the Holy Spirit that resonates with women and all people"
P 280 para 2, line 11 "reciprocity" for "reciprocality"
P 284 para 2, line 2 "women" for "feminine essentiality"
P 290 after "Daly, M. (1986). *Beyond God the Father - Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. London: The Women's Press Ltd." on the next line insert "Daly, M. (1992). *Outercourse: the Bedazzling Voyage Containing Recollections from My Logbook of a Radical Feminist Philosopher*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco."

Abstract

This research examines the faith journeys of seventeen Australian based women theologians with feminist perspectives whose personal histories and professional lives have intercepted with second wave feminism as it impacted upon the Christian church and society generally. It analyses and reflects upon the theological, spiritual and social sites of struggle involved in the shift from inherent positions of patriarchy, within the faith and the church, to more liberated philosophical and social locations. The work includes story, reflection and analysis of the effort, to find and live faithfully to, true self within male built church structures, and androcentric ideologies and hermeneutics. It is a naming of the processes of becoming, a documentation of how feminist theology as an alternate model to traditional thinking and practice, has translated, or has failed to translate, into the theological, spiritual and social lives of respondents.

This thesis is an intentionally personal mapping of inner and social search to find integrity of faith. It is a critique of the soulful and social dynamics required in facing the personal **Cleft** or disjuncture, in the lives of the respondents, caused by androcentric Christianity. The work documents and reflects upon the process of shedding, sometimes loved, but often unhelpful or even abusive theologies that have engendered certain individual internal spiritualities, and social practices. It also maps the journey into nothingness, confusion and insecurity as an integral component to the reformulating and embracing of new theologies, fresh personal spiritual perspectives and relocated social practices, against the revered and powerful authority of the **Rock** of tradition, within the lives of the respondents. It is their story of the costs and gains within a largely unfinished feminist journey to authentic soul spirituality that, with less compromise and jarring, meshes better with redefined and less male prescriptive, social paradigms.

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Johannes Schaefer, my husband, for his unwavering belief in my ability to see this thesis to completion, and for his enabling practical support.

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis contains no material accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university or institution. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference in made in the text.

[redacted]

Robyn Schaefer July 2004

All biblical references are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise specified.

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Introduction

Research for Personal Survival

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in thee;
> Let the water and the blood,
> From thy riven side which flowed,
> Be of sin the double cure,
> Save me from its guilt and power.

(Toplady in *The Australian Hymn Book*, Hymn 157)

The initial impetus for this work emanated from a personal spiritual wasteland. It was a desolation felt more acutely for the fact that the sense of spiritual drought was not always so. I grew up in a church-going family whose Christian traditions go back several generations in evangelical strands. A personal relationship to God and participation in church community were considered crucial components of the right way to live. This thesis has been motivated by a deep grieving, due not only to lost confidence in 'old time' personal faith, but also to a gradual recognition, beginning some years ago, that some of the valued main-stays of that faith were founded upon unstable ground. For me, the metaphoric solid 'Rock' of biblical texts and church traditions, featured in ecclesiastically-treasured old hymns, had become an unhelpful icon.

As personal feminist awareness developed, I realised that the Christian faith had engendered unhelpful and untrue imagery dispersed with gems too precious to lose. As a minister of religion initially with Churches of Christ and, in more recent years, with the Uniting Church I did not feel as free as I perceived lay people might be, to ignore the problem, much less walk away from it. A task of unravelling lay ahead. I have been propelled by a thirst for workable and heartfelt feminist theology that could reinstate the Christian faith as honest and viable from a personal perspective. Therefore, the thought processes for this work began not only with a flickering hope of discovering some core, gender-inclusive tenets at the heart of Christianity, but further, a way of spiritually embracing these for individuals such as myself, who bore the marks of conservatism.

The Problematic 'How to' of Feminism and Christianity – Initial Curiosity

As indicated above, the initial motivation for this research was vitally personal. At the outset, I needed to solve the problem of *how* to integrate Christianity and feminism. This had become crucial to the search for synchronisation between my role as a Uniting Church minister and my feminist convictions. To me, perceived inconsistencies between feminism and Christianity, despite all the feminist theological literature over recent decades, still confused personal spirituality and caused a sense of social misfit. As a means of survival, it seemed reasonable to collect data from other theologians with feminist perspectives who may have arrived at some sort of workable inner and social position within Christianity. Within the lives of my contemporaries I hoped to find some ways of thinking and some modus operandi that would shed light on the *how* of meshing lived Christianity and feminism and, in so doing, discover harmonious models for inner spirituality and its social expression.

Due to my personal dilemma, in the early stages of inquiry, the key question was whether one can be a true Christian, whatever that may mean, *and* a true feminist, however that is defined. This was pertinent in the light of some theorists who raise the issue of possible mutual exclusivity of feminism and Christianity (Joy, 1996:111; Lawson, 1995:150; Hampson and Ruether, 1987; Hampson, 1990; Daly, 1975; 1979). For example, Hampson (1990:75-78) suggests that feminist theologians are simply committed to Christianity because they want to be, and therefore they find or invent justifying theory. I wondered if an extra-Christian stance was, indeed, more valid or whether extra-Christian feminists were missing something vital. The hope was that this might become evident if I interviewed those with feminist perspectives for whom Christianity has been professionally, socially and spiritually central.

Feminist theologians known to me through reading, as distinct from personal encounter, advocate substantial mind shifts in personal faith perspectives. However, reinterpreting biblical texts (Trible, 1992; Fiorenza, 1990; Russell, 1974), re-critiquing history (Fiorenza, 1983; Ruether, 1998a) and re-visioning God (Daly, 1986; Johnson, 1996) have engendered spiritual, emotional and social dilemmas. Tolbert (1990) acknowledges the painful split for women who are both daughters of patriarchy and feminists. For me, as a

private person of faith and as a minister, the academic journey from conservatism to a more liberated stance seemed creative and theoretically sound but the 'how to' of implementation within *personal* spiritualities and *actual* social settings was left largely unanswered. I wondered if and how relatively new feminist hermeneutics overrode past indoctrinations and genuinely translated into the everyday social and inner lives of Australian Christian feminists. I hoped to find working models within the actual personal and professional lives of women theologians.

Whilst the problems of hermeneutics, biblical texts, church traditions and language were important, I perceived the pivot to be the God/human relationship and sought to make this central. The work thus began with an initial curiosity about how women theologians with feminist perspectives relate to a male God as portrayed by many aspects of the Christian faith (Duck, 1991; Hampson, 1990:92-96; Porter, 1989:74). It was my contention that the male image of God has been a major factor in forging the ethos of male dominance and female oppression in the church and in the world generally (Storky, 1987:4-21). The initial research plan included a proposed investigation into the role of a male-imaged God in the construction of gender identities, and ongoing or changing images of God within the lives of respondents.

A Modification of Direction

As outlined in the methodology, the collaborative approach has been an important element in this research. I bore in mind the heritage of silencing and ignoring women (Rae and Marie-Daly, 1990:4-5; Smith, D.E., 1988:15-43). I wanted to ensure that those contributing should have a voice in the text and that the finished work should be a useful document for women (Acker et al, 1983).

Throughout the course of the interviews it was the power of individual stories that ultimately determined the direction of the thesis. I became interested more in the journey than in discovering Christianity/feminism formulae. Respondents indicated the need to tell their stories of largely unfinished struggles with androcentric systems and ideologies, and their determination to find liberating theologies and spiritualities by which to live. In so doing, they also indicated that the grand struggle encompassed, but was broader than,

the question of personal relationship to God-images. The process of documentation and analysis therefore includes particular sites of dilemma with regard to inner spirituality and social life. It also includes the dynamics of spiritual, theological and social survival or non-survival, gains and losses along the course of respective journeys.

As the interviews progressed the burning initial question concerning the compatibility of feminism and Christianity dulled. Respondents indicated varying degrees of disjuncture or comfort in this regard. In short, I found a gro: of people struggling, much like myself, with no outstanding answers for the fe st/Christian compatibility question. I resolved to live with ongoing ambiguities in t pect. My attention turned to the process and the fascinating stories of inner and social struggle undertaken by those who were so willing to share, in depth, their faith journeys.

The Final Research Content

This research is an inquiry into how seventeen women theologians, with feminist perspectives, have survived or not survived within the Christian faith and church. Their lives have been set throughout an era when emerging feminist theories and ideologies have been pitted against entrenched male structures. It addresses aspects of the sociology of religion and the subject matter is set in the context of relevant historical and traditional Christian strands within male-built structures, to investigate if and how religion has been used as an ideology that has both nurtured and oppressed women. The work looks at how respondents have remained true or untrue to their spiritual selves and have found or failed to find comfortable social locations. This includes exploring the processes of moving from patriarchal thinking to more liberating, theologies and personal spiritualities. This thesis tells the story of how respondents have wrestled to find honest theologies that do not require so much massive inner and social compromise. It tells of the ongoing, heartfelt process to maintain individual integrity with regard to personal feminism and personal Christian faith. The research therefore evolved as, not so much a 'how to' of practised inner and social feminist theology, but a documentation of what has happened in the lives of respondents as they have confronted or failed to confront, the feminist/Christianity dichotomy. It is an analysis of the process of becoming.

As stories unfolded, it struck me that a driving motivation for the journey was not simply a pragmatic bid to reconcile theory, but the need to heal personal aspects of fragmented inner and social faith as caused by traditions that have been 'rock' solid and hard to move. That is when the following ecclesiastic metaphors came to mind.

Rock and Cleft – Redefined Metaphors

An enduring metaphor within Christian tradition is that of the 'Rock' and its sheltering 'Cleft' (Isaiah 17) (Kruger, 2003; Jacob, 1996). The 'Rock' varies in its application within both biblical texts and church custom. Sometimes it is a metaphor for God *Himself* (Psalms 18,62,71) or Christ, as in the tradition of the above old hymn, and sometimes it is the vehicle for a miracle (Numbers 20). The 'Rock' has been depicted as the epitome of all that is absolutely safe and secure (Psalm 71) and that which provides shade and respite from exhaustion in a 'weary land' (Psalm 32). Its life-giving qualities resound with Gnanadason's (1997:2) eco-feminist work, where metaphors are drawn between the womb and the cleft in the rock comparable to Schaef's (1985:34-37) theory of the empty space in women. The biblical subtleties of its meaning also include some supernatural qualities. Its Cleft is able to open and yield revitalising water in the desert (Psalm 105) and hide those who need shielding.

The Rock-Cleft metaphors have also presented as apt for the purposes of this thesis. The 'Rock' of ages as defined by this work acknowledges and embraces traditional meanings but has further application. Interviews suggested that those aspects of faith and practice previously assumed safe for general humanity, have sometimes spelled imprisonment and abuse for women (Kelly-Gadol, 1987). For the purposes of this thesis, the Rock is defined as the cumulative, essentially male-defined, layered calcification of biblical and church tradition, intent, language, interpretation and practice, and prescribed images of God, over at least the two thousand years of Christianity.

The Rock is a dichotomy. It is both nurturer and oppressor/excluder. It is loved and hated. Feminist theory recognises that 'Women experience religion as a contradiction where it is simultaneously a source of oppression and liberation' (McPhillips, 1994:249). Brock (in Brock and Parker, 2001:148) talks about the threat of her soul splitting apart

because her 'feminist theological insights were challenging virtually every form of Christian theology' she knew. Weber (1987:43) also concedes, 'My own struggle for connection between my womanhood and my Christianity is by no means complete.' Similarly Morton (1985:19-24) speaks of the 'jar' of male language, structures and images that mandate women to feel one thing and live another. The evidence collated thus suggested another meaning to the Cleft metaphor. Whilst recognising its original meaning as shelter and life-sustainer within the Rock, this thesis defines the Cleft as a personal/inner and corporate split experienced by women. In this definition, the Cleft is not provided by the Rock but caused by it. The fact that both former and latter definitions are retained within the experience of respondents is, in itself, cleft-creating. Tension between these two opposing definitions of the Cleft renders the solution of either total submission or total desertion of male-created structures and practices problematic.

As mentioned, this inquiry was motivated by a basic sense of women's misfit within the structure of the Christian church. Smith (1988:49-50) addresses what she terms the 'line of fault', 'point of rupture' or 'disjuncture' between social life and women's actual experiences. She identifies a discrepancy between the two. She suggests that the options open to women are, either to speak from male ground, or to speak from a restricted female ground, because men own both the male *and* the so-called 'neutral' ground (pp.52-53). Similarly, Kelly-Gadol (1987:175) speaks of the 'double vision' with which women regard history. Rae and Marie-Daly (1990:40-42) note the split in women's psychic energies and the limitation of Jungian theory that frames the animus (inner *man*) as the thinking and logical function of a human being. Outside feminist frames, Sardello (1999:vii-xxiv) also refers to a 'doubling' that occurs when fear obscures the true self, and the subsequent loss of soul-connection.

This 'line of fault', 'double vision', 'split psyche' or 'cleft' occurs when subservient people are hoodwinked into perceiving themselves through the eyes of the dominators. Daly (1975:53) holds that the church has thus 'duped' women. The research of Pevey et al (1996:175) also uses the word 'dupes' and suggests a maze of contradictions between philosophy and practice within gendered power relations in Christianity. This is substantiated by such works as *A Troubling in My Soul* (Townes, 1993) depicting a cleft between the hermeneutics of sin and suffering within the lives of black women, and the

struggle to find honest and helpful perspectives on the subjects. Cranny-Francis et al (2003:232) also talks of a 'disjuncture' more specifically between feelings and the lived experience of intimacy. This kind of discrepancy is at the heart of the Cleft experienced by respondents and caused by the Rock. Hence the 'Rock of Ages' is, by definition, a 'Cleft for Me'.

The following chapters document the 'fault line' and analyse the Cleft within the lives of respondents caused by: the Rock as inherent Scripture and its historic hermeneutics, the Rock as church structure and social controller, the Rock as taught imagery of God and the Rock as prescribed social and interior spirituality. I begin with clefts that started in experiences of childhood church and respondents' relations with parents, followed by chapters that articulate spiritual and social clefts in adulthood as respondents sought careers within the church. Later chapters are concerned with resolutions to the Rock/Cleft problems.

The Nature of Journey

This research does not regard the journey to be complete in the lives of respondents. However, it is an attempt to capture crucial stages and paradigm changes in the lives of women who have lived through a pertinent time of rising feminist awareness.

The interception of individual journey and societal history is intimated throughout this work. By this I mean the interaction between the individual and unique sets of circumstances within which each respondent has been placed at given times. This is where the historical elements of a social environment interact with personal intellect, emotion and spirituality to determine the social direction of the individual (Mills, 1974; Smith, 1988:125). Respondents often interpreted specific experiences as Divine interaction with the individual, through everyday events.

Models of 'journey' could imply a linear progression. However, like such theorists as Groover (1999:123), I tend to hold that this is an androcentric model of journey. According to a number of women's literary genres and women theologians, the journey for women is often circular or multi-dimensional. For example, Plaskow and Christ

(1989), Fiorenza (1992), and Kidd (1996) speak in terms of weaving and dance implying forwards and backwards movement. There is also an emphasis on networking and reaching out to others, rather than a walk whose goal is solitary autonomy (Groover, 1999). The weaving and dancing metaphor is also an apt description for the order of transcript analysis in the structure of this thesis. Respondents' accounts are thematically interwoven and relevantised to one another. Stories and individuals surface and resurface within the text.

Whilst the nature of individual journey is more complex than simple linear stories, some broad trends emerged to form the general frame of this thesis. After the theory/literature and methodology chapters, I proceed, throughout the thesis, to demonstrate how the metaphors of Rock and Cleft help to describe the journeys of respondents. The *spiritual* and *social* lives of respondents form the vital dynamics. The transcript material was thus categorised broadly under these respective headings as an enabling tool for analysis. It was discovered, though, that, because the spiritual or inner life of the individual and outer social environment interact so closely, real life experiences do not lend themselves to a stark line of demarcation. Social cleft and reformation therefore is part of the spiritual cleft and reformation. One category of material is intrinsically 'tarred with the brush' of the others thus illustrating the 'dancing', 'weaving' nature of the journey. However, following the *Methodology* and *Literature and Theory* chapters, for the sake of coherence of structure, the data analysis chapters have been collated into sections that are broadly chronologically progressive.

Data Chapters Outline

The Identification of Clefts

Clefts in Childhood and Adolescence

Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock identifies clefts in retrospective memories of childhood faith and church experiences.

Parents: Cleft-Forming Phenomenon looks at respondents' perspectives on mothers and fathers and the impact on images of God. It documents relationships with parents and structures for those who felt called to careers within the Christian church.

Spiritual and Theological Clefts problematises traditional theology.
Social Clefts, identifies the points of disjuncture caused by androcentric church social prescriptions and structures.

A Time of Redefining

Wilderness, deals with the fluid time when old ideologies and compromises can no longer be sustained and new definitions of faith and personal locations are vague.

Reformation

Spiritual and Theological Reformation, addresses the process of redefining theological mainstays and looks at refiguring personal spiritualities.
Social Reformation, traces the building of new and affirming networks, language and social identity and then addresses new perspectives on the church, and the consolidation of supportive networks.

The Respondents

Respondents all began their careers in various strands of the Christian church twenty-five or more years ago. They are all of white, Anglo-Saxon/European backgrounds. Fourteen respondents grew up in Australia, one in New Zealand, one in England, and one spent early childhood in Scotland before migrating to Australia. All respondents were aged between forty-five and sixty-five at the time of their interviews. The prefix 'extra', used in three of the brief descriptions below, is explained in *Literature and Theory*.
Respondents come from a spectrum of denominational backgrounds, family origins, opinions and spiritualities.

Respondents all have tertiary qualifications in theology and most also hold degrees in other disciplines. They are,

Amira – an extra-Christian contemplative
Annabelle – a Baptist post-graduate student
Audrey – a Uniting Church academic
Eva – a Uniting Church parish minister
Jo – a Churches of Christ parish minister
Joan – a Catholic academic and member of a religious order
Kath – an Anglican priest/academic
Lily – a Churches of Christ parish minister
Lyn – a Uniting Church parish minister
Margaret – an Anglican priest/academic
Mary – a university chaplain and member of a Catholic religious order
Mickale – an extra-Christian academic/church counselor
Tamar – a Uniting Church parish minister/academic
Theresa – a Catholic academic and member of a religious order
Tylielle – an extra-Christian academic and writer
Sarah – a Uniting Church university chaplain
Veronica – an Anglican priest

Each respondent indicated an enthusiasm for the area of inquiry and a sense that the project provided an opportunity for issues they regarded as vital, to surface and be told. The methodology chapter outlines the method and strategy employed to ensure this. The following chapter gives an overview of theory and theorists pertinent to both the faith journeys of respondents and the essence of this thesis.

Literature and Theory

Introduction

Situating Respondents' Lives – The Interplay of Biography and History

The 1960s and 1970s saw turbulent changes in western thinking triggered by such phenomena as the anti-war movement (Kaplan, 1996:31-57), the rise of second wave feminism (Friedan, 1986; Greer, 1970), black rights movements (Allen, 1969; X, 1971), and emerging redefinitions of sexual and family norms (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977; Bernard, 1992). The Women's Movement strengthened and became vocal in Australia in the 1970s (Kaplan, 1996; Curthoys, 1994). Respondents have thus lived through eras that challenged biological determinism, traditional hallmarks of respectability and established power relations. As developing young women through the 1960s and 1970s, and as aspiring church leaders and academics, feminism and feminist theology has impacted upon many aspects of their lives. These include the approaches respondents have taken to negotiate their way around structures, make decisions, relate to men, formulate beliefs and practices, and work out their social locations. They have lived through an historical time when many women were awakened to, and persuaded of, the need to regard life from a feminist perspective.

The lives of feminist theological and sociological theorists and those of respondents have sometimes crossed with varying degrees of resultant friendships and networks or, at least, a sense of the living theorist who is one of us. This chapter therefore not only pertains to literature and thinking, in the area of socio-theology, but also to theorists who have impacted upon the lives of respondents, both generally and directly, from the late 1940s to the present time.

Social Self and Inner Self

A Soul Perspective

Two vital components of journey in this thesis are, the accepted existence of the human inner self, soul or spirit, terms that are used interchangeably throughout, and the social self. Tulip (1977:22) refers to Martin Buber's theory of the I-thou dynamics of self and observes, 'I recognise my own experience of love, not as a subject-object or I-it domination but as the encounter with another subject, an "I" who refuses to be an "it".' As interviews unfolded, respondents indicated that even women's inner selves have been imposed upon as 'its' of male objectivity, as men have dictated beliefs and set axioms of spirituality (Daly, 1975; 1979; Hageman, 1974). Each journey is the story of the struggle not to be an 'it'.

The nature and development of 'self' has specific and varying sociological definitions (Foucault, 1988; Berger and Berger, 1976:68-69; Kuhn and McPartland, 1972; Cooley, 1972; Kinch, 1972). Whilst there is not space here for detailed analysis of these, some pertinent theory is noted for the purpose of clarifying respondents' perspective on self/soul. Mead (1962:135) purports that the self, at birth, is more potential than reality. He maintains that the self develops through complex symbolic interactions with society as both organism (pp.245-252) and as mind (pp.90-100). He also theorises the "I" that is aware of the social "me" (p.173)' and examines the complexity of internal conversation. This thesis also assumes the development of inner self through social interaction and inner conversation.

However, this thesis breaks with Mead in the belief of inner self as *soul*. In keeping with Christianity (Foucault, 1988:39-49), this work also assumes that the inner self, whilst it is embodied for a time, also transcends 'earthly' consciousness, that we are more than organism, a theory with which Mead (1962:149-150) does not agree. He refuted the idea of a 'soul or mind' with which we have been 'mysteriously and supernaturally' endowed, (p.137 footnote) as an attempt to explain consciousness before the findings of science (Mead, 1982:189-190). Mead's model of the soul, though he acknowledges the theistic view and some of its historic origins (p.189), is firmly located within a finite frame.

Foucault (1988), on the other hand, devotes extensive space to the notion of soul and the role of Christianity in its regulation.

Feminist developmental theory stresses mutuality, love and lateral empowering in contrast to domination models. Ramsay (2000:274-280) cites these as key aspects in the lives of women clergy. It is acknowledged that the human self is born into a genetically encoded physicality, an enculturated group and an historical location (Mills, 1974). Whilst these are unalterable, the development of the self is not blueprinted. The dynamic of personal agency is also assumed (Heath, 1976). This thesis, then, acknowledges the classic theoretical models for the development of inner self but goes beyond to recognise the existence of inner self as soul that outlasts the organism and possibly exists before it (O'Donohue, 2000:xvii). Mainstream Christianity believes that the soul/self is more than simply the blank slate assigned us at birth. For example, Thomas Merton (Finley, 1978) distinguishes the 'false self' from the true, divinely created, self. This thesis also assumes the objective existence of God as ultimate Creator-Spirit with whom inner conversation is also possible (Bonhoeffer, 1959:145-153; Durka, 1989). Therefore the research is not only about women's quest for unimposed-upon social spaces, but is also a search for the true self that has often been buried below androcentric layers of prescribed theologies and formulas (Johnson, 1996:61-75; Walker, 1989:101-104; Grey, 1993:67-80) and other areas of male tyranny (Fenn, 1995). It also documents a feminist quest for truer personal spirituality, thereby making possible a truer conversation with a truer vision of God.

Interaction with God – A Further Dimension

As indicated, it is acknowledged that the self is a product of genetics, culture, history and its interactions with the exterior world and is able to reflect, in multiple layers, upon its relation to these. This thesis also recognises the self as a spiritual entity that is more than social construct. Respondents have given credence to a transcendent source of creativity. They indicated the belief that it is possible for human beings to interact with God as transcendent Spirit both independently of, and through, social interactions. Christianity claims that the human self/soul is not only able to reflect upon the social and inner self, but also to reflect upon the symbolic movement of God within individual spirituality and social activity. For example, C.S. Lewis's (2002) *Mere Christianity* is a call to both personal faith and social morality. The quest for God is often the propelling impetus for

the developmental quests of human souls generally, including some expressly feminist journeys (Finlay, 1978; Morton, 1985; Johnson, 1996).

Embodied Spirits and Male Structures

This thesis defines the soul as the essence of the individual in the deepest possible sense. I do not wish to engage in detailed discussion about whether or not individual souls are essentially and finally gendered. It is enough that, for our life spans, we live in bodies that carry the weight of gendered social constructs (Prendergast, 2000; Currie and Raoul, 1992a; Weitz, 1998). As indicated by feminist theorists (Raphael, 1996; Isherwood, 2000), I suspect the social world and prescribed spiritualities impact upon the soul. Power (1995a:44) cites the androcentric tradition that 'only male seed conveyed the soul' at conception, a theory that established men as the very owners of 'soul'.

Rankka (1998), quite graphically and directly, stresses the impact of women's physical suffering on their spirituality/soul. This thesis assumes male dominance throughout most world social structures including those that are vehicles of corporately taught spirituality. It is male-centred impositions at deep, soul levels that have impelled women to seek to 'get out from under' in order to redefine life, theology and themselves without so many male overlays (Townes, 1993; Schneiders, 1991a; Franklin and Jones, 1987; Miles, 1994).

Women Theorists - A Fresh Way of Thinking

Feminist analysis engages in the process of 'undoing philosophy's traditional self-conception' that women are objects of study and do not actually think and contribute to disciplines (MacKenzie, 1988). The standpoint of 'other' is given centre stage. Cannon et al (1985:135) describe feminist theology as 'a fresh way of living and breathing'. Whilst this is a heartening definition, it must be held in tension with the need for constant reflection in order to strive for models of critique that do not unwittingly reinforce oppressive dualisms (McPhillips, 1994). Adapting the Bible and the Christian faith to contemporary thinking has also been tackled by some male theorists. However, many such endeavours demonstrate little understanding of women's standpoint. Their 'freshness' is often still framed in male paradigms both in general social theory (Thiele,

1988:34) and within the Christian faith. Bruggemann (1993:31-33), for example, speaks of the frailty of the human condition as revelation. This may be news to men but, as Rankka (1998:58) points out, powerlessness is a traditional issue for women, in the face of male-defined theodicies. Bruggemann (1993:32) speaks of God as 'beyond (earthly) mother and father' without recognition of what losing children to war, marriage, adoption (Lake and Holmes, 1995), miscarriage, abortion and misadventure has done to women (Coffey, 2003:47-49). Spong's 'best seller' (1992:6,75,104) defends feminist issues with little acknowledgement that his arguments have been those of feminists for years, often without the acclaimed credibility that he has enjoyed. Wren (1989:171-194), in his largely positive response to feminist theology, still tends to defend Jesus rather than tackling feminist christological problems. Hutchinson (1994:5) prefaces his collection of churchwomen's chronicles with acknowledgement that he cannot share their pain, but then refers to Protestant women who 'snipe from the sidelines', as if staying in the centre were as safe for women as for men. Pittenger (1982) proposes a new model of God that is relational rather than hierarchical, but ignores the issue of God's gender. However, Blumenthal (1993) comes close to understanding women's oppression in linking victims of the holocaust with victims of child abuse and calling God into account. Feminist theologian, Brock (Blumenthal, 1993:xii) describes him as a rare 'trustworthy dialogue partner for feminists' because of his 'intense conversation' with feminist theologians and because he does not attempt to interpret women's experiences from his own frame. Her comments highlight that, in most cases, even enlightened male theorists still cannot see things from where women stand.

Feminist sociology and theology has intensified over the past few decades indicating an original void. Walsh's (1999) compilation is testimony to this. The snowballing has gained momentum as feminists have critiqued, replicated, offered shades of perspectives and built upon each other's work (Lawson, 1995). They have jumped over boundaries of given norms and have, therefore, not only fed us with new ideas to incorporate in existing paradigms, but have challenged foundational thinking. Respondents in this thesis have both contributed to, and been influenced by, this process through published works and critical discussion.

Feminism, Theology and Sociology

Feminism itself has proved transcendent to set disciplines (Raphael, 1996:20) with writers venturing into each other's territories to fudge the lines between academies. For example, within the academy of theology, an extensive, largely American bibliography draws from sociology and theology with an interdisciplinary audience in mind (Walsh, 1999). Further illustration includes Towne's (1993:1) definition of 'womanist' as someone 'committed to an integrated analysis of race, gender and class.' Brady (1986) comments on the role of women in the Catholic Church up to the 1980s in the context of general Australian society and McRae-McMahon (1998:174-177) discusses community and social systems. Thus feminist theologians often frame their arguments in historical and cultural contexts (Jones, 1986; Thiering, 1986). This is sociology *and* theology. There are books on feminist theology that include chapters on social theory. For example, Harrison (1985:54-82) reconsiders Marxian political economic theory with regard to religious social ethics drawing upon Niebuhrian and Weberian social theories. Thiering (1977a) argues against biological determinism drawing upon Oakley's (1972) sociological work.

Theologians have both drawn upon and contributed to social theory. They have used a 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1974) to analyse overlay on biblical texts with regard to content and context (Fiorenza, 1990:33-36), historical critical method (Fiorenza, 1990:128-136; Fander, 1993:205-224) and androcentric hermeneutical traditions (Fiorenza, 1983:41-67; Coll, 1994:132-173). Feminist theologians have also sought to develop feminist critical method and reconstruction (Bach, 1990; Fiorenza, 1983:41-94). They have critiqued from a feminist epistemological stance (Fiorenza, 1983:21-26) and have applied feminist sociological method to evaluate the social position of women in the church (Schneiders, 1991a; Winter et al, 1995). Confoy (1995) expounds theories of women as 'other' from both Christian and secular perspectives. Spender (1990:xii-xii), who analyses language construction and application, refers to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a women's suffrage champion and theological revolutionary of the 1800s. From Christian feminist perspectives, various theorists also offer models that have general social workability. For example, Mathews, R (1993:92-106) uses the 'power of the periphery'

to formulate models with integrity against the prevailing corruption in secular *and* ecclesiastic systems.

The process of rethinking theology from a feminist perspective has been refined and enriched by challenges to white societal models and methodologies. These include insights from African American (Baker-Fletcher, 1993; D.S. Williams, 1993; Thistlethwaite, 1990; Soelle, 1990:95-101; Townes, 1993), African, (Okure, 1993; Ruether, 1998b:254-262), third world (Kwok, 1993), Jewish (Plaskow, 1993), native American (Devens-Green, 1993), Latin American (Gebara, 1993; Ruether, 1998b:245-254), Asian (Ruether, 1998b:262-272; Chung, 1990) and Australian Aboriginal (Pattel-Gray, 1995) writers. Again these challenges are also evident within the general sphere of feminist sociology (Ladner, 1987; Harding, 1991:191-295; Dill, 1987; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). With respect to all of these, *doing* feminist theology involves critiquing issues on community function, epistemology, ontology, language, gender/power relations, sexuality, women in public and private spheres, and the division of labour. Feminist sociologists have developed theories and crystalised perspectives on the above areas. These themes have interplayed across the disciplines. Christian feminist inquiry and comment is specifically concerned with applying these to church structures, male-centred belief systems, biological determinism and gender relations, within the ecclesia. Most of the literature pertinent to this thesis is therefore in the area of Christian feminist social thought, with some references to parallel works in general feminist sociology.

Christian feminist literature is drawn from the following broad areas: feminist theology and spirituality, including specific God-images and Christology, feminist biblical analysis and hermeneutics, feminist stance on social relations, including ethics and pastoral theology, within the Christian church, and the language that frames all of these. Women theologians have been both influenced by, and contributed to, the growing and refining processes of feminist perspective (Fiorenza, 1992:ix). Fiorenza's (1995a:ix) personal interaction with a women's group in Alice Springs, Central Australia, studying her work illustrates the fudged lines between theorists and readers. A number of respondents have had work published and, as interviews progressed, the interaction between theorists and learners was obviated and demarcations indistinct. It is now also not appropriate to draw distinct boundaries between liberal and radical feminists (Christ

and Plaskow, 1979:15). Most respondents and most of the cited theorists have remained within church formations but are not blind to fundamental faults, and have fought to refigure structures and redefine Christianity (Ruether, 1996:x).

Christianity has been largely an androcentric faith not easily adapted to women's social emotional, physical or spiritual standpoint. Feminists have struggled with male images of God, a male saviour, male-interpreted hermeneutics, male church structures and a male-written Bible. Feminists have invested great effort into making sense of Christianity. The volume of literature since the 1970s renders it impossible to cite all works. This review, therefore, focuses on the key theorists and areas of literature most pertinent to the issues raised by respondents and the categories of changing thought to which respondents have been exposed since the 1960s. These are followed by a specific indication of the direction and area covered by this thesis.

'Adding Women'

Uncovering women's perspective in all its complexities is a continuing unravelling and refining process. In formulating theories, we have sometimes sought to dig a tunnel out of confinement only to surface in another part of the metaphorical prison. In this respect, McPhillips (1994) develops theory to combat feminisms that remain tied to taken-for-granted androcentric frames. Oakley (1985) identifies the invisibility of women in sociology. This translates to the specified areas in theology of biblical texts and church social contexts. However, Oakley and others (Smith, D.E., 1974:1; Harding 1987:1; Oakley, 1985:4) have problematised the practice of simply 'adding women' to theories, structures and research methods. Their contention is that gender has been regarded as just another variable rather than a challenge to entire theoretical structures (Stacey and Thorne, 1988). Problematising the 'adding women' practice has been adapted to feminist biblical hermeneutics, the language of Christianity and the challenge by women to church structures (Chopp, 1991:7). Schneiders (1991a) *Beyond Patching* is a good example. However, naming the problem has not resolved it. Abbott (1991) contends that, despite all feminist efforts, the tendency to simply 'add women' is still problematic and systems have remained basically male-centred. Kaplan (1996) and Stanley (1992:258) agree, identifying such tendencies as the 'containment of feminism' and the consequent

necessity to refine methods (p.260). These challenges have also beset feminist theologians as the layers of androcentrism within faith systems have emerged within the awakening process.

Spearhead Feminists

Veins of feminism can be traced back several centuries. Wollstonecraft's (1992) work, from 1792, bears testimony to this. Although Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1992) was first published in 1929 and de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, in English around 1953, many feminist issues did not take root in Australia until the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s (Kaplan, 1996). In this era, Greer's (1970) *The Female Eunuch*, articulated previously taboo issues of female sexuality and Friedan's (1986) *The Feminine Mystique*, cited 'the problem that has no name' (pp.13-29), that is, the deep yearning for meaning and fulfillment not offered to women within male-prescribed femininity. Spender (1983) also draws attention to lesser-known feminists whose influence is largely unsung. It was on the cusp of such changing social attitudes that respondents had to negotiate church traditions, attitudes and personal relationships.

An Australian Context

The life journeys of respondents in this thesis have meandered through various filters. These include the general influence of feminism in the world and feminism within Christianity. The social backdrop of Australian society with its peculiarities as documented by Caine et al (1998) and Hughes (1997) from historical and sociological aspects is also a consideration. Summers (1976) identifies Australian women's historical place as entrapment within the male-defined opposed concepts of 'whores' or 'God's police'. Brennan (1995:80-85) further uses the Australian historical background to explain the polarisations of secular feminism and pious 'churchianity's' negative response to it. In *The Real Matilda* (1987:11), Dixson defines the swagman's representation of woman, Matilda, as 'a thing, an item of property of a male who rejects women.' She thus depicts a particular form of chauvinism with its cultural emphasis on mateship, 'ocherism', sport and beer-drinking, that rates Australian women as 'the

Doormats of the Western World' (p.49) She argues that the American 'Mom' has higher status than the Australian 'Mum'. Thiering's *Created Second* (1973) supports Dixon's basic assertions regarding Australian women, as she specifically addresses church and religion as social, spiritual and intellectual territories of women's oppression in Australia. Further, Patel-Gray (1995) underscores the white bias of Australian church feminism and the subsequent need to develop the process of true listening within feminisms.

Whilst Australian feminist theologians may not have created theoretical feminist platforms as strikingly as their American sisters, they have added their voices to world discussion, facilitated feminist dialogue and have redefined orthodox models in an Australian context. Their work is internationally respected. Fiorenza's (1995a) foreward to a collection of Australian feminist essays bears testimony to such world camaraderie.

There are many shades of Christian feminism. As mentioned, five broad areas have emerged as problematec both in feminist literature, and within the lives of respondents. These include general taught theology and spirituality, prescribed, androcentic God-images and Christology, traditional biblical hermeneutics, and the stance on the role of women in the church. Language is also a problematic: it pervades all areas.

Christian-Sociological Feminist Areas

Language

Language is both an indicative and governing factor in all areas covered in this chapter. Wearing (1996:40) observes that language is the 'place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity is constructed'. It is not surprising then, that women have struggled with male-invented language to find words to express their experiences (Code, 1992:58-67; Spender, 1990), and with its use, by men, as a tool to establish dominance (Robson, 1988) and, silence and inferiorise women (Wearing, 1996:199-201). In this respect, Maitland (1990) points out the crucial connection between language and social order with regard to God, and Spender (1990) notes the all-pervasive sexist nature of language in its social, conceptual, structural and political applications, including the male naming of God (pp.165-171). Language, as an area of socio-theological feminist critique,

includes a critical look at biblical language, concepts, descriptions and pronouns used of God, and the vernacular of the church. These have been tackled on several fronts. Some theorists have invented words. For example, Fiorenza (1993) talks about Ekklēsia-logy and (1995b:178-190) names God as G*d, Raphael (1996) uses the word Thealogy (theology), and Ruether (1993) proposes a symbolic inclusiveness in the word Godd/ess. Thus there has been much effort to express feminine concepts that have not been available in conventional language.

Harrison (1985:22-34), a feminist ethicist, analyses the major role of language in initiating and reinforcing power relations, including issues of sexuality with regard to the language of Christian ethics and social relations. She argues that male conceptual God-language not only enslaves women but also 'feminises' the believer thus relegating all people to a subservient position (pp.34-41) and profaning the feminine. Feminist awareness has prompted various reactions. Soelle (1990:136-153) marks the feminist issue of such imperial concepts as 'kingdom of God' and 'Lordship' but regards the struggle with such concepts as an ongoing coping problematic. However, McRae-McMahon (1998:255-275) has initiated liturgies for those betrayed by the church and for liberation, and Duck (1991) looks at the androcentric nature of Trinitarian language and its inappropriateness for baptism of new worlds and beginnings. Also, among male theorists, Richard Franklin (1986) has written a 'how to' on inclusiveness and pronouns and Brian Wren (1989) has written a male response to incorporate feminist God-talk in worship.

Despite such efforts, language has been a complex area in which to effect social and conceptual change. McFague (1989:140) reflects,

> the shock of unconventional language for God – female imagery – jolts us into awareness that there is no gender-neutral language if we take ourselves as the model for talk about God, because we are sexual beings. Hence conventional language for God is not nonsexual; on the contrary, it is male.

McFague thus alerts us to the actuality and ingrained subliminal nature of male gender-biased God-concepts. But the shift in reshaping models has further implications. As Wainwright (1995) notes, names not only designate the place of the named, they also

impute power to the namer. There is, therefore, the further 'shock' of women presuming the role of namers.

Feminist Theology and Spirituality

Women's Bodies and Spirituality

Men have historically colonised the domain of women's bodies (Weitz, 1998:3; Gatens, 1988). Power (2001) gives historical, religious and political contexts to the spiritual and social foundations for the belief in the inferiority of women's bodies. Bartky (1998:27) talks about the spatial restriction on women and the updating of patriarchal power with regard to male-defined perfect female bodies. The medicalisation of women's bodies is well documented (Riessman, 1998; Cranny-Francis et al, 2003:187-190; Bryson, 1999:148-171) and highlights how women are trapped into collusion because systems dictate that they stand to survive better if they do so. Matthews (1992) work on women and psychiatric systems supports this. Brownmiller (1984:16) describes the price of femininity as 'a grand collection of compromises' at best. In this regard, Morgan, K. (1998) tackles the motivational impetus of cosmetic surgery and Wolf (1991) specifically talks about male-prescribed female beauty as an aspect of women's oppression and exploitation.

Despite feminist initiatives in the past forty years, there is still a hiatus between women's actual bodies and male prescribed idealism (Henderson, 2000). Dinnerstein and Weitz (1998:191) note that keeping women focused on controlling their bodies, even as they age, diverts their energy away from public arenas. Oakley's (1972) early work thus made the distinction between biological sex and socially prescribed gender. Although later feminism rethought this distinction concluding that biology does influence subjectivity (Wearing, 1996:47-50; Cranny-Francis et al, 2003), Wearing (1996:45) touches on the spiritual in asking, 'Is there a sexless soul which transcends the body and holds the promise of gender equality?' This prompts the question about spiritual equality as embodied souls.

The tide of androcentric socio-religion is not conducive to respect for the female body as a legitimate spiritual entity (Becher, 1990). Both secular and theological feminists cite

the problem of male as normative (Storkey, 1987:6-10; Wren, 1989:36-37) and Pagels (1979:108) quotes Jesus according to the Gospel of Thomas:

> Behold I will take Mary, and make her a male, so that she may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For I tell you truly, that every female who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Thus an important feminist problematic is the struggle to normalise and regard the female body as having integrity (Rowland and Klein, 1996:22-30; Ruether, 1990b; Gatens, 1988). Ruling classes have historically regarded women's bodies as inferior, weaker and sometimes morally depraved (Frazer, 1984). Male violence against women to reinforce the dominator/servant model is well theorised (Scutt, 1996; Kalven and Buckley, 1984). This takes various forms. Three broad areas include the suppression of women's political power (Friedan, 1986), disrespect and exploitation of the female body (Wolf, 1991; Currie, 1992; Hooks, 1998; McAslan, 1992) and disembodiment of the female spirit (Raphael, 1996). Women's spirits are taught to abhor their bodies. Weitz (1998:3) cites both Aristotle, and Galen's view of woman as 'misbegotten man', Power (2001) cites historic contexts to androcentric notions of women's physical inferiority, and Greer (1999:19-34) sites the male-orchestrated fight in which women engage in order to deny, sanitise, cover up and refigure their real bodies.

Whilst feminist sociology has theorised the general injustices of biological determinism, feminist theology has identified the particular dichotomies this has set up with regard to women's spirituality. Daly (1978) cites the extensive licence with which androcentric structures have mutilated and mistreated the human feminine. That uterus meant hysteria is testimony to this (Carr, 1993:11). Raphael (1996) identifies female 'sacrality' as a feature of what male-constructed Christianity has traditionally regarded as profane. Similarly, Moltmann-Wendel (1994:42) and Goldenberg (1989) note the dualism in the notion that body and spirit are separate and that men are of the spirit and women, of the body. This chauvinistic stance on women perpetuated through history is exemplified by C.S. Lewis' comment that we are all 'feminine' to God, that is, weak and unworthy, and is articulated by such theorists as Ruether (1998b) who traces the origins of identifying women with sin. Kirkman and Grieve (1986:56-57) cite male fear of women epitomised in the perceived Augustinian view that women can only image God through their

husbands. Whilst refuting this in the context of a fuller discussion on Augustine's precise theology, Power (1995b) cites Augustine's tenet that, unlike a man, a woman can only image God in her soul. Her body images 'desire', a 'threat to sanctity and order' (Power, 1995a:46-47).

With reference to the church *Fathers*, Tulip (1977:27) identifies the biological determinism with which women are regarded, but from which men are exempt, within Christianity. She notes derogative views of women by Aquinas and Luther, but the most scathing is that of Tertullian who calls women 'the devil's gateway' (see also Ruether, 1990b) and addresses them thus: 'How easily you destroyed man, the image of God. Because of the death which you brought upon us, even the Son of God had to die.' It is little wonder women have complied with men to redeem themselves. With these factors in mind, Harrison (1984) identifies the separation of sexuality from spirituality due to the dominator/oppressed model that precludes real intimacy. Love has become a power game that objectifies women and disengages sex from spirituality.

Feminist socio-theologians have sought to name the inconsistencies and amend the thinking. Stevenson-Moessner (2000), in linking the disembodiment of soul with women's violated bodies (p.14), notes that Mary, the mother of Christ, carried the Spirit (of God) in her womb (p.11). Physical senses, then, are the means by which we are conscious of both spirit and world (Harrison, 1985:12-20). Thus Isherwood (2000) and colleagues, suggest body-centred paradigms for theological and spiritual reflection. Carr (1993:22-23) notes that a feminist theological perspective often begins with women's bodily experience. Menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, childrearing and menopause elicit images, models, insights and concepts that shed light on God and the God/world relationship. Because male-stream theology ignores these, it distorts the God/human relationship. Peberdy (1988:16) notes the objection to women's ordination on the grounds of possible pregnancy.

A re-visioned biblical hermeneutic is often a starting point which, in itself, is interesting, since it assumes a male-taught paradigm of basic biblical authority (Hampson, 1990:37-41). For example, Moltmann-Wendel (1994:ix) notes the social disdain evoked by women's bodily functions grounded in a biblical story of one woman's gynaecological

illness, Lee (1995) argues the case for integrated body and spirit from First Corinthians, and Ruether (1990b:18-19) sets about claiming the female body as a legitimate symbol of Christian faith. With a poetic gentleness, Weber (1987) also takes the feminine body and gives form to a female Christology she calls 'WomanChrist'

Women, Sin and Redemption

Chauvinist/misogynist perspectives perpetuate women's moral inferiority. For example, Grey (1992) cites Christianity's demonising of Celtic heroines. Feminists have thus challenged traditional doctrines on sin. Soelle (1990:54-76) holds that sin is a separation from God caused when some human beings set up hierarchical structures to the detriment of others. She holds this as the antipathy of grace (pp.77-94). Ruether (1998a:26-30) analyses masculinist interpretation of Eve's role in Genesis, and the subsequent mandate on women to devalue their own kind. Similarly, Thistlethwaite (1990:77-91) develops the issues affecting the self and sin with regard to both sex and race.

Language is a key catalyst. Johnson, E.A. (1996:37) notes that exclusive male God-talk means that 'femaleness is relegated to the unholy darkness without.' Jones, S. (2000) too, asks questions about traditional sin-talk. She raises the issue of what sin-talk has done to *'her'* (women's) self image, what it has caused '*her*' (p.96) to become, and discusses the nature of ensuing communities where women have been regarded so negatively. She suggests that women have trouble acknowledging their right to a full life. They easily name 'oppression' but do not easily call it 'sin' (p.109). Jones also regards Calvin's doctrine of sin as not going far enough to include not only sinners, but also victims of sin (p.111). Further, Rankka (1998) identifies and opens up the reality of many aspects of women's suffering and, from a black, womanist perspective, Townes (1993) presents a collection of articles on evil and suffering. West (1995), on the other hand, refutes the notion of women's total innocence and warns against scapegoating men for all oppression underscoring the fine line between legitimate feminist issues and replicating perpetrator stances within feminist theory.

In *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether (1993) reinterprets God, Christ, sin and redemption, and holds that the 'critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women'. Therefore, she assumes 'whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts'

this is not reflective of God (pp.18-19). Ruether (1985:93-98) contends that male-assumed moral superiority is based on inadequate interpretation of the Genesis story that clearly implicates men as guilty. She cites the literal translation of the woman's name as 'Life' (as the Mother of all life), not Eve. In later works, Ruether (1998:29-30, 1996:69-70) identifies misogynist perspectives on the very creation of woman as the downfall of man and the notion of a return to spiritual 'maleness' as the means of redemption. There has been much feminist reaction to such theology. *Deliver Us From Eve* (Thiering, 1977b) is a collection of essays that extends feminist theoretical reinterpretation to social application within the Christian church. Grey's *Redeeming the Dream* (1989) challenges the practice of passive human response in the face of a singular male saviour. She names sites of women's oppression, as does Daly (1978), and raises the question of what, exactly, women need redeeming from. She then suggests models of redemption and atonement by redefining women's 'sin' as the power and wholeness that needs to be reclaimed. However, Daly (1986:44-68) does not consider the story as salvageable to Christianity. She contends, 'the myth reveals the "fall" of religion into the role of patriarchy's prostitute (p.47)'. These have been radical redefinitions of women's place within the faith extending specifically to images of God and Christ.

God-Images and Christology

God Metaphors

One central problematic for feminist theology is the traditional exclusive male image of God, its prescription of God/human relations and its resistance to expulsion even within the experience of some radical feminists (Morton, 1985:147). There is an overwhelming volume of feminist contribution in this area from a variety of perspectives. Daly (1986:19) contends that 'if God is male, then male is God'. As men writing responses to feminist theology, Wren (1989) concedes that male language and God-models have facilitated male control, Bouma (1992:36-37) and Harrison (1985:34-35) note the application to male as head of the household and its public amplification, and Franklin, R. (1986) notes the problems of God and male pronouns. But male God-language goes beyond pronouns. The male image of God has been challenged on various fronts. Daly (1986) dethrones God the Father as the judgmental conformist to ruling power bases,

Ruether (1993:53-71) liberates God images from the King/Lord depiction, and Duck (1991) proposes liturgical alternatives to the all-male Trinitarian tradition.

Some core uniting factors in the literature include suggested images of God that do not legitimate male as normative and do not support dominator/subservient models within theology and social structures. However, feminists have met some feminine images of God, with caution. As Hampson (1990:92-96) and McFague (1989:141) stress, the concession to attribute a male God with feminine characteristics still stereotypes gender and threatens to swallow the feminine in an all-embracing male model. Both Hampson and Daly maintain that the Judeo-Christian God is essentially and irredeemably male. Daly (1986), who speaks in graphic terms of the death and castration (p.19) of God the Father, advocates moving beyond Christianity. Others have searched for models that reconcile Christianity with women's standpoint.

For some, the starting point has been Scripture. Trible (1990) cites female God-images, including God as Mother, in Old Testament passages, and calls the editing out and ignoring of such imagery as 'scandalous' and the one-sided depiction of God as 'male idolatry' (p.25). Johnson, E.A. (1996) concurs, identifying the 'scotosis', the blind spot (pp.13-16) that blocks out legitimate wisdom when it does not serve the cause of the ruling parties, and Daly (1986:69-70) extends the idolatry suggestion to the Jesus tradition. Feminist critique on androcentric images is thus a bid to discover 'the God beyond', that is, the 'real God' (Carr, 1988:140).

Feminists have sought alternatives to hierarchical theology and gendered God-images. An understandable progression from Father God is to explore the notion of God as Mother. This has various applications. McFague (1990) distinguishes Mother God and embracer of all ecology, who orders the cosmic household 'in a fashion beneficial to all' from King-redeemer God who punishes those who assume rights that belong to the King (p.256). She regards God as lover and healer.

Unlike Brock (1984) who views the cross event as pure violence, Maitland (1990:154) sees Christ's passion as a legitimate birthing metaphor that brought forth new life. Maitland's view is that we need both mother and father images and metaphors that transcend these, and that each gender needs the beloved 'other' (p.156). This resonates

with Edwards' (1989:13-143) view as she considers models for the ordained clergy and Coll's (1994:42) call for images that do not suggest the 'social distance as do King, Master and Lord' and 'measureless power', but 'presence and immanence'. However, Daly (1986:97, 149) notes how mothers and daughters have been taught to hate each other. Further, Johnson, E.A. (1996:172-75) and Duck (1991:57) warn against patriarchal romantic idealising of motherhood and defining the feminine as biological function, and Grey (1989:6) cautions against the exclusive use of female experienced-based God-images. In this respect, *Motherhood: Experience, Institution and Theology* (Carr and Fiorenza, 1989) is a collection of significant comments on social and theological constructions of mother and the link to God as Mother.

Because parental God-images are so problem-fraught (Carr, 1988:142-143; Coll, 1994:41-47), some theorists have embraced more fluid and diverse concepts. These include Heyward's (1982; 1984) definition of God as the power-in-the-relational to transform social inequality and injustices, Ruether's (1993) systematic feminist treatment of Christian symbols and McFague's (1990) almost lateral reference to God as 'lover' and 'friend'. Maitland (1990) also points out the image of God the child who plays with us, and the unpersonified images of God given by Jesus (the Way, the Vine, the Resurrection, p.155). She also includes God as verb of transformation (pp.155-156) noting, 'how can you tell the dancer from the dance?' that is, the deed from the doer. Interestingly, dance is also Fiorenza's (1992:20-50) metaphor for 'charting the field' for feminist biblical interpretation and Wren's (1989:195-214) for the interplay of elements in the Trinity. Daly (1986:xvii-xx) discusses God-as-verb citing the noun-Goddess as static, as distinct from the verb-Goddess as transforming energy that replaces 'faded metaphors' (p.xix) with action that remakes individuals and communities.

Women's Relation to Jesus – Underside Theology

Another basic feminist problematic is the fact of a male Messiah. Whatever can be made of God, historically the person of Jesus was undeniably male. Ruether (1993:116-138) therefore poses the question, 'Can a male saviour save women?' The answer has been framed in historic explanations for the patriarchalisation of Christology (pp.122-134) and various feminist reconfigurations of the Christ icon (pp.134-138). This necessitates a theology that begins from the underside (Thistlethwaite and Engel, 1990), a focusing on

textual shadows, a liberating of the traditional Christ icon (Isherwood and Ruether, 1999) and the transformation of myth (Wainwright, 1994). For example, Brock's *Journeys by Heart* (1988) challenges the construction of Jesus as revered male hero and grounds salvation in the relational imagery of love, and the 'heart' as metaphor for the human self and its capacity for intimacy. Brock (1984:68) advocates a fluid nature of feminist spiritual centres and calls for an end to the 'idolatry' of Jesus/crucifixion focus. Fiorenza' (1983:130-140) mentions feminism's discovery of 'equality from below' and Sophia as the Spirit of equality in the Jesus movement. She analyses the socio-political context of Christological discourses, and formulates a paradigm shift against domination models through the tracing of Divine Wisdom in the Jesus tradition (Fiorenza, 1995b). Carr (1988:158) advocates a Christology 'from below' that widens the motif of Christ as *logos* to include Christ as Wisdom (Sophia) incarnate (p.173). This is Johnson, E.A.'s, (1996) major premise for the model of Sophia, an inclusive and healing Jesus. She regards the configuration of Christ as male head a distorted image (Johnson, E.A., 1993:118-120) and discusses Wisdom as inclusive of the oppressed and marginalised (pp.120-129). This theory also resonates with Wainwright's (1994) contention that the disruptive naming of women in the Matthean text indicates the presence of Sophia (p.67) and that this 'underside' of the text enables the use of female symbols. She argues that essential textual notions of Jesus are more inclusive than subsequent hermeneutics of messianic images that oppress women (p.67).

Further, in *Saving Jesus From Those Who are Right* (1999), a title that bears similarities to Spong's *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* (1992), Heyward refutes the 'right winged' view of Jesus as 'Lord' and explores Jesus as an advocate for mutuality. Thus, Jesus is not a weapon to be used against women, children, racial minority groups, poor people, adherents to other faiths, gays and lesbians, the disabled or against the earth. Similarly Fiorenza (1983:105-159) argues for the inclusivity of the Jesus movement that was not meant to discredit Judaism. She (Fiorenza, 1990) moves beyond the dualistic Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith as interpreted by historians and theologians to discover the Christ in Relation who is both human and divine and works for justice between all people.

Soelle (1990:102-119) also regards Jesus from the underside, a figure with arms outstretched who identifies with the oppressed more than simply a 'phantom on earth' (p.115) of some heavenly power. She cites Bonhoeffer's Jesus, the 'man for others' as problematic for women because of the continual mandate for many women to be the persons for others (p.116). Her image resonates with Thistlethwaite's (1990:92-108) account of Christa, the figure of an unclothed woman outstretched in crucifixion position in St. John the Divine church in New York (p.93), that she came to regard as empathetic with women who had suffered sexual and domestic violence.

Various conclusions have taken form from the underside. These include West, A.'s (1995:178-186) caution that the feminist theology of 'otherness' is in danger of alienating still more 'others' because no one person or theory can truly represent everyone. The inference is that we might as well settle for Jesus. Daly (1986:79), on the other hand, talks about 'the scandal of particularity', that is, regarding Jesus as the only God-human and advocates a faith without models. Daly and Hampson claim that a single cultured male saviour who lived in the first century cannot really save anyone (West, A., 1995:179).

God, Jesus and Suffering

The issue of Jesus' suffering as an example of obedience for women is another feminist problematic. Daly (1986:114-122) contends that male models, particularly of submissive suffering, reinforce the 'unholy trinity' of rape, genocide and war. This is supported by Rankka's (1998) analysis of women's responses to God amid differing types of personal suffering. She documents the oppression in selected women's experiences of suffering caused by traditional punitive and redemptionist theories. Towne's (1993) theme is similar. The issue, then, is that of feminist response to the crucifixion. As an extreme response, Brock (1984) reworks atonement theory to expunge violence from Christianity. She regards Christ as a 'distant partner who participates in our search for life whole and healed' (p.69) and notes, 'We redeem Christ when we refuse to let patriarchy and its death-dealing images have the final word' (p.70). Brock argues that the person and hermeneutics of Christ are that of male perfection and sacrificial victim, and that Christian feminists need not have any fixed authoritative centre. Jesus can be redeemed as 'healing presence' (pp.71-74). However, there are a range of theories that relevantise

the cross event for women. For example, Johnson, E.A. (1996:158-161) regards Jesus' suffering as a stand against suffering. Her theory is that:

> Jesus' death included all that makes death terrifying: state torture, physical anguish, brutal injustice, hatred by enemies, the mockery of their victorious voices, collapse of his life's work in ruins, betrayal by some close friends, the experience of abandonment by God, and the powerlessness in which one ceases to be heroic (p.158).

The survival of Sophia/Jesus despite all this is testimony to victory over dominating violence. Ruether (1998a; 1998b) outlines a history of male-centred redemption theories and develops a feminist theology of redemption that does not include a specifically male icon and does not revere suffering and subjugation as either punishment or requirement. Ruether (1998a:103) embraces the idea of resurrection wherever people rise up and confront injustice, sentiments that are shared by Soelle (1990:120-135) with shades of difference. Soelle contends that, 'To go the way of Jesus means finding a different relationship to suffering from that of avoidance and denial,' (p.120) and that 'women who have had just enough of hunger, the military and big business at the expense of our mother, the earth' (p.135), regard the cross as a way of resistance.

Just as Daly (1986:75) regards Jesus as 'mankind's most illustrious scapegoat', Ray (1998:53-70) also calls into question theories of atonement based upon Jesus as spotless sacrifice, scapegoat, surrogate and superhero. Ray (1998) challenges the theology of self-sacrifice as normative for Christians because it resigns victims to their suffering (p.60) and encourages those wishing to imitate Christ to take the rap for others (pp.63-64). This does not encourage the oppressed to work for justice in the present (pp.66-67). Thus she contends that liberation must be seen as broader than the individual response to embrace the structural as well (p.85). However, she suggests that the Crucifixion reveals that suffering and death need not be fruitless and useless in the face of human oppression. Similarly, Grey (1989:16-17), in citing Daly's (1978) view of a God whose glory depends upon women's suffering in childbirth, holds that the cross event *did* benefit humanity. She addresses the issue of women's self-sacrifice, names the feminist response to male theology of self-denial and sets about outlining 'the redemptive ethic of cross theology for women, to discover non-destructive meanings for self-sacrifice' (p.17).

The Goddess

The Goddess has multiple faces across many traditions (Husain, 1997) considered heretical to Christianity (Hampson, 1990:77). This is evident in Christ's (1979b) exploration of the Goddess outside Christianity. Rae and Marie-Daly (1990) trace a history of Goddess images from pre- and extra-Judaic/Christian traditions and patriarchal intent to dominate by silencing, cultifying and exterminating various Goddess practices. They link this to ecological destruction. Daly, (1978) also refers to violence and oppression against woman as 'Goddess Murder' (pp.107-11). Her book, *Gyn/Ecology*, with an axe as a slash, gives graphic illustration to her point, not unlike the separation slash in the title of this thesis.

In reforming traditional God-images, feminists have often challenged what has been considered sacred ground with concepts regarded as heretical by mainstream Christianity. Such is the notion of the Goddess. It is one thing to use a female pronoun, it is one step further to actually use names such as Sophia (Johnson, E.A., 1996) or Shekinah (Coll, 1994:37) and icon God as female. Within Christianity, feminist theologians regard Sophia as a suppressed tradition. A major paradigm shift within the thinking of respondents to this thesis has been, if not to personally embrace the concept of God as Goddess, to at least respect the theology of those who do. Johnson, E.A.'s (1996) *She Who Is*, has been a principal feminist work on theological education reading lists (Fiorenza, 1988:2-3). It is a major permission-giving source for the use of female God metaphors and an overview of critical Christian feminist issues. Johnson brings to life feminine symbolism and metaphors, redefining such concepts as wisdom, power and divine suffering. Unlike Fiorenza, Johnson is not concerned with the differences between her theories and those of others so much as the synthesis of a wide range of feminist theory. Her work resonates with that of Morton's (1985) discussion on the power of language, symbols, images, metaphors and myths to shape thinking and social experience. Johnson, E.A. (1996:50-51) problematises the notion of the Holy Spirit as the only God-head manifestation of the feminine. Compared with God the Son who has a face and God the Father who can be visualised thus, the feminine is still faceless.

Johnson E.A. (1996:124-187) speaks about the relation of God images to the self and Sophia in Biblical literature as Spirit, Jesus and Mother. She argues that 'Wisdom' is

God Herself – a more significant metaphor than 'Son of God'. These images are referred to in terms of action and language to reinvent theology and to tackle the issue of their eclipsing and distortion within tradition. Johnson and others have thus sought answers to the social hiatus in feminine God-models and spirituality. In *The Wisdom of Fools*, Grey (1993) writes of revelation as a redefinition of God/human relations. Grey aligns the 'Logos Myth' with the dominator/sub-servant model. She, like Harrison (1985:3-21), identifies women as traditional outsiders to interpreted Divine revelation. Grey thus invites us to consider the more 'foolish' philosophy of 'Sophia' as relational, non-competitive, and ecologically embracing model (see also McFague, 1987). Wainwright (1995) takes a similar tack and looks at male language, concepts and imagery in biblical texts to exegete 'below or behind the biblical story to a time when divine power was imaged as female' (1995:108) in the Old Testament tradition culminating in the Christ figure whom she identifies as Jesus/Sophia.

However, there are some serious reservations about Goddess theory. For example, Morton (1989) gives an experiential personal account of the importance of the Goddess as more than a cerebral replacement for a male God, and Carr (1988:142) notes the possibility of a Goddess that can become 'as oppressive – suffocating, sentimental, possessive – as an authoritarian father symbolism.' Ruether (1996:7), more pointedly, warns of the dangers of Goddess as mere 'adding women' theory and frames the concept of Godd/ess 'beyond gender' but 'being the ground of the personhood of both men and women (p.8)'. Heine (1989) examines the theories of goddesses, original matriarchal community, feminising Jesus and what she considers the partial or false hope these alone promise. She analyses how feminism turns back on itself to re-oppress. She advocates a skepticism of feminist icons and sets about a second stage of challenge to oppression that transcends feminist theology by integrating humanity. Heine critiques the foundations of feminist theology as inadequate theories and praxis that aggravate the divide between women and men. She suggests the integration of images and theologies, a new science that transcends popular feminist theology. However, Heine (1989:3) assumes that, 'Today women theologians can arrange services which eliminate all male elements in language and conceptuality'. This statement ignores the many situations in which women theologians are socially hamstrung and indicates the need for constant reflection on theory and how it translates to actual practice. From this perspective Cady et al (1986)

offer, perhaps, a viable solution. They examine the possibility of Sophia as a work-in-progress model for feminist spirituality. They dare to define her as unfinished (p.79). They trace the image from Hebrew/Christian perspective to extra-Christian. Cady et al (pp.38-54) analyse the Sophia/Jesus dynamic but also point out the limitations of Sophia as sometimes male and white middle-class feminist defined (pp.77-80).

Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics

Epistemology and Ontology

Traditionally, knowledge has been authenticated by presumed purist objectivity (Harding, 1991:138-163; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Smith, D.E. 1988; Brewster, 1988). Although such an androcentric epistemological frame is difficult to overcome, feminist epistemology insists upon the relevancy of asking who the purported knower is (Code, 1992:1-26). The process has questioned traditional authority and given rise to the acknowledgement of women's ways of knowing (Harding, 1991; Young, 1990:49-69; Belenky et al, 1986). For example, feminist sociology challenges male-centred models of scientific enquiry (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Harding, 1991; Acker et al, 1983; Oakley, 1992; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002) and Code (1992) in *What Can She Know?* argues that the sex of the knower is crucial in how knowledge is perceived and credited. Confoy (1995) identifies traditional views of 'woman' as a derivative term, women as inferior, the numbing of women's self-awareness, the quashing of women's creativity, experience and contribution, and the monopoly of men as experts and namers over women. But, although post-modernist thinking appears to challenge much of the positivist approach, it too often decentres the knowing subject, again devaluing feminine knowledge and recreating yet another male epistemological paradigm (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:97). Feminist theologians who have questioned a system that is only informed by androcentric knowledge and reality constructs have also encountered such circular regrouping of male themes and interests. It is against this backdrop that such works as Russell's (1987) assertion of legitimate feminist' authority to reinterpret Scripture and insist upon the church as a new household of equals, has been important.

Feminist Biblical Reconstruction

Women's trust in their own ways of knowing has been a significant paradigm shift. As Brock (1993:71) observes, 'we can use any text to look at the multiple voices inside us

and speak with more than the voice of innocent victim.' Thus feminist exegetes extract meaning from many hidden biblical voices and their resonation with the reader. Feminist biblical hermeneutics includes relevantising the Bible for women, bringing into focus women in texts, women's issues and feminist perspectives on texts against the tide of male dominant textual issues, male presence and male hermeneutics. Respondents reported that the kind of thinking that thus challenged traditional biblical hermeneutics carried with it the fear of contradicting God, rendering radical rethinking dangerous. Permission-giving scholarship has therefore played a crucial role.

There is a huge range of feminist biblical scholarship. Whilst the nature and purpose of this thesis is not to cover and give a detailed review of all such work, some main areas and theorists stand out.

Feminist biblical hermeneutics can be traced back several centuries. Selvidge (1996) documents some early historical 'voices' from the 1500s who argued, from within Scripture, the essentially egalitarian intent of Christianity. In the 1890s Elizabeth Cady Stanton led a group of women that produced *The Woman's Bible* (1895/1898). It attacked the bias of male biblical authorship and male hermeneutics and raised such issues as women's invisibility in biblical texts. Stanton was concerned that Jewish-Christian traditions and Scripture were the root of women's oppression both in religious spheres and in broader society (Gifford, 1993:52). Her work has been expanded by contemporary women scholars (Newsom and Ringe, 1992). Although it did not address the issue of holistic equality in the contemporary sense, this was a daring work for its time and indicative of a simmering undertone of feminism in an extremely restrictive era.

The rise of second-wave feminism in the 1970s fostered thoughts that because patriarchal religion had 'erased' women, feminists needed to move beyond it (Ruether, 1996:ix; Coll, 1994:133-134; Fiorenza, 1983:xviii). But there were those who stayed to take a more critical look at Christianity. Russell's (1976) edited work, *Liberating Word*, pitched at lay and student level, is an early attempt to think beyond male-taught paradigms. A central contributor, Fiorenza, is one of the most ground-breaking feminist theologians. Her book *But She Said* (1992) articulates the five-point methodology from which she critiques the Bible, indicating her sensitivity to the multiple angles from which

androcentrism has infiltrated scholarship and life generally. Fiorenza has developed feminist biblical hermeneutics from both the refinement of her own methodologies and those of others. For example, in, *In Memory of Her* (1983), she highlights inadequacies in what she frames as Neo-orthodox models of feminist interpretation, in which category she places Ruether, Trible and Russell (p.19), and the Feminist Sociology of Knowledge model (pp.14-26). Like Ruether, Fiorenza views departure from essential Christianity as a denial of women's history and heritage. She and others have invested great scholarship and soul-orientated thinking in feminist biblical hermeneutics. This has entailed critical analysis of biblical cultural contexts, challenges to male doctrinal interpretations and a search for salvageable core axioms (Fiorenza, 1983). In *Bread Not Stone* (1990) and *But She Said* (1992), Fiorenza takes key biblical texts, articulates androcentric paradigms and establishes feminist critique away from male-based assumptions. Fiorenza thus calls for similar transformation of biblical studies as feminist sociology has challenged the practice of simply 'adding women' (Harding, 1991:105). She encourages the 'hermeneutic of suspicion' (1992:57-62) as reflection to ensure against espousing male paradigms in disguise, and an awareness of omissions from texts.

Theorists have elaborated upon and affirmed each other's models. For example, Heine (1989:21) advocates that 'mistrust is appropriate' when reading Scripture and, in *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, Schottroff (1995) amplifies Fiorenza's model by applying the hermeneutic of suspicion beyond the contemporary context of the reader to the historic situations of biblical stories and interpretations of Scripture. Thus she illuminates how women in early Christianity might have interpreted Jesus-style liberation.

Feminist exegetes have contributed various feminist approaches to biblical content. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes (1993) have searched for actual female authorship in biblical texts through oral traditions, framed in masculinist cultures and overlayed with masculinist interpretation though they may be. Some theorists have connected texts to women's social struggles in similar mode to Blumenthal (1993) as mentioned above. Schottroff (1995), for example, reclaims the stories of women in the New Testament and the early church to underscore the structure of male domination in the church and its' ignoring of poverty. The story of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), for example, is viewed from the perspective of women's monetary struggle (pp.91-100).

Some have focused on uncomfortable texts and have revisioned specific stories and characters from a feminist standpoint. Trible's *Texts of Terror* (1992), for example, is a pull-no-punches underscoring of the violence done to Hagar (Genesis, 16) and Tamar (Genesis, 38) of the Old Testament and the dignity each manages to maintain if read from a fresh perspective. Hampson (1990:91), on the other hand, refutes the idea of redeemable dignity in these stories, whilst Ruether (1996) does venture broader than Christian texts for feminist meaningfulness, all of which has fuelled lively rhetoric, opening the way for the journey forward.

Theorists have thus provided a variety of approaches. Ruether's early work (1975) identifies the historical connection between sexist ideology and social structure, and in *Womanguides* (1996) she takes the innovative step of drawing upon biblical, Near Eastern and Greek sources to compile a collection of texts as a springboard for a women's canon. On the other hand, and emanating from Protestant evangelicalism, Russell, L.M. (1974) concentrates on biblical images and material for a usable past and future. These form the basis for Russell's later works. Whereas Russell and Ruether centre on tradition as a basis for critical feminist biblical methodology, Trible (1973:30-49) concentrates on textual structure. She insists that there is a depatriarchalisation dynamic intrinsic to biblical texts as they pilgrimage through history and cultures (Fiorenza, 1983:19-20). This theory forms the basis for her classic *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Trible, 1978). Her *Texts of Terror* (Trible, 1992) as mentioned above and her reinterpretation of the Creation story (Trible, 1979) underscore the inadequacy of traditional exegesis and the issue of female invisibility in biblical texts that violate, downgrade and misunderstand women. Similarly Chopp (1991:40-70) argues for the intrinsic freedom heard through Scripture that she claims binds Christians together (p.42) despite its oppressive texts. She advocates finding a way through the overlay of 'Word' as male authority to 'Word' that speaks from women's marginality (p.25) and where God is listened to from the position of other (p.125). Unlike Isherwood (2000), who begins with God as flesh rather than Word, Chopp (1991), with reference to Fiorenza's (1990) work on 'Women-Church' and some parallels to McFague's (1987)'experimental' thinking, advocates non-traditional ways of regarding the 'Logos'. She defines women's right to expound, from their experiences, new discourses for the proclamation of God the

Word as a means of rediscovering Scripture, transforming church community and bringing good news to the world.

Further innovative approaches to Scripture include Schneiders (1991b) *The Revelatory Text* in which she regards the divine-human encounter in the act of interpretation. This is an ongoing, changing primary dynamic. She considers Scripture as 'the divine self-gift' that has been 'taking place from the moment of creation' (p.39) and continues to do so. Another innovative contribution is that of Keller's (1996) *Apocalypse Now and Then*, that offers a new interpretation of the impact of the Christian Apocalyptic theology on Western history and thought. She demonstrates through biblical texts, philosophy, feminist and poststructuralist theory, imagination, poetry, history and contemporary politics how the concept of the Apocalypse has directed Western views about text, history, community, and gender. Whilst refuting traditional doomsday threats, Keller does not relinquish the concept of justice.

Noted Australian works and biblical scholars have also impacted upon the lives of respondents. These have sometimes offered local permission-giving and camaraderie. They include Dorothy Lee's interpretation of anti-dualism in First Corinthians (1995), Veronica Lawson's proposals (1995) for freeing both text and reader from patriarchal frames and, as mentioned above, Elaine Wainwright's (1994, 1995) underside view of Matthew's gospel.

Literature about women in the Bible, by authors of both genders, has often been interpreted through male prescription of women's social role (Fiorenza, 1992:20,27). Feminist interpretation seeks to reinterpret texts taking the silencing, disempowering and invisibility of women into account. In *But She Said* (1992) Fiorenza applies her evolved interpretive process to refigure the lives of specific women in the Bible. As did Stanton in less articulated form in the 1880s (Newsom and Ringe, 1992:xiv), Fiorenza (1992:27) also employs the critique of imagination and 'hermeneutics of suspicion' to discover biblical women without the overlay of contemporary prescribed roles, attending to the silences and voids where women are not explicitly present. Fiorenza seeks to acknowledge forgotten women writers behind biblical texts, and to rediscover the agency

and influence of women left out of male historical accounts. As with Brock (1993), Fiorenza legitimises the interaction of woman reader with the text.

Generally feminist writers seek to hermeneutically, creatively and imaginatively relocate well-known women biblical characters and bring into focus those who have been largely invisible. Examples of this include Winter's biographical, contextual and liturgical works (1991a, 1991b) on women in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, Ruether's (1996:174-194) work on unsung exemplary Old and New Testament women, and Coffey's (2003) *Hidden Women of the Gospels*. Coll (1994:141-143) reclaims Eve from Tertullian's image of Eve as the 'Devil's gateway' and De Boer (1997) suggests that Mary Magdalene may have been the disciple whom Jesus loved, disguised as male in John's Gospel. Feminist theorists have also challenged traditional images of Mary, the docile and compliant mother of Christ, and the social implications for contemporary women (Oldfield, 1977). Ruether's early work on Mary (1977) traces her as an historic and soulful constant. She identifies Mary with Goddesses of ancient Near Eastern tradition, Mary as the Wisdom figure in the Old Testament, Mary as Mother of Christ and Mary as executor of Christ's mission. Thus Ruether illuminates Mary as a thread-like historical contribution. Others have offered various perspectives. For example, Soelle (1990:69-70) regards the underside revolutionary nature of the Magnificat (Luke, 1:46-55) and Stevenson-Moessner (2000:11) reconnects Mary to the female body rejecting the male-defined passivity and sinless virginity that disembodies her. Although some would regard such theology as an incomplete deconstruction of romantic Mariology (Coakley, 1992:105-106), Ruether (1993:139-158) views Mary as a partner of God, representative of poor and oppressed humanity called to liberation.

Coll (1994:89-107) reclaims Mary as 'Disciple'. This does not entirely solve the problem because Mary as disciple to her own son raises more issues of subservience. Chung (1990:74-84), on the other hand, redefines Mary as disciple *and* co-redeemer and Weber (1987, 152-172) takes a fresh look at the concepts of 'virgin' and 'mother', their integration into a freeing image of Mary for women by redefining 'virgin' as the seat of Wisdom. Such efforts highlight the fluid and unfinished nature of feminist deconstruction/reconstruction work.

The Church and Gender Relations

The Church as Community

Feminist have identified broad areas of discrimination and oppression against women across many spheres. Smith, D.E. (1988) articulated the fact of *'Everyday Life as Problematic'* for women and the negotiating processes in which women must engage in order to function. In recognition of the complexity of women's subordination/oppression in both the public and private spheres of social life, Walby (1989) proposes that patriarchy can be analysed as six interlinked structures that often clash with one another to oppress women in the workplace, in domestic life and in political spheres. One of these structures is 'the patriarchal culture' (p.214) that includes the media, education and religion. Walby notes that religion has been particularly significant in the definition of socially appropriate forms of feminine (and masculine) behaviour. Feminists have therefore argued about whether or not the church is redeemable as a reformed community of equals.

Despite her charges against the church for its enforcement of women's oppression, Daly (1975), unlike de Beauvoir (1972), originally believed in the theoretical possibility of eradicating sexism from the church, but later reneged to feminism outside Christianity. In this regard, Grey (1997) identifies the dichotomy created by the desire to work for change and the wish to escape immediate oppression. Jones, S. (2000:153-176) too, names the discrepancy between what the church *could be* and its actuality. For feminists, the struggle has been heartfelt. Furlong's *With Love to the Church* (1965) is a review of the church's inability to operate as a love-for-people motivated organisation. Those who have stayed in Christianity have framed the basis for relational, as opposed to male-hero-centred, theology. This is essential to Brock's (1988) Christa/community, Victorin-Vangerud's (2000) liberated theological model for a household beyond monotheism, Fiorenza's (1993) *Discipleship of Equals* and Grey's (1989) theory of mutuality and connectedness (see also King, U., 1990).

Fiorenza's (1993) *Discipleship of Equals*, is a collection of her various articles over the years relevant to the feminist struggle for equality within the church. In it she traces the origins of patriarchy, names it as 'dependence on and control by men in power' (p.213),

and argues from Scripture that the Jesus movements were essentially a refutation of this (pp.211-232). This significant work seeks to address the problem of limited feminisms that reinforce dualisms. Rather than a sisterhood model, Fiorenza advocates an *ekklsia* occupying an 'open space' wherein 'overlapping subcommunities' take into account multiple differences and exercise mutual respect to combat 'patriarchal relations of oppression' (p.348).

Russell (1974) also applies biblical theories of liberation, freedom and redefined humanity to church structure, including the issues of women's ordination, organisation of family life and women's autonomy. It is noted that major feminists theorists and movements do not advocate replicating exclusionist theology. The Sheffield Report (Parvey, 1983) bears testimony to this. Ruether's (1996:x) motivation is to help transform Christianity into a 'working culture more affirming of women in mutuality with men'. Russell (1987) also insists upon the church as a new household of equals. Her later work (1993) expands this and places white mainline church feminism at the forefront of opportunity and responsibility for human connectedness. Russell's (1984; 1987; 1993) liberationist formulation of a non-hierarchical theology has optimistic social implications for marginalised people and church structures. In similar vein Soelle (1984) identifies traditional 'culture of obedience' both inside and outside the church and advocates a rethink of religion. Her collection of essays, *The Strength of the Weak* resonates with Janeway's (1980) *Powers of the Weak* and other works (Blumenthal, 1993; Rankka, 1998; Mathews, R.D., 1993:92-106) that extract fortitude from disadvantage.

Bendroth (1993) critiques the basic masculinity of American revivalism, its anti-feminist stance and its bid to maintain order by prescriptive traditionalist vocation and family gender ro[illegible] Much of these tenets resonated with the original social location of respondents. *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (Loades, 1990) is a potent overview of broad feminist theology including feminist biblical interpretation, feminist position of Christian historical tradition and the social consequences for women and the world. Essays are drawn from feminists in America and Britain. In it, Loades identifies theology as underscoring women-oppressive world structures. She notes Daly's abhorrence of this

(p.181) but majors on theorists who formulate paradigms of hope for reformulated Christianity.

With an emphasis on homosexuality, Ruether (1975) traces the rationale and origins of women's oppression through secular and religious social mediums. In some respects, this prepared the ground for Heyward's (1984; 1989) radical tack on sexuality and relational theology. Whilst Heyward's (1984:55-74) earlier work applauds such theorists as Ruether and Daly, she proposes a more radical feminist movement with regard to sexuality (1989), takes up the cause of lesbianism, and argues against church categorisation of humanity. As opposed to the dominator/subservient model, she redefines the God/human dynamic as mutual relation. Rudy's (1997) stance is similar. She suggests that conservative Christianity has missed the point in raising moral issues. Instead of rigidly defining people as either gay or straight, a paradigm shift would be to focus on whether or not human relations are exploitative and whether or not our sexual encounters help us to understand God better.

From an Australian perspective, Thiering (1986) argues against hierarchical structures and fundamentalism as moral absolutism, to reaffirm women as equals in the church and in the home. On the other hand, Brady (1986), whilst not refuting the oppression of women in the church, stresses those ecclesiastic areas where women *have* had autonomy. However, as so many other works stress, these have been restricted. *Women, Faith and Fetes* (Willis, 1977) is an ecumenical collection of essays depicting the social relegation of women to menial, unacknowledged and disempowered roles within Australian churches. Marie Tulip's *Sexism and the Church* (1977) is an early and somewhat wide-eyed relief at the naming of androcentric church tradition. Later she wrote a chronology, from 1977 to 1983, of the feminist based 'Affirmative Action' initiative in the Uniting Church. This is a documentation of the church's progress, or lack of it, with regard to women's representation on decision-making committees (1986). She concluded that sexist attitudes and behaviours had changed little by 1983. Dempsey (1991:73-75) also notes the inequality of men and women in church decision-making processes set against the major role women play in keeping the churches viable in rural areas. Similarly, Sturmey (1991) gives historical context to women as the work-horses behind the Anglican Church in Australia from early settlement days and 'God's police' in colonial

life. She observes that, as Australian society gradually separated from the church and the faith, women in the Anglican tradition remained more 'spiritual' and therefore less connected with education, politics and public life (pp.49-50). Her theory is that, as the church became linked with the domestic sphere, it was therefore seen as 'women's business' (p.50) except for its official leadership. This model has been at the heart of the debate over women's ordination.

Women's Ordination

Smith, D.E. (1988:74-75) highlights the discriminating practise of objectifying women. The debate on women's ordination within mainstream denominations has brought into the public arena, women's social status, women's intellectual abilities, women's capacity for 'men's' work, women's bodies as clerics, women's prescribed traditional roles and women's spiritual standing before God and the church. However, debates have sometimes ignored women's actual physical presence and emotional involvement. I was once reprimanded, by a senior cleric, for not 'paying attention' when male clerics, ignoring the presence of women clerics at a clergy retreat, were debating the issue of women's ordination, as if it was purely theoretical.

Much has been written on the topic. Some literature is almost apologetic. St. Paul's negative comments on women (1 Corinthians 14:35) and traditional arguments based on the fact that Christ was a man and the disciples were all men (Armstrong, 1993:211; Porter, 1989:164; Langley, 1987:84-85), have prompted the necessity for an historical, biblical and ethical 'case for women's ordination' (Edwards, 1989; Carr, 1988:43-59). Thiering (1973:84-85) pointedly asks, 'Is there something about the nature of the ministry that makes it dependent on male sexual characteristics?' Male comments include Kevin Giles' (1977) bid for women's ordination in the Australian vernacular as giving women 'a fair go' (p.41). Though apparently well intended, this tack tends to water down the injustice of inequality. Leo Hay (1986) gives a non-committal Catholic standpoint including the issues of church tradition and apostolic succession. Although pointing out some insensitivities towards women, it generally problematises them. In this respect, David Wetherell's edited collection (1987) on the debate within the Australian Anglican church is more concerned with the rupture to church structures, the undermining of Anglican authority and the damage to ecumenical relations than it is with

injustices to women. In answer to these general attitudes of the time, Porter (1989:163) cites a Melbourne vicar's speech to the 1985 Melbourne Synod in which he said, 'Women will not be ordained until men repent!' This indicated the need to redefine the entire male church structures and theology on women (Langley, 1987:80-81). Likewise Parvey (1980), whilst taking into account different denominational traditions, argues that there cannot be a way forward for Christian unity without the recognition of the full humanity of both women and men.

To begin to overturn the status quo has taken great energy. An overview by McPhillips and Tulip (1998), of historical contexts, varied religious feminisms and feminist movements across denominations, within Australia, is testimony to this. A groundswell called for an end to the silencing of women in theological construct, biblical text and in the church (Hageman, 1974; Armstrong, 1993). But to let women out of the 'cage' (Franklin and Jones, 1987) was considered dangerous. A second report by The House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, (1988:1) states the need for 'safeguards in the event of the Church of England deciding to go ahead and ordain women to the priesthood.' Porter (1989:1) cites Furlong's metaphor of the women's ordination issue as a 'great spring of water gushing up in the middle of a croquet lawn', upsetting well-ordered injustices, thus stressing the need to go beyond 'adding women' to existing structures. This has been an evolving process. *Opening the Cage* (Franklin and Jones, 1987) is a collection of individual biographical stories that reveals the changing roles of women and the threats this posed to what was considered the sane order of society. Porter (1989) documents the protracted struggle for the ordination of women in the Anglican Church in Australia in its historical context from the late 1800s to 1989. Her work includes details of legalities, councils and controversies, theological debates and bitter exchanges with regard to a slow and painful process, revealing the arduousness with which women were scrutinised. Her follow-up paper (1994) hones in on the immediate events of the decision to ordain women, which was won by only a few votes (p.162). In the end, the catalyst was not theology, but an action that dragged the church through the civil courts (pp.163-164). Porter notes, 'the Australian (Anglican) Church finally voted for women priests to save itself from catastrophe,' that is, not because its hierarchy generally realised the error of inequality. Franklin, M.A. (1986a) also discusses the painful debate in the Australian Anglican Church and notes the scraps

offered to women officially but often not put into practice. Her comment underscores that sexism transcends policy and thwarts process. Field (1991) further analyses the confusion of meaning in the discourses within the same debate using Foucault's concept of a 'discursive field' (see McHoul and Grace, 1995) with a view to understanding contributions to the debate. She cites the predominant thinking that locates women within domesticity (Field, 1991:57) and renders them invisible and 'excluded from the scheme of salvation' (p.59).

The battle for women's ordination within Anglicanism has been hard fought. Jill Black's response (1987) is an anti-feminist attack on Franklin, M.A., (1986a) and the Movement for the Ordination of Women (Porter, 1989:103-6; Franklin, M.A., 1986b:ix) for the sake of church unity. Piggin (1996), who obliviously describes the debate in sexist terms, as more complex than 'a two-*man* match' (p.203) similarly concludes that the issue of women's ordination should never have become central to the church. Porter's paper (1994) is a blow-by-blow documentation of the end of the official process that impacted directly on the Anglican respondents in this thesis and indirectly on those in other denominations. She documents events as they pertain to the Anglican Church from a feminist/justice perspective but with obvious personal commitment to the institution. Betty Feith (1990) similarly gives an account of the earlier struggle for the Order of Deaconesses and the Campaign for the Ordination of Women within the Methodist Church from 1942 to 1977. She notes how deaconesses had to prove that women could 'undertake positions of responsibility' (p.36). A later research report to The Women's Commission of the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Australia (Bouma et al, 1996) underscores biases and injustices still meted out to women clergy and the unaccommodating nature of present structures. Respondents demonstrated similar commitment as ordained women trying to make genuine contributions within male clerical structures.

As noted, feminist theology goes beyond 'adding women' to clerical ranks, seeking redefinitions of clergy roles and church structures. Russell (1984), in looking at women's ordination, suggested a paradigm change from hierarchical, dominant/subservient models of ministry to one that gets rid of the pinnacle and sees servant-hood, not as non-choice slavery but as the Christian *choice*, particularly for clergy, to serve others. This concept

still has subservient overtones for women and ignores those denominations where clergy have not had much autonomy (Ballis, 1999). However feminists theorise, the discrepancy between liberation ideology and church actuality persists. Lehman's study (1994) on what lay people think about women priests/ministers in the Anglican and Uniting Churches indicated that, at least until the early 1990s, large sectors still expressed a preference for male clergy in specific roles (p.125) and Brennan (1995:96), active in the original Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW), raises doubts about its essential impact.

Christian and Extra-Christian Theorists – the Conversation.

The conversation between Christian feminism and allied and/or contra streams is vital for continuing reflection. I have used the term 'post-Christian' sparingly throughout this thesis due to the connotations of a 'post' as a stark marker that excludes the middle, fluid ground so crucial to the lives of respondents (see McPhillips 2001). The term 'extra' also has limitations but, because it could mean 'outside' or 'including' Christianity, perhaps, better describes the dialogue between feminist Christianity and general feminist spirituality. A classic of such dialogue, is *Womanspirit Rising* (Christ and Plaskow, 1979b). This reader evokes such essential questions as, does theology speak to women's experience? and, does the past hold a future for women? From a variety of theorists it looks at reconstructions of traditions, new traditions, Goddess Spirituality, witchcraft and themes from secular feminism. This is an intrinsically uncompetitive collection that contributes to a holistic overview of choices. Such works have sprung up during the course of the respondents' developing careers, opening areas that have been traditionally taboo. Significant extra-Christian feminism has continued dialogue with Christian feminist theologians (Hampson, 1990; Hampson and Ruether, 1987; Christ and Plaskow, 1979a:15). Hampson (1990) regards Christianity as androcentric to its core, Christology as patristic and the biblical God as automatically 'he' (p.96) and therefore beyond feminist redemption. Unlike Daly's (1979:59-60) early suggestion of a free Christ, she does not regard Jesus as particularly feminist (Hampson, 1990:87-88). She argues that Christianity is so anchored in historic context that it has no mechanisms to change without serious breach of its own principals. She advocates abandonment. Ruether

(1990a) refutes this, contending that, whilst patriarchy has silenced feminist perspectives, the core of Christian revelation to the community of faith is to appropriate change. White (1995) goes even further. She not only contests Hampson's directive to abandon the past, she considers this impossible.

Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* (1975), published with an extra-Christian introduction, highlights her lost hope in Catholicism/Christianity. Like other theorists such as Farley (1976), Daly searched for symbolic core gender equity in Christianity. However, unlike Farley she was unable to refigure core symbolism and later refuted the possibility of gender equality in the church (1975:6) and in Christian theology (1986). Though Daly later described the comment as 'obtuse', she observed that, 'a woman's asking for equality in the church would be comparable to a black person's demanding equality in the Ku Klux Klan' (1975:6) and that, at best, Christianity cannot get beyond 'adding women' (1975:37-41). In *Gynecology* (Daly, 1978) she articulates the death of the Goddess as women's disempowerment through cruel, androcentric social violations. Daly's works (1979,1986) provide a springboard for discarding the paternalism equated with Christianity and a hope in the mustering of women's liberation movements. Though she moved on to address more general issues for radical feminism (1978), her work has prompted much feminist thought for Christians.

In Summary

The above sections outline challenges to traditional theologies, and male-prescribed social structures and roles, including ways of regarding church. Feminist theorists have sought fresh perspectives on such aspects as the language in which faith, and church social relations have been framed, and general male-as-norm theology that marginalises and sometimes demonises, women. They have contended the negative way in which the female body has been regarded (Power, 2001), they have balked at the lack of female God-imagery, and have problematised points of traditional Christology. Theorists have also tackled orthodox biblical hermeneutics that eclipse women's contribution and pervert women's spiritual development. Feminist theologians have insisted upon an ecclesia of equality, particularly with regard to the women's ordination issue. Respondents have been both influenced by, and contributed to, these challenges. The

stories of their journeys are a reflection upon the profound redefining at work within each inner and social self, and the continuing change of interaction with God and community. On the crest of second wave feminism they have struggled to negotiate more honest ways of being than simply adding women to existing male structures within the church and have sought the true self beneath encoded prescriptions.

My Window in the Academy

Whilst I am not aware of works that specifically trace the particular journeys of remaking in the lives of theologians with feminist perspectives as I have attempted to do, there are some whose themes resonate with this thesis. *Interpreting Women's Lives* (Babre et al, 1989) is a collection of biographical and autobiographical material whose objective is 'to create a more inclusive, more fully human conception of social reality' (p.3) than those in male research paradigms. The process of achieving this is often painful. Weber (1987:21-28) discusses the dangers and benefits of 'descent into womanbody,' the process of women shedding oppressive androcentric myths about who they are. She speaks of the painful body dismemberment that must be suffered in order to remake identity (pp.29-40). This is largely the process undertaken by respondents, in varying degrees, as their lives developed from the 1960s.

Chopp (1991), throughout *The Power to Speak*, stresses the importance of women writing the stories of their own becoming. The telling has been undertaken in a variety of forms, sometimes intentional, sometimes in the course of academia. Hutchinson and Campion (1994b) have collated academic papers by churchwomen. Whilst these contain some individual reflection, they are essentially thematically issue-centred rather than autobiographical. Some individual theorists have offered insights into their own journeys. Fiorenza's (1993) *Discipleship of Equals* is, to some extent, a chronology of feminist struggles, including her own. Ruether (1995) traces her academic journey in the twentieth anniversary edition of *New Woman-New Earth*, and Nelle Morton (1985) is candid about the internal individual grappling that takes place in changing symbols and theology to move from patriarchy to liberation. The appendix features 'jottings' of her transformation through the 1970s and into the 1980s. Mary Daly (1975), in an autobiographical preface, also briefly plots her own course from 'radical Catholic' to 'post-Christian feminist.'

Similarly, Kidd's (1996) *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* is the story of her transformation from conservative Southern Baptist to devotee of the sacred Feminine.

Other instances of work that touch on the spirit of this thesis include biographical/autobiographical collections. *Unveiled: Nuns Talking* (Loudon, 1993) includes ten stories of individual nuns acquired through taped interviews. Though not expressly feminist, gender issues surface through accounts of power struggles, naming of injustices and identity definitions. With similarities, Ware's (1985) edited work plots the progression of American nuns through the changes implemented after Vatican Two. *God's Fierce Whimsy* (Cannon et al, 1985) is a record of exchanges between an ethnic mix of American based women in theological education. It is an attempt at inclusive feminism and offers insights into the process of their working together as feminist theological scholars. *Opening the Cage* (Franklin and Jones, 1987) is an Australian collection of individual stories by women and men who reflect upon the impact of gender on their lives in church and society. Their accounts are both theoretical and experiential, some of which have commonality with *Changing Women, Changing Church* (Uhr, 1992). With nine women and men from diverse cultural and ecclesiastic heritages, this book reflects upon the changing lives of women in changing communities.

Still more stories have emerged in the collated material of researchers. *Defecting in Place* (Winter et al, 1995) is a survey of churchwomen who are mainly, but not all, feminist. Extensive quotes are used to highlight struggles between feminist women and the church. The study casts a net across both lay and clerical feminists, Catholics and Protestants, and touches on the costs of both leaving and remaining within church structures (p.7). It includes a look at support groups for Christian feminists (pp.118-153, 227-234), feminist God-language and images and feminist spirituality. This is a work that largely allows page after page of short quotes from women, identified only by age group and (American) ethnic background to speak for themselves. A similar smaller work is that of Miles (1994) who has thematically collated quotes from twenty women, aged between twenty-one and sixty, in Nottingham, England. These include comments on theology, spirituality and church experience. This too, is a collection rather than an analysis.

Pidwell (1994) has researched the lives of eight Australian women lecturers at theological colleges. This work comes closest to my own. She begins by looking at father/daughter dynamics (pp.28-46) and the body/soul divide (pp.47-69) that is used to exclude women from androcentric theories of spirituality. She then earths the discussion in the struggles of her respondents, within their careers as theological lecturers. Her work is primarily socially based and does not include detailed reporting on changing shapes of individual theologies, spiritualities or feelings, nor is it concerned with the wider range of women's careers within the church, including ordained clerical roles and women in religious orders.

As is evidenced in the works cited above, and in so many more for which space here does not allow, there have been some significant shifts in theological paradigms and social organisation. My aim has been to critique the faith journeys of seventeen Australian theologians with varying feminist stances, to ask, not only the questions about what changed for them, but to critique their defining moments, how they coped and what ensued in their lives. Though this work is thematic, my objective has been to plot their courses more individually, thereby creating a work whose respondents resurface as living individuals throughout the document. The following chapter details the method and methodology of the process.

Method and Methodology

Introduction

As outlined in the thesis introduction, this research is an inquiry into how seventeen women theologians with feminist perspectives have survived or not survived within the Christian church/faith in an era when emerging feminist theories and ideologies have held such juxtaposition to traditional and entrenched male structures. This work attempts to plot their inner faith and social journeys and to listen to what personal belief and social changes have cost them and what they have gained. This chapter outlines the methods and the supporting rationale adopted for data collecting and processing. It identifies the basic tenets of feminist perspective from which this thesis is written and clarifies issues pertaining to the choice and status of respondents.

Why Quality and Not Quantity?

The methodology adopted in this thesis was largely decided upon through the experience of the quantitative work undertaken for my Masters thesis (Schaefer, 1994), within the discipline of theology. There is a sense in which this current approach is a lesson learned from the voices of previous respondents who would not be silenced or constrained. For my last thesis, a study of the way in which music shapes spirituality, questionnaires were distributed for participants to complete and hand back. It was anticipated that this particular aspect of the research would not include conversations between participants and researcher. The methodology was positivist. However, the response was beyond that anticipated. People indicated their desire to both participate much more directly and to enlarge upon, add to, and digress from the central issues in the questionnaires. Questionnaires were returned with further comments and footnotes, enclosed additional pages and a clear desire to tell more of the personal stories triggered by the original questions. Many participants also made personal contact, face to face, by telephone and letters with the clear intent of engaging in conversation about the subject matter raised in the questionnaires. There was an articulated need for catharsis and story telling. The

richness of much of the material volunteered gave depth and dimensions to the finished text that would otherwise not have been included.

The experience indicated that an exclusively quantitative research design, in this instance, threatened to fragment human experience (Maynard, 1994:11). It also assumed a more comprehensive and objective knowledge of the topic on the part of the researcher than was the case, as it pertained to the lives of others. Maynard theorises two basic problems of positivist research that were validated, for me, in the Masters undertaken before this Ph.D. Of those researched, she argues that, positivist research reduces the findings to 'a simple matrix of standardised variables which is unable to convey an in-depth understanding of, or feeling for, the people under study (p.11).' Of the researcher she adds that structured and positivist approaches assume that the researcher is fully conversant with all aspects of the area under investigation including 'how these can be encapsulated, categorized and measured' (Maynard, 1994:11).

The current thesis is also an investigation into an area of human experience that involves the nebulous and less easily quantified realms of feelings, personal spirituality and that which is best served by the anecdotal. The Master's research included both men and women who broke the bounds of the intended research parameters equally. It was noted, however, that, in many instances, women raised different issues and were more inclined to digress from what had been deemed central. This indicated that they were possibly even more marginalized by the confines of the questionnaire than were the men and demonstrated, as in many studies, the fact that women's issues are often invisible (Oakley, 1985; 1992) even to the woman researcher. The number of qualitative responses to what was originally envisaged as quantitatively based research then became problematic given the volume of distributed questionnaires (around four hundred).

Within the current research, particularly as it pertains to women's stories, I therefore regarded the importance of valuing and lingering over the anecdotal. I thus determined to recognise, as totally as possible, the experiences of respondents and to opt for a smaller number in order that contributions could be explored as fully as possible. Therefore, whilst the general topic was set, emerging themes were determined by respondents through the range of particular stories. However, whilst respondents indicated enthusiasm

and personal interest in the research, it was difficult to engage in ongoing collaboration because they were women with busy teaching and ministerial schedules. This meant that they were not available to assist in the process of analysis beyond initial interviews and some follow-up conversations and correspondence. Respondents were happy for me to undertake the work of analysis. I acknowledge that the researcher can never stand outside the research environment (Smith, D.E., 1974) and the limitations imposed when the researcher must assume the position of final analyst and interpreter of, not only written transcripts, but also those elements of interviews that incorporate more than words (Acker et al, 1983:429). These are the confines of the frame within which the research has evolved.

The Respondents

Seventeen women theologians were approached to participate. Pseudonyms have been used and every effort has been made to respect confidentiality through anonymity. They were selected for their willingness and demonstrated academic ability to reflect upon their lives with regard to issues of theology and personal spirituality. I knew this through conferences, written works, personal contacts and personal recommendations. Denominational backgrounds broadly included Anglican (3), Catholic (3), Churches of Christ (3), Baptist (2) and Uniting Church (6). Some had multiple denominational backgrounds. Respondents were from around my own era of theological study and ordination date. Seeking people 'just like me' was an important factor in researching how they fared in the same basic realms of discourse and professional fields. They were all born before 1958 and began to challenge church structures and traditional Christian hermeneutics from the early 1970s. Historically, this concurred with the second wave of secular feminism.

It is noted that feminist researchers have problematised universalising feminism. Harding (1987) refers to the many hyphenated categories, which illustrate this. For example, Black-feminist, lesbian-feminist, socialist-feminist and concludes with 'these fragmented identities are a rich source of feminist insight' (p.8). All respondents are therefore from white western, English speaking culture. Fourteen were born in Australian, one in New Zealand, one in England and one in Scotland. Fifteen have lived in Australia all their

adult lives. One came from England in early adulthood and the woman from New Zealand has lived in Australia for the past twenty years. Therefore, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic variables were not as marked as would have been the case across a broader world spectrum.

Stanley and Wise (1993:189-193) suggest that feminist methodology is unachievable in purist form. They point out the problems with feminist standpoint as a 'successor' to feminist empiricism (as cited by Harding, 1987:183-189; see also Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:41-59). For the purposes of this thesis, however, 'standpoint' theory is a useful means of describing the position of respondents. Feminist standpoint theory broadly assumes that, because women live within male structures, they have had to understand men's world-view to the detriment of understanding their own (Harding, 1992). All respondents are, or have been, dependent upon the church for career identity and income. For fifteen respondents this was still the case. Two have left the church and the faith. Respondents were also chosen because each presented as having, to some extent, broken free from, or were at least serious questioners of male constraints and were able to survey their worlds from both the male dominators' and their own, reformulated viewpoints. Standpoint model is therefore useful here, not as an absolute, but as a tool to describe the positions from which respondents have lived. I chose respondents from those known to me as people who had reflected upon both their own stances and ideas with regard to male structures, and male ways of thinking from the positions that they have held within the church communities and academic institutions. The necessary negotiating process and the struggle to some measure of freedom on many levels had already established them as the 'knowers' of both sides.

The collaborative approach has been important to this research (Oakley, 1992:44-47). This has not been achieved by repeated interviews, as Oakley suggests (pp.44-45), but rather through previous and ongoing friendships and continuing expressed interest in the work on the part of most respondents. Whilst it was important to discover some measure of resolve to my own faith dilemma, it was also crucial to adopt a respondent-centred methodology. This meant facilitating a finished work that identified the way it is, and has been for at least some women who have made church and the Christian faith central to their private and professional lives. Another imperative has been to produce a work that

is useful to feminist theologians and women in the church generally and to identify the major issues pertinent to those participating (Acker et al, 1983:423-435).

Some Basic Tenets of Feminist Methodology

The Status of Respondent and Researcher

Schneiders (1991a:15) defines feminism as 'a comprehensive ideology which is rooted in women's experience of sexual oppression, engages in a critique of patriarchy as an essentially dysfunctional system, embraces an alternative vision for humanity and the earth, and actively seeks to bring this vision to realisation.' Feminist theorists have applied this general vision to evolving ho'istic methods of social research (Acker et al, 1983; Abbott, 1991; Smith, D.E., 1991; DeVault, 1999). Until the advent of feminist critique, doing sociology or theology meant the employment of male formulated methodologies (Langellier and Hall, 1989:198; Morgan, 1990). Objectifying sociological methodologies reinforces the ruling apparatus, extolling the finished text to the status of a third and transcendent authority which purports to be perfectly devoid of prejudice and perfectly able to digest and interpret the 'real' facts. It is a methodology whereby the sociologist fits motivation for actions into pre-constructed sociological frames (Smith, D.E., 1974; Oakley, 1992). However, to do research any other way has been to step outside the accepted 'field' or 'discipline' (Smith, D.E., 1988:60). If we begin from any one of a number of feminist perspectives, some considered basic assumptions are not built in because the perspective adopted is that of an outsider to the structure (Millman and Kanter; 1987, Smith, D.E., 1974). This includes interview practices that have not been considered proper scientific means of collecting data (Oakley, 1992). Therefore to document women's experiences has sometimes meant the creative invention of practice in order to effect accuracy and aptness (Millman and Kanter, 1987).

Whilst feminist sociology does not necessarily endorse the concept of a methodology unique to feminism per se (Stanley and Wise, 1993:188; Harding, 1987:1-14; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:15-16), it reacts to white, ruling class, male perspective. It purports that, in traditional methods, the objects of research have little power and voice in the finished 'authoritative' text and respondents' interests are often not served by the

research in which they participate (Smith, D.E., 1974; Millman and Kanter, 1987). Rich, A. (1979:207) suggests that 'objectivity' is simply the androcentric expression for subjectivity. Stories have been reported/distorted through male perspectives (Epstein, 1983:149) and the process of research often reflects the curiosity and values of those who undertake the projects (Millman and Kanter, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1993:59). Those researched have been relegated to the status of 'other' and silenced (Opie, 1992). Thus women respondents in research projects have often occupied lower social status and less social power than the researcher. In this regard Glucksmann (1994:153-156) poses the question 'Whose research and for whom?' She has a clear consideration of the social discrepancy between researcher and researched even with regard to her own spheres of inquiry. Further, Reay (1996:64-65) has stressed the 'thin dividing line between identification and exploitation.' However, as a feminist theologian, I have endeavoured to conduct this research from the 'inside' (Smith, D.E., 1988:122) and have, hopefully, minimised objectifying my 'sisters' (Oakley, 1992:41-46). I have also chosen to interview either laterally or 'up' with regard to my own educational and/or professional status by collating the stories of colleagues and to acknowledge my own subjectivity within the process (Stanley and Wise, 1993:58-61). These aspects of the methodology have hopefully minimised researcher power-advantage. Because most respondents were already known to me through conferences and friendships over the years or had been referred by trusted mutual friends, a measure of confidence had been established prior to each interview.

Central to the methodology of this thesis is the assumption that, as indicated in *Literature and Theory*, to practise feminist sociology is to engage in more than the oversimplified solution of 'adding women' to male structures (Harding 1987:3-5; Smith, D.E., 1974:7) or regarding gender as just another variable within male-prescribed paradigms (Millman and Kanter, 1987:29; Stacey and Thorne, 1985). To this end Smith, D.E. (1988:66-67) refers to the sociological studies on women's work done using the same criteria as that used for men's work. She raises questions about the appropriateness of this, arguing that housework is a different paradigm to that of paid employment for a number of reasons. I have concluded, therefore, that women's views on relationship to God, church structure, and matters of personal faith and its development within the experience of the individual also need to question many so-called commonsense norms. Accepted axioms that may be

true of and pertinent to men's interests and lines of inquiry, may be a bad fit for those who seek satisfying answers to the dilemmas faced specifically by Christian women. In this respect I have endeavoured to embrace a methodology that does not silence respondents by rendering them simply as subjects to the observer's interpretation. Ideally there was no sense of 'other' on either side (Stanley and Wise, 1993:134-135). Respondents agreed with the need to research the topic, offered encouragement and generally responded with self-assurance, made suggestions and clarified the parameters of personal confidentiality. Their opinions and wisdom have been vital in shaping the finished work and the result has hopefully produced an integrated text.

With such methodological footing, this thesis embraces basic principles of feminist research as identified by Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983:423). These are, broadly: that research be undertaken with the view of contributing useable knowledge to women's liberation and that is helpful to the respondents/contributors themselves; that non-oppressive methods of attaining knowledge be employed. The above-mentioned theorists also advocate the practice of continual reflection on methods as part of the methodology. It is acknowledged that pure idealistic feminist practice is probably unattainable with respect to lingering ingrained androcentric systems, language and taught modes of thinking with which both researcher and respondents have grown up. Awareness of this, however, fostered clearer feminist goals throughout the interviews.

Epistemology

It is also acknowledged that there is sometimes a disjuncture between what women know and how they are compelled to live, and between what they feel and the androcentric nature of the language they have to express it (DeVault, 1990). This thesis acknowledges the often restricted ground from which women speak (Smith, D.E., 1988:17-36) and that significant experiences are sometimes beyond the words that struggled to express them. I have endeavoured to choose women who have demonstrated awareness of at least the basic limitations and sexist nature of language and concepts and I was committed to listening for clues in language and demeanour that indicated hidden thoughts and experiences (DeVault, 1990:102). There were thus sometimes acknowledgements of understanding between researcher and respondents, both tacit and spoken in phrases such as 'you know what I mean' (p.103).

Smith images a 'circle of men' excluding women. Men speak and listen to one another. Women have simply been encouraged to listen. This metaphor is one means of explaining how male imagery and epistemology and male ways of determining what is authoritative developed and became the 'real' or the 'norm', the circle of the present building on the past (Smith, D.E., 1988:18). Smith claims that women have been admitted to the circle by special licence as individuals, not as representatives of their sex. This became a governing social force and then integral so that women thus 'never controlled the material or social means to the making of a tradition among themselves' or to discoursing with men as intellectual equals (Smith, D.E., 1988:18). This thesis takes for granted the basic truth of these assumptions. Thus the difficulty is in endeavouring to structure a methodology that, whilst it may not be exclusively feminist in all aspects, given that feminism is diverse and also shares commonalities with other causes in society, at least, for the most part, approaches some independence from androcentric overlays.

This thesis acknowledges two ways of knowing, among others, that are not always paid credence by hard science. Firstly feminist theorists have specifically identified women's epistemology and ontology outside androcentric frames of knowledge (Code, 1992; Garry and Pearsall, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Brewster, 1988). For example Stanley and Wise (1993:66-91) argue that the political is never beyond the personal, that the experiential is at the centre of theory and that theory should be fluid and adaptable (p.72). This challenges the 'neat and tidy' objectives of positivist research, admitting the hazier sphere of emotions. It defies the notion that reason and emotion are opposing concepts, that it is possible to separate emotion from other human faculties and rejects the idea of dispassionate research (Jaggar, 1992). This thesis recognises experiences and feelings as valid sources of knowledge and theory (Code, 1992:222-224; 243-244). To add more complexity, it is also acknowledged that even emotions are often social constructs of the dominant culture (Jaggar, 1992:143). Smith, D.E. (1988:17) notes that even our inner selves have been coloured by text-forming 'ideological apparatuses' by which society functions and that these purport to be universal and objective (p.19-22). However, feminist insight can minimise this (Jaggar, 1992:145-149). The starting point has been to investigate my own sense that something is 'not quite right' (p.145) similar to Freidan's

(1986) 'problem with no name' and to follow the hunch that others seemed to be indicating the same. There appeared to be both 'tip of the iceberg' occurrences and silent undercurrents challenging the status quo in the church and in Christian theology. These seemed to be outside 'official' knowledge bases. This led me to pose the questions, 'What are the experiences and feelings of other women in similar positions to my own and what do they therefore know?' and 'What needs to be brought to the surface?'

Sec y, this thesis assumes some 'givens' because of its subject matter. Christianity pr certain basic tenets as objective truths. It rejects the idea that 'all knowledge is created discursively...(and that) there is no way of stepping outside the discourse to check against an independent reality' (Abbott and Wallace, 1997:297). For example, respondents were chosen for their demonstrated belief in God, in some form, as a fact of reality and as a Spirit who could be known. This is understood as objective reality within the lives of both respondents and researcher. Knowing things through such experiences as prayer, divine revelation, and interpretations of events and significant memories in the light of belief in God is considered legitimate within this research. Religious experiences are accepted as legitimate (Berger, 1969; Donovan, 1979; Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle, 1997:73-96) and many small aspects in stories are accepted as symbols of wider aspects of respondents' worlds. This phenomenon is, in itself, an accepted way of knowing within the domain of religious beliefs (Donovan, 1979). The stories of faith journeys have been told, within this context, assuming that there is a God and that God is, at least in part, knowable. It is upon this basis that both researcher and respondents are in the process of redefining how to live Christianity.

Whilst respondents were chosen as those most likely to have reflected upon their emotions and experiences from a liberated perspective, this thesis accepts as fact, that for women to advance in many fields they must negotiate with male criterion, male decision-making and a male controlled workforce (Coward, 1992:4; Ferguson, 1992:94-95; Harding, 1992:194-195). This involves conformity (Coward, 1992:8; Fiorenza, 1993:242). Women have had to compromise their feelings, standards, intuitions, beliefs and gendered physicality (Greer, 1999; Weitz, 1998). For women to refuse to work with men generally spells job loss/poverty/starvation (Frye, 1983:98). I was therefore mindful that, whilst respondents presented as generally self-confident individuals who were either

equal or senior to myself with regard to qualifications and church standing, they, none-the-less, could have personal 'underside' stories to tell. Interviews were conducted with these complex overlays in mind. I began with the understanding that therefore some respondents may give some guarded responses to protect their positions. However, I tried to choose those who might see the vitalness of deepest honesty to the accuracy of the research.

Cumulative and Reflective Methodology

It was my contention that ideologies of Christian feminism may not translate easily to everyday living in the experiences and social locations of women. In this respect there was an original vague 'wondering' rather than an articulated theory to be tested. However, I determined to allow theories to emerge from interviews with some features of Strauss and Corbin's (1994) 'grounded theory' though without strict adherence to their specific formula. For example, a conscious effort was made to acknowledge the ideas that have emanated from my particular personal experience. This has remained undocumented comparison rather than superimposition over the accounts of respondents. Further, the research process employed a method of ongoing engagement and interaction between analysis and data collection (Strauss and Corbin, 1994:273). Theories have emanated from the data cumulatively and employ the process of critical reflection throughout the research process.

Strauss and Corbin (1990:41-47) also identify that research questions often originate from the professional experience of the researcher and that, because of such familiarity, the researcher can use a 'theoretical sensitivity' as a tool for research. This suggests that the researcher can identify an area for research through the detection of unanswered questions within an area of society. Furthermore, the researcher can, because of experience, be aware of 'subtleties of meaning' in the data (p.42). This suggestion rang true for me. I have a sense of having 'lived the life' in terms of the area identified for this thesis. Through conferences and personal friendships I also sensed that there are many aspects of theology, faith-community and personal spirituality that are understood between women theologians, particularly those who have worked within the same or similar organisations.

Interview Method

The above ideas on feminist practice indicate, not so much a formularised, fixed method, as a range of sensitivities to bear in mind when interviewing women. In this regard, Acker (1989:72-76) acknowledges feminist theory as an unfinished work. Interviews were taped using equipment that could record voices at a comfortable distance. This minimised the focus on the tape recorder. Respondents were not required to make their stories fit a set time frame (DeVault, 1990:100). The idea was to allow as much time as each respondent deemed necessary. Interviews lasted an hour to an hour-and-a-half.

Ann Oakley (1992) has problematised traditional protocol for collecting data by interview, especially with regard to interviewing women, as a basically masculine model. She advocates the need for authentic conversation (pp.41-51) whilst pointing out that, in purest form, this is probably not possible (pp.51-58). However I did try to establish that ground covered was of mutual pertinence. Questions and suggested areas for reflection were negotiable throughout the interviews. Respondents were encouraged to reflect upon social, theological and spiritual aspects of their respective childhood and adolescent years with regard to their inherent belief systems, church communities and their families of origin. I asked for similar reflection on relationships, structures and feelings with regard to the pilgrimage to individual career decisions and further reflection on subsequent years. Respondents were encouraged to share notions of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the development of personal faith and theology throughout various eras of their lives. They were also free to identify personal dilemmas, social struggles, survival resources and further, to discuss issues pertinent to them outside the suggested areas for exploration. Respondents thus had a voice in topic construction (DeVault, 1990:98-101)

The analysis endeavoured to take a comprehensive account of the contexts in which interviews were conducted (Smith, D.E., 1988:111-117) and to recognise the commonality of social relations that structure the worlds of both interviewer and respondent (Cook and Fonow, 1986:6; Oakley, 1992). Some aspects that positivist sociological methods may render as irrelevant or treat as invisible may therefore have impacted upon the finished text. An acute example presented when interviewing a Catholic nun in a convent in Melbourne. The flat dimensions of intention were simply to

conduct an interview that encouraged conversation regarding the above-mentioned areas, but a bomb had exploded in the street that morning. It had blown the roof off a house a few doors away. This brought an added dimension to the situation. For trueness and accuracy, this fact was not ignored. It gave pertinence to the subject matter and affected how she told her story. It was important to include aspects that 'really do happen' even though tidy orchestration is rendered harder because of variables and purest conclusions become more elusive. These factors, although not explicit in the text, were taken into consideration in analysis. This methodology involves endeavouring to see research situations in more than just snapshot mode (Smith, D.E., 1988:111-117; Barbre, et al 1989; Oakley, 1992). It views people and their surroundings as part of living, ongoing processes that have a relationship to things past and present (Smith, D.E. 1988:111-117).

Process Subsequent to Interviews - Tapes, Transcriptions and Ethnography

Subject matter of interest, pertinence and commonality between respondents emerged as I listened to the tapes, read the transcripts and consulted notes made immediately after each interview. These formed the basis for both the particular areas covered and the general direction of the thesis. It was the overall content of the interviews that inspired the title.

Subject matter was streamed into categories and sub-categories through 'Ethnograph' (Qualis,1998) computer software for analysis of text-based data. This facilitated the identification of themes and cross-referencing that built the chapters. The chapters are thematically driven. They are not a strand-by-strand linear biography of each respondent's life. Some respondents are featured more than others within emerging themes.

End Note

This thesis has endeavoured to maintain a continuous reflective methodology. As the life stories of respondents unfolded, issues obviated in the felt experiences and the anecdotal brought to the surface such tacit questions as: If Christianity is so fraught with patriarchy, why bother? What is the core of Christianity? Is it intrinsically patriarchal or is there a point at which it is all embracing? How do we personally discover or rediscover the pertinent truths? What things can we afford to throw out? What background leads to redefinitions of such concepts as the nature of God, the nature of personal relationship with God, the role of Jesus as historic person/Messiah? What is it that binds people to Christianity? What is risked if some of the presupposed 'core' of Christianity is discarded? What leads people to change basic concepts of faith? What are the sites of struggle? What happens to people when they limp on with an inadequate or unhelpful perception of Christianity, particularly when they know this is so, but feel powerless, or do not know how to put it right? What is involved in the process of moving on to a more honest and workable Christian faith for the individual?

The research was undertaken acknowledging that, no matter how multi-dimensional, no one research project can raise all the questions and solutions of every group of Christian women. The aim was that, at least the major issues problematic to respondents would find voices in the text, and that stories would remain true to real lives and actual experiences as opposed to fitting overlays of convenient paradigms (Heilbrun, 1988). Implementing some basic methodological precepts articulated by feminist sociological practice, this thesis seeks to map how respondents have faired spiritually, theologically and socially throughout the course of their emerging feminist perspectives on the Christian faith. It seeks to look at how their ideologies have altered with time and through analytical thinking and spiritual maturing, what this has cost them, what has been gained, and how this has spiritually and socially impacted upon the lives of respondents. The process begins, in the following chapter, with reflections on childhood and the church.

Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock

Sunday School, Confirmation and Childhood Church.

> Build on the Rock, the Rock that ever stands,
> Build on the Rock and not upon the sands.
> You need not fear the storm or the earthquake shock.
> You're safe forevermore if you build on the Rock. Anon.
> (Sunday School song of the 1930s-60s based on Matthew 7:24-27. ref. Blackburn, 2003)

The above children's hymn encapsulates the ideology of teaching children to base their lives on the 'Rock' of Christianity as taught by the church. For many of the respondents, devotion to the church began at Sunday School, confirmation classes and other childhood forms of church. Loyalty was fostered through good and affirming experiences and, ironically for some, despite the predominantly bad memories. Childhood church evoked bittersweet memories where some ambiguities began. It is noted that interpretations of distant memories are fraught with objective-truth-altering phenomena (Denzin, 1989:23-25). However, feelings and impressions from childhood have played a governing role in the lives of respondents (Crawford et al., 1992). Some respondents were clear, as children, about why certain things did not socially or spiritually add up. Others reported it was only as adults that they were better able to piece together the way things were when they were children. Generally, the data collated suggests that spiritual and social clefts within the lives of respondents resulted from factors that, perceivably, neither logically nor intuitively made sense to the individual child. In childhood, clefts often manifested simply as feelings of disjuncture, discomfort and/or resistance (Simpson, 2000). Inner disjuncture was often triggered by situations that did not appear to concur with taught morality. The following accounts highlight the legacies and clefts born of 'building on the Rock'.

Early Appeal to the Spirit and the Intellect

The need for women to develop intellectually for the sake of the inner self has largely gone unrecognised by church and society. Men's education has taken precedence and has

relegated women to supporting roles and domestic tasks (Neville, 1974:78-80; Spender, 1988:22-31). Respondents indicated that women's connectedness within the general church community, through catering, cleaning, choir membership and fundraising (Kingston, 1977:20; Franklin, M.A., 1986a; Matthews, J.J., 1992:58-73) often depended upon assumed role consensus and complicity (Coward, 1992:190-200). This has left non-conformists either aping agreement, or alone with no clear role in the church (Miles, 1994:37-42). Either course is cleft-forming.

Why, then, have women sustained enduring and dedicated connections to the Christian church setting down roots through the crags of the Rock? I have sought explanations for some of the inconsistencies such as the depth of dedication to Christianity and/or the church, within the lives of respondents, despite the clefts. Early socialisation proved an important factor (Beit-Hallahmi and Argile, 1997:95-113). One of the holding forces was the appeal of scholarly spirituality offered by a cleric or other teacher. Intellect and spirituality have sometimes been regarded as separate entities in human experience, perhaps even mutually exclusive. For example, Beit-Hallahmi and Argile (1997:181) discovered that 'physical' scientists are able to compartmentalise religious beliefs from academic work. However, there is evidence to suggest that holding them separate 'cripples' both (Maslow, 1976:17).

Respondents are a mixture. Some hold 'natural/physical' science degrees as well as degrees in theology. Their quest has been for a faith that is logical and spiritual, fact-finding and analytical as well as feelings based. With some, this struggle was obvious early in life.

At the age of eight or nine, having become cynical about biblical hermeneutics as taught in Sunday School, Audrey's 'saving graces' were early appeals to the intellect. However, for Audrey, this fascination was more than cerebral. She needed to find theology that resonated with logic *and* feelings. A teacher in secondary school taught a critical view of Genesis that Audrey found revelatory. She said, 'all of a sudden there was something there for me to get my head around'. She described this as 'exciting' because, for years, she had been cynical about 'all that stupid morality, be goody-goody, be nice, that you knew wasn't true.' She said she had, 'known from first years in Sunday School, there

was this huge gap between people's practice and what they taught' and added, 'Now all of a sudden there was something engaging there!' – that is, a transcendent basis for scholarship that also resonated with feelings.

The experience explained the motivation for continued connection with the church even when strands of affinity with individuals wore thin. She spoke of feelings of belonging as mystic shared commonality, despite the hypocrisy. For Audrey, intellectual revelations were appealing to the soul. She remembered the teacher citing Christian 'connectedness' as an 'exciting' aspect of the faith. The teacher offered Audrey a 'different dimension' from which to regard the church and the faith. This 'dimension' included, but went beyond, things intellectual. She indicated that a scholarly meaningful faith could go beyond what appeared peripheral and senseless.

The discovery of this 'different dimension' did not entail seeking a different community at that stage. It was the same community with the same fault-ridden teachings and behaviours, but viewed from the realisation that there was a foundation; the Spirit of God, in a truer form, that was somehow bigger than the faults of the church, but for which the church was the vehicle. Audrey explained, 'When I was a small kid and people talked about being a Christian being exciting, I thought they must have meant something different because my idea of *exciting* was a birthday party.' Thus, having missed the appeal of Christianity as a young child, the 'penny dropped' as an older child. This happened when the teacher took a critical look at Genesis 'without all the pious claptrap' and spoke of Jesus as a real person, as opposed to a figure used emotively, through Sunday School, for social control. Jesus thus became someone she 'was longing to know'. The fact that the teaching method was 'very intellectual, not evangelical' became the 'driving force'. She spoke of this moment as an experience 'from the *inside* (soul)' from which grew 'a passion about the unconditional love of God'.

For Audrey, appeals to both the intellect and feelings were the means by which the everyday external world made sense at deep personal levels. She went on to talk about her brother who constantly lived on the edge of the wrong side of the law. She referred to her commitment to him in terms of 'God's unconditional love' for which she had a 'passion' to pursue. Thus this tenet made profound sense and found application in her

everyday world later in adulthood. Also, whilst many aspects of the church and Christians grated on her, making the connection between church life and inner faith enabled her to 'enjoy the religious stuff' at least some of the time, simply 'because it was comfortable and familiar'. These experiences formed a basis for a deep sense of belonging (O'Donohue, 2000).

An early appeal to the intellect was also the basis for Margaret's lifelong involvement in the church. Her experience was similar to that of Audrey's when she attended baptisimal classes at the age of ten. However, unlike Audrey, Margaret had enjoyed an intellectual biblical approach from the very beginning. She remembered an elderly and scholarly minister who taught biblical critique and redaction to the children, that she later regarded as 'remarkable given the denomination (Churches of Christ) at the time'. In adult retrospection, Margaret realised her privileged position, as a child, given the general lack of emphasis on scholarship within her denomination of origin. Even though she was female and a child, she felt then that her social position and intellect within the congregation was taken seriously. Margaret said she was sure that this 'saved' her from subsequent disillusionment and an 'adolescent crisis of disgust (with Christianity)' that might have ensued 'with pre non-critical use of Scripture.'

Luring appeals to the intellect or 'bitten-ness' as expressed by Veronica, was a determining factor for a large part of faith's basis in the experience of some respondents. Veronica recalled being 'bitten', that is, intellectually and spiritually captivated, by confirmation classes and the archdeacon who conducted them. She talked about 'the old man in his gaiters and a cloak and a Canterbury cap' as the image of God she had at the time who 'stretched (her) mind' as he referred to God as a 'fourth dimension'. In retrospect, she too regarded this as 'astonishingly radical talk' for 1961 that gave her the basic notion of God as 'Divine', 'Supreme' and 'Other' that she still maintains. She recalled, 'no notion then, of intellectual or spiritual limitations due to prescribed gender role differences.' On the day of confirmation, the girls and boys sat together giving the impression that there was equal access to the inspiring intellect of the archdeacon and God, and all aspects of the faith. Veronica talked about the 'subliminal' benefit. The relative uniqueness of this was not identified until much later.

This resonated with Audrey's experience. Incomplete awareness of exact context and circumstance both structural and personal was a factor in a number of stories. Thus, the value of some experiences was not understood until much later. Audrey recalled the new minister who came to her church when she was eight and that, 'without knowing', she 'had a fairly constant diet of scholarly reflection on Scriptures' that she 'couldn't articulate' at the time. This cleric had been her parish minister from the time she was eight to the time she was twenty-five. It is therefore curious that it was not until his funeral, just prior to the interview and many years later, that Audrey was able to identify the fact that their commonality had been the intellectual, soul-feeding appeal of biblical scholarship. In that respect, his personal influence upon her life had been somewhat unarticulated, but powerful enough to warrant her attending his funeral some thirty years later.

Thus, for Audrey, Margaret and Veronica, childhood experience of church and faith was highlighted by specific engagement with the intellect as appeal to the inner self and was met through the efforts and scholarship of a member of the clergy. Upon adult reflection, all three considered their respective ministers to be ahead of their time and/or out of step with the more conservative middle line of church denominational practice.

Some ministers were remembered as inspirational but also sometimes cleft-engendering within the lives of respondents. One reason was that, whilst the scope they opened was inviting, historically, the general culture regarded female children as secondary candidates for serious education (Cleverly and Phillips, 1988:9-12; Spender and Sarah, 1988). Stimulation of the female child's intellect was not necessarily regarded as the beginning of essential development and equality within the church (Daly, 1975:65; Hampson, 1986:130). Respondents recalled inconsistencies, and intellectual journeys that were encouraged earlier but not nurtured later.

Margaret, Veronica and Audrey experienced an interaction with theological scholarship that, at least initially, personally engaged and affirmed them. However, influential scholarship has not always been accompanied by early personal support and interaction. Eva also reported an intellectual engagement with scholarship, but within a frame that

was less personally encouraging. She talked about a 'Calvinistic minister' whose scholarship she respected, but of whom she was afraid.

At a young age, Eva already sensed that personal faith development within the context of church, although sometimes inspired by church authority figures, was not necessarily an experience to be shared with such figures. For Eva, there was no sense of partnership between exponent and recipient. The physical setting was also different. Veronica and Margaret benefited from small groups and were known well by their respective teachers, although Audrey's minister knew her less personally. He regarded her, more nebulously, as one of a family unit, and frequently called her by her sister's name. Eva sat in a large group before a male presenter in the pulpit. She did not feel that she, personally, counted or featured in, this man's life. For Eva, the appeal of intellectual theology met with much more social resistance than was the case for Veronica, Audrey and Margaret. Because she was a girl, neither her church nor her parents encouraged her pursuit of scholarship. Her scope for achievement was articulated as limited from the beginning.

For Eva, the 'Calvinist' minister was an ambiguous figure. He was knowledgeable but not kind, an image that she had of God at the time. As a young person, appeals to the soul struggled to find a voice in the consideration of her future. Within her social context, the ordained ministry was out of the question for women, so she contemplated the role of deaconess. The dead end she encountered was just one of the cleft-forming components in her life. The minister talked her out of it arguing, 'You'll be everybody's servant and you'll be walked over'. The irony was that he was probably right. Eva reflected that, although 'He was never a loving man, he had a wisdom' and in the end, 'It was good advice' for a 'very sensitive person who was feeling a failure.' The minister's counsel appeared logical and reasonable, but conforming meant quelling an inner voice that, from adolescence, screamed, 'but I don't want to (conform)!' Eva complied with convention. She married and had children, and ignored an internal longing for something more. The explosion of the inner longing later in her life ruptured her marriage and relationships with her children, and is documented in subsequent chapters. Domestic life gave way to the pursuit of theology and a related career. She thus picked up some loose threads that began in childhood.

Inconsistencies – Hypocrisy and Endearment

One commonality of almost all respondents was the inner difficulties experienced when the integrity of the church, as loved institution, appeared hypocritical. Veronica felt a dichotomy between fluid, creative theology that engages the spirit, and the kind of rigid aspect of church structure that insists on liturgical 'correctness' at the cost of personal spiritual freedom (Heyward, 1999). In one instance, her parents represented the brittleness Veronica came to identify as part of church structure. She remembered the occasion when a heightened sense of personal spirituality, and legalistic rigidity, were in conflict at the very moment of her confirmation. This was a highly emotional and vulnerable hour when the structure was both vehicle of God's revelation to her and 'thorn in the flesh' as it insisted upon the kind of legalism she considered killed spirituality. Her voice and face changed quite markedly from enthusiastic to a tone of coldness and discernible anger and hurt, as she recalled her confirmation service and her parents' fury that it was not a Eucharist. Symbolic of staunch church members, her parents had prioritised structural liturgical 'rightness' throwing 'cold water' over an occasion where external environment and internal spirit should have been in harmony. Veronica further illustrated this. She recalled the time when her godfather had given her a book of Bible stories, how she had read it eagerly and then aired her newly-acquired knowledge at Sunday School thinking that the teacher would be impressed and delighted. Instead he appeared threatened and treated her behaviour as precocious. This, again, was a clash, this time between a theology that fostered and encouraged Bible knowledge in children, and a representative of the structure who punished her for it. Retrospectively, Veronica considered the teacher's reaction was heightened because she was a female child. This feeling was something she identified later in life when, as a woman candidate for the priesthood, the system appeared to be giving out the same sort of double messages. It preached recognition for those who achieved good academic results and demonstrated a dedication to the calling, but often treated women as precocious and self-seeking for their efforts (Field, 1991:55; Power, 1995b:3-4). The message was, 'We need good priests, but not you (women)'. It seemed, to Veronica, that metaphorically, on the day, the boys and girls do *not*, in fact, sit together, as indicated in the confirmation classes. Veronica's experience is not unique. Hampson (1986:130) recalls her fury, at the age of twelve to

fourteen in boarding school, because those in leadership were all male. Daly (1975:65-66) cites the proverbial glass ceiling visible from girlhood irrespective of talent or piety.

For some respondents, the experience of Sunday School was a matter of supporting a structure more than espousing a philosophy for the whole of life. Sometimes tenets of Christianity did not translate into the experience of family, practical church life, or relationships. Respondents registered disillusionment, anger and feelings of loss when significant adults were revealed more as supporters of a system than disciples of a bright and hopeful ideology. This resonated with Veronica's above-mentioned show of knowledge in Sunday School and was evident in Audrey's experience of a Sunday School Biblical quiz. Audrey was 'suddenly overwhelmed by the realisation' that there was a rote-learned, socially-acceptable 'right' answer for each question expected by the teacher, and 'then there was reality.' Again, she spoke of a grating 'goody, goodyness' of Sunday School piety. This resonated with the way in which Tylielle spoke of 'niceness' as a popular church sin that euphemised truth. Such practice was preoccupied with maintaining appearances, often to the detriment of *real* morality (Rushdoony, 1978; King, S., 1977; Kroll, 1988). Audrey's recollection revealed a cleft-felt experience with two aspects. As a child she sensed that the *right* answers to biblical and moral questions as taught by her experience of church, were *not right* according to her 'gut feeling'. She also knew the social inappropriateness of outwardly naming the discrepancies. Audrey cited Sunday School occasions that were inconsistent with the taught ideology, and Jesus as iconic epitome of truth. She recalled,

> I was five and we were all lined up to have our photographs taken at Sunday School and there were two things that struck me. The first one was (that) the man who was taking the photographs was a man from the church, but he was a reporter for the 'Age' (newspaper) so he had all his equipment. He had a beard and he was rather fat and untidy. He didn't come that often (to church) and I knew that the church disapproved of him in some way. I just had this sense that he was a disapproved of person, and I remember feeling a jarring that, on the one hand, they disapproved of him, but, on the other hand, they could use him to do these photos.

For Audrey, this was incompatible with humanitarian, all-embracing Christianity, as she understood Jesus to model. Though she was not able to articulate this as vividly or to quote biblical chapter and verse, such situations in which she was compelled to

participate as a child, contributed to an inner cleft. The intentionally imparted message of Sunday School lessons were, therefore, sometimes different to the less intentional 'body language' of the church. Audrey internalised that, although inclusive principles were preached, there were set modes of 'respectability' that often contravened ideologies. This evoked feelings of disillusion, unsafe-ness and tacitly warned her to stay within accepted boundaries of the prescribed structures. For Audrey, though, compliance necessitated repression of issues and feelings, the stuff of which clefts are made. She regarded the above occasion was doubly hypocritical. She remembered lining up for individual photographs and posing with a dry paintbrush against a blank sheet of paper and pointed out, 'We never *ever, ever* used paint in Sunday School, *ever*.' She then reflected, 'I discovered this huge gap then between the faith, and the church' and articulated this as 'the image (of honesty) that had been communicated' against 'the falseness' of the church 'in the face of their claims to be honest and truthful.'

With emphatic recollection, Audrey offered an explanation of what she deemed knowable, even as a child, through mystic and often unconscious interaction with God, that is, the difference between preached morality, and practice. She noted that this knowledge was probably pre-verbal and struggled to find the words. She said the reason for telling the above story was to illustrate the clear impression she had of God as 'not moralistic' or 'a set of rules' but rather 'a gut feeling about what's just and what's true'. Although theorists cite cultural construction of individual 'gut feeling' (Berger, 1969, 24), pure social origins of the self (Mead, 1962:173) and talk about children 'swallowing' whole patterns of behaviour and thinking as 'templates' for the self (Crago, 1999:46), Audrey's recollection also indicates an inner conversation with God. Her experience suggests this also contributes to the shape of the inner self and that this is obviated in the harmony, or lack of harmony, between inner self and social experience. Stevenson-Moessner (2000:128-129) notes that middle childhood internalises religious stories and moral precepts literally and that these therefore *must* ring true.

Though, even as a child, Audrey disdained its inconsistencies, there was a mystic 'something' about community that drew her to the church. The irony was that, despite its hypocrisy, the church was instrumental in fostering an interaction with God that enabled her to discern its double standards. Audrey concluded that God-human soul interaction

worked through, but also transcended, the imperfections of people and structures. She recalled the homemade visual tools for the telling of the biblical stories portrayed by a cellophane sea and cotton wool sheep. These were fond memories that evoked feelings of warmth and a sense of place, but they were also due to the efforts of the same Sunday School teachers who participated in occasions of hypocrisy. Her account revealed the 'double vision' with which she began to view the church.

The love for a sometimes endearing, sometimes inconsistent institution has rendered problematic the solution of simply leaving the church and/or the faith as a way of dealing with hypocrisy (Furlong, 1965). Respondents have not only had to live with the cleft caused by such dilemmas, as do many men, but also the prospect of continuing personal powerlessness. James et al (1999:99) make the observation that children are 'empowered by the structures that constrain them'. However, as female children, respondents faced the possibility of never developing into adults who would ever have a significant voice in the system.

Suffering, Sacrifice and Satan

Suffering for the Good of the Soul

As obviated in Williams' (1976) *Living Responsibly*, church attendance was considered good for the soul, facilitating the making of a good citizen. However, respondents reported that Sunday church activities were generally unentertaining or even gruelingly boring. Audrey indicated an element of suffering through church services when she talked about 'escaping' them by volunteering to teach Sunday School. Suffering through church, was considered, by some, to be part of the process by which the individual was fortified for the good (Cleverly and Phillips, 1988:30; Ward, 1984). It was the means by which an aspiring Christian was refined and schooled for a life that was more austere than that offered by the secular world. For example, John Wesley (Cleverly and Phillips, 1988:29), founder of Methodism expounded thus, of children:

> Break their wills betimes, begin this work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, perhaps before they can speak at all. Whatever pains it costs, break the will, if you would not damn the child.

This ethos had carried over to the childhood of some respondents. Whilst they were growing up, the energy and exuberance of childhood was seen as something to be subdued and harnessed, something to be shaped into accepted and respected forms of Christian conduct (p.31). They observed that sometimes adults seemed to be exempt from needing this. One common fracture cited by respondents in various contexts occurred at the juncture where, as children, the two greatest authority figures in their lives intercepted and presented a problem at both logical and feelings levels, that is, where parents and/or home life, and church disconnected. The most prominent example was a mandate on the child to attend Sunday School or church by a seldom-attending parent. Resentment and the nebulous feeling that something is 'not quite right', featured due to the child's ability to distinguish, at so-called 'gut' level, that Sunday School is different to ordinary school. At day school during the week there is no place for parents, but the church of their childhood was supposed to embrace the whole family and its ethos was supposed to translate into everyday family life practice (Kroll, 1988; Victorin-Vangerud, 2000). Some parents attended church on a regular basis, some did not, but every interview indicated that there were areas where Christianity as purported by the church, and parents and home life embraced both common and conflicting values and practices (Gill, 1999). Reactions to this ranged from mild confusion to overt rage within the child, even when the exact source of the anger could not be clearly articulated in childhood.

Mol (1985:128) cites the obligation non-attending parents felt prior to the 1960s and 1970s to send their children to Sunday School. Jo, who grew up on a farm in rural Victoria, attended a Wesleyan Sunday School because her mother made this mandatory. She reported feeling rage at the inconsistency, since her parents did not attend church. Further, Jo considered the mandate was enforced under what she considered were sometimes ridiculous circumstances. For her, this was cleft-forming. She recalled,

> We were *never* allowed to be sick...I remember slamming my fingers in the car door getting out of the car at the church on Sunday afternoon and the skin was just hanging off them, and my mother got a handkerchief and wound around them, and sent me to Sunday School and I will *never* forget. I remember sitting there in absolute pain crying my eyes out, but I had to get the ticks for attending.

Jo was dismayed and confused at the time. She could not reconcile the fact that, insensitive to her pain, her parents had insisted upon Sunday school attendance ostensibly to learn about Jesus who had compassion for human suffering, and all for the sake of not missing out on the 'ticks for attending'. She referred to her parents' attitude as a 'big contradiction' and described Sunday's church activities as a hated 'disruption' to her life. She despised 'dressing up' and having to forego sporting activities for the sake of church attendance. The 'contradiction' was multi-faceted. The fact that her parents did not attend was, perhaps, reminiscent of Veronica's parents who attended church ostensibly only as an example to others (see *Parents*). However, Jo's account also suggested strong evidence of her mother's need to win some ecclesiastic, or perhaps, Divine favour through the almost obsessive insistence on her children's faithful attendance. This too presented as a dichotomy. In Jo's case it was not sufficient to attain a reasonable attendance record; she was required, by her non-attending mother, to be the *best*. With the resentment still evident in her voice, she recalled, 'My mother loved her children to get the prize, at anniversary time, of the book for attending on the *most* Sundays and I've still got great anger about that!' Her account had overtones of Annabelle's desperation, from a mother's perspective, to maintain her children's church attendance as a gauge of parental accomplishment (see *Wilderness*).

There were no exceptions permitted to thwart the record of perfect attendance. Even social and family occasions had to be negotiated around Jo and her brother's Sunday School attendance. When the family visited grandparents who lived in another country town, Jo recalled: 'We had to get up there in time to go to Sunday School so we could get the letter (proof of attendance) to take back to our own church.' On these occasions, attendance at the church in the town where her grandparents lived caused further confusion, as neither she *nor* her grandparents were members.

Jo talked about prescribed forms of femininity that translated into models of behaviour and personalities in the Sunday School class. This did not suit Jo. She did not exude male-prescribed femininity. Sport (often male sport) and outdoor pursuits took precedence over interests modelled by those deemed to be traditionally feminine (Brownmiller, 1984). Jo was made to 'dress up' and take on what was, for her, an

unnatural persona. She was expected to act like the kind of 'girl' she was not. Jo felt 'other' and stifled.

The cleft, caused by the clash with the Rock, for Jo, was perplexing and multi-faceted. It engendered a hatred for the church together with a surprising love for, and enduring commitment to it. Throughout the account of childhood memories, Jo maintained an obvious demeanour of anger at the personal displacement she had felt over the issue of compulsory Sunday School attendance with all its 'frills'. The account concluded, however, with an unexpected softening. She conceded,

> Ultimately I don't think it did me any harm...I think it was probably a help even though I hate to admit that. I think it probably kept me on the straight and narrow.

This comment reflects the theory that human nature, particularly youth, needs harnessing and restraining (Morgan, 1997; Cleverly and Phillips, 1988:28-41). She conceded that upstarts, such as herself, need checks and balances. In the light of her angered account and her adult love/hate relationship with the church, Jo's conclusion that it was 'all for the good', reflected women's tenuousness in challenging male power values (Coward, 1992:8; Kirkman and Grieve, 1986:62-63; Scutt, 1994:280). She remained angry but conforming. Jo has not generally, or overtly sought support from feminist groups although her resentment of androcentric practices and structure was clear.

Professing Christians were expected to fulfill prescribed roles according to age and gender (Brownmiller, 1984:113-114). The living of these roles defined a 'good' Christian. Christian female children were expected to comply with male defined femininity and be junior women. This meant appropriateness, behaviour and thought processes (Brownmiller, 1984:82-83; Knight, 19[illegible]. The name of the state-wide girls' club in Churches of Christ was 'Good Companions' 'explorers' was the brother organisation for the boys. The names imply the prescribed gender roles. Boys were allowed to be adventurers. Girls were expected to [illegible]r women, supportive of each other and men. I still have the card on which the code is written encouraging me, as a 'Good Companion', to be loyal, tidy in dress, and thus 'become the girl God wants me to be.' This was not a journey of discovery. It was already blueprinted in the role models of

Christian women within the church (Rudy, 1997:1-66; Franklin, M.A., 1986a; Bendroth, 1993).

The mandate of girls as junior women and therefore as moral gatekeepers (Summers, 1976; Knight, 1982), reflected in Theresa's story. She and her sister were once stranded for some hours on Melbourne (Australia) central railway station. They were hungry and had just enough money to buy a meat pie each as they waited for their father to collect them. The enjoyment of satisfied hunger was short-lived when, having finished eating, they suddenly remembered that it was Friday, the day when meat was forbidden to Catholics. The thought of having 'sinned' made them ill. Boys could be adventurers and therefore were often forgiven for pushing the margins that defined sin. Girls had to be vigilant (Johnson, L., 1993:63-67).

Annabelle reflected that, having made the decision, as a child, to become a Christian, although she loved reading, she could no longer put her 'nose in a book and read and read and read.' She was expected to help her mother in the kitchen at the expense of personal leisure (Stevenson-Moessner, 2000:312-314; Scutt, 1994:75-78). The journey of adventure and intellectual stimulus offered through reading had to be laid aside in order to fulfil the role of ideal junior woman being a 'good companion' to her mother and ensuring that she paid heed to the training necessary to become an adult Christian woman. It could be argued that the prescribed gender roles in the church were essentially no different to those in society generally. However, within Christianity archetypes were regarded as God-ordained (Bouma, 1992:36-37) and more was expected of those who were considered divinely fortified (Dempsey, 1986; Cohen, 1986). Annabelle's experience resonated with what I remembered of childhood gender roles within the church. Boys who chose to formally espouse Christianity were expected to show tangible evidence that may have included practical help offered to parents. This did not generally, however, include assuming the part of junior men according to prescribed role models. As long as grave economic circumstances did not demand it, they were not expected to be junior breadwinners. Helping with male-cast roles like lawn mowing was, nonetheless, considered men's weekend work (Baxter, 1993). Girls doing domestic work were practising the dominant work of adult women (Oakley, 1984; Wearing, 1996:3-30; Walby, 1989).

Children Who Wrestled With Dark Forces

Common to traditions of evangelical Christianity is the acknowledgment, positioning and anthropomorphising of the 'dark' side of humanity and spirituality (Pagels, 1995; Cleverley and Phillips, 1988:31). Many such streams have considered the ignoring of the archenemy of goodness, truth and purity as dangerous to humanity and to the individual soul (Lewis; 1956, Campbell, undated:52-54). The culture of these traditions has been to live with the ever-present perceived reality of the power intent upon thwarting the efforts of God in the world generally, and within the lives of Christians in particular. Satan has been considered an ever-present threat to Christians (Lewis, 1956; Chapman, 1979:67; Rushdoony, 1978).

Christians within many evangelical traditions were encouraged to hold this in focus as a safeguard against complacency (Campbell, undated:213-216). Campbell (p.53) notes that the purpose of the Judgement Day is to 'pronounce an irrevocable sentence upon all according to their works.' The theology surrounding final judgement and the need to be 'saved' from evil was expounded from pulpits and through Sunday School (Bolton, 1980:187-195). The perceived intensity and immanence of this threat and the prescribed appropriate response has varied over denominations, individual faith communities within denominations, and eras. Some have held to the notion that each person is born in 'sin' and therefore in need of 'cleansing', by God's grace, from birth (Cleverley and Phillips, 1988:29-32). Divine grace was resourced by personal faith in God and a decision to be counted among the Christians, and has been marked by definitive rituals. In Churches of Christ and Baptist circles, these included confession of faith and repentance at evangelistic rallies and church services (Chapman, 1979:63; Ward, 1984), and public, believer's baptism followed by admission to the rite of communion (Robinson, 1946:81-81-87). The practice of formal and public 'decision for Christ' was considered appropriate for children and adolescents in some strands of evangelical tradition (Bolton, 1980:194; Wilkin, 1939:155). Committed young people were seen as the church's future (Wilkin, 1939:157). Annabelle made reference three times to the fact that she was ten or younger when she made the personal decision to become a Christian, marvelling at the weighty responsibility she took on at such a young age. She said,

> I can recall the 'call', you know, 'Give your heart to Jesus. Jesus is waiting for you to open the door of your heart', and this was all before the age of ten and I can remember thinking 'no, not today, tomorrow'.

Annabelle's reluctance was due to the fact that answering the 'call' entailed responsibilities and sacrifices, as mentioned, as well as privileges and protection. Positive response in children implied a certain mandate to grow up and take on some adult aspects of life. For example, Horsley (Bolton, 1980:107-108), of the Salvation Army, tells of the part his six-year-old played in the 'conversion' of a criminal. Annaballe's story indicated that responding to the 'call' carried with it a mixture of excitement and fear, privilege and challenge. It meant the perceived entire giving over of one's life to God in order to combat Satan, a heavy responsibility particularly for the young. This is reflected in Annabelle's words of reluctance, 'no, not today, tomorrow'.

Annabelle remembered that, in Sunday evening services, the mandate of the choice, for the individual, between salvation and hell, was generally preached with a sense of urgency and a seriousness that transcended all other situations. The decision to either accept or reject God was considered the decision of a lifetime, because its consequences carried beyond death to eternity (Campbell, undated:52-54). She recalled that the 'invitation' was very much part of her church tradition and talked about the 'fundamentalist' minister 'who didn't pull any punches' in 'preaching about hell, and what would happen to you if you didn't...become a Christian.' She added, 'I *did* know that becoming a Christian meant giving your heart to Jesus and if you didn't do that you would go to hell and you would burn *forever*!'

Annabelle's frequent exposure to 'hell fire' preaching underscored the fact that her local church ethos considered it was not sufficient to attend church and Sunday School regularly. Nor could children, who were considered old enough to comprehend the content of such sermons, shelter under the cover of their parents' faith. Fear, as a prizing tool, was considered legitimate insofar as it spurred the individual to flee from the evil that had the power to destroy them (Chapman, 1979:67; Rushdoony, 1978). Annabelle remembered 'images of flame and devils' and said these were more graphically described to her than any image of God or Jesus. For Annabelle, the dominant and enduring images

of punishment and evil, over and above a theology of God as gracious and forgiving, was cleft-forming. This too, made 'decision-making' serious and difficult. She was confronted with the conflicting male-depicted forces of good and evil. There was no female anthropomorphising in any of it. To reject God was to reject the most powerful male figure. To fall prey to Satan was to be destroyed by another powerful male figure.

For Annabelle, becoming a Christian meant a loss of freedom and a confinement of the self to narrowly defined perimeters of women's place in the world. She also illustrated the role of literally interpreted Scripture in her life and its frightening features. She recalled her anxiety and lack of sleep each time her father did not arrive home on time. One such night, she opened the Bible arbitrarily and read, 'He cometh not again' and was very distraught. The incident illustrated an image of a God who scrutinised every move and thought, and answered every situation very precisely, often through the literal words of the Bible (Potter, 1973:11-27; Campbell, undated:2-6).

For Annabelle, faith expression was twofold. Church members met to express the faith corporately. This also formed the basis for socialising and engendered, in many instances, a strong sense of belonging within the individual, offering a form of extended family. The entry to this, however, was by virtue of an assumed private faith outwardly proclaimed and ritualised. This was evidenced through such acts as outward response to the 'call' from God through the preacher, believer's baptism (as distinct from infant baptism – Williams, 1980:56-72; Robinson, 1946:81-87), and sometimes the public telling of a personal testimony. To reject the 'call' was also to reject the community. To accept and to make this known, was to be identified as part of a privileged community who had in common the fact that they understood the powers of good and evil, had chosen the good and were therefore 'saved' to be in community forever (Churches of Christ pamphlet; Campbell, undated:37-52). For Annabelle, though, the structure was quite rigidly chauvinistic. It stifled critical thinking, and crushed much creativity. However, interviews revealed that personal creative thinking did surface in the lives of respondents despite, or perhaps because of, such restrictive church theologies. Deep down there was often a sense of personal place and feelings.

A Place of My Own - Childhood Personal Space and Images of God

Solitude

I have a house where I go
When there's too many people,
I have a house where I go
Where no one can be;
I have a house where I go,
Where nobody ever says 'No'
Where no one says anything – so
There is no one but me. (Milne, 1989:1.)

Alternate and deeply personal spiritual environment, beyond that of family and/or church community was a significant feature of childhood for some respondents. It was often cited as a place, real or imagined, or a frame of thinking that gave flight to special and private expressions of faith, a respite not unlike Woolfe's (1992) *A Room of One's Own.*

Theresa, a Roman Catholic, remembered her family of origin as happy but crowded. The eldest of a family of nine, Theresa was raised in inner suburban Melbourne, and recalled the importance, as a child, of finding a piece of the country, as personal space, in the heart of suburbia. She talked about the local market gardens as the wide, open spaces and the 'benefit of the country' in the middle of the city, where she and many friends used to play. There was a need to find and to establish herself as an individual in a space where she could still interact with others, but within larger expanses. It was a game of pretending to live in the country for a few hours each week where the mind could effectively block out the backdrop of city noise and buildings. She observed, 'I've never ceased to be that country person at heart.'

City dwellers, however, were not the only ones to experience an inner longing for personal breathing space. Lily, from an evangelical Christian family and church, was raised in country Victoria. She recalled the times of solitude as a child that fed her spirituality and gave her a sense of the presence of God. As one of six children, she, like Theresa, needed to escape the crowdedness of home. But Lily also needed to draw away from some very identifiable tensions at home that often required her to comply with a role within the family with which she was uncomfortable. Her escape into personal space is reminiscent of the untying of a girdle, the unsnibbing of a

brassier or the stepping out of crippling high-heeled shoes. She would break free from oppressive prescribed feminine confines. In slow, leisurely fashion, she recalled,

> My happiest days were just wandering the hills at the back of my home and just sitting and singing and looking out on the beautiful valley there and in those moments, I'm not conscious of ever differentiating between God and Jesus,...it was in those times where you could just talk out aloud and there was no-one else to hear you but God and in a family of six you needed such times, and I found that was the really strong moments.

She emphasised these as the 'only really happy moments' of her childhood. One significant point is the attention drawn to the lack of differentiation between Jesus and God on these occasions of personal freedom. In a previous comment, Lily had sighted that Jesus and God did, in fact, fill different images and roles in her perceptions as a child. God was more the disciplinarian above Jesus. Jesus was the mediator who pleaded the case of the individual (Kasper, 1977:230-268). Lily reflected, 'If you did something wrong, you'd always go to Jesus, to have a word to God.' Times of personal breathing space, however, evoked a gentler image, in her mind, of a God who was otherwise less directly accessible, and harsher. God became like the headmaster on a picnic, away from the strict structure of the school and was prepared to talk heart to heart. On these occasions, God had the face of Jesus and, whilst he was still essentially male, he had somehow come off the Rock of hard church tradition and culture in order to be there, just for her, for a few precious moments. Lily related that this usually occurred at an actual geographic point that was higher than her family farm and the surrounding countryside. But the mood was broken when she and her sisters had to rush home before their brothers and father, prepare the meal for them, clean up, and then 'go away and be quiet and be seen and not heard'. Lily thus contrasted between the liberating personal spirituality that was more a luxury than general practice, and the prescribed spirituality of the church that translated into family life. Respondents indicated that the occasions that granted them the freedom to wander alone in wild, remote and high places, afforded insights not generally accessible in church experience. The Rock sought to capture and protect, but when respondents wandered off, they sometimes discovered that their personal encounter with God was notably different to traditional church prescribed

images of God. Times of freedom were, however, often regarded as not part of the real world. They were sometimes regarded as the pretend world of children, the holiday experience, the dream, the mountain from which one must eventually descend in order to fulfil the duties of a responsible person. However, the longing for freedom of thought and personal encounter with God lingered as a wrench in the descent back to ordinary life. Lily's account illustrated the reluctance with which this was undertaken. There was a contrast between experiences that allowed respondents to speak freely, be themselves and engage in a more flowing relationship with God, and those in which they were called upon to serve the men, including God, and be silent.

A number of respondents recalled this kind of dualism with regard to their images of, and relationship to, God: the imposed God of church structure and teaching perceived to be inherent in the lives of respected church members and sometimes parents, and the deep, personal interior that resounded with a more transcendent God. The particular features of the interior/soul-God, however, tended to surface less often in the humdrum experience of everyday church and family life prior to respondents' varying renaissance reformations. At surface level, respondents reported that taught church images and requirements of God predominated even within the conscious, inner self. This indicated the strength and depth of what Spender (1988) has identified as 'indoctrinations' that have been consistent generally within many fields of education. However, women often begin from the viewpoint of a learned distrust of their own thoughts and feelings in instances where there is discrepancy from dominator thinking (Scutt, 1994:280; Coward, 1992).

All seventeen respondents indicated, in varying ways, that, whilst there is strength in authoritative community consensus, there is also virility in the soul that lies beneath imposed layers. Tamar, whose parents were atheists, yearned to belong to a church community, partly because this was where her school peers belonged. Against her parents' sanction she joined an evangelical stream of the church. She reported that, from a very young age, something had drawn her to the Christian faith and that, despite the lack of encouragement from her family and the constricting theology of

religious instruction lessons at school, something transcendent had beckoned her. Like Annabelle's experience, it was a kind of calling from around the age of ten and, like that of Lily, it occurred within her private sphere. There were also, however, important differences. From childhood, Tamar was less socially and theologically constricted. Tamar never felt obliged to figuratively come down from the mountain. She trusted her own experience as applicable to everyday life and legitimate within everyday theology. It is not surprising that other respondents cited her as an inspirer of feminist theology from an early stage in her clerical career. She described her childhood encounter with God as 'mystical' when, at the age of nine or ten, she felt God to be 'all around' her as she lay on the grass and looked up at the sun. This 'feeling' of God, though intermittent, is the explanation she offered for never being able to accept the atheistic stance of her parents. Tamar noted, 'It was strange because I certainly wasn't taught about it (her personal vision of God) and I don't know that the religious instruction (in school) was all that good.'

Tamar's account was not unlike that of Audrey's intrinsic knowing of rightness. However, Tamar's experience was one of the most poignant examples of the insistent voice of the soul. It underscored a possibility that the 'still small voice' (1 Kings, 19:12) endures despite inculturation (McManus, 1991:2). As was the case with Lily and Audrey, Tamar's account indicated a kind of natural, essential wisdom that does not rely upon formal teaching or conditioning. It was Tamar's particular faith consciousness, that flew so conspicuously in the face of her atheistic grounding, and the fact that her parents were so different, in this way, to their surrounding culture, that gave Tamar permission to seek out spaces of her own. She indicated that this facilitated intrinsic images of God, and creative expression of faith throughout her life. As Tamar has insisted upon a social theology that is true to her inner self and has therefore not generally been a conformist, she has clashed with both the grass roots level of church membership and higher echelons of church authority. At times, as I have known her, it has been difficult to understand just what has motivated her sojourns into such 'deep water'. It is feasible that the vision of a young girl, lying on the grass, drinking in the sun may be a clue.

End Note

Respondents' stories underscored the importance of childhood faith experiences as a launching pad for the formulation of lifelong ideas and spirituality. They emphasised the crucial interdependence of the intellect and the spirit and the impact of the social world upon the inner self. Respondents welcomed early intellectual engagements with the Christian faith, but often struck the metaphoric 'glass ceiling' both in childhood when too much intellect was interpreted as precociousness or conflicted with social protocol, and in adulthood when gender issues became more evident. It was intellectual engagement, together with individual encounter with God, often outside prescribed paradigms that fortified continuing Christian practice. The conviction that somehow the church was vehicle to the mystic essence of God, despite its hypocrisy, uncomfortable role expectations for women and, in some instances, fear engendering theology, that rendered a dismissal of the church unfeasible as a simple solution. Respondents indicated that the clefts caused by the Rock, the church, in childhood often took some decades to resolve.

Childhood experiences as the starting points for adult faith embraced both church and home life. Parents were critical to these. The following chapter explores the roles of mothers and fathers in determining theology and attitudes within the lives of respondents.

Parents: Social and Spiritual Cleft-Forming Phenomena

Parents and the Image of God

Focus

The focus of the first section of this chapter is a two-pronged cleft within the lives of respondents. Interviews revealed a clear displacement of the feminine within families of origin that, in turn, impacted upon images of God. The cleft is therefore both spiritual and social and its significance is amplified in later chapters that address spiritual clefts and spiritual reformation. The latter section of this chapter addresses the clefts in the lives of women who not only devoutly espoused the Christian faith and community in adult life, but who, for their efforts, were regarded by parents and others as 'children who went too far'.

Fathers Over Mothers – Respondents Against Their Own Kind

As discussed in the previous chapter, childhood clefts were generally retrospectively identified in adulthood. One exception, however, was a general eclipsing of feminist perspectives on daughter/mother and daughter/father dynamics, obvious to the interviewer but not necessarily to respondents. This was surprising given the general depth of feminist insight respondents had in other areas. It seems this is not unique. Secunda (1996:60), who asserts that mothers and daughters are 'natural' aliens to each other, categorises mothers and offers insights into their impact on daughters' lives without much analysis of underlying social constructs that create complexities (see also Caplan, 2000:80).

An overwhelming feature of almost all the stories was a general alignment with fathers over mothers and a childhood priority to please fathers. Crawford et al (1992:6) record the childhood recollection of one contributor feeling sorry for her mother, and guilty because she loved her father more. Respondents tended to be harsher on their mothers of whom more appeared to be expected (Caplan, 2000:68-95; Rich, 1977). They were

generally more forgiving and justifying of their fathers. Pidwell, (1994) whose research was also with women theologians in Australia, found the same.

Some respondents saw their fathers as victims of dominating and/or manipulative wives (Secunda, 1996:73). Though all respondents indicated feminist ideology there was a general devaluing of, and sometimes disdain for, the female parent, with scant insight on why women manipulate (Caplan, 2000:119-124). There seemed to be little reflection on the social and historical positioning of mothers or sympathy in the light of what respondents had learned from their own struggles and feminist thinking. Pidwell (1994:34) reveals the same phenomenon although one of her respondents at least recognised the dichotomy. Pidwell's respondent talked about intelligent girls who side with their fathers to the detriment of the mother/daughter relationship, and concluded, 'It's always over against who you really are and so you end up with a terrible struggle' (p.35).

Eleven of the respondents connected their mothers with predominantly negative events and feelings. Only four did so of their fathers. Sarah, Lily and Jo reflected overt disdain for their mothers. Mary and Joan were the only ones who preferred their mothers to their fathers. Annabelle, whose feelings for her mother were less negative, reported that her mother was a caring and important figure but that she had 'bonded' with her father (Wearing, 1996:15). She did not know why. Many respondents indicated a 'do not know why' aspect of feeling at such odds with their mothers. Heilbrun (in Pidwell,1994:28) observes that a father is crucial to a daughter 'seeking a destiny beyond her mother's'. Daly (1986:149) notes that 'Mothers of our culture are cajoled into killing off the self-actualisation of their daughters, and daughters learn to hate them for it, instead of seeing the real enemy.' Traditional theology could also be regarded as the 'real enemy'. Boose (1989:51) points out the absence of a daughter in both the creation story of Genesis and the Holy Family in the Jesus story. These may be clues to respondents' original lack of maternal affinity, but the issue of why women who have identified the 'real enemy' as androcentric structures in other aspects of life, have not applied this to the relationship with their mothers, remained unanswered in this research.

Social life after the 1950s began to challenge the 'Parsonian' model of mother's expressive role in the family (Rapoport et al, 1977:83-84), and respondents felt justified in resenting the invisibility with which they were often treated by male colleagues. However, most respondents appeared to regard their mothers from the same biased perspective. Theresa, for example, reported, 'If there was work to be done after tea, my father generally did it.' When asked what her mother did at this time of the day she responded, 'Well, my mother would be putting kids to bed.' She said this with no obvious notion that this too might be work (Oakley, 1985). Theresa, the eldest of a large Catholic family, said that she 'found it difficult' to talk about her mother because she did not remember a great deal about her. Theresa's initial lack of recall is interesting since, as her story unfolded, she appeared to remember more and more about her mother. As one memory prompted another, her mother took form from shadow figure, to someone quite vibrant, as if Theresa was rediscovering the contents of an old trunk from long ago. The image of her father was much more crisply defined and much more accessible to immediate memory. He was reportedly 'wonderful'. He had once made her a dress, but then she remembered that her mother had made *all* their clothes (Caplan, 2000:79).

For respondents, the embracing of feminism involved reversing a learned distrust of women's expertise and wisdom (Code, 1992; Buchan, 1980). Adult perspectives about mothers, however, presented as a general inconsistency and revealed the incompleteness of the process. Caplan (2000:ix) notes that, despite contemporary research and publications on mothers, 'mother-blame remains pervasive and powerful'. The adult process of discovering and owning feminism confronted respondents with the fact of their own gender displacement. For many, however, the mother/daughter relationship remained either a work in progress, or shelved.

Parents and God-images

Clefts formed from childhood seemed centred around the implied notion that things masculine were worthwhile or, at least, forgivable, whilst things female were often seen as untrustworthy and pathetic (Secunda, 1996:81-94). This was problematic because theology has been framed in family metaphors and parental impressions linked to images of God (Vergote et al, 1969). When asked by her daughter to describe God, Cohen (1986:105) found that she had unwittingly described her father. Kath recollected that she

had to 'work on' her relationship with her mother and that she was therefore not comfortable with the imagery of God as Mother. Individual father/daughter relationships, together with other male figures in childhood generally correlated with individual perceptions of God. Discarding the notion of Father as sole God-image was not straightforward, but God as Mother did not always work for respondents either.

Fathers

Three general categories of father emerged. These included, father as companion/icon in the faith, father as ordinary bloke, and the abusive father.

Father's Faith Companion and the Male Image of God

Secunda (1996:74) cites the 'Daddy's little girl' syndrome as a cause of feminine rift in families. This rift was most powerful with regard to spiritual affinity. Annabelle's church tradition held that moments of 'call' from God and subsequent opportunity for 'decision' were not necessarily available to the individual all the time and that it was therefore important to 'seize the moment'. This ethos was shared by her father and was part of the ostensive motivation for the 'hell fire' sermon (Bendroth, 1993:77; Piggin, 1996:11). As noted in *Childhood Adolescence and the Rock*, occasions to commit oneself to God through Jesus as a once-and-for-all life resolution, often presented in suitably orchestrated church services and crusades (Piggin, 1996:155-156; Ward, 1984). Annabelle and her father attended these services together. She talked about services where 'hell-fire and brimstone were preached'. Retrospectively she could not understand why her father exposed her to such austere theology before the age of ten. She remembered the minister saying that he had misgivings at a service where most of his congregation were young girls but that 'the Lord had laid it on his heart' to preach about hell. Annabelle went home that night and wrote, 'Today Jesus knocked at the door of my heart. I've opened my life to him and I will serve him all my life long.'

Some evangelical theology held that harsh methods were often justified in order to save souls (Cleverly and Phillips, 1988:29). Annabelle's seizing of the moment concurred with that of the preacher's. He too was faced with a decision. The innocence of his

audience was outweighed by a perceived urgent mandate from God. Annabelle observed that, the fact that he made this process known to the girls, could well have prompted the prayerful question in devout and sensitive minds, 'Is this modification of plans for my sake, God?' Thus the preacher's telling of the process was, in itself, a powerful tool. For Annabelle, it defined a moment of black or white for the damnation or salvation of her soul. She had to either answer the call or turn God, the male preacher and, possibly, her father, away. The drama took place with her father's sanction. He knew the topic was heavy for children, but considered such exposure justified in order to 'save' them. Annabelle's father was 'over the moon' about her response. He knelt her down as an act of 'confirmation' that she was going to heaven instead of hell.

Annabelle's account underscored some of the motivating influences in becoming a Christian, for the child 'convert' within some evangelical strands. Her experience resonated with that of my own. Whilst there was some individual agency in such a decision, there were also strong church traditions, theological doctrines, and often, powerful adults influencing children and adolescents. Piggin (1996:154-157) documents the influence and masculinity of the Billy Graham Crusades at the time. Annabelle, Eva and Lily all testified to the strong patriarchal influence on adolescence. Annabelle explained that her 'conversion' was about trying to please her father and added, 'He would have been a minister but he wasn't able to, and I think he plonked onto me with all the expectations of becoming an official Christian.' Pidwell (1994:34-35) talks about 'mirroring' as the ambitions of a father projected onto a daughter. The need to be approved of, and belong within the patriarchal structure of the church, featured strongly within the childhood stories of respondents. As with Annabelle, this largely carried through to adulthood. She married a minister to please her father. Pidwell's research (1994:38) concluded that the motivating influence to success and conformity was the drive to please fathers. Presumably, had Annabelle been born male, she would have become an ordained minister herself.

The Ordinary Bloke as Father and an Image of God and/or Jesus

Another image that emerged was that of father as not-particularly-religious 'ordinary bloke'. As with church-member fathers, the 'ordinary bloke' usually had to be met on his own terms in his own environment to establish affinity. This is consistent with the general social theoretical requirement that women adapt to male standpoint both theoretically and in tangible, lived practice (Smith, D.E., 1988:181-185; Harding, 1991:119-137). Audrey spoke with obvious affection for her father as an 'ordinary bloke' who reminded her of Jesus. He possessed a 'gentle strength' and was, coincidentally, a carpenter by profession. This resonated with who Jesus was. Audrey grew up when school subjects were overtly genderised (Scott, 1980:97-120; Spender and Sarah, 1988; Dillon, 1986). Audrey was 'just acceptable' to her father because she initially did what he considered normative for 'real', that is, male, education and studied science as opposed to being a 'bloomin' acco (academic)', that is, one who studied humanities. To be on Jesus' side, therefore was to endeavour to think like an 'ordinary bloke'.

Jo also described her childhood as a 'male world' in which she felt basically comfortable due to the affinity she had with her father. This contravened her mother's mandate for Sunday school attendance. She recalled the days on her parents' poultry farm helping her father 'chopping the heads off chooks' and 'shooting the rats in the sheds.' She said the male world of those days was strong and safe (Wearing, 1996:15). She regarded the female world as weak and inadequate (Frazer, 1984:1-6; Thickstun, 1988:1-36; 60-86). This was still the case in adulthood, although she admitted this did not altogether make sense. Jo was slower than the other respondents to intentionally seek out women as friends and colleagues. She did more than simply admire the 'ordinary bloke'. In some respects, she sought to *be* the 'ordinary bloke' in both in her student days and later in her role as a parish minister. This fits the displacement of women to 'quasi men' (Lake and Holmes, 1995:51) or 'quasi persons' (Kirkman and Grieve, 1986:63). For Jo this was a reasonable objective. She struggled with issues of chauvinism, but tackled this the way she considered the 'ordinary bloke' often sought to cope with personal challenge: that is, alone, thus preserving a kind of perceived dignity (Wearing, 1996:58).

Like Audrey, Jo spent time with her father engaging in 'blokey' activities. Audrey said that she and her sister were taught to paint, hammer and saw. Jo and her father killed animals. For Audrey, however, it was not time alone with her father. Her brothers were encouraged more in these pursuits. Her ties to the concept of the 'ordinary bloke' still remained in adulthood, but not as strongly as with Jo. Audrey's father treated her more as 'other' than was the case with Jo, and sent her and her sister to a school that fostered the values of Victorian male-prescribed femininity. This was, perhaps, in the same vein as Eva's father who saw it as his ultimate duty to see his daughter married.

Whilst father/daughter relationships varied in intensity, all but three respondents regarded their fathers as generally less complex, more amenable and more approachable than their mothers. Tylielle reported her mother's intricacies contrasted with her father's simple goodness, and willingness to 'plod along' and 'accept life as it was.' Such lack of overt complexity appeared to have fostered a familiarity and ease of communication on male territory. Sarah also saw her father as the 'ordinary bloke'. She met him on his own ground in the shed (Thomson, 1995) into which he would retreat every night after the evening meal. She talked to him about cricket because that was *his* interest. Sarah regarded her father's shed as a necessary male province because of her mother's 'tendency to nag'. Exemplifying this as an Australian cultural norm, Williamson (1995), an Australian folk lyricist, sings, 'all Australian men need a shed'.

Jo and Lyn similarly regarded the dynamics between their respective fathers and mothers. Although not strictly their own, the domains of fathers were regarded, by some respondents, as spaces in which even female children could embrace a kind of freedom. In many instances, to step onto Dad's territory was to escape Mother's complexities creating a better chance of personal autonomy (Secunda, 1996:13; Heilbrun in Pidwell, 1994:28). This seemed healthy. However, Wearing (1996:15-16) argues that this is one way women contribute to 'building the foundations of their own oppression'.

Theresa's father also reportedly had many of the qualities of the 'ordinary bloke' but he did not insist upon the same measure of personal space. He presented as a compassionate Catholic. He took for granted that his wife would continue bearing children for as long as 'God kept sending them'. Theresa, the eldest of a large family, considered her position in

the family as privileged because she was a child while her father was still young. She reported that her father assumed a much more domestic role than other fathers. He respected the load that pregnancy and childbearing placed on his wife and determined that he would do all he could to lighten this. Theresa recalled that her father was always the one who tended to the needs of children in the night or when they were sick. Her account resonated with Coward's (1992:120) identification of women's tendency to regard themselves as 'lucky' when men help with domestic chores. Theresa's father's territory was easy to enter. He had *chosen* to care, in this specific way, against a culture that did not require this of him.

Theresa had no objections to the male image of God and even expressed some annoyance at those who appeared to harp on this as a feminist issue. However, she thought it important to embrace other images of God. It is notable that Margaret, whose father was also the preferred parent, described the process of an emerging image of God as an 'adding to rather than a subtraction from'. She too had no objection to a male image of God provided that this was not the only image.

For some respondents, church patriarchs often mirrored what they valued at home (Victorin-Vangerud, 2000:67-85; 141). The church was basically safe because men, the 'sensible' ones, were at the helm and the women 'safely' under men's care (Brennan, 1995:83, Wearing, 1996:86). The cleft, however, for the female child, was that no matter how much she allied herself to men and met them on their own ground, the understanding was that her future lay among those who were not in charge (Smith, D.E., 1988:51). The dilemma lay in the perception that the gendered self could never really belong to the category of individuals who were really made in God's image (Field, 1991:57-58; Wainwright, 1995:105-108). A girl could never be an 'ordinary bloke'.

The Abusive Father and the Male Image of God

The following stories reveal sinister circumstances of trying to please father. Blumenthal (1993) tackles aspects of an abusive God with aspects of human suffering, such as child abuse. These were also related components in the lives of some respondents. Eva and Mickale recounted the saddest stories. Eva recalled, that her father simply did not like her no matter how hard she tried to please him. Even in the telling, she said,

> I just went quiet and I find myself doing that now (in the interview). When I don't know what to say, I go quiet. I just shut up. He'd say, 'I can't stand you like that' and he'd hit me.

Eva's battle to move beyond her father's tyranny and father images of God endured into her sixties. Her father treated her as insignificant, but loathed her for feeling that way. Eva's self observation of her tendency to go quiet in threatening situations as a child and the comment, 'I find myself doing that now', is indicative of the profound influence of her learned reactions that carried through to adulthood. Smith, D.E. (1988:22-25) notes women's learned silence and Schaef (1985:69-96) identifies the 'stoppers' that keep 'women in their place'. However, C.J. Dennis, in his poem, 'Beef Tea', suggests that women's silence sometimes confronts men with their own naked wrongdoing. The drunkard, confronting his wife, reflects, 'But silence told me 'ow 'er 'eart was wrung' (Pickering, 1978:54-57). Eva said her father both caused and punished her silence.

One of the most damaging aspects of her father's silencing tactics was to ignore her educational achievements and aspirations. This damaged the whole of her life. Eva recounted that it did not matter whether she did well or failed at school, her parents, particularly her father, did not appear to be interested. Good marks and bad marks were treated with the same disregard. Her teachers encouraged her to aspire to university but her father forbade it. She said, 'All I ever wanted was to teach, but he had the vision that his job was to see me married.' Eva was forced to live out a life that, in many respects, did not fit her inner self. She partly vindicated her father by inferring that he was socially expected to make sure she married. The strength of her inner voice, though, endured through years of uneasy compliance. She eventually undertook tertiary studies in her fifties. The completion of a degree in theology concurred with the decision to end her marriage, to leave her home in country Victoria, and to rethink an ingrained male image of God. God, the father, had not worked for Eva. In some ways, because her father was emotionally distant and abusive, it appeared to have been easier for her to shed masculinist theologies than it was for some other respondents.

Mickale's experience of childhood had much in common with that of Eva. The abuse, however, presented as even more severe. Her father was an alcoholic who used her as a

flogging post. She was beaten many times and hospitalised as a result. Mickale chose to speak little of her father except to say that she did not bond with him. In adulthood she found the male image of God totally unacceptable. She found models of God's behaviour and personality framed in androcentric terms, oppressive to the point of experiencing the physical symptom of a perceived lead weight on her chest when metaphors such as 'King of kings' and 'Lord of lords' were used in church. Mickale's compliance with male images of God did not last as long as with most of the other respondents. Her Celtic origins, including the distant but enduring memory of her Scottish grandmother by whom she felt valued, endeared her to Celtic and other female images of God (Stone, M. 1976:24; Ruether. 1996). As with Eva, the fact of an abusive father legitimised the shedding of many androcentric Christian doctrines. The journey, though, was painful and arduous, largely due to the expectations and restrictions placed upon her in the role of minister's wife.

Neither Eva nor Mickale formed particular affinity with their mothers. God as Mother did not automatically replace masculinist images of God. This fits Duck's (1991:55-56) findings that abusive households also involve ambiguous mother images. It appeared there were no neat theological alternatives for abused daughters.

The Atheist Father

There were other fathers who did not fit any of these categories. Tamar's father and mother were atheists and her father, in particular, opposed her Sunday School and Church Youth Club attendance. He met her growing commitment to the Christian faith with debate and logic. Tamar reported that they were, in her opinion, good parents and citizens with moral consciences. However, she did not align the male image of God, as perpetuated through the church, with her own father. Of all the respondents, Tamar appeared to have had the least personal dilemma discarding androcentric images of God and chauvinistic church practices.

Mothers

As mentioned, the position of mother within the lives of respondents, was much more tenuous than that of father. There was a love/hate for mothers (Caplan, 2000:17-36). They were blamed for perceived negative inherent factors. Lyn, for example, attributed her own depression to that of her mother's (Caplan, 2000:19). Mother's power was sometimes regarded as dangerous (Caplan, 2000:119-127). Society has also tended to blame mothers for what goes wrong in the lives of children (Kitzinger, 1997:174-175). For example, Furlong (De-la-Noy, 2003) attributed the onset of a fairly disabling stammer, and a terror of using the telephone, to her mother's dissatisfaction with her gender. The following reflections bring to the surface some of the issues with which the respondents either grappled or failed to fully identify when facing clefts caused by the ambiguous relationship dynamics and social locations of their mothers.

Mother as Power Figure.

Victorin-Vangerud (2000:98-101), in advocating a feminist-maternal standpoint, has identified the power of motherhood in the perpetuation of oppressive domestic arrangements. Respondents rarely regarded the 'power' of mothers within the family and within the life of the developing individual as legitimate. Mary was the one exception who conceded that her mother's 'surreptitiousness' was necessary in order to 'look after our (the children's) interests' because her father, generally, did not. Of those who saw their mothers as the family dominator, most regarded this as invasive of personal space (Secunda, 1996:115). In most instances there was little or no attempt at understanding maternal behaviour and very little pathos even within the accounts of those who now have children of their own. Many alluded to forms of 'emotional blackmail' and other behaviour, employed by their mothers, rendering respondents feeling emotionally powerless. Jo's account was the most outstanding instance. It also highlighted the power of women's chosen silence. She recalled,

> My mother was very possessive, you were frightened to cross her because she would go *months* without talking to you....absolutely powerful stuff and I used to go *berserk* inwardly and outwardly and I had this friend, this lady in the church who I could just go (to) and when my own mother wouldn't talk to me, I'd be

> able to go and scream and say, 'Oh, she's at it again, I can't live with this silence!'

Jo regarded her mother's silence as a power tool worse than verbal fighting. It evoked a fear that challenged logic, intelligence and well-being. The inner self went 'berserk' in the silence. Jo found a woman in the church who assumed the role of surrogate mother. This woman was what she thought a mother figure *should* be. Jo's mother sought counsel on the problem from the same woman. Despite this, Jo did not concede that, although the silence appeared to have been used as an emotional goad, it was possible that her mother may also have struggled with her own unfortunate way of dealing with the relationship. Even retrospectively there was an adamant one-sidedness about Jo's account. She did, however, give credence to the possibility that the silence was so excruciating *because* there was a longing for intimacy on both sides.

Jo's account of inner turmoil was echoed in many of the respondents' encounters with the church. It is of significance that the church has been referred to as 'Mother' (Arnold, 1985:153): God the Father – The Church, our Mother. The metaphor mirrors the attitude to women in society generally. In traditional Christianity the power figure, God, is male; the lesser, subservient church, is female (Kung, 1978:234). The male figure is actually regarded as the *creator* of the feminine. There was a correlation between Jo's retention of God as Father image and her determination to remain on the side of perceived strength (Wearing, 1996:16). God the Father had power over life and death as surely as the male world in which Jo grew up had the power to kill the hens on her father's poultry farm.

Five respondents expressed contempt at what they regarded as a heightened sense of respectability and/or the notion of restrictive domestic order initiated and maintained by their mothers. There was the sense of a handed down 'character' whereby the mother dictated behaviour and sculptured the shape of the family identity within the community in order to satisfy some personal need. Lyn reflected upon the duality that this created. She said that her mother 'ruled' the household and that, in childhood, there were two 'languages'. There was the language of the schoolyard, and the 'respectable' English spoken at home and at church. She stressed that as soon as she 'got anywhere near home' she changed tongue. For Lyn the two 'languages' indicated the lack of synchronisation between the home-and-church world, and the world outside of these. Mother was

responsible for the necessity of separation. She was responsible for a kind of social brace that kept both father and children in check. Lyn did not use the word 'mum' more widely employed in contemporary Australia. To Lyn, whose mother was still alive at the time of interview, her title was the more formal 'Mother'. Lyn's recollections and those of other respondents indicated that, generally, they did not regard their mothers' as the parent with whom there was freedom, creativity or adventure. There was little room for things to wander too far from their 'proper' place. Lyn's account resonated with the enforced 'dressing up' for church of which Jo spoke (see *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock*). In regard to these, Fiorenza (1995a:xiii) speaks of freedom in terms of relinquishment of the '"ladylike" claim to moral purity'.

Lily also reported her mother as the one who orchestrated the 'place' of things within the family. She described life on the family farm as outwardly chauvinistic due to her mother's influence, and cited meal times as examples where the 'men' of the family were fed first and the 'girls' sometimes even had to sit at a different table. Absolving her father of blame for this, she said,

> *Never* did I hear it from my father. It was more my mother's idea, though she would always *say* Dad was the head of the house, it was often her telling him what she'd already decided to do.'

Lily felt disenfranchised as a young woman because she perceived the unalterable map of the future had been issued by her mother. 'You left school, got a job, fell in love, got married, had children and stayed at home and that was the end of you life.' It was a 'no options' course. This resounds with one of Pidwell's (1994:66) respondents who reported depressing 'images of nothingness' with regard to motherhood. Like Eva, Lily was forced to leave school against the advice of the teachers. Lily drew on a military metaphor as she described how her mother 'marched' her into her first job the day after she left school. She recalled,

> I lasted six weeks then I left, because he (her boss) thought for thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents a week that he could run his hands over me. It happened on a Friday. By Monday she'd (her mother) gone through the paper again and she marched me into another job.

Lily resented the fact that her body was regarded so cheaply by her boss and, apparently, by her mother. She also resented the lack of debriefing after such abuse. In young adulthood, Lily lived out the blueprint as set down by her mother, but later disowned it. At the time of interview she reported that the relationship with her mother was neither happy nor close.

Among the common emergent themes concerning Mother, the need or the wish to escape, hide or, at least, to seek protection, recurred in various forms. Kath commented on her mother as a trespasser into personal space. Jo, in adulthood, hid all points of possible vulnerability from her mother. She said, 'Even now I don't tell her anything. I was separated for six months before I ever told her, *separated from my husband!*' Jo stressed the latter phrase in order to underscore the abnormality of keeping such an important fracture from one's mother.

Sarah, whose mother lives in another state, described her mother as 'manipulative and over-bearing', someone who 'made you feel guilty if she couldn't get her own way'. God as Mother 'horrified' Sarah. She complained about the fact that her mother telephoned every Sunday. The calls were a burden that seemed to eclipse the fact of the faithful regularity with which her mother telephoned from interstate and willingly paid the bill. She further linked the notion of her mother as nuisance caller and intruder to that of an absurd image of God. God the Father might be chauvinistic, but God the Mother-power was regarded as surreptitious and emotionally draining (Heine, 1989:30-31).

Kath expressed similar sentiments. She found God as Mother uncomfortable because, as a child, she had 'learned to look compliant' whilst actually fostering her own internal agenda as a protection against her mother's psychological intrusiveness. She also overcame the problem by spending a lot of time with her father. The notion of God as a Mother with the same characteristics as her mother but powerful enough to 'read souls' and with whom nothing could be feigned, was frightening and unthinkable for Kath. God as Mother may appear liberating and empowering for those who abhor the singular representation of God as male. However, patriarchal structures have impacted upon the role of Mother within the family in complex and subtle ways (Hooton, 1990:167; Caplan, 2000:96-138). Some respondents regarded their mothers as 'dragons' from whom escape

was a means of survival. Sarah did not temper her views. Living interstate partially solved the problem for her but her father was not at liberty to do this. She described her father's death from cancer at the age of sixty-three as 'the ultimate way of getting out of the difficult relationship.'

The Disenfranchised Mother.

Audrey and Tylielle were among those who remembered their mothers more kindly than most respondents, though both considered their mothers disenfranchised and relegated to form the backdrop of other people's lives (Finch, 1983:94-98; Wearing, 1996:118-119). Audrey saw much of herself in her mother. She regarded her mother as having a kind of second-hand life because of the dearth of encouragement and educational opportunity afforded to women in the past (Spender, 1988:22-31; Pidwell, 1994:63). Audrey was grateful for her mother's help in attaining a tertiary education, initially in science, but also referred to how women have sometimes been regarded as non-persons (Kirkman and Grieve, 1986:63-64; Tong, 1989:227). Audrey referred to her own inherent shyness and, in the same breath, reported that her mother was too timid to survive more than two years of secondary school. Audrey had also felt invisible to the prominent people within her church. As noted in *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock*, the minister, who had known the family for some time, had constantly called her by her sister's name. For Audrey, as with her mother, the feeling of being a bland entity to others never fully subsided.

Tylielle, too, regarded her mother as something of a social shadow. Her mother felt inadequate, judged, and not 'up to scratch' in the face of the church, and therefore found the prospect of church attendance personally daunting. Unlike Audrey, Tylielle felt confident enough to take flight from the things that weighed her mother down. She broke free of having to bring her mother along with her (Schaef, 1985:83). Tylielle's experience of church was affirming and liberating and, in the end, prepared the ground for her to leave the Christian ministry and the church without guilt. She indicated, though, that privately she was deeply affected by who her mother was. Over the years, Tylielle felt deeply her mother's underlying and enduring unhappiness. Illnesses and, finally, an alcohol problem culminated in her mother's early death at the age of forty-six (Cloward and Piven, 1979). She felt that illness gave her mother permission to express an unhappiness whose root cause was unarticulated. She described her mother as a creative

person 'trapped in a conventional marriage' whose only outlet was through conventional needlework and concluded, 'in the end, this wasn't good enough'. Tylielle thus indicated the stifling of women's creative contribution beyond the domestic sphere and the general devaluing of women's art (de Beauvior, 1972:163; Broude and Garrard, 1982; Thiering, 1973:20). As indicated in *Social Reformation*, Tylielle rejected 'conventional marriage' in a way that her mother could not.

The Respected Mother.

Only one respondent, Mary, reported a preference for the relationship she had with her mother over that of her father. She described her father 'very unloving and strict'. Mary felt she was a disappointment to her father from her childhood to his death (see below). Mary identified her mother as the loving one who looked after the interests of the children. She took obvious pride in depicting her mother as 'very attractive' and 'well dressed, especially when she went to the races'.

Mary's was the only account of a loving mother with a measure of independence who led, rather than lived her life through, her children. Mary's recollection of her was that of a strong, socially significant individual who held the reins of the family with confidence, providing a safe environment for her children. Her mother was a shield against the weaker and more negative influence of her father. Mary described her wider family as matriarchal, wherein the women had a tendency to mother the men. She reported that her father, as the only boy in his family of origin, was 'spoilt' by his sisters. She remembered him as 'little boyish' and somewhat emotionally incompetent. Both parents were strongly Catholic. However, it was her mother who was heavily involved in the social aspect of the local parish. Catholicism, both in its social and moral application, was lauded as the only way to live (Byrne, 1993; Ware, 1985; McGovern, 1977). Mary's family embraced it as second nature, without analysis. She became a nun who, later in her career, studied directly under Fiorenza in the pursuit of a feminine and Mother image of God and a feminist reconstruction of theological hermeneutics. Mary found the Mother-image of God a comforting icon.

Joan, also a Catholic nun, was another for whom the childhood and adolescent experience of mother was positive and affirming. God as Mother came into focus when

her mother died and she imaged God as an extension of her mother's loving characteristics. Joan spoke of her mother and God in the same context as co-inspirers of the work for which she felt ordained. She felt safer than most of the respondents in allowing a pathos with her mother's experiences to impact upon the direction of her life's work. Joan reflected upon her mother's childhood experiences as an Australian in Ireland as the impetus for her own work among refugees and children of varying ethnic origins. Mary and Joan were the only two respondents for whom the idea of God, with all the characteristics of their mothers in magnified form, was not viewed with, at least some apprehension, if not abhorrence.

Not all respected mothers were emotionally robust, however. Audrey did not consider her mother a strong, independent woman but remembered her, nonetheless, as one who did her best to launch her daughter beyond the bounds of the dimensions by which she, herself, felt bound. Although timid, as noted, Audrey's mother encouraged her daughter in avenues from which she felt personally excluded. Audrey spoke of her mother's endless availability and encouragement with homework, elocution lessons and, with great affection, noted her mother's preparedness, as a 'failed year ten' student, to help Audrey 'nut out problems' and explain sophisticated theories when Audrey was studying for a degree in physics. She sensed that her mother regarded tertiary education as the means of attaining freedom. Audrey added, 'She used to write down the lists of my subjects on bits of paper so she could tell her friends what I was doing.' This indicated the extent to which Audrey's mother personalised her daughter's achievements. Audrey's mother was willing to venture into realms about which she knew little in order to help Audrey clarify a life's course. The choice of elocution as a means to develop the individual is illustrative of the hope her mother had that Audrey would escape the experience of a completely introverted life.

Hurt and Forgiveness

Most respondents indicated that they were casualties of the mother/daughter relationship. All included anecdotes to illustrate the position their mothers held in their lives. These were related with anger, love, frustration and sometimes tears. Lily reflected, 'She (mother) doesn't realise what she's saying, how it impacts upon people and hurts them'. It was clear when Lily said this that she was not referring to 'people' in general but to

herself. Lily does not see her mother very often and has rejected many of her mother's values.

All respondents identified a male image of God that was personally oppressive and dominated the culture into which they were born. The Mother image of God, though, was not always the answer. To follow 'Mum' meant death to the self for Lily as noted earlier in her comment about her mother's notion of the natural course of a woman's life. Although Lily found it necessary to distance herself from her mother in order to protect herself, the longing for intimacy or, at least, the wishing that things could be different, was evident. This was also true of Jo whose comment was a clear lament. She said, '(I) have no sense of sharing life stories with my own (mother).' In so saying, Jo indicated that one of the tragedies of lost intimacy was the lack of someone very close with whom to share ones stories.

Secunda (1996:xv) has observed:

> There is something about the painful mother-daughter relationship that can linger, for many adult daughters, with punishing tenacity. These daughters may be bright, sensitive, competent women who are valiantly trying to overcome their troubled beginnings – yet they are haunted by them, as though they had flunked childhood.
>
> These women – tempered by stormy or chilly attachments to their mothers, survivors of emotional want, strong by any other measure – grow weak in the knees, or are choked with sadness, or are shaken with rage, when recalling their childhoods. Their mothers may be long dead, or white-haired and infirm, but still they have a profound hold on their daughters, who talk of them as though they were about to be sent to their rooms.

These observations resounded in the lives of respondents. Some expressed the notion of forgiveness as an appropriate factor in the mother/daughter relationship. This was true even of interviewees who had volunteered little about their mothers. Amira made a point of mentioning the mystic experience of a spiritual mentor in whom she has a great deal of confidence. The mentor had envisioned Amira's dead mother and had related,

> Your mother has grown enormously in the Spirit and her major concern is that she knows that she hurt you very much and she would like you to forgive her.

For Amira, the mentor's vision was valid. She referred to 'something unfinished' and that she did, indeed, need to forgive her mother. Amira has since found it possible to have 'little chats with mother' in her head. Forgiveness meant reopened lines of communication, a healing of the relationship and a sense of general personal liberation. Amira's spirituality has moved beyond the confines of Christianity. Her determination not to remain 'stuck' in structures perceived to be restrictive to her spirit, is consistent with the freedom with which she now 'talks' to her mother. Kath similarly observed, 'you don't grow up until you forgive your own parents for not being perfect' (Caplan, 2000:220-221).

Perfect understanding from one generation to another is rare as tradition seeks to squash challenges and 'normalise' the future (Johnson, E.A., 1993:57-63). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the era in which respondents grew up and decided upon clerical/religious careers was a period of defining social change (Dillon, 1986; Johnson, E.A., 1993; Kaplan, 1996). As Pringle's (1994) title suggests, it was the era that articulated the 'Ladies to Women' shift. For some parents, this meant their daughters went too far, violating the boundaries of comfortable role mandates.

Children Who Went Too Far

Women Clergy – Enigmas

Whilst conservative Christianity encourages the individual to stand up for what is right, it has generally not encouraged challenges to its structure (Daly, 1975; Harrison, 1974; Laeyendecker, 1989). Respondents revealed that, whilst many parents encouraged their children's involvement in Sunday School, church, confirmation classes and church youth club, some baulked at the notion of their daughters entering ministry/priesthood/religious orders. Whilst it is not possible to say whether or not this would have been so in the case of sons, the general picture given was that parents wanted social norms for their female children. The idea of girls entering the ordained ministry/priesthood/religious order was regarded as going too far, or even freakish, by some parents.

Ordained priesthood/ministry was considered a vocation reserved for extremely devout and 'chosen' Christians, whose call from God is recognised by the church (Parvey, 1980:59). It has also been generally deemed a calling for men only (Parvey 1980:57-59; Bouma, 1991; Wetherell, 1987). Ministers/priests have sometimes been regarded as enigmatic or, at least, 'other', even within the community of ordinary Christians; needed and revered but set apart from ordinary life as distinctive metaphoric church architecture (Porter, 1989:2; Blaikie, 1983). Women priests/ministers, however, do not fit the traditional design (Wren, 1989; Hageman, 1974; Zikmund et al, 1998). Whilst parents may consider a son's move into such a profession as extreme, in context it has still been within the realms of social normality. The data for this thesis suggests that when daughters have made such moves, however, the metaphoric 'roof-line' and 'floor plan' of church social architecture is ruptured. Although, in many denominations, the present official position is that women are no longer simply annexes to the 'real' leadership (Schneiders, 1991a; Hageman, 1974), my findings indicate that, in practice, women clergy have not generally encountered automatic acceptance (Zikmund et al, 1998; Bouma et al, 1996; Neave, 1990: section 5/1-20; Tulip, 1983). Interviews suggested that daughters who entered the ordained ministry some twenty or more years ago were often considered outside the accepted norm. Respondents reported confrontation and marginalisation, not only from church power bases, but also, in some cases, from home communities and family.

Parental Disappointment and Outrage

Those entering religious orders initially did not alter a paradigm. Whilst daughters entering religious orders may be considered, by some Catholic parents as, 'going too far', such action is still within the bounds of 'normal' Catholicism (Ware, 1985; Loudon, 1992). It reinforces rather than challenges Catholic structure. The Catholic contributors to this thesis, however, have not remained within conventional parameters. They have sought to be more than sub-servants to the system. They have attained tertiary qualifications at post-graduate level and have claimed a place in academia. Whilst it is not unusual for nuns these days to pursue an academic career (Ware, 1985), contributors to this thesis have been 'trail blazers' in this respect. They have brought into focus and sought to address many of the clefts within their individual and collective spiritualities

and have challenged many of the practices and structures of Catholicism and the Christian church generally (Hirschman, 1970).

Mary, now in her sixties, entered a religious order over forty years ago. Her career survived the drastic changes to her order brought about by Vatican Two, after which her 'uncloistered' self emerged into the public arena (see Ware, 1985). She subsequently studied theology and spirituality under the direct influence of, arguably, some of the world's leading feminist theologians. Mary is well respected by her peers. However, after some moments' pause in the interview, amid reflection upon her parents' influence and her Catholic upbringing, Mary recalled, with discernable melancholy, that her father (aged ninety-one at the time of the interview) had recently told her that she should have married and had a family. For her this was a clear disregard of all her achievements. Her father's comment, at such a late stage in her career, saddened her because she felt that this was indicative of how her father may have tacitly felt for the past forty years. Suddenly she was made aware of the possibility that her parents had secretly longed for her to be married and living a more 'normal' life, as were her sisters. Her father's comment suddenly evoked suspicion that Mary had misinterpreted her place within the family psyche for over forty years. Mary's parents had wanted her participation in Catholicism but, in her father's estimation, she had gone too far. To confront the fact that her social position, believed to be ordained by God, was possibly different to the expectations of the family, for whom she had a profound love, was distressing and cleft-forming.

Some respondents recalled, vividly, the reaction of parents and other significant figures, to the announcement that they were seeking clerical careers. Jo reported the events surrounding her departure for theological college,

> My parents were *horrified* and, at my farewell, the minister stood up and said how much he disagreed with what I was doing, so my parents just thought he was *wonderful*. I got home that night and was told, (by parents) 'well how can you do this? Even your own minister (does not agree)'. My parents were *shattered*, they were *devastated*. I had to sell a new car, which *devastated* my dad, I bought an old, old clapped out Holden which *devastated* him...and they stood behind my car to prevent me from backing out the morning I was leaving.

Jo's story, although extreme, resounded with the feelings of other respondents, treated as enigmatic within their own communities. In Jo's parents' view the minister's opinion supported the fact that her choice of career was inappropriate. Replacing her late model car with an old one was also seen as foolhardy for a girl raised to value the trappings of wealth. To intensify matters, Jo had chosen Mother's Day to tell her parents she was entering theological college. The inference was that this was essentially bad news and should not have violated Mother's Day. The event was not allowed to fade into the fabric of family history. She emphasised the words 'horrified', 'shattered' and 'devastated'. The account was all the more graphic for the account of her parents physically standing behind her car on the morning of her departure for theological college. She also recalled her mother's anxiety about what would happen to a relationship Jo had begun with a local young man. Her mother, amidst tears and silences blurted, 'What are you going to do about him?' Jo recalled that her mother was equally distressed at the possibility of Jo passing up the social norm of marriage that they considered gave more legitimacy to women's lives, than careers (Wearing, 1996:118-119). Jo coped by endeavouring to distance herself. In the interview she commented on how she and her parents were 'never close' and how they were not 'a huge part' of her life. She said, 'We don't talk about things' and 'I might carry a label of a minister but they wouldn't have a clue what that basically involves.'

This was puzzling in view of the fact that, of all the respondents, Jo was the one who talked most about her family, often in less harsh words and tone than the above comments. This contradicted the idea that her family was not 'a huge part' of her life. The dilemma, for Jo, albeit unarticulated, appeared to be in the fact that the family for whom she *aid* care was not only out of touch with what she did for a living, but did not know *who* she was. Jo reported that when she visited her parents', home reminders of the 'abnormality' of her choice of career were avoided. There was thus a cleft between the social self at her parents' home and her identity as a minister of religion in her 'normal' life.

Lyn's parents responded to her candidature for ministry with similar, though less drastically expressed sentiments. Her mother thought that religion was acceptable as a hobby but not as a serious career, and was 'horrified' at Lyn's decision. Her father

suggested she take on the role of deaconess as a compromise to soften the blow for her mother. Ministry was seen to be meshing weekend and private life with the business of earning a *real* living. Her father's suggestion was an attempt to bring the place of religion back into an extension of the private sphere, where, in her parents' view, it belonged, especially in the life of a woman. Lyn surmised that her mother's objections probably stemmed from the embarrassment of her daughter's odd choice of career but added, 'I think she (her mother) was also thinking of me. I think she felt that if I went into the ministry I'd probably not get married, which proved to be correct' (see Turner and Helms, 1988:161 on *Stereotypes about Singlehood*).

It seems odd that this should be of concern to one entering a career that was so clearly laden with men. Until this time Lyn had been a pharmacist. This too has been a male-dominated field, particularly until the time when Lyn announced her intention of a career change in the early 1970s. Clearly, though, the choice to study pharmacy did not bother her parents as much as her later decision to pursue theology. Theology was an even more gendered field than pharmacy and beyond normality for a young woman. It appeared that Lyn was out on two counts. She had chosen a field that should have remained within the sphere of 'hobby' and one that was more heavily male-gendered than most others. In this respect, her parents, like those of Jo, considered that Lyn was about to commit, what was for women, social suicide. They considered her decision dangerous and foolhardy but indicated little regard, even as Christians, to the notion that this may be 'God's calling'.

Standing Alone – Strong Women

Lyn's story bears some commonalities with that of Veronica. As noted earlier, Veronica, though her parents attended church regularly, experienced the discrepancy between church intent and parental priorities on the occasion of her confirmation. However, even that memory did not compare with the foundational devastation she felt in adulthood when, upon asking her mother the reason for her parents' discontinuation of church attendance in later years, her mother replied, 'Oh darling, surely you realise we didn't need to go any more, daddy had retired. He only went to be an example to the men (under him in his military regiment)!' (Gill, 1999; Goode, 1980). Upon regarding Veronica's perplexed reaction, her mother added, '*surely* you understood, dear.' Veronica felt a cornerstone had been removed from under her. She was then unclear

about her father's motives for engaging in something as an example to others when, in his personal set of ethics, it appeared later to count for so little. Her mother's explanation for non-attendance indicated to her that her parents considered themselves socially above taking Christianity seriously, and that they considered churchgoing was only for the 'rank and file', lesser people. It overwhelmed Veronica to have her discernment called into question with the comment, '*surely* you understood, dear'. Veronica's voice shook in the telling. She said the revelation was 'like a stab wound' because she and her husband and children were 'deeply' involved in the church and this was based partly upon perceived family faith heritage. She felt as if part of her foundations had been cut away and added, 'I could not believe that I had come, innocently, out of so peculiar an environment.'

This revelation not only shattered Veronica's childhood perceptions of the relationship between church, faith and parents, but also part of her own identity within a particular history and spiritual place of origin. She had remembered her father as a man of great faith and example, but her mother's remarks had now prompted the retrospective 'double vision' factor (Kelly-Gadol, 1987:175). Veronica had also assumed that her parents shared her love for the Anglican Church and that she had therefore sprung from a kind of oneness of family and community of Christians. The place of the Anglican Church therefore needed repositioning within her own historical context and early family memories. Its role as obligatory ritual and outsider, in relation to her family of origin, was now superimposed upon its earlier image as central and beloved family 'friend'. For Veronica, her mother's disclosure also meant a reformation of her 'raison de etre'. The notion of being a person who loves the Anglican Church, partly due to the perceived orientation of respected and loved parents, no longer held credibility. Other respondents revealed that there is often a longing for the old perceptions of reality that appeared to worked so well, and for the old self whose place was known. Interviews suggested that the longing to believe in the way things seemed to be, as opposed to the knowledge of reality, were cleft-forming essences at work within the spirit of the individual.

In many respects the shattering of childhood recollections in Veronica's life is a microcosm of what has happened in the lives of all respondents. With each new

awakening to the androcentric nature of the Christian faith, as each layer was peeled away, there had to be a redefinition of the self and personal location within the faith.

Christian tradition preaches, as an ideal, unity between family and church. The family, as support to the individual, was supposed to be built upon, and a microcosm of, the Rock as mirrored hierarchical structure (Byrne, 1993; Bendroth, 1993; Victorin-Vangerud, 2000; Bouma, 1992:36-37). Veronica's situation suggested that, where this does not happen, there can be a sense of having to stand upon the Rock alone. Although liberating, this can be a lonely experience as some respondents indicated. However, for Veronica, the sudden realisation that one has *always* stood there alone prompted an inner sensation of cleft and crisis.

Veronica identified herself as a child who had a tendency to go 'too far' in the story with which she chose to open her the interview. She began thus, with an obvious mental stretch to recall her very earliest memory of church.

> I was probably two-and-a-half, it might have been three. We were in a village church somewhere in the Cornish countryside and they had box pews, Jacobean box pews. I know that I was not supposed to venture out of the pew in which we sat, but my teddy bear had the loveliest time at the service. She kept walking out of the box pew doors and walking back in again, you see, and my father slapped me on my leg, the only time in my life that he slapped me.

It is interesting that Veronica regarded her 'teddy' bear as female. Perhaps the phenomenon is an indication of how women often have to make do with male names and male norms in order to live and move (Lake and Holmes, 1995:51-52; Bryson, 1999:75-78). To this end Tong (1989:227) suggests, 'Where woman does not reflect man, she does not exist'. Immobilised by church restrictions, Veronica found a way by blaming socially unacceptable mobility on her bear. The bear sometimes did the unthinkable and visited other people in their enclosed pews. Later in the interview, Veronica recalled many times when she had to devise ways of breaking through church restrictions in order to minister to people or to further the boundaries of her career. She would sometimes, likewise, feel the smarting response from a structure from which she took the punishment, but that she basically loved. Reprimand from the beloved Rock stung.

Tamar's experience of metaphorically building alone upon the Rock contrasted to that of Veronica. As mentioned above, her parents were atheists and, as a child, Tamar was consistently called by her father to justify her reasons for Sunday School and church attendance. Tamar, like Jo, used the term 'devastated' to describe her parents' reaction to the general dedication with which she embraced the Christian faith. For Tamar's parents, however, the going too far and the 'devastation' began earlier when she insisted on a personal inquiry into the Christian faith through Sunday School and church youth activities. Tamar recalled,

> Every Sunday afternoon after I'd been to church, my father would tell me why Christianity was wrong and why the Bible was wrong and I had to argue back. I could never win because he would use how the Bible contradicted itself and so on, which, now I think, it does. And then I couldn't argue against it. I didn't quite know how to argue. We'd have big arguments. I wouldn't let him win, so there would be this continual conflict through my teenage years.

The strength developed when combating her parents' objections could have been the training ground for Tamar's later battles with church bureaucracy. Like Jo and Veronica, hers too was the story of a disjuncture between family and faith, but one that was much more overt. Tamar is tall in stature and has a discernible strength of presence identified by some respondents and the wider sphere of Christian feminists in Australia. She grew up in an era when tallness was not a generally accepted form of femininity. In many ways petite and dependent women had a smoother social right of passage (Gillespie, 1998; Brownmiller, 1984:23-51). Perhaps her physical height, together with her childhood in an atheistic household, facilitated an acceptance of the need to challenge the Rock, with less obvious support than some of the others.

As she was growing up there was an acknowledged cleft between the two most central influences in her life, her parents and the church. However, there was also an extra dichotomy. Like Veronica, it came into focus with better clarity in adulthood but with almost an opposite slant to Veronica's situation. Whereas the adult Veronica was confronted with demythologising her roots because her parents had appeared committed Christians but were not, Tamar's atheistic parents, as mentioned, embraced a moral code on truth, authenticity and respect for fellow human beings and fidelity to a humane and social justice based set of tenets for living. The cleft, in Tamar's instance, was that her

parents were in basic philosophical harmony with much of Christianity and would have made good Christians, but were not.

Tamar presented as one who was comfortable living with a fluidity of faith. She did not appear to have to know all the answers. There was a contentedness to live with certain conceptual unknowns. Among a number of the respondents she has been regarded as a 'trail blazer' and forefront-runner for liberated thinking on women's place within the church and the Christian faith. Within the church, she has sometimes stood alone for principles that have been socially unpopular and/or theologically controversial. For her this has not been a foreign personal position. Her parents considered she had gone 'too far' from schooldays.

Sarah, who already held a degree in agricultural science when she decided to candidate for ministry in the Uniting Church reported, of her family ethos that, 'If women had brains then they were supposed to use them – academic ability, they were supposed to use it.' Her parents had sent her to a private school, carefully chosen for its encouragement of girls for the kind of adulthood where women took their place among professionals (Johnson, E.A., 1993:9-10). For Sarah, childhood models included grandmothers and aunts who had roles in the public arena. Of those respondents who already held tertiary qualifications before candidature for ministry, most had ventured into academic areas that had been notably male dominated. These included physics/chemistry, pharmacy and agricultural science (Dillon, 1986; Spender, 1988b). It could be argued that, in the view of the general communities of their time, they had already begun to venture too far beyond the accepted parameters for women (Bhathal, 1999). However, even respondents whose families encouraged them in higher education, were socialised to regard marriage and family as their prime objective (Gilding, 1991:31-63; Safilios-Rothschild, 1977). Sarah's family considered entering such a life-embracing career as the ordained ministry, an odd thing to do.

If the plea to enter ministry, priesthood or a religious order for respondents whose family culture favoured education for girls was problematic, those whose families did not embrace this ethos encountered even more difficulties. Lily reported that, in her family, higher education for girls was considered a waste of time and resources. Lily reflected

that the boys and men in the family '*always*' came first and that the women were there to serve the men. She said that this impacted on her life and ministry. Even though Lily had tried hard at school and attained 'dux of the class' more than once, her mother could see 'absolutely no reason' for a woman to be educated past year ten level.

For Lily's family, women's role was so inflexibly tied to the home (Spender, 1988a:25) that any sort of job in the paid workforce was considered only as a necessity for women who were *unfortunately* not married (Hunt and Hunt, 1990:269-273). It was an ethos that clashed with her academic ability, enthusiasm for learning and success at secondary school. Her plea to enter theological college was met with a lack understanding by her parents. Her aspirations were treated as enigmatic. The shortfall between the position of her family on education for girls and the requirements of the tertiary institution became obvious when she applied and found that, though she felt she had the academic fortitude needed to complete a degree in theology, she did not have the official prerequisites. This was a painful revelation to Lily in view of the fact that earlier academic achievements had been promising. She regarded her lack of secondary qualifications as a stifling of her identity. Lily reported that this did not fit the general scenario of the male students. The few aspiring to ministry who had left school early had done so either by personal choice or economic necessity, not due to an expected and gendered role imposed upon them. Lily sensed at that time, that frustration due to lack of acquired qualifications is what happens to some women who aspire beyond their prescribed station in life. However, over time, Lily mustered the fortitude to transcend this childhood socialisation.

Outside 'Normal' for Church and Society

The distance from patriarchy to a more liberated position was a long and continuing journey for Lily as for most. Lily, however, was younger than the other respondents and the process was probably aided initially by societal changes in attitudes to women by the time she applied for tertiary study (Thorne and Yalom, 1982; Grieve and Burns, 1994). This was not the case for Eva, at the other end of the age spectrum. Perhaps the stories of Lily and Eva, respectively, illustrate the difference made by at least some societal support for women trying to extend beyond traditional roles. Whilst this part of Eva's story is outside the direct category of childhood and is therefore detailed more fully in *Social Reformation*, it is indelibly linked to adolescent longings. Her account illustrated

that, though the struggle is magnified when there is little support from significant others or traditional systems, women have demonstrated challenging personal agency (Winter et al 1995; Williams, D.S., 1993; Rankka, 1998). Eva is at least sixteen years older than Lily, thus placing the period of her youth and the culture of her family of origin in the generation before that of Lily's. As previously observed, it was Eva's father who effectively dashed her early bids for higher education. Her father held both the power of veto over higher education and the power of psychological persuasion, convincing Eva, at least for a short, that to pursue higher education would be against her ilk both in regard to her womanhood and to her personal ability. Eva dutifully conformed to family and community expectations. Eva fulfilled the role of dutiful mother, wife and church organist for some thirty years, in what she now considers conservative, country Victoria. But eventually she was unable to quell the underlying surges of unease and the feeling that many things in her life were 'not quite right'. At the age of fifty she threw off the societal overlay for the pursuit of mature age studies in theology and ordination. Eva's family and community then considered she had gone too far.

Whilst Eva's story is probably the most conspicuous contrast between personal old and new life, the presence of inner motivation that has propelled women to redefine the boundaries of religious structures and their own spirituality was obvious in all respondents (Winter et al, 1995). Tylielle's mother, who was not a church attender, saw her daughter's aspiration to ordination as inappropriate. Tylielle's explanation highlighted both the importance of her family's role in her life and the overriding resolve of her inner voice. She remembered,

> My mother was terribly upset about my, sort of, stepping out of the *world*, as she saw it, into the churchly life and that was one side of the picture and the other was that I must have felt very urgent about it to do it without the full support of my family.

Respondents reported that parents and others often perceived their chosen career paths as not only stepping outside the accepted limits of the traditional church, but also even beyond the margins of respectable general/secular behaviour, given that the church held a more central role in Australian general society some years ago (Bouma, 1983; Browning, 1986).

Parents and Issues of the Journey

The journey to a truer soul identity was thus spiritual and social. It involved theological and physical shifts that often had their roots in childhood and families of origin. As the interviews progressed it became clear that the necessary reshaping of personal spirituality involved much more than simple adoption of feminist theology. God images were often drawn directly from experiences of Mother and Father within the family. This frequently proved problematic and cleft-forming to respondents. To espouse any form of feminist theology and embark upon a journey to discover a truer inner self sometimes encountered a reluctance to relinquish the Father image as sole icon of God for a number of reasons. God as Male rests upon the weight of tradition (Storkey, 1987). This, in itself, was difficult to overcome both socially and spiritually. Those for whom the relationship with father signified religious wisdom and/or personal integrity and childhood friendship, sometimes grappled with the notion of betraying this. Also if 'father' meant power, there was fear in rebellion.

Nor was it a simple matter of replacing or adding to male images and perspectives. Schneiders (1991a:11) identifies the need to redefine faith 'beyond patching' equality into male paradigms. Female images sometimes proved problematic. The Mother model is not the only feminine God-image (Reuther, 1996; Cady et al, 1986; Weber, 1987), but it emerged as the most profound and influential feminine impact on respondents. The feminine aspect of human life was often perceived as weak and/or untrustworthy (Scutt, 1994; Frazer, 1984:1-6). Therefore, to align God with Mother often carried with it a set of difficulties that were different from, but just as problematic as those associated with the image of God as Father. Thus, in order to move on, respondents often had, not only to bring into focus feminist issues, but also to redefine the meaning of feminine. To move from the awkwardness of allies to men's images and perspectives, respondents encountered clefts caused by negative experiences of mothers. In the process, they also had to face the cleft-forming dilemma, detaching from traditional male perspectives. This could be perilous. Rankka (1998:70-71), who deals with women's suffering, cites the consequences of disobeying God the Father. Some of the themes in this chapter are therefore vital to the sections that deal with adult clefts and processes of reformation.

To entertain ideas of feminism is one thing. To act upon them is a test of confidence, and to 'call the bluff' of their validity is another. Some respondents had the support of some of the significant others in their lives. Others did not. Many of the respondents entered the ordained ministry/religious life in the face of strong disapproval when their links with feminist groups were still tenuous or non-existent. Some withstood judgment from parents and powerful individuals within their local churches and wider church denominations. They were often made to feel like social freaks. Respondents recollected times of self-doubt and confusion about the moral rightness of their own decisions. The incomplete and ongoing nature of the journey is borne out, even by theorists. As mentioned in the *Literature and Theory* chapter, Kidd (1996), in plotting her own journey from conservative southern Baptist to feminist theist, nonetheless still describes her social relation as *daughter* and her action as *dissident*. For respondents, it was the gradual trust in their own judgment that enabled them to venture into unexplored territory. The following chapters document the spiritual and social paths of those who, in the opinions of some, went too far.

Spiritual and Theological Clefts

Chapter Focus

> He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock
> That shadows a dry, thirsty land;
> He hideth my life in the depths of His love,
> And covers me there with His hand. (Crosby, 1980)

Respondents intimated the hidden-ness of true soul consciousness due, not so much to God's genuine shelter, as to the overlay of patriarchal control posing as Divine protection. The distinction between the two took some time to work out. The hand that 'covers' often proved to be a hand that smothers. Estes (1996:256-297) speaks about women's soul being stolen and the journey of 'returning to oneself'. With some similarities, in *Bedeviled*, David Martin (1995:40) describes the loss of soul as 'the dethronement and incarceration of that which should be sovereign, and erasure of essential markings' and 'the deterioration in the realm of spirit of vital "presence"' that ultimately causes 'destruction, darkness, and death.' He defines soul-loss as what happens when 'evil spirits' occupy the soul. Whilst genres of insanity and demons were not a feature of the interviews, the characteristic loss of unique feature or 'essential markings' is a good metaphor for the experiences of some respondents. Patriarchal impositions upon the social self and upon the soul were acknowledged as unjust and sometimes described as evil.

As noted in the thesis introduction, respondents indicated that sites of spiritual and theological struggle included, but were broader than, the God-as-male problematic. Also, because social struggles of respondents had soul-felt implications, it was not always easy to distinguish the spiritual from the social. Nor was it evident which came first. Initial social discomfort was often a result of unnamed spiritual clefts. However, it was identified personal spiritual clefts that helped respondents to recognise and explain social disjuncture. This is why I have placed this chapter before *Social Clefts*. This chapter cites the broad areas of theology identified by respondents as cleft-forming. Sites of struggle

included specific doctrines surrounding deeply entrenched notions on sin, guilt and human imperfection, and formulated views on God, Jesus, Scripture and language. These have impacted upon personal spirituality. The problem with hermeneutics and prescribed theology is implicit in all sections below.

The Problem with Theology

The 'Sin' of Being Born Female

One of the major causes of Cleft for respondents was in the area of learned theology and its general male perspective on women's social and spiritual locations (Thiering, 1977b; Balfour, 1987; Zundel, 1987). Schaef (1985:27), on male therapists, notes their 'difficulty understanding what it means to be born with a birthright of innate inferiority.' Women's low spiritual self-esteem is not without foundation. Ruether (1998a:29-30, 1996:69-70) cites early perspectives on the very creation of woman as the downfall of man and the notion of a return to spiritual 'maleness' as the means of redemption. In an analysis of the Augustinian understanding that the female part of the mind, designated as helper, as inferior, Powers (1987:30) cites the damage done in putting women 'at odds with their bodies' and having 'to live as the symbol of all that is inferior'. The feminine/woman-inferior theology (Ruether, 1998a:84; Coll, 1994:141-143; Powers, 1987:30) had clearly permeated the spiritual journey of every respondent. Evidence included Eva's persistent feelings of intimidation as she struggled to be regarded as a serious scholar, Sarah's tears in the telling of what chauvinistic church practice did to her soul, Mickale's metaphor of the internally felt 'lead weight' in a similar account, and Audrey's internal/emotional collapse that found no healing in male theology. All respondents' stories demonstrated the off-centred nature of women in male theological frames.

Uncomfortable Male Theology - Punishment, Guilt and Human Imperfection

Luther proposed a theology of God and self 'undoing' (self-abasement) (Jones, S., 2000:55-63), but men's theology on humility has different overtones for women. In highlighting the inappropriateness of singularly male theology generally, and for women in particular, Heyward (1984:124) reflects,

> If we direct our attention and faith to the "power in powerlessness" and the "strength in weakness" (which is what such theologians as Bonhoeffer and Jurgen Moltmann suggest), we are misled into a wilderness of assumptions in which our saints *must* be martyrs, rather than revolutionaries, dead rather than alive, singled out and set apart rather than *with* us holding all things in common.

In western culture, the church has sometimes been allied with industrial bureaucratic structures where power has been interpreted as God's favour (Bendix 1974:266-267) and powerbrokers communicate across institutions setting the rules (Kornhauser, 1972:561). Hirschman (1970) articulates that those who raise concerned 'voice' from within organisations are labelled dissidents and are silenced rather than regarded as loyal members seeking better structures. Church rules are not only social but also theological, aimed at the spiritual heart of the individual (Rushdoony, 1978; Cox, 1973). Feminists have named oppressive theologies as instruments of social and spiritual control over women's lives (Trible, 1990:23-24; Leonard, 1995:14-29; Miles, 1994:33-36). Whilst secular structures have named those who violated the rules as deviates (Roach Anleu, 1999), to disobey tenets of the faith, as set down by traditional hermeneutics, has carried with it the perception of violating something that transcends human structures (Rankka, 1998,70-71; Grey, 1993:93-119). Christians generally believe that the consequences of philosophical choices we make extend beyond death (Wenham, 1975:27-41).

The vehicle for oppressive theology sometimes emanated from the pulpit in the Sunday evening 'gospel' service. Annabeile related with visible anguish:

> The biggest problem I had was with the devil, hell images...that was what kept me in the church more than anything else, the fear that, if I stepped out of *that*... (terrified expression indicating divine punishment)!

Annabelle's interview was punctuated with references to the impact of this kind of theology on various stages of her life. As observed earlier (in *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock*), those who perpetuated such theology were often driven by fear and a sense of responsibility to make known, particularly to young people, the consequences of stepping outside of this particular theological and moral framework (Bonhoeffer, 1959). Overhanging threats extended to both genders. There were, however, some dynamics particularly pertinent to girls and women. Some of the interviewees suggested that there

were greater expectations placed upon girls and women to be moral examples to each other and to men (Bendroth, 1993:15; Summers, 1976). Rankka (1998:91-92) also cites the problem that some, usually the disempowered, are expected to follow the suffering of Jesus more than others. However, at the same time there was the implication that women were more prone to 'falling from grace' because they could lead men astray (Ruether, 1996:82). Annabelle implied that this tended to make the fear of damnation more threatening for women and girls, who were not only called to be responsible for their own salvation but also for men's (Summers, 1976; Grey, 1993:30-47). For Annabelle, the impact of hell-fire preaching endured into adulthood. She reflected that, even though she had not intellectually believed in the punitive devil and eternal damnation theology for some years, it had 'got hold' of her at a 'very early age'. As a result, Annabelle went through a 'terrible time' because she could not coerce her adult daughters into church attendance (Grey, 1993:30-47; see also *Wilderness*). The guilt and anguish she suffered underscores church and society's expectations of women to orchestrate their children's conformity (Chodorow and Contratto, 1982:55-59).

Respondents indicated that there was pressure to succeed at male prescribed feminine role models. Jones, S., (2000:96-97) discusses the role 'sin-talk' has had in women's subjectivity. This was endorsed by Eva's account of the stress incurred by constantly trying to be a better person. She too responded to a male authority figure in the pulpit preaching damnation for the disobedient. This was a recurring experience to which she was consistently exposed. She recalled, of the evening 'gospel' services,

> You have your sins nailed to the cross of Christ. It's a man out front with his arms wide and you're invited to stand if you want your life changed and come forward, and I did it *over and over again* and I *never* felt any better.

The 'man out front with his arms wide' posed a very strong image of a male God on the cross. Though she responded to the appeal, the promised life-changing outcome was not forthcoming. Eva assumed this was the result of some personal failure. The words '*over and over again*' underscored a perceived intrinsic personal weakness. In a number of instances respondents reported the emotional and spiritual energy expended in trying to comply with male prescriptions of Christian perfection (Rushdoony, 1978:1-10).

Similarly, Jo talked about the ritual of 'believer's baptism' practised within Churches of Christ (Williams, L. 1980; Robinson, W., 1946). She described the event as 'huge' with regard to church expectations of conformity and 'perfection' within the life of the individual. Sarah also talked about her struggle with the pressure exerted by the church for compliance within narrow perimeters of faith tied to male prescribed social roles. She reported on the church's lack of willingness to reflect upon itself and the powerlessness of the individual woman to challenge hermeneutics and theologies. She said, 'I have real difficulty (believing) that there is only one way of doing it (theology)' but added, 'If you don't toe the line, then (you've got it wrong).'

The Search for Inclusive Ground

The early inability of most respondents to move out of oppressive prescribed theological paradigms, and the energy expended, by some, in the attempt to draw closer to perceived Christian perfection, proved to be cleft-forming. Perfection was an inherent hermeneutic, but it could not be achieved (Wesley, undated:292). Some respondents reported attempts to take respite in theologies that appeared inclusive and affirming. Mary, for example, in contemplating her future vocation as a nun, chose the Eucharistic community because the ritual of communion is 'not so sexist laden, or gender laden...as the images of God.' She was attracted to 'the whole idea of a shared meal' because it implied 'the discipleship of sharing'. However, some years later, as her feminist awareness grew, she realised that, even though her whole order revolved around the Eucharist, the sisters still needed a (male) priest to 'bless' the elements of bread and wine in the actual rite. This is sexism at a very deep level for sacramental Christians and has been articulated publicly. In the thick of the Episcopalian (American Anglican) debate on women's ordination in the 1970s, Reverend George Rutler expounded masculinity as essential to priesthood (Armstrong, 1993:202). He regarded male sexuality as intrinsic to the Eucharist and saw the priest as 'a symbol of the seminal initiative of God' (see also Power, 1995a:44-45) Refuting such theology, Ruether (1998a:81) raises the question, 'If women cannot represent Christ, in what sense can it be said that Christ represents women?'

Male-Led Spirituality

This thesis has set out to comment on the interior spiritual struggle of respondents within the Christian church, through social and theoretical aspects of the faith. It is recognised that all aspects of life impact upon the spiritual identity of the individual. Respondents presented a variety of insights into the dilemmas of their own spiritual interiors. Whilst much of this territory was formless and fluid, some drew a connection between the personal fulfillment promised to the individual by the church, and the actuality of the felt interior void. They indicated that this has been caused by encouragement to espouse male-imposed spirituality as set down by male authority figures in the church. Christ (1979b:229-232) speaks of women endeavouring to fit their own spiritual identities to men's stories. Nelson and Walter (1989:168-178) identify the extent of the difficulty women have in finding spiritual places of their own, away from male prescriptions and paradigms of spirituality. The stories offered by respondents bore witness to these theories.

Eva suggested that men have defined spirituality, and are regarded as the normative prayers. She spoke in parabolic mode, re-enacting something that she had actually experienced. She gave this description of a prayer meeting,

> ...someone says that we must pray for God's will and what happens? Everyone goes quiet, especially the women, right? Because...this illustrious man, and it's usually one ordained for life, who says, 'well, we must pray for God's will in this matter'...(the man is) going to come back to the next meeting and say, 'well, *I* prayed, this has happened to *me*, *I* prayed and *I* believe that this (the solution reached by the man) is God's will.'

Feminist theorists have noted the silencing of women's experience and spirituality and the assumption that women's spiritual experiences carry less authority than that of men (Fiorenza, 1983; Carr, 1988). Eva's account bore this out. She drew attention to the traditional plausibility of men's relationship to God over that of women. Her manner echoed the resentment about her own apparent dislocation with regard to God, and the devaluing of her own spirituality.

Devalued personal spirituality was also central to Audrey's story, which she conveyed with tears. She spoke about the taught context within which she could expect a personal encounter with God. In anticipation, Audrey complied with prescribed attitudes and modes of thinking that set the stage for deep personal engagement with God. She spoke of 'the promise of a relationship' and described her own feelings as a 'longing' for God. She saw, in the church, 'the potential for that longing to be met' and confided, 'It was on the strength of *that promise* that I was confirmed'. But Audrey was left wondering whether such intimacy with God was an 'unrealistic image or expectation'. She admitted, 'it never materialised for me' and added, 'I still feel like, I believe in the *theory* and the *potential* but it hasn't happened for me'. Audrey thus identified that her Confirmation, as a young person, was based upon what the church had taught, rather than her own personal experience. She had believed that what the church taught about individual encounter with God would happen eventually if she responded in the prescribed way.

As an adult with a doctorate in theology, Audrey was still waiting for a close personal encounter with God. She hinted at her own contribution to this failure. She suggested that she could have embraced unrealistic expectations of God-human encounter partly due to male-prescribed circumstances and the moral contexts in which this ostensibly happens (Lewis, 2002; Donovan, 1979). Audrey further alluded to the fact that she may have encountered God, but possibly lacked the means to recognise it. This could be the result of prescribed, imposed limitations of spirituality. She concluded, 'One of my big struggles is *still* the sense that there is (only) a *belief* rather than an *experience*'. Audrey's story fitted the kind of dishonesty felt by some respondents because they lived within men's stories and experiences (Coward, 1992). As a theological lecturer, the coal-face of cleft-forming phenomena, for Audrey, was the social assumption of her having had some sort of inner identifiable personal encounter with God.

Mickale's account bore some similarity insofar as her primary experiences with God were not within the sort of spirituality conveyed by the Christian church. She reported still belonging to the church because of her husband's commitment to parish ministry, but that her inner journey did not mesh with what other Christians appeared to take for granted. Her dilemma was also that she felt others assumed her spirituality was essentially Christian. Mickale admitted, 'I feel like a cupboard drinker' but explained that

honesty about her lack of mainstream Christian spirituality would cause a reaction from her husband's family. She said, '(husband's family) would be on the 'phone, all eight of them, *and* their partners, there'd be a trauma...it would just cause a whole heap of headaches.' Mickale alluded to the metaphoric avalanche the truth about her real spirituality would cause, and decided it was not worth the cost. This decision, however, has meant that she has had to live with the onus of felt dishonesty. Eva also touched on this kind of dilemma. She observed: 'Every other experience that's outside of that (church prescribed) is not really counted (by the church) as a spiritual experience.' She regarded this perspective as 'very masculine' but did not elaborate, then added, 'That's where women are caught'.

Sarah commented upon the aspect of women being 'caught' within the context of ministry as a paid job. She spoke of the discrepancy between male prescribed expectations of expounded theology within church services and the heartfelt beliefs of a feminist minister. She alluded to being caught between honest personal theology and the capacity of the congregation, including the local power brokers, to withstand it (Porter, 1989:74). She was torn between being true to herself, and the need to provide for her family. Notably Sarah, and a number of the other respondents, have been assigned small remote country churches where theology and general ways of thinking have been more conservative than city communities (Dempsey, 1977; 1991; 1992; Hawkes, 1995). This has accentuated the inner struggle. Sarah described her personal compromise quite graphically:

> I wouldn't call it prostitution, but it certainly feels like losing my sense of personal integrity, being dishonest at times. Over three years, twice a Sunday, probably there were two or three services in that whole time that I actually felt good about, and that (discrepancy) was horrible. It was a really bad experience.

As with Veronica, Sarah felt a responsibility to refrain from expressing radical theology within the local church in case it was counterproductive, but, like Margaret, she felt the onus to share *some* new ways of thinking. Respondents conveyed that knowing how much to share and how much to keep secret was precarious. Sarah reported some success in effecting changes in thinking within her congregation but underscored the amount of

effort invested in each small move forward. This was reflected in the vocal tiredness with which she recalled the effort. Margaret, on the same topic commented,

> There are days when I look at all that (structures, institutions and hierarchies) and I say I really can't tolerate this stuff (androcentric spirituality). It's not true enough. It's not real, so why am I, you know, is it still worth trying to do the changes, because it's an awful long task.

Images of God as Problematic and Cleft-forming

God as Friend and Perpetrator

Tolbert (1983:126) identifies the problem of feminist theology as needing to confront the 'same God as enemy and friend; as tormentor and saviour' and 'the same Bible as enslaver and liberator.' Similarly, from a Jewish perspective, Blumenthal (1993) looks as the issue of God as abuser and Parker (in Brock and Parker, 2001:48) notes the problem of regarding the cross as 'pain inflicted by God for the spiritual edification of believers'. She concludes, 'You couldn't look at the man of sorrows and give thanks to God without ending up a partner in a thousand crimes' (see 'God, Jesus and Suffering' in *Literature and Theory*).

Whilst Blombery's study (1991:88-90) suggests that images held by Australian women reflect God as an ever-present helper and personal friend, respondents to this thesis reported God as more problematic (see 'God-Images and Christology' in *Literature and Theory*). Throughout the course of this research, metaphors of the cleft-forming mono-icon of God as Father/male have been colourful – some offered by women who were not direct respondents. These included God as a metaphorical male gynaecologist – someone who has socially respected knowledge and kudos; kind, maybe, but with no intrinsic means of internal understanding about what it means to be a woman. According to this image, God's social peers are men. Another vivid depiction was that of God as a motor mechanic on the Nullarbor (Australian desert). It is necessary to appease *him* because, 'if you break down, he has the power to set you safely on the road again or leave you in the desert to die!'

A feature of Scripture often ignored by respondents' churches was the contradiction between the idea of God as love and other images of God in Scripture, or as taught by punitive theology (Rushdoony, 1978; Townes, 1993; Jones, S., 2000:94-125). Whilst this could be problematic to Christians of both genders, the scriptural positioning of women with regard to God has given rise to a more complex problem. Respondents have been confronted with a God of both love and punishment, who speaks, through Scripture, primarily to the issues, and in the language, of men. One example is God's apparent sanctioning of the slaughter of entire tribes, including children. This ignores the standpoint of women as mothers who have not been the traditional military decision makers. Sarah reported, 'I have real difficulty with that part of the Old Testament where God says, "I'm going to wipe people out just because they're Amelekites (for example), therefore they must all be evil"' (I Samuel 15:18). These and other hermeneutics have been the subjects of deconstruction work in which Sarah has had to engage as a woman, a mother, and a minister.

The Crucifixion as Problematic

Biblical violence culminates in the story of Jesus. For respondents, a problematic aspect of the doctrine of Jesus as sacrifice was the paradox of God as loving kindness and God as murderer, or, at least, sanctioner, at the cross event (Schaefer, 1999:50; Brock and Parker, 2001). Victorin-Vangerud (2000:150-153) identifies the problems of the cross event as perfect surrender to a God who abandons the victim. Brown and Parker (1989:9) note,

> The image of God the Father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son has sustained a culture of abuse and led to the abandonment of victims of abuse and oppression.

Rankka (1998:90) also problematises the death of Christ as 'divine child abuse'. Androcentric hermeneutics have not encouraged Christians to ponder either the metaphoric or actual role of Mary, the mother of the one who was murdered, in such an event. They have not been encouraged to deliberate on the implications for women and their relationship with God by the apparent God-ordained killing of children as sacrifice (for example: Genesis 22, the story of Abraham ostensibly challenged by God to kill his

son, Isaac as a test of faith and allegiance, and Matthew 2, Herod's killing of the children because of the birth of Jesus with little credence to the suffering this would have caused).

Respondents found these aspects of Christianity deeply disturbing. Amira, who has left the church and the faith, raised as problematic 'the notion of a God who has to be appeased by the killing of a Son'. Tamar also chose to comment on this paradox of taught theology. She said, 'God the Father offering his son up for crucifixion is child abuse, isn't it?' Sarah said, 'Questions about whether God actually abandoned Christ at the crucifixion, whether God was *in* the crucifixion, those kinds of questions. They sound like mind games to me,' and admitted to a kind of mental exhaustion with regard to the topic of the crucifixion.

The Problem of God as a Gendered Presence

An anthropomorphised image of God is a strong tradition in Christianity (Pittenger, 1982:9-17). Moreover, Christians have stressed the importance of individual personal relationship with God (Bonhoeffer, 1959:84-91, 139-161; Brandt, 1969), the one in whose image human beings have been made (Genesis, 1:26). But traditional hermeneutics have given God a male identity in the life of the church (Carr, 1988:135-140; Pittenger, 1982:9; Daly, 1979; 1986). Reuther (1993:53) and Bouma (1992:36-37), note the symbolic hierarchy of God over men, and men over women, the roots of which lie in such traditions as the Augustinian notion of proper order (Power, 1995a), and the fact that women have been denied a direct relationship to God. Interviews indicated that this has translated into the private spirituality of individuals. For feminist Christians, God as male, and, more specifically, Father, has proved problematic. Christ (1979b:275) purports that in regarding God as male, women deny their own identity as God-imaged (see *Parents*).

As indicated in *Parents*, God as Father was most graphically problematic in Eva's story. The only image of God for much of her life paralleled that of the genetic father who abused her. This part of her story, though recorded later in the interview, follows on directly from the earlier reflections on her father noted in *Parents*. When Eva was a child, there was little acknowledgement of child abuse by family, church or community (Blumenthal, 1993:195-209). It was assumed that a father fulfilled the role of trusted

head of the house (Bouma, 1992:36-37). Abuse was clandestine (Heine, 1989:14-18). For Eva, fathers were figures to be feared and appeased. As Heine's work (1989:14-18) underscores, Eva made the connection between God and abusive father, thus, quite directly,

> This is the sexual image, the thrust of God into your life, you see. Not quite in that word, but that's the way if affects me, as though I'm being um, (raped? – *interviewer's question*) yes and, and I find that very hard because I want to be my own person and my identity isn't what somebody's going to do to me, you see, and it is very sexual God is, very much, related to that authoritarian parent image.

Eva trod warily in relating this part of her story. The words, 'not quite in that word' were an attempt to balance the radical opening sentence. She further qualified this by adding, 'but that's the way it affects me' in order to clarify that this was her own experience and should not be taken as her opinion of God in the lives of *all* Christian women. The implication was of God as rapist who effectively took away her autonomy. This resonates with Brady's (1995:67) discussion of God as invader of women's space and is, perhaps an adaptation of Father God who 'speaks the seminal Word' and orders the passive feminine (Power, 1995a:44-45) to effect creation. A cleft within Eva's life was caused by the fact that, although detestable, she felt socially obliged to revere and internalise an image of God as Father. It took much analysis of her own spiritual and social location for Eva to re-image God in more theologically and spiritually helpful icons. She regarded the image of God as woman, not necessarily mother, as both a relief and a rejection of God as Father. Eva sought to eradicate God as Father from her thinking.

Margaret also indicated that Father God had been used to thwart women's spirits. By comparison, though, she was reluctant to part with such heritage. Her attitude was that, in itself, God as Father was not a negative image. The problem was the way in which it had been used to restrict women (Storkey, 1987; Daly, 1979). She indicated *this* was the source of cleft formation within women's spirituality and reflected indignantly,

> How dare they (traditional exponents of Christianity) use this stuff (male power figure) for this oppressive behaviour…okay well, let's throw a few more ingredients into the mix to get them off balance and make them realise there's more to God than they are acknowledging.

Personal relationship with God has been pertinently stressed in the lives of those in religious orders. In contrast to Eva's notion of God as gendered and sexual, Joan, a nun, was swift to allay any hint of this. She indicated an abhorrence for the 'Bride of Christ' (Thickstun, 1988:107; 125-127) metaphor, in an uncharacteristic raised voice, with 'Well that's just crazy…it's not a bridal relationship at all. No, not at all, no!' However, more quietly, she then reflected upon the wedding dress and veil she had worn at the end of her year of preparation and the ring she still wears on the third finger of her left hand.

Mary, a nun in another order, was quite comfortable with the 'Bride of Christ' description of her relationship with God. Mary even spoke of being 'in love' with Jesus, but considered it an affinity without sexual content. Both Joan and Mary assumed a feminist stance socially and theologically, but lived with the ambiguities of traditions and symbols that place women in the position of 'other' to God, often in ways that are so taken for granted that they are not always easily identified by the individual. For example, Jones, S. (2000:55-63) gives an analysis of Lutheran and Calvinistic theories of 'undoing' the self and putting on an identity that is God given as a means of sanctification and justification. She points out that this is oppressive theology for women whose view of self already has overlays of male definition. She says, 'When Luther's God meets this woman, he potentially re-enacts the cultural unraveling she already knows too well' (p.63).

Although the male and specifically father-image of God, at least as sole icon, proved problematic for respondents, as noted in *Parents*, God as mother has often not worked either. Adult reflections on present feelings towards mothers ranged from a need for inner reconciliation with respect to past differences, to continuing unrest. Apparently ignoring her own role as a mother, Sarah reported,

> God our Mother thing, that doesn't work for me…my mother and I do not get on. If God is like a mother and mothers in my family, in general, are manipulative, over-bearing. That's not how I see God.

In the light of evidence that the mother/daughter relationship is often fraught with difficulties (Secunda, 1996), as noted in *Parents*, Sarah underscored the inadequacy of a simple shift from God as Father to God as Mother. Respondents indicated that when God

as Mother did not work, the void tended to revert to the established image of God as male. The dilemma is that interpersonal relationships are gendered. It is difficult to model a personal relationship with God on something else. Sarah continued to struggle for helpful visual images and concepts adequate for a personal relationship with God. She was unsuccessful in breaking free of gendered images. She reported her floundering thus,

> I went through the stage where I thought the Holy Spirit was the female part of God and there was the Father and the Son...That didn't really work very well, because, if the Holy Spirit was female, and the Father and the Son were males, you still had a two-thirds male majority (in the trinitarian Godhead) and it really doesn't help much (see also Johnson, E.A., 1996:5051).

Women have been socialised to think of God as 'He' perhaps in the same way as left-handed people were once made to write with their right hands (Clark, 1974). The result was sometimes an inability to write properly with either. For women, it could be argued that the natural affinity with an anthropomorphised God has been hijacked in a similar sort of way, even for feminists within the church. Veronica admitted that she did not 'travel easily with God as She'. She described the use of 'She' for God as a 'gasp' moment and, as a priest, she felt a responsibility to ensure that others were not made to feel uncomfortable about the language used of God, particularly in church (Wren, 1989; Chopp, 1991). This was the impasse for a number of the respondents. Because of the need to accommodate congregations, male images often thwarted efforts to reshape their own theology and spirituality. Joan drew on the metaphor of how white settlers could have originally appeared unfathomable to Aboriginal people as a way of illustrating the enigmatic concept of God as 'She'. She said,

> I think they (Aboriginal people) just had no concepts of ships and white people 'cause they hadn't seen them and I think that was a bit like it for me. I mean I had no feminine images of God.

The metaphor, however, has limitations in view of the fact that it cites the confrontation of a group of people with what is an entirely new phenomenon. Women, however, have been a known co-majority of people since the beginning of humanity. It is therefore perplexing that notions of feminine images of God have been unacceptable within most of Christianity and Judaism (Wren, 1989; Gross, R.M.,1979).

Joan thus drew attention to her own early fear of imaging God as female:

> Wasn't it pagan and weren't there people that were persecuted in the Scriptures and the Old Testament, weren't they the women worshippers (that is: worshippers of women)...you know this wasn't part of the box so I just never thought outside (of the box).

The 'box' constituted the androcentric thinking to which the Christian church has largely been restricted. Interviews revealed that this has placed women off-centre to God and has taught them to disregard feminine notions of God (Franklin, R., 1986:113; Wren, 1989). God-as-male is further substantiated by God's choice of a male saviour.

The Problem with Jesus

The historic and spiritual figure of Jesus was identified as problematic for some respondents. As the personalised and humanised clone of God, Jesus' influence on individual Christians is inescapable. For example, some respondents said that they had found Jesus as saviour and sacrifice, guilt evoking. This was true for those whose church background taught that Jesus died *for* us and possibly took our place on the cross (Isaiah, 53:1-12; Luke 22:19-20; Baillie, 1977:157-202; Kasper, 1977:119-123) and that the individual Christian was therefore to blame for his death. Pidwell (1994:7) insists that feminist theological argument is not with the principles of Jesus but with the practice of Christianity. However, this was not necessarily so for respondents to this thesis. For some, Jesus' suffering formulates a model of suffering for the Christian and subsequent continued victimisation of women (Rankka, 1998:91; Brock and Parker, 2001).

The Maleness of Jesus as Problematic

The rise of feminist thinking within the church has challenged the ide[illegible] God as exclusively male and has drawn upon feminine and other images o[illegible] These include God as verb (Daly, 1986:xvii), God as Mother (McFague, 1989:139-[illegible]; Johnson, 1996:170-187), God as non-hierarchical (Soelle, 1990:186-187), God as Sophia-Wisdom (Johnson, E.A., 1996:124-187; Cady et al, 1986) and Goddess theology (Morton, 1989; Heine, 1989; Christ, 1979b). Though unacceptable to conservatives socialised to God as Father (McFague, 1989:139), nonetheless, there are arguable biblical and historical bases

for alternatives (Pagels, 1979:107-119; Stone, M., 1979). However, the Jesus of history as God incarnate has proved more problematic for some Christian feminists. As Carr (1988, 159) puts it, 'That Jesus was male is not a negotiable issue.' Ruether (1996:106) observes, 'If feminist theology and spirituality decide that Christianity is irredeemable for women, its primary reason is likely to be this insurmountable block of a male Christ who fails to represent women. She also cites the 'Son of God' as problematic reification of God as Father (Reuther, 1993:58).

The 'otherness' of women to the male image of Jesus as God incarnate was stressed specifically by ten of the respondents and typified by Eva. She reported,

> Sometimes I find it difficult, this man wandering around Galilee and I know some feminists have tried to say 'Oh, but it's female as well as male', you know, the *Christ* (that is, as concept) and sometimes I can get around that by using the word 'Christ' rather than Jesus, the human being, which is very meaningful to me...I've come in and out of that so I use the word 'spirit' a lot.

Her comments indicate the disadvantaged position of women with respect to a gendered Messiah. Jesus is taught as the personal link to God (Soelle, 1990:102; Bonhoeffer, 1959). Learned images such as Jesus as 'Son of Man' (Cullmann, 1963:137-192), 'Lord' (pp.234-237) and 'Son of God' and/or 'God' (pp.270-314), were problematic. Respondents reported engaging in cerebral and spiritual gymnastics to somehow revision Jesus as representative of both genders. Trinitarian church doctrine has taught God as Creator, often referred to as 'Father', God incarnate in the person Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit (Kaufman, 1978:94-104; Macquarrie, 1977:190-210). Because the former two have been so heavily gendered, respondents often reported a confinement to the more illusive Spirit reconstructed through all three (Johnson, E.A., 1996).

Saviour as Problematic.

In Genesis, the conservative view of Eve is that of the temptress who caused her own downfall, that of her male partner, Adam, and the whole of humanity (Genesis 3:1-13). Feminists recognise this theology as unjust (Furlong, 1988:1;Thiering, 1977a) and the basis of male-driven conservatism (Pevey et al, 1996:174) that scapegoats women as evil (Grey, 1992:113-115; Reuther, 1996:83) and lacking the moral strength considered endemic to men (Jones, E., 1986:2). This theology legitimises a male saviour.

Women's off-centredness to God has been argued in the light of atonement theology, that is, it was the *man*, Jesus, who hung on the cross for the sake of humanity (Brock and Parker, 2001; Ruether, 1998a). This issue arose as a source of hurt as respondents recalled their respective struggles for ordination in the face of hermeneutics that perpetuated a lack of direct line, for women, to Jesus' original disciples (Boyd, 1987:63; Fleming, 1987) and a lack of 'official' place in the church (Fiorenza, 1993). In this respect, women have been left out of the saving/healing bridging between the human and the Divine. Dory Previn (1990) gives wings to this 'Cinderella' aspect of the Christian faith for women. She writes,

> did jesus have a baby sister?
> was she bitter?
> was she sweet?
> did she wind up in a convent?
> did she end up on the street?
> on the run?
> on the stage?
> did she dance?
> did he have a sister?
> a little baby sister?
> did they give her a chance?
>
> did he have a baby sister?
> could she speak out
> by and large?
> or was she told by mother mary
> ask your brother he`s in charge
> he`s the whipped cream
> on the cake
> did he have a sister?
> a little baby sister?
> did they give her a break?
>
> her brother`s
> birth announcement
> was pretty big
> pretty big
> I guess
> while she got precious little notice
> in the local press
> her mother was the virgin
> when she carried him
> carried him

therein

if the little girl came later
then
was she born in sin?
and in sorrow?
and in shame?
did jesus have a sister?
and what was her name?

did she long to be the saviour
saving everyone
she met?
and in private to her mirror
did she whisper
saviourette?
saviourwoman?
saviourperson?
save your breath!
did jesus have a sister?
a little baby sister?
was she there at his death?

and did she cry for mary`s comfort
as she watched him
on the cross?
and was mary too despairing
ask your brother
he`s the boss
he`s the chief
he`s the man
he`s the show
did he have a sister?
a little baby sister?
did jesus have a sister?
doesn`t anyone know?

Johnson, E.A. (1996:265-269) problematises suffering saviourism as a self-depletion model because 'it has operated in the sociological sphere to maintain women's subordination' (p.265). Interviews revealed that, although it was important to retain concepts of God's person on earth, Jesus as 'Saviour of the World' was problematic to some. It was as if atonement theology somehow made Jesus less accessible, less of a friend and more within the category of 'important man at the top'. Veronica's comment was quite clipped. She said, 'What the hell's a saviour?' and 'I don't cope with the word

"saviour". (It) bothers me much more than Jesus being a boy.' Her reaction was explained anecdotally. She recalled the tragedy of a young girl killed in a car accident and a parishioner who asked Veronica if the girl was 'saved,' that is, was she a Christian? Veronica replied, 'Shit, Jenny, I don't think I know and I don't think I care!' It was an angry response to the apparent inhumanity of fundamentalist salvationism (Rushdoony, 1978:1-10) taking precedence over the tragic loss of a child. Veronica continued:

> I've seen enough infants born, my own included, to look at them and say, 'This is perfect,' ...and I do not cope with that notion of, we are immensely bad. I think the human being is immensely good!

In some traditions, Jesus has been constructed as the metaphorical policeman watching to ensure that the individual gets the theology right (Heyward, 1999). Veronica defied the theological structuralism that asserts rule-keeping as the individual's entrée to heaven and that the inherent badness of human beings needs ecclesiastic structures to police thoughts and behaviour (Rushdoony, 1978; Ward, 1984).

Tylielle also departed from the idea of Jesus as saviour. She pondered,

> I think I always thought of Jesus as my brother more than my saviour. I think Jesus was more a teacher for me than a saviour. He was, sort of, this universe brother, you know, this brother that understood me and I thought I understood him and that he was this story teller and this great gatherer of people and a visionary and he didn't have a lot to do with saving.

One common source of cleft for respondents was the longing for Jesus as personal friend and 'gatherer of people' (Tylielle) set against the hermeneutics of Jesus as 'important man at the top' whose direct friendship is not available to marginalised humanity. Tylielle's views on Jesus were part of the reason why she did not survive, beyond middle life, in the Christian church. Her regard for Jesus was much more egalitarian than that of conservative thinking when she suggested that Jesus might have also learned something from her. This was clearly 'out of kilter' with the church. Similarly Mary confided, 'I have difficulty with saviour, it's such a (conservative) religious word.'

For some respondents, Jesus as Saviour within the church meant an androcentric conservative Jesus. The concept endorsed the marginalisation of women, the idea of

people as inherently bad, and the reinforcement of God-as-male. Ruether (1998a:103) refutes such theology thus:

> The cross is not payment for sin, or a required sacrifice for our well-being (this would reinforce the idea of suffering and subservience as requirement), but the risk that Jesus and all people take when they unmask the idols and announce the good news that God is on the side of the poor and those who struggle for justice.

Respondents, generally, intellectually endorsed and respected such permission-giving theory and theorists. However, the inner struggle to make sense of atonement and saviourist theology involved a struggle with deep-seated clefts born of male-imposed theology and androcentric hermeneutics of Scripture.

Scripture, Hermeneutics and Women Who Tamper with the Bible.

Christianity is grounded in a document of the distant past that, it is perceived, does not change. Respondents indicated the taught sacred authority of the Bible as a site of struggle in the journey to liberation. This varied in intensity according to personal background and denominational ethos. Many approached any perceived tampering necessary for liberation with caution, if not trepidation (Bouma, 1992:72). Smith D.E. (1988:23-25) points out that women were once burned for interpreting Scripture and that Stanton's (1895) *The Woman's Bible* was banned in its day. Because of the revered sacredness of the document, respondents were, at least initially, reluctant to engage in reinterpretation of traditional hermeneutics.

In her youth and early adulthood Annabelle believed that 'what the church said (about the Bible) was right'. Margaret reported that, within her original denominational culture, 'the Bible had the answers to anything you wanted to ask' and that it was 'the very authoritative place to go for your answers'. Kath spoke of the practice of learning whole sections of Scripture word for word as a means of handing on and preserving its authority. Some respondents therefore had to deal with an encoded morality that ousts all but basic translation work, undertaken for the purposes of digesting and 'spreading the gospel'.

Interviews indicated that women's encounter with Scripture may not be as straightforward as that of men. One emerging factor was that the Bible has forced a cleft in respondents by mandating an often-unconscious translation shift for the woman reader in order to accommodate the self (Fiorenza, 1992; Trible, 1973). Ruether (1993:53) notes the Old Testament tradition of God addressing the male heads of families directly and others indirectly. Jo observed,

> All this translation that had to go on inside my head, especially with the Old Testament stuff and the fact that we (women) didn't seem to be ever addressed directly, we were always lumped in with the cattle and the land and we were disposable.

Jo thus discerned that women's scriptural inheritance was mostly indirect communication to God. She drew attention to the displacement of women from human beings to disposable items, highlighting the unsafeness of women's social position (Townes, 1993; Coward, 1992; Neuger, 2000). This recognition, conscious or otherwise, fits Jo's social choice to identify with men's spheres (see *Parents* and *Social Clefts*).

Attempts to integrate women have included the inadequate practice of simply 'adding women' to the text either conceptually or linguistically (see 'Adding Women' and 'Feminist Biblical Reconstruction' in *Literature and Theory*). This fails to take into account the male perspective from which the text is written and its intended male audience (Fiorenza, 1990; 1992). There are many biblical contexts into which women do not generally fit. As feminist theorists have observed, women are not simply the social counterpart of men and men's perspectives (Smith, 1988; Schneiders, 1991a; Harding, 1991:105). The interviews revealed that the 'adding women' solution did not address the basic cleft within respondents' intellects and spiritualities.

Jo's solution was to disassociate from the feminine and try to cross the gender line with respect to God and Scripture. She said,

> I suppose as long as I was a surrogate man, I'd crossed the line and I was safe. I didn't want to know about the rest of my female people, you know. It was better to be in the male world…

Survival thus meant a fundamental forgetting of who she was.

Clefts were caused by both the contents and the historical hermeneutics of a document considered so vitally sacred to all Christians, but so apparently addressed to, and interpreted by, men, throughout the centuries. An observer in the discussion for this thesis observed that when she read the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, with its referencing of women almost always in the third person and its treatment of them as disposable (Trible, 1992), she felt like the 'Little Match Girl' in the Hans Christian Andersen story (1987). She explained that for years she could not understand why she was not warmed by the metaphoric fire of the faith that appeared to warm so many others. Later she realised she was only looking in through a window. Others benefited from the direct heat of the 'fire' but she, like the match girl in the story, was actually out in the cold, freezing to death!

There were a number of instances where respondents made reference to the treatment of women within biblical narratives and indicated the personal dilemmas with which the Bible had confronted them. Theresa and Eva exemplified the tendency of respondents to bring biblical scenarios into the present. Theresa drew attention to the figure of Mary, the mother of Christ, whose biblical role came to an end soon after the crucifixion. She raised as a rhetorical question, 'Well, why does Mary disappear from the Acts of the Apostles?' and answered,

> She was a disciple early and they couldn't cope with this woman that had this vision, they couldn't cope with this woman that had this strength of character so they just put her out of the narrative!

Theresa then raised the issue of other women who disappeared from the text at around the same juncture, indicating women's invisibility in the writing up of stories and history generally (Christ, 1979a). She indicated a contemporary context, that is, that women are 'written out of the text', wiped out or stopped, especially when men cannot cope with them (Coward, 1992:164-165; Schaef, 1985:69-96).

Eva also referred to the apparent disposability of women within biblical contexts. Like Sarah, she spoke about the accounts of violence in the Old Testament that wiped out women and children as part of the acceptable process of general warfare according to

men's perspective. In citing the biblical story of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19; Trible, 1990:24), she said,

> It's alright to chop up women, remember that one! It was alright to chop her up, you know, but they avoided that word 'sin', you know, and I think, which is more violent? The more violent is the telling of that sermon and people sitting there listening to it without batting an eyelid...What's more violent is what's happening now in the interpretation of it.

For Eva, the church's reluctance to name acts of violence against a woman as 'sin' indicated the diminishment of women both in the biblical text and in subsequent eras and cultures (Haddon, 1992; Townes, 1993; Rankka, 1998). Her anger was possibly intensified by the fact of her own violent childhood. She articulated the kind of conspiracy that perpetuates women's oppression. The culprits are not simply the writers of biblical texts who have treated women's suffering as incidental to main genres. Here she also drew in, as perpetrators, those who are not outraged by it in contemporary contexts, including church orators and people who listen 'without batting an eyelid'. Eva's life story, however, bore testimony to the difficulties attached to women raising objections in the face of purported Divine authority. Other respondents also mentioned being cut short when they raised the issue of much of the Bible's treatment of women (see Schaef, 1985:69-96 on 'Stoppers').

The fact that women have been metaphorically 'left out in the cold' is a major motivating impetus for feminist theologians and presents a site of struggle for the healing of clefts (Christ, 1979a; Weber, 1987; Carr and Fiorenza, 1991). After the traditional theological education at the beginning of their careers, several respondents, either formally or informally, embarked upon feminist theological courses with the intent of feminist biblical reconstruction as an act of, at least partial, cleft-healing. They confronted the painful fact of the editing out of the feminine from the Hebrew text in such passages as Deuteronomy 32:18 (Trible, 1990:25) •. In Sarah's opinion, this particular instance was

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• [Note: This passage, in the King James translation of the Bible, speaks of Israel as a people who forgot the 'Rock' (God) who 'begat' (fathered) them and gave them form, whereas some contemporary and ostensibly more accurate renderings of the early Hebrew speak of the God who 'gave birth' to Israel (Revised Standard Version). The

so glaring that it was difficult to see the misrepresentation, in the King James Version, as anything but deliberate.

For respondents, the challenge of re-devising biblical language, concepts and perspectives to redeem the faith was multi-layered, arduous and sometimes fraught with emotional overtones. Although androcentric, the Bible was loved heritage and vehicle of the Holy Spirit. To tamper with it sometimes evoked the feeling of trying to redesign God *Himself* or flying in the face of a loved grandfather.

Tamar had less of a battle than others in this respect. As a child she took a stance against her atheist parents (see *Parents*), and found a spiritual home within evangelical Christianity. Later she became uncomfortable with the way in which the Bible was interpreted. It is possible that, because her family of origin did not espouse Christianity, the Bible had less 'grandfatherly' connotations for her and she felt freer to challenge traditional scriptural interpretations.

Respondents, generally, stressed the fact that feminist encounter with Scripture is complex and uncomfortable. Church structures and hermeneutics as encoded ways of thinking have evoked both external social challenges and internal struggles. Respondents indicated feelings of isolation and displacement with regard to the Bible. Understanding and subsequent changes, both as individuals and as part of the corporate work of feminist theologians in the world, is still a work-in-progress.

The Problem with Language

One connection between the inner self and the social self is by way of words (see 'Language' in *Literature and Theory*). When the words do not fit, there is inner cleft (Harrison, 1985:22-41; Ruether, 1993; Spender, 1990; Schaefer, 1999). Respondents indicated that male colleagues, and women alike, have not always understood why simply 'adding women' does not work. Women have sometimes felt guilty because,

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Today's English Version of the Bible reverts to the more middle stance of 'the one who had given them life']

despite all the effort made in adding or changing words, there is still a feeling of exclusion (Wren, 1989; Robson, 1988). Fixing the language rarely fixes the entire problem.

Feminist perspective acknowledges that male-as-normative assumptions encourage women's invisibility and ignore the fact that women have been left out of the process of contributing as substantially as men to language-making (Spender, 1990). Non-inclusive language and words that indicate male modes of thinking have become so familiar as to dupe humankind generally into non-critical mode (Field, 1991:60). In citing the predominantly male language of theological and liturgical discourses, Field concludes that 'women are not only invisible, but appear to be excluded from the scheme of salvation' (p.59). Eva reported,

> It (non-inclusive language) did a lot of damage and I find that's where I've given up trying to explain to (non-feminist) women the reaction, because they become very defensive.

Eva was referring to the damage non-inclusive language has done, not only to the imbalance of power between men and women, but also to relations between women with respect to the lack of value women place on one another (Schaef, 1985:23-27; Smith, 1988:71-72). Her experience indicates the way in which women have been socialised to defend male structures (Coward, 1992; Fiorenza, 1993:242). To challenge such structures in the church has carried the added overlay of male dominance as God ordained (Bouma, 1992:36-37). God has been both male and ultimate namer (Genesis 1). Respondents indicated that when women's feminist consciousness is raised, there is personal inner discomfort. It was initially perceived that, to assume the right to change Christian language, bordered on sacrilege (Wren, 1989). Some respondents reported that non-inclusive biblical, hymnal and liturgical language made them feel off centre to the faith and out of God's direct line of vision.

Eva continued, 'Well, I grew up in the idea that, I was always told, that *mankind* always included me, in all the hymns.' Eva was taught to disregard and to distrust the fact that she did not *feel* included. Respondents indicated that the cleft forms when feelings and learnt data are in conflict. Veronica and Sarah also drew attention to the internal

discomfort evoked by so-called generic terms framed in male language (Smith, J., 1985:30) and the ensuing mental scramble caused by trying to put things right. Sarah mentioned the further difficulty of endevouring to re-organise language to avoid personal pronouns when referring to God (Franklin, R., 1986).

Tamar reported feelings of alienation when she was required to endure worship services that were 'all in masculine mode'. By this she referred not only to the language per se but also the genre. Similarly Mickale reflected on her life before she took a stand against sexist language and sexist concepts. She talked about hymns that included the terms 'King of kings' and 'Lord of lords' as evoking a 'very masculine God in a very masculine environment' where she was not allowed to be herself. Mickale objected to the words 'King' and 'Lord' as male terms applied to God, and as imperial and abusive concepts that reflect hierarchical structures, and render her powerless. As mentioned in *Parents*, she referred to the physical lead weight she felt within her chest when such terms were mandated.

Several respondents cited language as problematic with regard to the inclusion of women clergy in entrenched male church structures. Lily mentioned the fact that her denomination, Churches of Christ, was unofficially but commonly referred to as 'The Brotherhood' and that, despite the presence of women clergy, ministers groups were often still referred to as 'fraternals'. However, renaming things also had problems. Veronica cited the instance of the 'S*** and District Ministers Association'. This contracted to SADMA. She concluded 'It (the renaming) made it worse because who wants to belong to something called "SADMA". I'd much rather it was "GLADMA"!' Respondents reported instances where attempts at change in order to accommodate women, including language, theology and social practices, only seemed to worsen the problem. They gave account of situations where people floundered for words and modes of thinking due to the problem of man-made language (Spender, 1990:182-190; Friedan, 1986; Coward, 1992:191).

In some cases respondents themselves had trouble finding words. Theresa's account demonstrated that women have often been caught between the unaccommodating familiar and the grating of an unfamiliar expression that makes some attempt at inclusion

(Spender, 1990:182-190). She remembered the awkwardness of someone trying to adapt a biblical reading to inclusive language without using pronouns and the ridiculousness of repeatedly reading, 'If a person, if a person, if a person,' when 'it was clearly a male that was being talked about.' Theresa described the attempt as 'almost off the planet' and, at the time she thought, 'How am I going to ever cope with this kind of stuff?'

End Note

The interviews revealed that prescribed theology often cuts deep wounds and has been at the heart of oppression. Whilst abandoning Christian theology and spirituality may present as a simple solution and a way to healing, the interviews have revealed that this is neither easy nor, in most cases, desirable either for the individual or for the cause of women's liberation generally. Fiorenza (1983:28) has observed, '...relinquishing our biblical heritage merely reinforces the androcentric reality construction of Western culture according to which male existence and history is the paradigm of human existence and human history.'

The Cleft, at intellectual theological level and at spiritual level, has formed due to the fact that walking away from the faith has not been the answer for most and has been an internally hard-fought answer for a few. The problematic image of Jesus as male and saviour, with all its dichotomies has been, nonetheless, the human face of God to many respondents. To some, Jesus has been the friend who has made an otherwise largely unknowable God, personal. Images of God have also been both oppressive and comforting. Other means of Divine encounter have been through the church and through Scripture. To challenge, change or even face the Cleft cause by these has meant confronting a minefield of contradictions and mixed feelings with social implications. The following chapter deals with the social clefts often brought to light through internal recognition of male-prescribed theology and spirituality.

Social Clefts

Chapter Focus – The Rock and Women's Lived Experience

Christian feminism generally holds that the culture of Christendom has not originated from equal human representation or from grass roots level (Daly, 1975:53-73). It has emanated primarily from white, patriarchal power bases within the church (Williams, 1993). The church has this in common with other societal structures. Smith (1988:19) notes,

> The forms of thought and images we use do not arise directly or spontaneously out of people's everyday lived relationships. Rather, they are the product of the work of specialists occupying influential positions in the ideological apparatus…Our culture does not arise spontaneously; it is "manufactured"…These positions of power are occupied by men almost exclusively, which means that our forms of thought put together a view of the world from a place women do not occupy.

The transcripts collated for this work suggested that mandated world-views not shared by women but perpetuated as normative, create both social and soulful rifts within women. This is also suggested in Miles' (1994:7-9) transcripts on the issue of the church's non-valuing of women's experience. The Cleft caused by inconsistencies between women's lived experience and women's felt knowledge, however dimly recognised by the individual, is accentuated in a structure that requires community as a manifestation of Divine love (Bonhoeffer, 1958; Macquarrie, 1972) but where women sometimes suffer from 'ontological anguish' because of a sense that 'they are not supposed to participate in making culture' (DeVault, 1990:100).

Clefts within respondents manifested at varying levels of awareness, ranging from feelings of slight disjuncture to deep, recognised crevices of hurt and anger. Respondents indicated that the hurt and anger have been amplified by the fact that it is not an easy thing to socially desert the Rock. For them, bitter/sweet, nurturing/perpetrating, love/hate feelings and experiences have rendered Christianity problematic. When set beside feminism, its practices, language and ideologies have created a social contradiction

within the lives of respondents. All respondents stayed to do battle with the church and the faith, at least for a time. The major sites of struggle included, male authority over women's ordination, clashes with individual clergy, clashes with community, and the enduring sense of loyalty and love for the church. Causes of clefts between the Rock and the inner self were generally identified as either social or spiritual. Whilst, as mentioned, it was not always possible to differentiate one from the other, this chapter attempts to focus primarily on social factors pertaining to lived experience.

Male Authority and Women's Ordination

The Wrong Gender

One of the primary sources of social and soulful rift evident in all interviews has revolved around the socially constructed assumption that women are off-centre to 'normal' (Frye, 1983:72-76; Storkey, 1987:7) and that, therefore, certain roles should be closed to them. Storkey (1987:6-10) notes this with regard to both church and secular spheres. Thus, arguments against women's ordination are social/political and theological (Giles, 1977; Langley, 1987:84-85).

All respondents indicated that, at various stages in their careers, there have been occasions when they have been made to feel that they were stumbling blocks and nuisances to the male agenda of the church. Grey, 1993:70 cites the phenomenon of women getting in the way of the hero's quest. This was manifest particularly as they challenged the status quo either overtly by making suggestions that advocated a change of thinking or simply by their gendered presence in places where only men 'should be' (see 'Male Authority and Women's Ordination' *in Literature and Theory*).

Historically women have been viewed as 'other' (Confoy, 1995:12-13; Harding, 1991; Smith, D.E., 1988; Ruether, 1993). A number of respondents sensed this from their youth. However, for others it came as blow well into adulthood. In some cases, as long as prescribed gender roles were lived out, there was little perception of any oppression or gender differentiation. Because these respondents had been able to move freely within given social locations, the issue of inequality remained vague. It was when they

attempted to cross forbidden social lines that many aspects of their respective spheres were turned upside down, and their other-ness came into focus. At this point the structure that they had loved and had regarded as 'home' became hostile towards them. Fiorenza (1993:13-14) reports the stir in the Catholic Church when, as a lay-person, she enrolled for the full theological course normally reserved for aspiring priests. All respondents reported the general experience of being regarded as off-centre to 'normal' in one form or another. Two, however, stood out from the rest. Both respondents played vocal and key roles in the debate on the ordination of women within the Anglican Church in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s.

Veronica first became aware of oppressive male authority when she presented for entry to a degree in theology in 1985. She recalled that a man interviewing her had said, in astonishment, 'But Veronica, you're a *woman*!' and had laughed at her. Veronica suddenly realised her delusion about equality within an organisation she regarded as 'home'. The hurt and cleft was accentuated by the perception that, whilst she was perplexed, the powerbroker laughed. The committee rejected her initial application for ordination, one man commenting that she was a 'splendid lay (layperson)' and should 'get back in her basket'. Veronica contrasted this with the story of a 'homecoming' service on St. Peter's Day in a beloved church. She described this as 'a glimpse of the kingdom (heaven)' but with the 'shit' (from the rejection) still 'ringing' in her ears. Veronica was torn between the personal devaluation meted out to her only days before, and the dearness of the surroundings in the church service, 'the incense', 'the mosaic behind the altar' and familiar faces and voices. Her rating of this as a 'glimpse of the kingdom (of heaven)' was an indication of her high spiritual investment in such occasions. She presented as a loyal Anglican for whom total desertion of the organisation was not an option. However, the rejection from the ordination committee brought into focus, for the first time, the fact that there were only men and boys in the procession on St. Peter's day. She also realised that 'splendid lays' such as herself had sometimes unknowingly constituted the backbone of a structure whose best interests were served by keeping women out of the power jobs (Storkey, 1987:5; Sturmey, 1991:47). Veronica noted that what men mean by a good 'lay' usually refers to the sexual gratification men get from women. After this encounter, she became disillusioned with 'home' and did not attend church for a long time.

Veronica maintained that, from childhood, she had been a person with 'spirit' and energy. These qualities had been admired and harnessed by the church and were the means by which she had earned the identity of 'splendid lay', until she channelled them into the battle for her own ordination. It was then that the same qualities were held in disdain and described differently by church hierarchy. Whilst men are praised for seeking ordination, women have been reproached for it (Field, 1991:55). Veronica lamented, 'No bishop in G***** was ever going to ordain me because I'm just a troublemaker and a rabble-rouser and a woman to boot.'

Kath's experience with Anglican hierarchy was similar. On the issue of men who laugh, albeit nervously, at the notion of women priests, she reported her grief at the church's failure to take women seriously. Kath related an occasion that illustrated not only the shadow existence of women, but also the sinister theology behind some of the reasons for objection to their ordination. A Sydney bishop, alluding to the Genesis story (Rankka, 1998:72; Brown, 1992:226), had preached that women could not be ordained 'because women had introduced sin into the world'. A number of respondents indicated that such perspectives have been used to justify keeping women out of certain roles and decision-making processes. Further, they noted that men in powerful positions often appeared to have no qualms about stating their opinions publicly and in situations where women had no socially acceptable right of reply. To raise objection in a formal setting and oppose a man adorned in ecclesiastic robes and standing on a raised platform in a cathedral, is not only daunting, but also possibly damning for one's future career in the church (see Forienza, 1993:242 on silence as a means of survival in patriarchal structures). Kath could only internalise her distress on such an occasion. She said she was 'profoundly angry', 'shocked' and 'shamed' because she *belonged* to the Sydney diocese and that she had wanted to stand up and make it known that the bishop did *not* speak for everyone. The dichotomy stemmed from the fact that Kath 'belonged to the Diocese of Sydney'. The man was not an outsider but part of her community. Kath voiced her love for the church and concluded, with some melancholy, that the best evidence for women's Divine call to ministry is raised by the question, 'why else would you hang in there?'

The Problem with 'Equality' on Men's Terms

At a World Conference of Churches consultation in Sheffield, England, in 1981, Robert Runcie, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, whilst basically supporting women's ordination, was concerned that an 'over concentration' on the issue would reinforce an erroneous view that ordained ministry was the only ministry (Parvey, 1983:3). The Mud Flower Collective, a group of feminists in theological education also note, '...feminism is labelled counterproductive to the important business at hand' (Cannon et al, 1985:11) in the church and in the world.

The quest for gender equality has many layers of consciousness and application (Wearing, 1996:3-21). Franklin, M.A., (1986a:75-80) has documented a case study that illustrates past discrepancies between policy and practice. As discussed in the *Literature and Theory* chapter, women's ordination, in Australia, has been a contentious issue (Franklin, M.A., 1986a:68-80; Wetherell, 1987; Lehman, 1994; Porter, 1994). For some, though, simply ordaining women did not address more vital issues. Whilst Lehman's report (1994:125) revealed a majority *for* women clergy, there were some worrying inequalities regarding some preferences for male clergy in functions such as sermons, baptism, Eucharistic officiation, funeral services and church administration. This indicates a non-valuing of what women bring to clerical roles. Fiorenza (1993:213) relates the willingness of a theological faculty to recommend her ordination, but they also clarified that her aspirations to be a bishop would never materialise due to the obedience owed to such a position. In this respect, Gross, E. (1988:191) notes the problem of 'including women as equals within patriarchal theory'. Bryson (1999:75-78) similarly identifies the problem with 'equality' on men's terms and within male-devised structures and Tulip's (1983) report on the status of women in the Uniting Church, is titled, *Women in a Man's Church.* Thus it is notable that Lehman frames his analysis in male military terms such as 'war', 'battle' and 'battlefield' as metaphors for the ongoing women's ordination debate.

Theresa took a more radical feminist perspective than some respondents. She saw women's ordination as mere admission to a 'boys' club'. She said she was 'sick of people who *go on and on and on*' about women's ordination and that she believed women *should* be ordained but not 'until there is a different (non-hierarchical) model'

(Porter, 1989:163). Langley (1987:80-81) similarly raises the issues, 'Why ordain women to a suspect institution? Why lumber women with a questionable role? Why not first reform the ministry itself?' The annoyance and frustration was obvious as Theresa indicated the stupidity of people who are prepared to settle for pseudo equality within structures that are not egalitarian (King, Y., 1984:59). Theresa felt the point of feminism was missed. The repetitious 'on and on' suggested the idea of getting stuck somewhere that clouded, and was not central enough to, the real issue. She saw men's wearing of clerical collars outside of church services as expressing some sort of insecure need to display their position in society. When women do the same she angrily said that she wanted to 'tear' the collar from them, and raised the issues, 'Why are we imitating men? Why can't we find some other way of being?'

The point that male structures have not known how to accommodate feminine contribution (Cranny-Francis et al, 2003; Delamont, 2003:1-12) was also substantiated in Tylielle's experience. When entering theological college, she was allocated a room within the domestic staff section and worked a few hours at cleaning and cooking each week to legitimise her presence there. This was because she 'wasn't supposed to be a (woman) theological student in a men's college.'

Mucking Around with Women's Lives

Some respondents made reference to their lives being 'put on hold' while church structures decided their future with regard to ordination. Theorists have identified the exasperation felt over the delay of women's ordination (Dowdy and Lupton, 1983:73; Field, 1991:61). According to respondents there were no official support systems or interim survival strategies offered by any denomination. They were left to 'tread water' while church hierarchies pontificated. Perry (1987:25) described it as a 'treadmill'. Hierarchies offered an assortment of motives for refusing or delaying the ordination of women, ranging from literalist theology to more functionary reasons (Porter, 1989:90-91). Amira reported that the Baptist Union simply said they had never had a woman apply. She considered it an excuse offered in order to dodge the proverbial 'can of worms' debate and decided to call their bluff. She already had more than adequate theological qualifications and replied, 'Well okay, we can fix that! You can have an application *quick smart*!'

The 'quick smart' retort aped the ostensibly straightforward explanation as to why women had not been ordained in her denomination. If the problem was so uncomplicated, she was offering a 'quick' solution. However, as she anticipated, her application forced the surfacing of the *real* motives for the exclusion of women from ordination and an eventual negative vote on the matter. She said,

> Suddenly the application went on hold and we had twelve months of debate on the issue of women in ordination and a *major* debate in Sydney in the assembly of the churches and a vote not to ordain women.

As the test case, Amira said she became the target for all manner of objections to the ordination of women. Most of the hierarchy and many of the grass roots members who expressed opinions in the thick of the public debate appeared oblivious to the fact that the political was also personal. In many instances the argument was waged as if she was not an actual person with feelings and a sense of calling to the profession. She said that while the debate was still in progress, a further oversimplified solution was offered as an answer to the theoretical dilemma rather than a challenge to the status quo practice. The church could vote for the ordination of women but make sure none were called. To Amira this proposal of an unwritten policy, adopted in some states, was hypocritical, dishonest and cleft-forming. It effectively froze women's careers and lives within her denomination.

Amira contrasted her own battle for ordination with the ease of passage experienced by her husband. She referred to the '*major, major, major*' debate on women's ordination in New South Wales. Amira's belaboured tone and the repetition of the word 'major' corresponded with Theresa's words 'on and on and on' and indicated how stuck the church was on this issue and the consequent stymieing of some women's lives. Sarah recalled the plight of a woman colleague in the continuing Presbyterian Church who, despite her qualifications being higher than most of the male clergy, was told she would be required to undertake a further three years in theological college. Sarah described this as 'crazy'. Margaret reported that the sense of needless marking time was also felt by women throughout the years of debate on women's ordination in the Anglican Church. She observed, of the hierarchy, 'They may have been listening but they weren't *doing*

anything about it.' Margaret left the country for some years (see *Wilderness*). She relived her angry sentiments of the time, 'They can just bloody well sort themselves out but I can have a life!'

Call

Unlike most other careers, the concept of 'call' is inherent to the tradition of vocational religious life (Parvey, 1980:59). There has been a notion that God does the calling (Langley, 1987:75; Cohen, 1986:103). The 'call' is obviated through personal conviction and/or sometimes as a suggestion from others within the church (Felicity, 1993:89-93; Balflour, 1987:13). However the 'call' came, in almost all instances, respondents received it with an initial reticence and lack of self-confidence not common to male candidates. They substantiated that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the possibility of ordination, for women, necessitated thinking outside traditional frames.

Lyn was asked by her lecturer if she had thought of going into ministry to which she replied, 'Come on, haven't you noticed that I'm a woman?' For Lily, the notion of 'call' was triggered when a faculty member of her denominational theological college visited her local church. He talked about God's call to *men*, whereupon Lily raised the question about God's call to *women*. The college representative then replied,

> God's calling women like yourself to become top flight secretaries, *top* flight secretaries, and then go into (theological) college and do two years so that you can get the theological language down pat and a little bit of Greek and counselling skills and then you go back and you give your services for free to the senior minister in the large church and that is what God is calling you to do.

Such advice was consistent with church teaching (Bendroth, 1993:27). Willis (1977) is a collection of articles on women's dedicated and unpaid work that has formed the backbone of the church. The speaker cited by Lily advocated the same calibre of academic achievement as the course for ordained ministry but without the recognition in terms of career or financial remuneration. On this score, Riley (1935:85) advises aspiring ministers considering marriage to 'seek the girl who would gladly serve Christ without official distinction'. Bhathal (1999:4) observes the same of women scientists who supported their fathers, husbands, uncles and brothers. Lily persuaded her husband to put off having children in order to comply with the man's challenge. As her theological study

progressed, Lily felt a sense of call to the ordained ministry, this time not issued by a man but from God. She described this 'tremendous' conviction as the reason why she was 'put on this planet'. Despite the certainty of the call, it was met with a sense of personal inadequacy. Lily recalled arguing with God that, in view of her youth and lack of education, this could not mean her. Eva similarly wondered how the wife of a M*** farmer two hundred miles from Melbourne could become a minister. The thought 'petrified' Lily.

Unlike Lyn, Lily and Eva, Veronica approached the sense of call with personal self-assurance, spurred on, in the face of opposition, by 'the complete and utter confidence' that God wanted her. Veronica made the clear distinction between the will of the church and the will of God. She did not believe that the church always spoke for God. She had 'never felt let down by God'. The tacit implication was that the church had let her down. So resolute was her call to ministry that she noted 'conscious dates and hours and times and places (as evidence of God's will).' For Veronica, the cleft was caused largely by the church's initial disregard of her personal sense of call and the ignoring of God's will in this respect.

Clefts took many forms with regard to respondents' call to ordained ministry. Some respondents were caught up in regarding male authority systems as normative, including purported male monopoly on knowing God's will. Others indicated more confidence in their own ability to know God directly but still struggled with male structures to have this recognised.

Clashes with Individual Clergy

Initial Responses

For the respondents, clefts were created, not only by church structures and hierarchy, but also by personal friendships with male clergy. Sometimes friendships changed when respondents hinted at the possibility of crossing the line into commonly regarded male territory. Veronica reported,

> When I told him (male cleric) for the *third* time, because he didn't bother to listen the first two times, I told him. The *third* time I said, 'I'm going back to school, David, I'm going to study theology and he said, 'Are you? I should have thought cake icing would have been more in your line.'

Again repetition indicates a sticking point for both parties in this conversation. The male priest either could not, or did not want, to hear. His reaction was an attempt to contain her within domestic spheres. Veronica had stepped outside the confined expectations of women's contribution in the church to 'tea-making, flower-arranging and teaching children' (Thiering, 1973:20).

In claiming her right to break through male mandated confines, Veronica then had to suffer the consequences from someone who had been helpful and affirming in other applications of the friendship. The two-edged nature of the friendship became problematic to Veronica. She said,

> I knew him better than he knew me then. He's the priest I've learnt most from. He's the priest I'm probably most like in the way I do things. I love him dearly as a friend. He drives me probably to drink and he did not cope well (with the thought of Veronica studying theology)...but I thought I had a vocation, you see, and he stabbed me so many times with 'cake icing' type remarks. Oh, it made so small the thing that was the most important thing to me at that time.

It is significant that the priest was known better to Veronica, and was more central to her life, than she was to his. Her intention to study theology brought her into focus and threatened to alter the pecking order. Field (1991:55) notes, 'When women move out of their assigned subordinate position, patriarchal power is used to try to position them back in their "proper place"'. The result, for Veronica, was that someone she 'loved dearly' had 'stabbed' her over an issue for which she expected support and enthusiasm. This was particularly hurtful from one in whom Veronica saw many of her own characteristics.

For most of the respondents, the pursuit of theological study and ordination meant jeopardising some valued friendships and being made to feel that they were breaching a structure and a code of ethics that were God ordained (see Power, 1995b:215-216 as a summary of Augustinian order). As mentioned in *Parents*, Jo's parish minister publicly voiced his disapproval of women clergy at her farewell party as she was leaving for theological college. The man was her good friend's father and a father figure to Jo. Over

ensuing years, he appeared oblivious to what he had done on this occasion. Thus respondents indicated that although some attitudes have mellowed over time male clergy were still reluctant to acknowledge the pain and breach in friendships caused by their initial attitudes. The priest in Veronica's account now interprets his hurtful comments as 'a joke' that he 'did not remember', but she was quick to reinforce that it was *no joke*. The justification that it 'was a joke' conflicted with not remembering. Veronica articulated the contradiction of the situation by asking him, 'Why are you two people? Why are you one in the pulpit where you tell me truth, and one when you sit in your kitchen and you tell me a whole bunch of other things?' She noted that he did not have an answer. Veronica conceded her own contradiction of values, that some of her 'best friends are patriarchs' and that she sometimes overlooked their oppressive behaviour for the sake of friendship.

Theological College

Women have been absent from social theory (Oakley, 1985:1-28; Frye, 1983; Gross, 1988) and eclipsed from culture (Smith, D.E., 1988:17-43). Eva recalled the first few days of her transition from farmer's wife to academic theology. She was given the wrong date for orientation day. There was no acknowledgement of the inconvenience to her, particularly with regard to the distance she had to travel. Eva felt this underscored the notion that a woman in her fifties was not as valued as the 'promising' young male students and that, whilst the misinformation had not been deliberate, it may have occurred, partly, due to the devaluing of older women (Estes, 1996:3; Harrison, 1985:152-166; Dinnerstein and Weitz, 1998).

Whether old or young, there were various reported strategies for negotiating relationships with male colleagues. Jo's approach, as a young theological student, was to try to be one of them by exploiting such commonalities as the interest she shared, with some, in football (Lake and Holmes, 1995:51). She regarded the acceptance of 'the boys' club' as vital to her survival at theological college. She said, 'You either were kind of accepted initially or you really didn't belong.' This was the perspective deplored by Theresa as noted above. However, at the time, Jo did not regard this unwritten policy as too harsh on women and took some pride in the fact that she had succeeded in 'getting alongside some of the guys'. She preferred male company because men appeared to have the edge on the

power, and were socially placed 'where the action was'. She had regarded women as somewhat insipid and unconfident. In this way they were their own worst enemy. Jo, however, also noted that, for her efforts, she endured 'putdowns' levelled at her both personally and at the expense of her gender, and noted the kind of defensive male behaviour that avoids confronting women as real people (Frye, 1983,47-48; Delamont, 2003:1-12). Jo found that the 'surrogate man' strategy was, at best, an incomplete answer to women's need for camaraderie and respect. Her story fitted with those of Pidwell's respondents (1994:83) who reported the need for the support of men in order to succeed.

Lily, who attended the same theological college as Jo some four years later, observed the necessity for women to edit what they said because of the scrutiny to which women candidates for ministry were subjected. This helped to forge a cleft between social life and inner feelings. Lily remembered that the few times she 'took a risk and shared at depth' with male colleagues were used to 'stab' her later, so she learned to keep her inner thoughts to herself. The sharpness of the hurt expressed in the concept of *stabbing* resonated with Veronica's sentiments over fractured relationships. The experience engendered the formation of acquaintances rather than friendships. Lily's account fits Confoy's experience (1991:5-6) that, whilst men may not deliberately patronise women, they lack the skill to relate to women as equals in work fields.

Bendroth (1993:27) cites the practice of regarding women theological students as by-products rather than serious career contenders. Costigan (1977), a Catholic priest, wrote of his seminarian experience that taught women's place as quiet and subservient. This resonates with respondents' claim that, as candidates for ordination, they were scrutinised more than the male students.

Colleagues in Ministry

Interviews revealed that, in some situations, the ordination of women caused confusion in male/female relationships within clerical ranks. It was largely uncharted territory and models for relationships were partial and inadequate. Many of the respondents found that male clergy tended to lapse into the dominant/subordinate model. Hawkesworth (1990:48-52) draws attention to the difficulties both genders have in valuing the expertise

of women. Respondents reported that men still believed in the superiority of male knowledge and expertise (Code, 1992; Harding, 1991; Forienza, 1993:211-24).

A respondent in the research conducted by Winter et al (1995:66) comments, 'I have seen many women nurtured into ministries only to have their gift rejected according to a pastor's whim.' Lily, who had served as the resident minister in an outer suburban church reported that, when the congregation decided to appoint a male minister to work with her, he did not regard her as an equal colleague and tended towards a traditional domestic relationship model. She described him as, 'so sexist' with the 'go-get-me-a-cup-of-coffee-because-I-have-important-minister-stuff-to-do' attitude to women. He also said that she had 'no gift whatsoever, for preaching' (Wren, 1989:223).

Some feminists consider the pulpit and preaching as male symbols (Ruether, 1980:72; Morton 1985:40-61) but, at the time, Lily regarded them as the traditional hallmarks of a 'real' minister. Her colleague thus stifled her career in this regard. Her 'pulpit' ministry was seriously curtailed until he left. She considered his priority had been 'whipping this girl into shape' and 'stitching things up so that they (congregational attitudes) would never change.' By this she meant that he had tried to mould her to fit the system and to reinforce the structure so that it would not tolerate any challenge or creative ideas she may offer outside accepted norms.

In due course, her original colleague left. The church continued to employ Lily for five years until they procured another male cleric to work with her. Although he was just newly graduated, it was taken for granted that he would assume seniority. His appointment had practical and symbolic applications. He was given full-time pay. Lily was cut back to three days a week. Another mark of a 'real' minister is as one who occupies the church residence, the manse (Dempsey, 1986:96). Although a single man, he was given the large manse. Lily and her family were told to find somewhere else to live. Lily felt devalued by church decision makers. Her new colleague did not refute this. However, within a week of starting, the man became ill, was hospitalised and could not continue. Lily recalled the unexpected turn of events. 'We didn't know whether he was going to live or die,' she said, 'so they allowed me, *for the first time*, to make some decisions!' It seemed to Lily, that women could not progress beyond standbys and

associates (Wren, 1989:216-217). They were expected to rally when men were not available but they were not the 'real' custodians of the system (Bendroth, 1993:110). Cohen's story (1986:100-112) as a minister's wife bears testimony to this. Lily felt that her expertise and abilities were reluctantly trusted by default. A number of respondents reported that their 'lucky break' came at a point when there was no choice but to trust the woman, who at least had her qualifications and some experience. This is consistent with Scutt's work (1994:30) on the lack of 'brains' attributed to women.

Where respondents were placed in situations outside of the acting-in-an-emergency model, and actually given a senior role, they were often met with resistance. For some the position became too lonely and controversial to bear. Lyn's experience as a presbytery minister meant jurisdiction over ministers within a geographic area defined as a presbytery. The animosity directed at her by male ministers and other church leaders became too painful and she left before the agreed time expired. Lyn observed that men did not seem to comprehend a woman's need for human camaraderie and professional support, and her right to exercise the role that the job required (Balfour, 1987; Bouma et al, 1996). Jo's answer to such injustice was to 'beat them at their own game'. It fitted with her bid to be 'one of the boys'. Jo spoke entering into male-based competing in order to survive, but admitted that she, 'was brought undone' and felt 'emotionally distraught and rejected' many times.

Some respondents worked with men who regarded themselves as sympathetic to the cause of women clergy and feminism generally. However, the depth of such empathy did not always stand up beyond the theoretical (Bouma et al, 1996). Tylielle's male colleague was supportive until challenged with adapting the hymns to inclusive language (see *Wilderness*). It was revealed that even sympathetic male colleagues tended to be unable or unwilling to think critically about basic social frames (Schaef, 1985:64-66). Tylielle observed that even the nicest men became fractious in instances where they felt feminism 'went too far'. Male/female clergy alliances were therefore often fragile. This was acknowledged and accommodated more by respondents than their colleagues. Coward's research (1992:1-14) reveals women's reluctance in challenging men to basic changes in power relations. Eva's account indicated why. She once voiced disapproval of

a male colleague's betrayal of a confidence and had to endure his anger. She noted his more tolerant response when his male colleagues did the same.

Frye (1983:98) identifies the penalty of refusing to work within male frames as starvation for women. In this regard, West, A. (1995:63) talks about the 'slamming of the door' in women's faces and Feith (1990:40-46), in particular, cites the challenge to male/female relations at the onset of the Uniting Church. Fiorenza (1993:242) also cites the warning to women not to hurt the organisation or its members, through dissident behaviour. Respondents indicated the cost of determination to follow their calling despite the splits in friendships, the risks to self-esteem and the precariousness of their careers.

Androcentric Authority over Women's Ministries and Lives

Bouma (1991:124-130) cites the three sources of ecclesiastical authority as tradition, sacred texts, and charisma, all of which are heavily overlaid with androcentrism. He refers to early church *fathers* (p.125) and talks about charisma as 'gut feeling' (p.127). Feminists have asked, 'Whose gut feeling? Whose knowledge?' (Harding, 1991:106-110). One of the central arguments against women's ordination is the notion that, because Jesus was a man, women cannot icon God (Ruether, 1996:105-106; Daly, 1975:37-41; Black, 1987). Eva, as mentioned in *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock* was frightened of a Calvinist minister and likened him to God.

At the age of four my own son, from a back pew of a country church as people stood to sing, yelled, 'Sit down, I can't see God!' He was referring to the robed minister at the front. I had been a minister since before he was born, yet had never been thus elevated! All respondents had experienced a lack of trust in women, not only to icon God, but also to know God's true purpose in the church. Most respondents acknowledged early tacit conformity. Belenky et al (1986:4-5) theorise on women's distrust in their own authority. Eva thus reported that, as a farmer's wife, she had 'lost (the) sense of calculated decision making' (Dempsey, 1992). Many stories emerged on how women's ministry was overseen by male ministers both officially and unofficially. This fitted a general social tendency (Robinson, M., 1994:247-248). Jo recalled the time when a minister from the central office of her denomination sent her cards to be filled in and returned detailing her visits to parishioners. To her knowledge, no men were required to do this. Jo's approach

to injustice generally was confrontational. Her resentment was visible in the recollection. She said she tore up the cards and sent them back to the man with the words, 'forget it!' The strength of her stance won her a degree of respect in high places but the energy required took its toll.

Some years later Lily, from the same denomination, encountered a similar authoritarian approach when she was asked to be the first woman speaker at her denominational state conference. She recalled being treated like a trainee. She was telephoned by a male cleric whose lack of trust in her ability to discern what was required for the speaking appointment extended to counsel on what to wear. He also offered 'advice' on oration and delivery. Lily re-enacted the dialogue. '"We would have never chosen you if we thought (that you would not do as you were told)" and I said, "Hang on a sec, you *did* choose me!"' Lily described the speaking appointment as the 'dizzy heights' of privilege in her denomination and gained the impression that church hierarchy had chosen her *despite* her gender and expected her gratitude. She said that they became angry when she insisted on being shown the same professional respect as that of her male colleagues on previous occasions.

Lily also noted that church hierarchy actively discouraged women clergy from banding together to effect change or challenge church practices. Such dynamics resonate with Hirschman's (1970) contention that organizations tend to silence dissident but loyal 'voice' from within. This was substantiated when Lily was pregnant with her first child and a patriarchal church committee was set up to formulate a policy on maternity leave for clergy. This did not include consultation with the women to whom the issue was pertinent. I had already given birth some months before. Church authorities warned Lily against conferring with me on the matter, if she valued her career.

Schaef (1985:27) identifies the fact that men do not understand the 'sin' of being born female (see also 'Women's Bodies and Spirituality' in *Literature and Theory*). Respondents related a number of stories where the church appointed them to fulfill roles but did not facilitate the means to carry them out. Many felt, as Lily did, that they were scrutinised more than men. They also felt that, for the most part, decision-making bodies were ignorant of the fact many positions, basic to the structure, were more precarious for

women. Audrey recounted, with obvious emotion, the pragmatic decision to move her from a parish where she was happy, to a more hostile situation. In this instance the male hierarchy, without regard to gender issues, assumed that, like men, women were in a position to make a reasonable success of any new situation. Audrey's predicament echoed Lyn's appointment as presbytery minister in Western Australia. Audrey was appointed to a church that 'didn't want a woman minister'.

Lack of Autonomy for Nuns

Some respondents acknowledged that they had contributed to the dominator/servant model. In this regard, Smith, D.E. (1988:71-72) notes the practice of women using male structures and thinking to devalue and invalidate one another. Respondents in religious orders confirmed this. West (1994) identifies the historical conflicts between nuns and male hierarchies (see also Fiorenza, 1993:237-248), and McLay (1992:256-267) specifically documents the struggle of the Sisters of Mercy, against dominating bishops, for autonomy over everyday life.

The three nuns interviewed were Theresa, Joan and Mary. They represented separate orders. All were aged between fifty-five and sixty-five and had been members of their respective orders from young adulthood. Although the church provided them with better opportunities later, all were critical of the convents in which they had spent much of their early lives. Theresa reported the complex hierarchical social arrangements of convent life. She was the principal of a school, by day, with her Mother Superior on the staff and, in the evenings, back at the convent, the power roles were reversed. This gave rise to confusion and strain between the two. Theresa felt that she was 'most unjustly treated'. Her Mother Superior colluded with the male power brokers and had Theresa removed from both the school and the convent to study theology at university. Theresa said that she was 'absolutely devastated' by this lack of autonomy. She explained that theology was her hobby and that she did not want to study it full-time. The decision makers assumed they knew what was best for her life without consultation. She felt her private life had been invaded.

Lack of autonomy was also an issue for Joan. She identified the two basic perspectives on access to God conveyed, as tenets of the faith, to the nuns of her order. One way was

through self-sacrificial denial of almost all personal possessions and freedoms (Heymann, 1992:65; McCormack, 1985) and a total devotion to prayer and service, often at the expense of personal comfort and sleep. Theresa stressed that this was not required of priests to the same extent. She noted that another way to God was through an attitude of 'seeing yourself as a child of God' and submitting trustfully to overruling powers. Research on Methodist deaconesses has revealed the same tendency to treat women as children (Feith, 1990:19). Daly (1975:53,59), in the 1960s, also commented on women's 'lack of adult-size participation in society' and Carr (1988:140) tied the women-as-children in with the image of God as male. For Joan convent life bore aspects of some orphanages with respect to the lack of personalised care, a feeling of social displacement (Hughes, 2002) and being treated as a child.

McLay (1992:379-380) talks about nuns' regulated daily rituals as 'weird' and the 'masculine spirituality' that cut women off from feminine identity (Grey, 1993:14-29; Daly, 1986). Mary described her early life in the convent with such phrases as 'the lack of human possibilities', 'the lack of ascetics' and the 'lack of a normal life'. She talked about the oppressive silence, the dearth of engaging literature and aspects of convent life that she described as 'strange behaviour' where 'you didn't quite know what you're doing'. The loneliness of those days was re-enacted in her face and tone of voice. 'Mother Superior' she said, 'at least had a priest to whom she could speak, but I had no-one!' 'Particular friendships' were discouraged (McLay, 1992:391; Renate, 1993:187-188; McCormack, 1985:95).

Daily life in religious orders in the 1960s and 1970s, for Theresa, Joan and Mary, was fraught with cleft-forming phenomenon. They regarded the mandate to deny the need for intimacy and the requirement to endure harsh treatment from superiors as inconsistent with a God of love. The encouragement to be childlike in subservience did not mesh with intellectual abilities, a cleft that was only addressed later in their vocational lives.

Ministers' Wives

Both Finch's (1980:851-70) and Dempsey's respective studies reveal the high commitment of ministers' wives to their husbands' careers. My findings agree, though with a subtle difference that I suspect could also have been true of some their

respondents. Mickale and Annabelle were strongly committed to their husbands, and therefore tried to accommodate the church. However, there was also accumulated resentment. Dempsey's (1986:84-85) sample group of clergy wives reveals an aversion to prescriptive expectations, the breeching of personal privacy particularly with regard to the church clergy residence, and the mandate for conformity (pp.92-96). My findings agreed. Both Mickale and Annabelle had post-graduate qualifications in theology. However, this did not mean absolute affinity with their husbands' work or social position. In both instances the husband had his qualifications before the wife and the husband's career took precedence. Both felt they had no choice about the issue of church attendance.

As with Finch's findings (1983:38-39), Mickale said she felt 'roped in' by virtue of her husband's chosen profession. She said the church expected her to participate, usually beyond the commitment of other parishioners, because she was the minister's wife (Dempsey, 1986; Cohen, 1986). As was the case with clerical respondents, Mickale felt that, in many respects, the church assumed ownership of the entire family. This sometimes took the form of a caring extended family but was also, many times, intrusive. Whilst it has been noted that one of the marks of a 'real' minister is their right to live in the church residence, ministers' wives have sometimes found establishing a private life on church property very difficult (Dempsey, 1986:85). Mickale lamented that, because the church was next to the manse, she felt like she was 'living in a goldfish bowl' and that parishioners assumed the right to walk through her backyard. She described imposed values as 'ridiculous stuff' such as the fact that she was 'in trouble' when she 'hung nappies on the line on a Sunday morning'. It was regarded as a breach of a sacred day.

To illustrate how strongly she felt about the infringement of privacy, Mickale drew on an example that, for her, created a dilemma. She said, 'One (clergy) couple actually put a padlock on their front gate after six o'clock at night.' Whilst this may have kept people *out*, she felt it would have shut her *in*. Over the years Mickale resented the lack of an easy solution to the problem. It seemed to her that the clergy family was trapped whether there was a lock on the gate or not. To her the choices were either conformity or doing battle with the church. She eventually chose the latter but not without cost to her own well-being and to her husband's career (Finch, 1983:93).

Mickale recollected several 'crunch' moments, one being a conversation with one of her husband's superiors. The man assumed that Mickale, like many other ministers' wives, would conform and go wherever the church sent them. She refuted his suggestion that she and her husband could be transferred 'out the back of Bourke'. The man then recalled how he had been posted to a place so isolated that his wife had cried for the first '*few years*' but later become resolved to the posting. Mickale then made it clear that if this happened, her husband would be going on his own, even if that meant divorce. She resented the fact that she had to get angry with the man in order for him to hear what she was saying. She also resented his assumption that it was simply a matter of applying his own will, and the fact that he thought it was acceptable to enforce misery on his wife for a 'few years'. The man's attitude, though, was not unique. Whyte (1971:80) comments on the expectation that ministers' wives accept postings without complaint.

For Mickale, the ethos that put wife and family second to the job was intrinsic to the theological college in which her husband trained. The principal of the college had indicated that, for the (male) student, the time allocation for family amounted to helping with the dishes at night. It is noteworthy that even family time had a task allocation and that this was set against the perception of 'wasting' time. Mickale reported that study and work in student ministry placements was mandated 'As if nothing else mattered'. She cited an ideology where relationships came second to academic achievement and so called 'God's work', and that it had taken her husband many subsequent years to, even partly, overcome the way in which he had been programmed as a student.

In a similar situation, Annabelle found her voice much later in life than Mickale. To some extent she had lived the blueprint set down by Mickale's husband's superior. Since the beginning of her marriage, several decades ago, she had experienced the regular disruption of having to uproot herself from job situations, social networks, and later, her adult children, in order to follow her husband's career. She identified the irony of a life in the church that was not conducive to spiritual health (Daly, 1975; Hageman, 1974). One church initiative required an international move. This was not her choice, nor did the move stand to benefit her career. For Annabelle, the greater the personal involvement she had in the church, the less she found of spiritual meaning.

Throughout the interviews, respondents indicated that lack of autonomy was a source of cleft between the social self and the soul. The clergy wives, however, reported that the dearth of independence was compounded due to the subsidiary nature of the position and that this had impeded their careers and academic pursuits, and invaded their families. They were, in fact, in their younger days, as Finch (1983:149) suggests, inclined to put aside the notion of an independent career and concentrate on support of their husbands' calling.

Clashes with Community

Social Positioning of Women in the Church

Clefts were also formed at grass roots levels of the church. All respondents reported clashes with local church communities, largely due to respondents' challenges to prescribed social roles (see 'The Church and Gender Relations' in *Literature and Theory*). Lily explained that, in the past, lay*women* in Churches of Christ were not generally permitted to administer Communion as were lay*men*. Their role was to wash the glasses afterwards. As with secular education (Buchan, 1980:81-89), Lily noted, that whilst little children in the church were the responsibility of women, more 'senior' positions with teenagers were usually held by men.

Lily pointed out that, whilst women were sometimes required for certain tasks in the absence of men (Bendroth, 1993:110; Feith, 1990:11), they were not permitted to act as teachers to men *except* men from parts of the world considered by the church as 'mission fields' (Bendroth, 1993:89-90; Griffiths, 1987). This inconsistency underscored the presence of racism within some church attitudes and practices. Tylielle, in fact, reported that her original intention was to serve on the mission fields because she thought that this was the only ministry open to women. Encouragingly, the Congregational Church made her aware that women could be parish ministers within that denomination. She remarked that it was a relief that she did not have to 'disappear', from her country and culture, at the end of her training.

Unlike Tylielle, however, Lily indicated that her church tradition was quite gender prescriptive on the matter of leadership and that, although it sometimes looked as though they had charge of some things, women and girls were socialised to be supporters of men within the church. Lily pointed out, with a note of futility in her voice, that although she was leading Bible studies and organising inter-church activities at the age of fourteen, she felt that she could not count this as an apprenticeship for adult leadership in the church. Clarke (1994:134) notes the 'glass ceiling' in this regard.

Lily and others have sought to redefine the rules of gender relations and roles in church communities and have sometimes suffered isolating and even hostile consequences. Lily recounted the large number that stayed away when she was the speaker at the Churches of Christ state conference and concluded, with melancholy, 'You can lead a horse to water but you can't make *him* drink. You could make me a conference speaker but it didn't mean people were going to turn up.'

Lily's account bore the same issues to that of Audrey who, as mentioned, was sent to a church that did not want a woman minister. Failure can tap into women's tendency to personal guilt and depression (Coward, 1992:105-118), as was the case with Audrey. For both Audrey and Lily, it was obvious that the decision makers did not understand the fact that the social position of women was different to that of men and that this ignorance can set women up to fail.

The Woman Minister and Marriage – Community Enigma

Women's position within the traditional nuclear family has been advocated by the church and paralleled within its structure. Victorin-Vangerud (2000:67-85, 141) cites this model as stifling and potentially abusive to individuals. She speaks of this as 'poisonous pneumatology' (2000:143). The church has perpetuated the notion of father as head of the household, as decreed by God (Thiering, 1986:35; Bouma, 1991). Porter (1989:91) notes that one of the concerns about women's ordination in the Anglican Church was the notion of ensuing neglectful motherhood.

The model of the married male minister or rector was well established, but women's religious vocational models in the 1960s and 1970s were largely confined to nuns, deaconesses or women missionaries (Porter, 1989:14, 46,53). Women had been

socialised to self-sacrifice and to marriage and motherhood as a preferred model (Dell, 2000b:312-314) and even as Divine promise (Orr, 1956:32; Scanzoni and Hardesty, 1992:21-46). By virtue of the only religious models available, women had also been socialised to believe that women's dedication to a religious vocation was partly demonstrated by remaining single to ensure more time for God's work. Griffiths (1987:71) on women in mission, notes, 'One of the greatest assets for the single woman is her time.' In this regard, Feith (1990:17) notes that deaconess training was discontinued for the married or engaged woman and Treadway and Miller-McLemore note the social difficulties 'when a minister has a baby' (2000:187-189).

Lyn observed the paternalism of those around her who regarded the roles of marriage and ordained ministry for women, as mutually exclusive. She did not regard this as malicious. She said, 'I think they were trying to save me' because they knew the cost of motherhood and the cost of ministry and the fact that husbands often did not emotionally and practically support their wives in the same way as wives did their husbands. With first hand knowledge of my own situation, she pertinently added, 'I mean, you (the interviewer) still carry most of the burden of the emotional stuff in your family, in spite of the fact that you're both ministers.'

While Lyn acknowledged the practical problems associated with the combination of marriage and ministry for women, she resented the social arrangements that set them up. She noted that 'not many blokes in those days would have married a woman minister' and observed the wisdom of a colleague who married *before* she was ordained. Lyn regarded my own situation as exceptional and 'lucky' and said she was still angry at a system that held one set of rules for male clergy and a more stringent set for women (Feith, 1990:17). As noted, Amira identified some social blocks to women's ordination. Lyn extended these to include the sphere of marriage. Both drew attention to the precarious negotiating processes mandated for women who sought ordination, and from which men, by virtue of their gender, were exempt.

Veronica related her church's view that women were not much good unless they were in the Mother's Union. She was taught that when women overstep the mark, their 'meddling' can taint things or upset the God-ordained order. The entrenchment of

prescribed gender roles was also evident in Lily's story when she felt intrepid about exploring the possibility of ordination. When someone asked her what her heart was telling her, she answered, 'Well it doesn't matter because I'm a woman, I'm twenty years old and I've been married for two years and I should be home having my babies.' The dilemma she felt was underscored by the fact that almost all her female friends regarded study as unnecessary after marriage.

Respondents reported that marriage was sometimes pushed as an antidote to their defiant bid for ordination and said that some church leaders hoped that it would 'fix' the problem. Jo felt metaphorically bludgeoned into a 'disastrous' marriage and, with anger recalled, 'I just got sick of all the expectations and everyone saying, "When are you getting married?"' One of Miles' (1994:21) respondents also commented, 'You're not meant to be happy and single in the church.'

Prescribed Morality, Guilt, Duty, Worthiness

Sex and Sexuality

The Christian church has rigidly endorsed a paradigm of family with women at its domestic heart as moral gate-keepers (Rudy, 1997:21). Interviews supported that more was expected of women and less was forgiven them. Women were expected to be the moral police (Sturmey, 1991:41; Bendroth, 1993:114-115; Summers, 1976:311; Rudy, 1997:48). To an extent, respondents blamed the church for some moral hypocrisies with which they were raised (see 'Uncomfortable Male Theology – Punishment, Guilt and Human Imperfection' and 'Women, Sin and Redemption' in *Literature and Theory*). Amira commented that sex, outside of marriage, was regarded as a bad sin, and that sexuality was reduced to rule-keeping and avoiding social embarrassment (Knight, 1982; Christian-Smith, 1998). She considered this 'pharisaic'. Veronica bore testimony to this. As a committed Anglican, it was important for her to do 'the mother thing well and do the churchwoman thing well'. Veronica, however, contravened the boundaries by marrying a *Roman Catholic*. Veronica stressed the fact that she had done '*everything* wrong' and found the struggle to regain 'respectability' difficult.

Veronica was raised when 'good' Protestants (including Anglicans) did not marry Roman Catholics or vice versa (Law, 1933; Stuart, 1994). This was acknowledged by

both Catholic and Protestant respondents. Joan also commented on the 'terrible dilemma put on people', in this respect, by the (Catholic) church. She also regarded many of the sexual mandates of the church as 'a lot of rule keeping' and 'not liberating at all', and saw many of the 'rules' as a contravention of the claim that Christianity 'sets us free' (Rudy, 1997). Veronica's 'sin', however had gone further than choosing a partner from the 'wrong' denomination. She was also pregnant before her marriage, to a man too much her senior to be considered 'respectable'. She sought redemption as a model wife and mother.

Lyn raised the issue of the church and homosexuality (Rudy, 1997; Heyward, 1984:43-48). Her conservative views changed when she discovered the homosexuality of a parishioner. She recalled, 'I sort of tried to digest that (his homosexuality) because he was a terrific chap and a great (church) elder…', almost as if homosexuality and these qualities were mutually exclusive. He pointed out that celibacy required by the church of single people was harder for him than for her. She had the possibility of marriage. He did not. She marked this as the beginning of her journey into a better empathy for humanity and a more profound understanding of her own 'loneliness'. She concluded that most church policy makers had no comprehension of the loneliness of either heterosexual or homosexual single people in the church (Matthews, 1992:111-147; Heyward, 1984:33-48).

Fear, Conformity and Getting it Right

All respondents alluded to fear as a conformity lever within the church (Rushdoony, 1978). Amira talked about fear and control with regard to sex codes (Rudy, 1997). Others suggested broader applications Fear and guilt as tools in the lives of respondents varied from a source of mild discomfort, to a major governing factor (Coward, 1992:105-118; Rankka, 1998). As observed earlier, Annabelle referred to 'devil' and 'hell' images used to stifle creative thinking fuelled by the controlling apparatus of the church for the sake of its own power.

The pressure to conform affected both genders, but for women the mandate was complex. Women were required to obey male constructed precepts (Smith, D.E., 1988:65-66). When confronted with her husband's decision to become a cleric, Mickale

concluded that all she had to do was to think like him and she would 'fit right in'. It was important to know what it was you were *supposed* to be thinking and doing as if this could be adopted easily. However, Mickale began to realise that to silence her own voice was problematic. For example, she recognised the inner cleft caused by outward acknowledgement of God as Father. As alluded to in *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*, she spoke of her connection to Celtic spirituality and how this endured privately although buried beneath the social requirements of conservative Christianity, and stifled by the confines of her husband's faith.

Mickale was disapproved of for not being able to 'do it (Christianity) right'. She thus recalled the tool of conformity used by one of her husband's parishioners,

> She'd (parishioner) bring a cake and *then* she'd tell me what I wasn't doing right and what the kids weren't doing right and what (husband) wasn't doing right and how I wasn't a good minister's wife and every time I saw her walk down the driveway with a bloody cake I knew (that Mrs. C was going to criticise)!

Mickale recalled the sense of ownership the church asserted over her life and that it was assumed she could be bought for the price of a cake. This was consistent with another occasion that stood out when she inadvertently drank half a bottle of Anglican Communion wine. When a woman from the Anglican Church turned up 'with her hat pulled down to her eyes' demanding the wine back, Mickale panicked and topped up the bottle with water because she was 'too scared' to admit her mistake. The account was related retrospectively as a humorous incident. To Mickale, however, the woman with the hat pulled down to her eyes was a fearful epitome of church austerity.

Mickale's predicament was not unlike that of Eva who reported that, for most of her married life, before entering ministry, she was struggling with personal insecurity and inability to please the establishment. She said, 'I was doing what I was told to do, doing what I thought was my role to do, and everything was all wrong.'

The feeling that some inarticulate dynamics were not right was common to most respondents with respect to first identifications of a rift between church expectations and the buried location of the individual soul. Joan suggested that fear, used as a lever on individuals, was also implicit in hierarchies and propelled the system (Rushdoony, 1978).

She said, 'It's almost as if the church is so afraid of heresy that it takes an extreme view that therefore means that the glorious richness is lost. It's terribly narrow and scary.' Fear of offending God was used as a lever against non-conformity. Later in her career, however, Joan considered straight-jacketed Christianity more frightening than the risk of offending God by not 'getting it right'. She referred to a 'richness' born of diversity that is 'lost' in the insistence upon narrowness.

The Cleft Between Contemporary Church and Pure Christianity

Religious hypocrisy was a major cleft-forming phenomenon, that is, occasions when church practice was in conflict with central Christian tenets (see also *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock*). Contraventions included the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the church. Theresa insisted that Jesus *did* give a different way of thinking but that the more the church became institutionalised, the more it moved away from the original liberating Jesus thinking. She spoke of this as 'the beginning of the boys' stuff.'

Mickale saw androcentric structures as discriminating even of male clergy. She referred to secular management models employed by the church and mentioned how church hierarchy categorised clergy as either 'achievers' or 'non-achievers' despite the fact that 'non-achievers' were generally assigned small, struggling parishes that were unconducive to defined measures of achievement. Further, she talked about the hurt and anger she felt when her husband was considered a non-achiever without regard to his particular circumstances. He needed corneal transplants on both eyes. With grief and anger, Mickale also remembered the lack of church support when her baby was stillborn. She was not alone. All respondents recalled situations of extreme personal need that they felt the church had ignored.

Sometimes points of hypocrisy surfaced even within the context of worship. Veronica recalled the opening procession of a church service when the priest, 'turned around and snarled at some parishioners'. As God's representative, and this most obvious in a worship service, the power balance is usually tipped in favour of the cleric. In Veronica's view, this man had the power to seriously diminish the parishioners' capacity to participate spiritually in the rest of the service. Her reaction was a double take. She

thought 'hang on, that's not right, that doesn't go with what we're doing'. The discrepancy between belief and practice led her to conclude that the ceremony was, 'mumbo jumbo, absolute twaddle.'

Lyn's experience also constituted a point at which socially acceptable behaviour and consecrated ground meet. Christians are involved in a wide range of services to the poor and needy. Within these areas of community work, there is often tolerance for persons who do not fit church respectability models. The Salvation Army epitomises this (Bolton, 1980:226-238). However, respondents indicated, that the Sunday church service is often territory Christians regard as their own. Conformity is expected from whoever enters. Lyn explained her understanding of what church should be in terms of God's love for the 'broken ones', 'the ones that are hard to love'. She gave an account of the time an 'outsider' came to church. He was unable to control his bladder and his bowel. The congregation did not cope well.

She noted that it was the women who finally identified the hypocrisy of God's people wishing that a particular person would stay away. It was they who found 'other ways'. The women drew up rosters to take him to the toilet every Sunday morning before the service. No man volunteered. It could be argued that this is men's work because the occasions necessitated dealing with male anatomy but, because he was ill and because it was 'of the body', it was considered women's work (Stevenson-Moessner, 2000:15; Grey, 1993:32-33; Dunphy-Blomfield, 1994:104). For Lyn, this highlighted the difference that sometimes exists between the theorists and the doers of Christianity and how men have sometimes so prescribed women's work as to ensure that they do not get their own hands dirty (Bryson, 1999:81; Goode, 1982; Scutt, 1994:75-78; Sturmey, 1991:47-48).

Loyalty and Love for the Church as Problematic

As mentioned in the introduction, this work began with the fundamental question as to whether or not Christianity and feminism are mutually exclusive. Whilst this never developed into the central research question, the juxtaposition of these two essences

within the lives of the respondents was at the heart of cleft formation. Throughout the interviews, two dynamics emerged quite strongly. These were the overwhelming hurt and struggle caused by the church, and the great love that the respondents felt for the church and the loyalty it inspired. Walsh (1993:209), a nun in West Cork, Ireland, talks about the 'larger system' of the church that crushes people and refuses to take them seriously but adds, 'I do love the church, though'. Winter et al (1995:207), whose sample group were American Christian feminists, conclude that 'women stay because one central belief is what holds their life together, even while other teaching or rituals threaten to tear it apart'. Victorin-Vangerud (2000:xi) reflects, 'We may travel great journeys in our lives, but often we come to find ourselves deeply connected to the places and times of our past.' Even those respondents no longer in the church understood this dichotomy.

Heyward (1984:55) passionately makes the distinction between Ruether and Daly as Christian and extra-Christian feminist theorists respectively reflecting the hope she has in somehow reconciling feminism with Christianity:

> Ruether builds bridges to the future church and Daly burns them. Ruether takes care to be tender and Daly traumatizes. Ruether tosses us lifelines and Daly pulls them in, leaving us to swim or to sink. Ruether evokes my nod, my commitment, my Yes! Daly provokes my fist to clench, my stomach to spasm, my silent voice to shriek No!'

Respondents indicated similar commitment to stay and keep trying to reconcile feminism and Christianity. This kind of endurance was evident even within the lives of those who ultimately left.

Facing the Cleft

The research findings of Winter et al (1995:80) indicate women's reluctance to leave the church even when they recognise it as the perpetrator of women's oppression. Furlong (De-la-Noy, 2003), though she wandered from the church and took comfort in the (metaphoric) desert, could not distance herself entirely. *With Love to the Church* (Furlong, 1965) was prompted by her feeling that the church did not reciprocate her love.

The identification of cleft and the ability to accommodate its presence without immediately trying to fix it was a significant element of healing for some respondents.

Simply naming disjuncture was therapeutic. Veronica recounted this literally as a 'moment of tears' to be looked at carefully. For her, tears were the symbolic salt-water balm that named the discrepancy, windows into the cleft between her social experience, with all its constraints, as opposed to her personal spiritual location. Tears were an indication that something was amiss. Ballis's (1999:78) case study supports this as does Smith, C.M. (1992) who talks about authentic 'preaching', as 'weeping, confession and resistance'. Tears were also moments when Veronica decided to stay with the church because she regarded it as the vehicle for basic truth, despite its social oppressiveness.

The Holy Spirit, Connectedness and Community

One of the most prevalent reasons for continuing church membership was the value of community to the individual. It appeared that, despite much cleft-forming phenomena, there was a strong motivation to retain some original sense of community, even if this was later abandoned. As cited, Veronica's account of the dichotomy and confusion of emotions felt on St. Peter's Day bore testimony to the gender issue versus love-for-church issue. Throughout the interview, Veronica made consistent references to the love/hate nature of her relationship with the Anglican Church. By contrast, she also related treasured memories and the importance of belonging. In this respect she gave an account of her visit to Trinidad. She thus recalled the event with ecstatic warmth,

> It was choral Latin followed by Holy Communion. It was totally Church of England. It was Book of Common Prayer, of course, in 1970. The words were the same, the tunes were the same, the singing was the same. Everything was exactly home. If my eyes were shut, I was at home in our own parish church (in England).

Veronica often referred to the Anglican Church as 'home'. Repetition of the words 'the same' gave the account a lyrical quality. Whilst she acknowledged the ethnocentric nature of her feelings with respect to Anglicanism in Trinidad in the 1970s, her point was that, for her, there was a human connectedness within the tradition. Bouma (1992:23) expands Durkeim's theory of social solidarity and basic connectedness. He notes that, 'the gathered religious community creates and makes real the sense of the presence of the transcendent.' Arnold (1985:183) writes of herself as 'an important member of the family of God' and about the 'richness' of the church that both 'attracted and repelled' her. Kath, also Anglican, on the issue of belonging, offered, 'I have never not belonged to the

church'. She said this almost as if it were a kind of spiritual genetic factor. Feelings of connectedness within church communities with respect to shared memories, common faith, and the mystical Holy Spirit were set against the disconnectedness respondents sometimes felt with church hierarchy, clergy and church members on feminist issues and other matters of injustice.

Sarah suggested a further dimension related to guilt. Like Veronica, she acknowledged the church as 'home', that her criticism of the institution therefore sometimes felt like betrayal of one's own and that when people outside the church say, 'why don't you leave? You say, "I can't" and you can't explain why you can't.' Although unable to explain the exact dynamics at work, Sarah recognised the option of walking out on the church as problematic. She also conceded the lack of sense this makes to outsiders in the light of internal church injustices. She spoke about the Holy Spirit as both an individual and collective element that essentially binds Christians. Her contention was that, in view of this sacredness, it is problematic to regard walking out as a solution. Her difficulty was also in explaining this to those outside the church.

Annabelle consistently referred to the lack of inspiration and relevance that the church had for her life. She offered little explanation for her continuing church membership except to say, 'It's too deeply embedded in my psyche for me to move away. I was born into the church and I've committed myself to the church and I'm not going to leave it now.' The strength of community pull was obvious throughout the interviews. Tylielle, though she had left the church, nonetheless observed, 'we were there to congregate together and to be a circle of human beings, and the greatest community I experienced still, even after all my work with human beings, has been a Congregational church.' Mary talked about the involvement of both immediate and extended biological family and neighbours in the Catholic Church in the area where she grew up. She stressed the significance of belonging to family, neighbours and church in her childhood and teenage years. Kath underscored the entrenched nature of belonging. She also indicated that, for her, the connectedness was more than localised or immediate. She reported a 'sense of belonging to an ancient institution.'

Mary's account gave further dimension to the nature of ancient connections. She spoke of the feelings of isolation engendered by enforced community living in her religious order. Despite the bad memories, however, members of the order, now fragmented throughout New South Wales, Victoria and New Zealand, still know of each other's whereabouts, keep in touch and visit one another. Mary talked about their 'painful (shared) history' and, when someone observed that they all appeared to 'get along very well', she replied, 'of course they bloody well do, because they don't live together (as they did before)!' Mary indicated that the shared history went beyond the demoralising experiences of their time together in the convent. She cited the ancient Eucharist as 'blessed Sacrament' and 'opus' for community. Mary concluded, 'So I'm writing my thesis on the Eucharist and I can't get away from it.' This resonated with Kath's point about the ancient and the mystical.

Feminism and Contribution

Reasons for staying were not all individualistic. Margaret also named the dynamic of connectedness and spoke in terms of doing the right thing by others, in particular, her congregation. She referred to 'the eighty-three year old sitting in the pews' of the church for which she had responsibility as priest to encourage critical thinking. Margaret spoke of feminism as a resource to share and a source of 'nourishment' for community (see *Social Reformation*). Kath also indicated a feminist contribution to the church as part of the expression of her love for it. As with many respondents, Kath's commitment to the church and to feminism led her to stay and be a feminist within the structure. Like Sarah, she thought about leaving the church but could not bring herself to do it, strongly advocating that women should not surrender their inheritance in the church or their spiritual authority (Fiorenza, 1993:3; see also *Social Reformation*). This indicated that, as well as the duty to raise the awareness of others with respect to feminism, there was an imperative to stay and 'save' the system from complete male dominance.

Some respondents indicated feelings of discomfort in the early days of their own critical thinking, fearing that feminism could be a form of self-indulgence, an enemy of the structure to which they felt loyalty. It seemed selfish to be considering one's own rights, identifying one's own discomforts and challenging an institution that was 'home'. It was only as personal feminist networks grew, that some respondents felt free to explore

feminism and view it as a resource that could better the church and that the entitlement of the rights of individuals were part of this.

End Note

Throughout the interviews a number of themes emerged as sites of struggle and cleft-forming phenomena. These included the off-centred-ness and sense of displacement the women felt to men's agendas and, in particular, when they crossed the line of prescribed gender roles and attempted to take leadership positions with church structures. At times respondents felt that their lives had been inconvenienced, their autonomy curtailed and career paths thwarted by male decision-makers. They also reported that, during this process, personal relationships with colleagues or prospective colleagues often became strained and, in some cases, hostile. Church communities were also given as sites of struggle when traditional parameters and social locations for women were challenged and where church practice appeared to contravene the intent of Christianity.

Shared experiences and memories within church communities were crucial to the formation of personal loyalties. God as community-making Holy Spirit engendered love and loyalty for the church. Some respondents also indicated the responsibility of maintaining feminist influence in otherwise male-centred structures. These aspects rendered the simple answer of desertion in the face of hurts and injustices problematic.

The identification of social and spiritual clefts did not follow clear linear chronology. As the unarticulated sense of social displacement gave way to clearer feminist awareness, inner journeys were more specifically addressed. The reverse was also true. The spiritual also informed the social. As mentioned, it was difficult to separate the two. The previous chapter identified the spiritual clefts within the lives of respondents. This chapter has addressed social clefts. The next chapter looks at what happens when spiritual and social Clefts, prompted by the Rock, reach a level of saturation point and conspire to render various kinds of *Wilderness* within the experiences of respondents.

Wilderness

Chapter Focus – When the Mud Hits the Fan

> Beneath the Cross of Jesus
> I fain would take my stand –
> The shadow of a mighty Rock,
> Within a weary land;
> A home within the wilderness,
> A rest upon the way,
> From the burning of the noon-tide heat,
> And the burden of the day.
> (E. Clephane in Haskell et al, 1974. Churches of Christ Hymn Book, Hymn 492)

The above excerpt from an old hymn depicts the Rock as metaphoric protective haven in the otherwise hostile landscape of life. However, as has been observed, respondents indicated that the calcified layers of the Rock were often problematic. One woman, outside the chosen sample group, said, 'The protective Rock is all very fine, but I've been there because my feet have been caught under it. As I prize them free and walk into the wilderness, I walk with a limp.' Respondents also indicated that, though they may walk freer these days, residual legacies of the past remain.

When structures become too constricting, sometimes the groundswell rears up at saturation point, finds strength and demands a way through. Rich (1978:4), in *Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev*, depicts a wilderness experience. She reflects thus, upon a Russian women's orienteering team who perished in a storm on Lenin Peak in 1974:

> We know now we have always been in danger
> Down in our separateness
> And now up there together but till now
> We had not touched our strength

Respondents also talked about finding what had been latent strength through venturing into the potentially lethal unknown. Sardello (1999:1-30) suggests confrontation with the empty space (cleft) where fear and uncertainty lurk, as a painful but only way forward. Like O'Donohue (2000) he regards the emptiness as the space from which freedom and

creativity can emanate. For respondents, this ensued from a saturation point at which oppressive aspects of the Rock had to be confronted in order to avoid the greater trauma of a soul that is constantly silenced. Kushner (1987:132), a Jewish rabbi observes,

> True religion should not say to us, "Obey! Conform! Reproduce the past!" It should call upon us to grow, to dare, even to choose wrongly at times and learn from our mistakes rather than being repeatedly pulled back from the brink of using our own minds.

Respondents revealed that the Rock as structured faith has caused long-term clefts in their lives through its imposed intellectual, social and spiritual restriction and through the ignoring of women's voices (Scutt, 1996:108-109; Spender, 1990:52-75). Johnson, E.A. (1996:5) notes, 'For some, the journey involves a sojourn in darkness and silence, traversing a desert of the spirit created by the loss of accustomed symbols.' This chapter documents the addressing of issues and subsequent twilight or grey area between old and new life directions. It is an area that dislodgess the 'post' as symbolic marker (Gray and McPhillips, 2001).

The term 'wilderness' could bring to mind the concepts of quandary, place of confusion, or nothingness. Wilderness, in its contemporary application in an age of conservation movements, is often perceived as a place that has been left in its natural state (Seed, 1996). Schama (1996:7) notes that founding environmentalists, Thoreau and Muir regarded wilderness as the 'preservation of the world'. In this sense 'wild' means natural rather than 'mad' or 'crazed'. Estes (1996:3-22) and Roberts, M. (1991) allude to 'wild woman' as the primal, instinctual nature of women often buried beneath socially constructed feminine images. Weber (1987:47-48) speaks of the yearning of humankind for the lost feminine, the Shekinah, to be met in the place of exile. Both 'natural' and 'crazed' were found to be apt definitions within the accounts offered. Stories included experiences of madness and confusion together with the discovery of the instinctual, the intuitive, and the soul buried beneath the debris of socially imposed spirituality. For the purposes of this thesis, wilderness is defined as that position where an awareness of the ill fit of imposed theologies, traditions and spiritualities became identifiably problematic, for respondents, to the point where inner compromise was no longer possible. It was the crossroad at which there was sorting out to do, the point at which the 'mud hit the fan'

and, although some were not too sure what, there was the feeling that *something* had to be done.

One of the key aspects of the wilderness and/or exile experience was a sense of displacement. Most respondents felt that they had been obliged to live out a social role that was increasingly incompatible with the inner spirit. All respondents identified a period or point of wilderness in some form. All reported a lack of autonomy that, at one point or points, had become unbearable. Clarified awareness that male had been the assumed normative (Confoy, 1995:13; Storky, 1987:6-10; Wren, 1989:36-37) was often the catalyst for embarkation on a 'Wilderness' aspect of the journey. Respondents reported instances where they were trivialised, marginalised, ignored or resented for assuming equal footing to men, when they expected to be heard and taken seriously as 'normal' people. In interviews, the memories of these evoked feelings of hurt, grief and powerlessness. Respondents indicated that, in the end, they had the choice of living an off-centred life, or embracing the search for another paradigm. A journey through spiritual wilderness was often part of the discovery process.

A number of respondents felt compelled to continue making concessions outwardly for the sake of their careers and income. Such compromise caused a complexity of results including illness and feelings of pain, guilt and betrayal. Wilderness was the point at which the cleft from within took on more than a 'back-burner', festering presence. It screamed for attention in the face of accepted norms. Sometimes this meant a crisis of faith, sometimes it was the point at which personal convictions could no longer tolerate church practices and structures. Wilderness as desert implies a lack of water and sustenance. The wilderness experience was, for some, a kind of spiritual dehydration that motivated a search for sustenance and survival in a different form to what they had known. Respondents' stories evoked geographic metaphors that resonated with those of Jones, S (2000:49-50) who uses such terms as 'landscapes', 'map', 'signposts', 'pathways' and 'terrain' to describe changing theologies and spiritualities and emerging feminisms, and McRae-McMahon (1998:198-211) who talks about social environment as 'landscape'.

Geographic Wilderness

Eco-feminism identifies that men have regarded earth's wildernesses as feminine and therefore a force to be tamed and conquered (King, Y., 1984:56-64; McFague, 1987:9). This does not mean, however, that wilderness has necessarily been the domain of the human feminine. Women have not generally been accredited with mapping and conquering new lands. In pioneering situations, their task has largely been to establish a familiar domestic environment as a haven in the wilderness. Kolodny (1984) in her studies of diaries and letters written by Euro-American women on the American frontier discovered that, generally, they did not share the same adventure as their men. She found that theirs was often an unwilling journey into unmapped wilderness and that they were often captives in small, makeshift houses whilst men were free to wander, discover and tame. Women, therefore, often went into geographic wilderness following someone else's dream (pp.5-6). Similarly early white settlement in Australia often meant hardship for women. Frost's (1995) *No Place for a Nervous Lady* bears testimony to this.

Geographic exploration and attachment has sometimes been associated with that of the soul (Groover 1999:1; Schama, 1996). An African American spiritual song (Allen, Ware and Garrison as cited in Williams, D.S., 1993:110-111) employs the response 'Go to the wilderness'. Such lines as ''Flicted (afflicted) sister, go to the wilderness', 'Half-done Christian, go to the wilderness' suggest wilderness as a place to find the true self and God. Brock (1993:69) suggests that geographic dislocation creates the critical distance required for reflection. The dominating culture, however, has largely left women out of actual land adventuring. An Australian short story, 'The Drover's Wife' by Henry Lawson (Stone 1974:74), depicts a woman whose situation in life was fundamentally chosen for her. Hers was not to adventure but to survive. Metaphoric wilderness in the lives of the respondents has revealed some common trends. A number of the respondents indicated that they had not generally been socialised to venture into wilderness unaccompanied or as prime adventurers, to contest male-constructed axioms. Respondents indicated that they did so in great fear and with an initial lack of self-confidence. Their stories also revealed that the agenda was different to that of men. They sought or encountered wilderness more as discovery than to conquer and control. As all

respondents reported experiences of metaphoric wilderness, desert or exile, it was not possible to include all instances. I have chosen a selection of situations that, in essence, illustrate common elements, some of which offered more detail than others. It was difficult to allocate succinct categories because many of the themes overlapped within narratives.

Wilderness as Illness, Failure and Loss

Leunig (2004) notes, 'the heart needs to belong otherwise we become ill'. For respondents, there were times of not belonging anywhere. Hampson (in Hampson and Ruether, 1987:1) talks about her break from Christianity as 'one thing after another fell away' and she wondered if any central tenet would remain intact. For a number of participants, wilderness was a loss of faith and meaning. Chittister (2003) in her work *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*, cites this as critical to new faith beginnings. For respondents, sometimes it took the form of the health crisis framed as 'nervous breakdown' or women's madness (Gorman, 1992; Matthews, 1992). Estes (1996:5) regards such breakdowns as due to 'spiritual lacerations of profoundly exploited women' and makes the connection with social restriction. In the lives of respondents, some of these crises were acknowledged as such, and some, medically treated. Others were less obvious even to the sufferer and only recognised retrospectively. In many instances the degree of stress and/or loss of meaning had an identifiable correlation to social expectations.

Breakout and Breakdown

Snorton (2000:286) notes that non-dominant groups have been taught to devalue self-care and identifies the need for women to develop a theology of rest (pp.291-294). She also cites women's tendency to neglect personal illness or disability until it is acute (pp.285-286). Cloward and Piven (1979) regard this somatisation (Freund, 1990:463) of women's unhappiness as 'hidden protest'. Wilderness, though often stark, was sometimes the only way to respite. Respondents indicated that the options, conscious or covert, were between breaking from social expectations and learned thought paradigms, or breaking down physically and/or mentally. Some reported a mixture of breaking down within the process of breaking out. Morton (1985:13) cites this thus, in the words of one

of her respondents, with respect to rising feminist awareness, 'When things get intolerable, you explode'.

Ballis (1999:82) refused to use the term 'burnout' because 'it focuses too much on the individual'. His point is valid in calling oppressive structures to accountability. Margaret chose to leave Australia in the thick of the Anglican debate on women's ordination 'because this church was crazy and making women sick and not doing what it was supposed to do'. Hampson's experience of the Anglican Church in England was similar. She physically healed when she left the church (Hampson, 1986:131). Veronica, in the same denomination, recalled viewing the move to ordained ministry through what appeared as an endless fog of persistent head cold, blocked sinuses and infected lungs. Doctors treated the cough but she said that 'nobody *ever* looked at *why*' and added, '*I know* why I had a cough.' The battle with both church bureaucracy and grass roots community to eventually enter the ordained priesthood made her physically ill. Having been denied ordination by the Melbourne diocese, she made the connection between this injustice and her illness and told a colleague, 'I'll be all right if I ever get ordained!'

Within the Uniting Church, during the same professional transition as Veronica, Eva was diagnosed with breast cancer. She reported, that 'everyone' expected her to 'drop out'. Both Veronica and Eva had the feeling that elements within their respective church structures showed signs of relief when health problems arose that might block their paths to ordination. Eva's marriage breakdown and ensuing emotional problems for which she was hospitalised, posed a further personal challenge in this respect. She described this as a 'shocking' time of 'grief'.

Some clergy concerned with the 'what if's' evoked by women's 'otherness', clearly wanted women candidates for ministry *and* the problems evoked by the issue of ordination to go away (Feith, 1990:34; Porter, 1994:178-179). Others reported that they were tolerated provided they did not confront male clergy with the sexist problematics of church structures. Audrey's story is documented below. Expecting her to function normally in the midst of a nervous breakdown, for which she regarded the male hierarchy was largely to blame, she said that the church hierarchy simply 'ignored' the fact that she 'was out of it (mentally unable to cope).'

Sometimes when self-confidence was still tenuous and respondents were entrusted with a high-ranking task, this too, made them ill. When Lily was the keynote speaker at her denominational state conference (see *Social Clefts*), she was 'more than quaking', she was 'physically vomiting getting ready for it'. Thus some respondents tried to compensate for the fact that they were not men by putting in more effort than was expected of their male colleagues (Scutt, 1994:30). Such conscientiousness often went unrewarded, sometimes made them ill, and sometimes alienated respondents from male clergy camaraderie. Lyn, who encountered wilderness involuntarily as a result of overwork, reported, 'I'd just worked myself so hard that I just was a complete wreck' and then added, 'that would have been alright but I just felt so lonely and nobody rang me and I was just so angry!'

Gilligan (1982:106-127) acknowledges the link between crisis and moral development. With retrospective insight, Lily partly attributes her acute diabetes to the unique stresses encountered as a woman in ministry and partly to a freak and involuntary wilderness experience. The helicopter in which she was a passenger crashed to the ground in the central Australian wilderness, an incident that is more fully expounded in *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*. For Lily this was a defining moment when the things that really mattered became crystal clear within the few seconds it took for the craft to plummet. It was the pivot upon which she strengthened and reformed her faith. It was also the incident that she claims sparked her diabetes and related ailments, and threw her life into physical and emotional turmoil. This part of her story illustrated the non-linear nature of spiritual journey. It was difficult to know whether the accident was the beginning of a wilderness experience or the beginning of reformed faith.

Breaking down in order to break out, or breaking down *because* of breaking out, was common to all respondents. The connection between inner self and physical self was clear. Illness was often a manifestation of the wilderness experience.

Loss of Identity – Annabelle's Story

Annabelle reflected upon what she retrospectively considered to be barren and thirsty years. This recognition came into focus as feminist awareness grew. As a Baptist minister's wife, she endeavoured to live the life she felt was blueprinted for her by the

Baptist ethos. For her, the issue was loss of identity. Required to move far from home immediately after her marriage, for the sake of her husband's job, she recalled,

> Nobody called me by my name but my husband. They all called me Mrs. Brown. So I wasn't there. I'd lost my Christian name and I'd lost my surname, all in a month, and six months later, I ended up an absolute wreck.

The loss of her name indicated that her public life was to be lived through her husband, and her private life was largely governed by her husband's career. At that stage, Annabelle felt that her future was the pre-destined property of her husband and the Baptist Union. She marvelled, 'You wouldn't believe the things that I *haven't* done in my life because it was going to hurt my husband's career'. She said that 'rocking his boat' was not an option and added, 'I don't know why I was so committed to it'.

Respondents' stories often demonstrated that compromise of the soul could cause both emotional and physical illness (see *Literature and Theory* section on 'Social Self and Inner Self'). For Annabelle, 'Rocking his boat' also meant rocking hers (Dempsey, 1986:87-90). To look after the career and social standing of a minister/husband was also to protect one's own location in the scheme of things. A career as a minister of religion relies heavily upon the harmony or perceived harmony of domestic life (Dempsey, 1986; Finch, 1983:28-29). It is one of the few social stations in life where, if a marriage fails, there is potential loss of job, income, living quarters and social status as a direct result. The onus of living out prescribed models of morality, in very specific ways, for the clergy's family, has often rested, to a large extent, on the minister's wife (Finch, 1983:34-35; Dempsey, 1986; Cohen, 1986). However, respondents indicated that this was not true of minister's husbands who usually had careers of their own and did not appear to carry the weight of the above-mentioned responsibilities.

Annabelle stressed the sphere of possibilities for her life that she retrospectively considered lost. She told this part of her story with sorrow and resentment. She missed the job she had prior to marriage, and resented the fact that it was not socially acceptable for ministers' wives to work for wages. Annabelle's loss of self was manifested physically. At one stage she could not get out of bed because there did not seem to be any point to life. She recalled, 'My identity was shattered. Who was I?' She gradually

'cobbled together' an identity as a 'minister's wife' but found there was 'no content in it'. Annabelle concluded that this part of her life was 'a total fraud' and that loss of identity 'does terrible things to you'. This was clearly wilderness. It was socially and spiritually removed from the childhood commitment she had made to Christianity (see *Parents*) yet she felt socially powerless to move on.

Verbal hesitation in the telling reflected the actual era. It was a time in Annabelle's life when both body and spirit could not 'get going'. She felt miscast and trapped in a prescribed life. The notion of fraudulence was one of the key points at which the Cleft became an identifiable feature of personal spirituality. Respondents indicated, at various junctures in the interviews, that keeping up appearances of commitment, at the expense of meaning, is to set the social self at odds with the inner spirit (Grey, 1993:67-80).

Of all the respondents, Annabelle most obviously continued to live with a cleft for which she saw little feasible source of healing or solution. As with Veronica her need for an identity found some 'respectable' resolve in motherhood (Coward, 1992:75-89). This enabled her to find a tolerable niche within her social standing as a Baptist minister's wife. However, unlike Veronica, Annabelle was not able to integrate motherhood wisdom as positive building blocks for liberated identity (see *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*). Motherhood, as an identity, worked reasonably well whilst her daughters were children. Her children's involvement in the church evoked in her a sense of legitimate belonging and wholeness. But as the children grew up and began to make their own decisions about church attendance, this prompted another crisis for Annabelle. As the church became less relevant to each one, Annabelle began to realise the depth and the subtlety of the old world religion to which she had been exposed as a child. Intellectually she had dismissed notions of Divine punishment or the 'malevolence of Satan' (Pagels, 1995.xvi) but admitted that, at a kind of psychic or 'gut' level, such images and influences endured. Daly (1979:56), on this score, cites the common split between the intellectual and the ingrained conceptual. At 'gut' level, Annabelle felt that she was a failure when her children left the church. This theology was not personally orchestrated. Grey (1993:30-47) expounds on the doctrine of women as saved through having children (1 Timothy 2:11-15). When Annabelle's eldest two stopped attending church, Annabelle clung to the hope that her youngest would not 'abdicate'. Annabelle reflected, 'I thought,

if (youngest daughter) leaves the church, I think I'll fall apart'. Not only was Annabelle's identity again in crisis when her youngest child *did* leave the church, she also felt that her three daughters were in peril of their salvation. She panicked because she was unsure of what would happen to her daughters after death. She said,

> You see, there was a real premise that I'm okay because I've got Jesus Christ as my personal saviour, I'm married to a minister, I've got double insurance there, so I'm not going to go to hell but my daughters are, you know (bound for hell).

Her own assured entrée to heaven brought little comfort to Annabelle when her children ceased to attend church. She felt that she had not only failed to secure her own identity within the church as a successful mother, but that she had failed to 'save' her children. For her, church attendance was a reasonable indication of those 'bound for glory'. Annabelle therefore carried the weight of both failure and grief at the thought that she and her children were ultimately headed in separate directions. For Annabelle, hell thus became superimposed over Heaven. Heaven is hell without one's loved ones. She remembered that she would 'go home from church weeping' because other people's children were there and hers were not.

Annabelle described this time in her life as 'total chaos'. Other respondents, through various aspects of their stories, echoed parallels where the institutional church, by its tradition and practice, had impacted on aspects of family life over which they had little control even when feminist awareness was raised. Eva described a sensation of 'drowning' as she lost harmony of relationship with her children. She, like Annabelle, fought to 'claw a way out of the well'. However, Annabelle probably fared the worst because she saw her daughters as her '*whole* spirituality' Her daughters were the means by which she 'cobbled together' her identity within the church. This was a responsibility that she never totally shed. As she gradually faced the irrelevance of church practice to her life, she established a social and spiritual identity outside the church in academic and other spheres as part solution to the cleft. She attributed continued church attendance to powerful early social conditioning and the continuing desire to set an example for her children, despite the fact that this role model had become largely meaningless. This dichotomy was cleft-forming. Annabelle was still at the crossroads when interviewed.

She was still searching for spiritual and emotional health. She was still in the wilderness in many respects.

Marriage Breakdown

As Hawkesworth (1990:86) asserts, single women have historically lived in a kind of no-*man's* or any-*man's* land without a male protector for social legitimacy. Although feminism seeks to bring insight to role bias (Hawkesworth, 1990:172; Stanley and Wise, 1993:92-114; Cranny-Francis et al, 2003:231-237), interviews revealed that traditional socialisation dies hard. Ballis (1999:159-163) stresses the link between successful marriage and viable ministry for men and the rejection by some wives of patriarchal expectations. There were three divorced respondents. Each reported that their respective marriage breakdowns were the most painful results/causes of spiritual and social change in their lives. A common component was a clash between malestream and feminist perspectives. Neville (1974:80) points out that what is said and what is expected are often two different things. As documented below, Eva reported that her husband appeared supportive when she first began theological study, but was ill-prepared for the consequences of her actual graduation.

Kath's marriage broke up when she began to put feminism into practice. She lobbied for women's ordination in the Anglican Church and began to think of ordination as a personal option. This time was a wilderness experience, with regard to her marriage, whilst the acute church dilemma lasted. She described this period as a 'watershed' in her life and remembered thinking, of her impending marriage breakup, 'I have to take this action to be who I am, and God will have to cope.' For the first time in her life she faced the possibility of God's disapproval.

Jo felt the external pressure to fulfill the additional traditional role of wife and mother. This did not fit her personal expectation. The discrepancy eventually led to divorce and the loss of her local church community. The central church hierarchy offered little support or understanding. They appeared to cope with the situation by ignoring it and, as with Audrey's nervous breakdown, expected Jo to continue on in ministry even though she had 'lost the plot'. She described the experience as devastating. She regarded the social expectations of ministry as beyond her, and saw little meaning in church life. Jo

felt she was 'just living out a role' that ignored her inner brokenness and said she had 'lost (her) way totally'. As was the case with Annabelle, she attributed the frequent bouts of physical illness at the time, to the disharmony between the social self and the soul.

The stories of Annabelle and Jo indicate that social reception within their respective church organisations was dependent upon women conforming to traditional roles no matter what office they held in the local church. They also indicated that the church as a structure, though it ordained women as clergy, still held an essentially unchanged opinion of their role in society (Bouma et al, 1996). This left them with two jobs (Klenke, 1996:178-182). Jo's husband accepted her ordination but could not accept her choice to forego motherhood. As indicated in Eva's account below, male theoretical support was easier than its practical application. Jo reported 'hating' what she did to her husband by leaving the marriage, because she 'respected him greatly'.

Eva's husband was enthusiastic when she first began to study theology seriously because, she perceived, it tapped into something in his own identity as an ex-missionary. However, ultimately he was unable overcome traditional thinking. As cited in *Social Clefts*, at first Eva also thought, 'how can a wife of a M*** farmer two hundred miles from Melbourne become a minister?' The first steps were taken with much fear and self-doubt. The ensuing years involved rigorous study, travel between city and country, and the constant process of redefining theology and private spirituality. Metaphorically Eva began to 'leave' home but the country community from which she came still waited for her return to 'normal'. They gave up when even the diagnosis of breast cancer did not bring her home. The decision to persist with her career eventually cost Eva her marriage, her home, and her sense of place in her hometown. After her ordination, it became obvious that the people in her hometown never moved beyond regarding her studies in theology as a hobby, an interest to be marginalised or discarded when other priorities begged attention, such as preserving oneself through breast cancer, for wifehood and motherhood. True to Coward's (1992:105-118) thoughts on women's intrinsic sense of guilt, Eva felt blamed whilst her husband appeared exonerated. She described the process as 'painful' and 'a terrible, shocking grief' that 'landed' her in hospital. However, hospital gave her the necessary respite from everyday life to sort out helpful therapy from abusive mandates. Much of the 'terrible', 'shocking' grief was the result of familiar life

falling to pieces and an unfashioned future looming, and challenges that would stretch untested talents. Whilst it spirited her into the future, this also took its toll on her mental and physical health.

Sense of Abandonment

Three respondents experienced crisis at the beginning, rather than the middle or the end, of their careers. For both, Audrey and Eva, the trauma came when they were still theological students. Both have, nonetheless remained in the ordained ministry.

Audrey, like Margaret, also spent time in 'exile' out of Australia. Having been sent overseas by the Uniting Church in Australia to undertake doctoral studies, she thought this organisation would maintain more than a passing interest in what she was doing. She expected the research experience to be a great learning adventure that would enhance her life and career. This was not the case. With tears she recalled the lack of interest from academics on both sides of the ocean. She explained,

> I took a long, long time over there. I was away for just over seven years. I felt *very, very* alone and unsupported and I didn't know that there were games to be played. I just was there on my own.

The 'aloneness', the unexpected, political 'games to be played' and an ensuing depressive illness necessitated a year's intermission that drew the process out to seven 'long' years. For Audrey, it was a time of cultural and spiritual wilderness. The Australian church that had originally sent her appeared to have lost contact and interest, and she felt forgotten. To illustrate this, Audrey reported that in her sixth year overseas she received a letter from her funding source. It read, 'We don't seem to have very extensive records. What course are you doing?' On the more immediate front, her supervisor showed a discernable lack of interest in her work. She observed 'He couldn't wait to retire' and that 'he'd much rather be playing golf' than supervising her thesis. She told him of her depression and that she was seeing a psychiatrist to which he made no response. It was his wife who noticed Audrey's weight-loss and depression. It was she who set about securing an extension for the deadline of the thesis. Audrey described her time away as 'horrid' and considered that she had 'lost' two years of her life through the experience, further aggravated by the fact that, when she finally returned home, there was

no real opportunity to debrief from the experience. Her tone was one of loss and sorrow and, through many tearful pauses, the general message was one of felt abandonment. She reflected,

> I thought I would, you know, those people that I loved that had sent me over there would hear what it had been like for me, would help me sort out the muddle and (I) would go on from there, and basically they didn't want to know me.

For Audrey. at the outset, this had not simply been the pragmatic sponsorship of an employer, but an organisation to which she felt her inner spirit was akin; an association that tapped into her childhood and adult faith. The account was not so much a criticism of the church, as a disappointment with 'those people that I loved'. There was disjuncture between the idealism of ecclesiastic pastoral care (Hiltner, 1958), healing (Newbigin, 1977:68-73) and sharing each other's loads (Bonhoeffer, 1958:90-93), and what really happened. She said that those who had sent her did not want to hear her 'sad story'. One lecturer simply suggested she 'put it all behind' her and added 'you've got what you went for'. This was a misunderstanding at best. Audrey stressed the discrepancy. She said,

> All they cared about was that I'd come back with a Ph.D. That wasn't what I went for. I just thought it was going to be just a wonderful learning time.

Her disappointment was highlighted by the fact that this lecturer had been the one who had taught her in theological college that 'when people are grieving, they need to tell their story,' but he was not able to hear hers.

The notion that the institution was only interested in the actual 'piece of paper' was further substantiated when she found that no one was actually interested in the findings of her research, or in reading the document, or in helping her to publish any chapters. Men helped each other and had articles published as ongoing development for their careers (Delamont, 2003:67-69; Spender, 1992), Audrey was encouraged to be satisfied with what she had achieved overseas. The statement, 'you've got what you went for', also underscored the assumption, on the part of the church patriarchy, that they knew Audrey's motives and aspirations. Before going away, Audrey had not realised that her research grant was political tokenism to satisfy the supporting of women's endeavours.

She said that the homecoming was, in a way, more shattering than the loneliness she had experienced overseas because, back in Australia, she felt abandoned by her own people. Church authorities wanted her settled in a parish as soon as possible in order to sidestep her problems. Church hierarchy seemed intent upon presenting her as their success story returned from overseas. She said they did not want to confront anything that could have been construed as failure and that they ignored the fact that she was 'out of it' and could hardly function. She talked about the 'game' they played in an interview where she observed protocol and 'said what needed to be said' but the fact that she was an hour-and-a-half late passed unacknowledged, along with what she regarded as other obvious symptoms of one who was 'deeply stressed and distressed'. As Miles (1994:27-36) has documented, church hierarchy often finds the raw facts of human failure too confronting. The patriarchs in Audrey's church regarded the clergy as coping people who did not break down. She felt these expectations were superimposed over the actuality of her depression. She felt that she could do nothing else but comply by saying the things that fitted the coping paradigm. King, S. (1977:79) speaks of women in the church working 'quietly' and 'without fuss'. This kind of complicity compromised Audrey's mental health.

The situation bore resemblance to Jo's feelings of abandonment and compulsion to act out a role. The issue of women in ministry was problematic enough to the church, but an emotionally broken woman, even if she did have a higher qualification, was even more problematic. Audrey knew the irony of this. She said, 'I was a female student. What parish would want me? (Did I) come back with this glorious PhD and enrol for the dole?' The central church hierarchy did eventually 'solve' the problem by sending her away to country Victoria.

A Woman Who Did Not Stay in Her 'Place'

As noted, Eva, originally a 'farmer's wife', entered theological college as a mature aged student. She had been a church organist for 'twenty years or so' and had lived according to what she was 'told to do'. By the time Eva began a Bachelor of Theology, the

reformation process in her life had taken root. It was her thirst for a more academically rigorous critique of theology than was offered to women in her area that prompted her wilderness experience. Through a difficult time with her teenage son she noticed that the faith that she had embraced for much of her life felt 'all wrong' and was largely of no help to her. Eva's quest for a better working philosophy that addressed the everyday dilemmas, initially led her to a locally run Bible study. She attended hoping this would offer what Margaret, Veronica and Audrey had taken for granted from childhood, that is, critical scholarship. She was disappointed at the non-analytical approach 'where you ask a question and you look up a verse from the Bible for the answer'.

For Eva, the Cleft became obvious when she was able to articulate that, despite fulfilling her ascribed role as a woman and an organist, 'everything was all wrong' – words she repeated several times. She was asking far-reaching 'soul' questions of the Bible, but its interpreters were teaching shallow prescriptive theology. She 'knew that wasn't right'. Her quest for proper scholarship was thwarted when she attempted to deepen the discussion at the Bible study by raising critical questions. For this she was treated as a nuisance. She recalled,

> Eventually (the minister) didn't give me any attention at all, he was just arguing with somebody else all the time, and I remember leaving and just sitting in the car and crying my eyes out. I knew it was all wrong and now I know it was a sense of injustice, how dare he treat me that way!

The experience was 'all wrong' because the practice of Christianity did not meet the reality of what was needed by the soul, as it had promised. It was not only the rote learning method that did not satisfy Eva. More pointedly, it was the fact that the minister was dismissive and uncaring, or perhaps unable to cope with the interface where real theology met real life. There was discomfort on his part when Eva stepped out of her role as compliant woman parishioner and began asking questions that expressed her general thirst for academic rigour, and she earthed theology to what was happening in her life. The laws of women's 'niceness', as Tylielle expressed it (see below), were not being adhered to. Scutt (1994:219-237) notes the systematic denial of women as academic thinkers and the need for men to retain the 'upper hand'.

Eva felt the male-controlling command back to domesticity, as a dog being called to heel. Each time she attempted to engage a minister in a discussion on such topics as biblical Greek and Hebrew, the man would connect with her husband and they would 'completely ignore' her. She said,

> I'd get the cups of tea and yet I was the one, my husband knew it, who wanted all this academic stuff, and they'd just ignore me.

Smith, D.E. (1988:34) notes the importance of understanding 'the deprivation of authority and the ways in which women have been trained to practise the complement of male-controlled "topic development"'. Further, Sarah et al (1988:56) talks about the difficulty women have speaking in the presence of men, and the fact that they are 'programmed' to 'defer to the male version of reality.' Thompson and Moyakovsky (2002:161) cite the exclusion of women from Platonic dialogue. Eva was 'guilty' of trying to set the topic for conversation. Gilbert (1988:33-34 in Smith, D.E.) cites women as mere punctuation marks. She writes of the way in which men ignore women in conversation:

> But I am forgetting the language,
> sitting has become difficult,
> and the speaking, intolerable,
> to say, "how interesting"
> makes me weep.
> I can no longer bear to hear
> the men around the table laugh,
> argue, agree,
> then pause, politely
> while we speak,
> their breath held in, exhaled
> when we've finished,
> politely,
> then turn to the real conversation,
> the unspoken expectation of applause.

Eva believed that Christianity is supposed to include *all* people in the real conversation. Moltmann (1978:53) talks accordingly about the friendship of Christians transcending gender roles. For Eva, the Cleft between the theory of Christianity and the lived experience had begun to scream for attention.

Agonizing though it was, this was one of the catalysts that brought about a drastic change to a more authentic life for Eva. She sought out an Anglican minister who encouraged her to pursue her thirst for theological scholarship. This occasion proved a significant turning point for Eva. With a similar watershed revelation as Tylielle's when she left the church (see below), Eva felt a compulsion to make theology, as an academic discipline, central to her life. With clarity she recalled the *exact* moment. She remembered sitting at the table in the family dining area with the material for the course in front of her and thinking 'ordination' before she even read it.

It was not the actual material that inspired Eva but the realisation that the scholarship for which she hungered was not just an exclusive sphere of men's conversation and therefore, not beyond her reach. The written material was right in front of her. It occurred to her, at that moment, that she could actually participate as more than just a 'punctuation mark'. She could actually engage with others on this topic that was so vital to her. The suddenness of this insight was evident in the retelling. As mentioned, the decision to enter the ordained ministry cost Eva her marriage, the community she had known, and caused a rift with her adult children. She was still in the process of rebuilding relationships with her children at the time of interview. Although church-centred life was commended as the moral way to live, the country community in which she lived considered that Eva had stepped so far out of accepted norms as to constitute a perversion of the faith. The unseen urgency, though, was the internal cleft that could no longer be ignored.

The lateness of Eva's action underscores the fact that, although women have interests and talents, they have been programmed to regard men as the serious public achievers (Smith, D.E., 1988:5; Schaef, 1985:23). Veronica's experience bore some similarities. Though her move into the ordained priesthood at a similar age to Eva did not ultimately cost her marriage and home, the journey had the potential to threaten these. She found the church at local level intellectually unchallenging, describing Sunday sermons as 'twaddle' and 'mumbo jumbo' and decided to discontinue attendance for a time, attending only for Christmas and other special occasions.

Tennison (1972:39-45) cites the link between perceived moral discrepancies, illness and religion in women's lives. Unlike Eva, another respondent was a long-time vocal challenger to structures and systems and felt less bound to axioms of respectability. She found spiritual solace and a 'raison d'etre' in a long-term extra-marital love affair. In this respect, like Eva, she reported, as painful, 'the giving up of the icons of good wife, good mother, good (complying) church woman'. These were prescribed roles endorsed by the church that she had 'embraced wholeheartedly'. For a time she floated in a kind of moral and spiritual wilderness with no clear sense of spiritual location.

Lack of Support from Structure

Of the seventeen respondents, fifteen indicated a lack of support from their respective church structures. Each of the fifteen reported that, at some stage, usually a time of great personal need, the structure did not appear to be geared for the particular problems encountered by women ministers, women theological lecturers, or women members of religious orders. Pastoral care, when it occurred, was paternal at best. Women's problems that highlighted hiatuses within the structure were either ignored or met with confusion, embarrassment, or hostility. Eva's situation, for example, raises the issue of what should be offered to a woman who is not satisfied with the lack of depth in a Bible study offered by the local male minister. Jo confronted the structure with the question of support for a woman minister who had stepped outside the bounds of accepted respectability by seeking a divorce because she did not wish to combine her role as a minister with the traditional role of housewife and mother. Annabelle's compliance, on the other hand, caused illness, distress and perpetual lack of meaning. Audrey did not return from overseas as a bright and enthused novice ready to begin her career. She returned a victim of a disinterested male supervisor. Margaret was, perhaps, the one exception to this. Although she suffered inner turmoil because of the debate on women clergy in the Anglican Church, the denomination did support her personally through an exile overseas and that preserved her spiritual well-being. Generally though, respondents indicated that help and recognition was not written into the structure.

Exile as a Door to Re-Creation

Refuge – Margaret's Story

Margaret clarified that her experience was not one of wilderness but of exile. She stated, 'There has never been a time when I didn't have faith, or when I've said, "No, bugger this, I'm leaving", or "I can't stay (in the church)"'. Her time of personal crisis was triggered by the hot debate over the issue of women priests in the Anglican Church in Australia, (Porter, 1989; 1994; Wetherell, 1987). She cited the metaphor of 'cynical rats deserting a sinking ship' circulating at the time that referred to the people who left the Anglican Church because of the debate. She did not lose her faith, nor did she wish to leave the church. It was too much a part of her. But it was hurting her, and so she left for another part of the world and a part of the church that could offer respite. She pointed out that self-imposed exile was her means of ultimate survival within the structure. She distinguished that theologically the metaphor was *Exile* as in Babylon (1 Chronicles 9:1), rather than *Wilderness* after Egypt (Exodus 13 and 14).

She left Australia determined to be a 'good citizen' of the Episcopal Church for four years, knowing that the Australian Anglican Church would always be the 'homeland' despite its unrest. The metaphor she drew differentiated between the Babylonian dispersion of the Hebrews from which they eventually returned, and their flight from slavery in Egypt to which they never returned. Whilst this time out was a healing experience, it bore much similarity to the wilderness experiences of other respondents. It emanated from a conflict that began to impact too painfully upon the inner self and she could not bear to see a beloved church struggling with a justice issue that put women at its centre. Biblical metaphor gave theological justification to her actions. She was not, in fact, a 'cynical rat deserting a sinking ship'. She was taking time to refortify and to ultimately return. Babylon as a metaphor is a little ambiguous. The Hebrew people did not elect to go but were sent by occupying forces (2 Kings 25). Margaret stressed both her choice to go, and her lack of feasible options. She broke with a familiar part of the Rock for another, for the sake of her soul. In the depths of the debate about women priests she had thought, 'I only have to be angry with the church for a couple of years

now' and, as observed in *Social Clefts*, she left the Australian Anglican church while they 'bloody well' sorted themselves out.

Her predicament was caused not-so-much by conflicting theologies within herself that needed reforming, as with some other respondents, but by her already well formed feminism, that conflicted with what she regarded as the hypocritical behaviour of the Anglican Church at the time. She spoke of her choice to leave *and* the sanction that she had from the institution to do this. Herein lies the crux of love for the church as problematic, the church as both damager and nurturer. Having stated that her frustration was with the 'male leadership of the church' Margaret, nonetheless, reported,

> I went with the blessing of the church, with the Archbishop's letter encouraging me to go, knowing that there was a church on the other side of the ocean that was also Anglican that would welcome me and give me a place to worship and a community to belong to. I went with financial help from the institutional church (sanctioned by the men who had the power to do so).

It was thus clear that her personal life and happiness, and the church, were very connected. This impassioned account revealed the depth of Margaret's devotion to the Anglican Church. The 'church on the other side of the ocean that was also Anglican' had overtones of a dear, if then unknown, arm of the same family, the distant blood relation with open arms, offering respite from immediate family conflict. She described the small church in America as 'an absolutely holy place that was full of holy people' and 'a community that was full of healing'. But the divide between good and bad was not clear cut. The offending arm of the church on the home side of the ocean was also not without its compassion. Interviews revealed that exile or wilderness sprung from such dichotomy. Sometimes to stay meant to be destroyed, but to go away completely risked abdication of home and heritage. The 'other' place, 'wilderness', or 'exile' was the geographic, social and/or spiritual location that clarified the murkiness of it all.

Refuge – Amira's Story

Amira's story bore similarities to that of Margaret. She too sought time out and, although she did not travel as far afield as Margaret, she never returned. In the thick of a debate over her ordination Amira found refuge in a Baptist church that was very much on the margins of the Baptist Union. In this way Amira, who already had a background in a

broad based human potential movement, repositioned the role of the wider church and its authority in her life. She fled to its edges for a time. This was aided by an opportunity to take up the role as a non-ordained minister of an inner suburban church. Her congregation had a large amount of autonomy, was involved in the social issues of its neighbourhood, and embraced a liberal theology. This enabled Amira to stay within a mainstream denomination of the church, but to live within a more self-determined immediate sphere. Socially, this fostered an exploration of Christian tenets that would not have been outwardly possible in the more conservative centre of the denomination. As noted later, (see *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*) in Sunday services she would go 'hiking off' beyond the Scripture readings, to areas of thought that would, generally, not have been socially acceptable within most churches of her denomination. This led Amira to formulate a personal theology that was eventually no longer compatible with mainstream Christianity. Amira noted, 'I think faith disappeared quite a long time before I'd left the church.' This factor is symptomatic of the cleft created by the discrepancy between the soul and the social self. It was accentuated by the fact that Amira was not simply a church member, but a minister with the task of leading Christian worship every Sunday. It was the acuteness of the discrepancy therefore that finally forced a decision to move out of the church.

A Watershed Experience

Amira's account revealed that not all who took time out, returned. Tylielle, in fact said, 'I came to love the desert'. Her childhood and youth experiences within the church were personally affirming. The church had encouraged her, throughout her twenties, thirties and forties, to embrace leadership roles at local and national levels. Tylielle did not have a honed clarity of the sexism within the structure of her particular church until her middle years. It was at what many would regard as the pinnacle of her clerical career, when she accepted a prestigious position at a central city church, that her awareness was raised. The duration of Tylielle's compromise was relatively short in comparison to that of other respondents. The androcentric bias of the church came as a sharp shock to Tylielle in a watershed turn of events within her new congregation. She spoke of the experience as her 'birth into a new understanding of what it meant to be a woman'. Tylielle described the awareness escalation graphically. She said, 'I felt my consciousness raised ten thousand metres, about sexism'. She described a 'really deep argument, almost a fight about

sexism' in her first Parish Council meeting. The debate was over a sexist joke in the parish newsletter. A young woman in the congregation had raised the issue. Tylielle's disbelief at the lack of tolerance and antiquated attitudes was still evident as she gave account of 'people crying and shaking their heads'. She described the event retrospectively as 'an omen (bad indication for her future in that place)' and 'hell'.

The next significant event followed not long after the Parish Council meeting. As noted in *Social Clefts*, it underscored the fact that even men who presented as non-sexist often intrinsically act within a limited frame (Schaef, 1985:64-66). For example, American Bishop Hallinan saw the appointment of women to the subservient position of deaconesses as a 'major reform' in the 1960s (Daly, 1975:27). Tylielle reported a meeting about 'sexist words in hymns' in which her male colleague, 'for all his wonderful support of women' failed to understand why the words of the hymns should be changed. 'That was copyright, you know!' Tylielle was disillusioned at the narrowness of her colleague's paradigm for change and challenge. It seemed the rules of the structures could not be violated. He did not appear to see the androcentric nature of the frames in which society operated. For Tylielle, this was a sudden and dramatic feminist dawning. She described the experience as 'enormous'. She said,

> I was in this little vestry having this deep and meaningful about hymns and about not being able to change copyrights even though it was offensive to women, and I felt all the women in the world were suddenly gathered in that room with me.

For Tylielle, this was the turning point. She could no longer think of herself as an ordinary minister whose job description was much the same as that of her male colleagues. She began to think of the things she did and said as a church leader in terms of how these impacted upon women. The men were insisting that the rules must be observed even at the expense of women. It was at this juncture that an identifiable cleft within her spirituality came into focus. She felt a connection with the collective feminine and felt betrayed by the church. She confided, 'I just felt so alienated from that which I'd given my life for'.

Tylielle also reflected upon the ways in which women perpetuate their own oppression. She said that, in her opinion, 'the greatest sin is niceness', referring to the ways in which

women do not speak up about matters of injustice in order to avoid offending (Schaef, 1985:39; Fiorenza, 1993:242). Tylielle described her own attempts at social 'niceness' in the throws of internal turmoil (Coward, 1992:190-191). Her resolve to do away with the 'niceness' for the sake of inner honesty was partial relief but tempered by the fact that she was still the minister. She described the experience as 'a breakthrough into another world' where she had to 'keep going' while she was 'falling apart'. She regarded the mandate to continue as a denial of the soul similar to Annabelle's experience.

However, Tylielle, unlike Annabelle, did not keep going. She lasted two years at the city church. At her last Parish Council meeting she symbolically and publicly burned a significant church report. This was not a flippant act. It took enormous emotional and spiritual strength. She then took fifteen months leave to live alone by the sea and reassess her place within the church and within the Christian faith. This is not an unknown scenario. Weber speaks of time alone in a cottage and walking 'wilderness paths' to find the heart of herself (1987:47). Tylielle's decision was to wrench herself free of the Rock, the church. She told this part of her story with drama and sensitivity to what the journey had cost her (see *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*). For her, the choice was between living with a compromise that tore her soul, or mustering the courage to cut ties with an institution that had been central to her life, and a faith that had given it meaning. When Tylielle left the church, her reformed perspectives were still some distance away. She fled not knowing where she was going. Ironically it was her experience of the church's non-punitive theology from early adulthood that facilitated permission to shed the church and the faith and step into the unknown for a while.

End Note

An appraisal of Walters book, *Soul Wilderness, A Desert Spirituality* (2001:back cover), observes,

> All of us are mystics and prophets but we have played it safe by settling for a surface piety or conventional spirituality instead of searching for a raw and unfiltered encounter with the divine. If we dare to go beneath the carefully built images we can use to make God distant and non-threatening, we can reawaken the mystic within each of us and have a direct experience with the sacred. This

> mystic emerges from the wasteland to help guide our modern spiritual journey into our own inner desert. Terrifying yet welcoming, filled with both danger and promise, this psychic wilderness is where our inner demons must be fought, our false selves unmasked, and our souls reborn. We are then renewed as our original selves, fused with God, and ready to reach out to others in compassion and empathy.

Within the lives of the respondents, wilderness was generally experienced at that point where an escalating awareness of another way of thinking had surfaced to the point where it could no longer stay submerged. This was the point at which dichotomies emerged that could not be easily sorted out. It was within a wilderness experience that some respondents seriously questioned the traditions and the thinking upon which they had based their lives and which substantiate social norms. Spiritual unease was also often perpetuated by the practical reality of having to work within a system that was regarded with increasing suspicion by the individual. The transition caused various forms of chaos that manifested physically, socially and spiritually. It spurred individuals on to reform theologies, spiritualities and social locations. Some argued that wilderness was necessary for the discovery of their 'wild' or 'natural' soul. Swan (2001:21) speaks of 'desert spirituality' as 'abundant simplicity' and the yearning to strip away all unhelpful obstacles in the pursuit of 'complete union with God'. She talks about 'dislocation' and 'relocation'.

Interviews revealed that feeling spiritually lost and socially out of place was largely the result of facing the discrepancy between the soul and the social self. The wilderness experience generally triggered an ultimate redefinition of theological axioms and repositioning of the individual from two perspectives. It included a new understanding of the inner self, the soul and a subsequent reconstruction of the social self. This is how 'Reformation' is defined for this thesis. Inner personal reformation, or at least its beginnings, is what generally gave rise to social reformation. Aspects of this as spiritual and social 'Reformation' are the theme for the following chapters.

Spiritual and Theological Reformation: Re- visioning the Rock

Chapter Focus – Creative Voices from the Fracture

Speaking on the issue of battered women. Bernice Martin (1995:86) makes the observation:

> These women are not timid, colourless people, constitutionally too feeble to defend themselves; they have been tricked out of their own souls. They are women possessed.

Respondents generally expressed the necessity to rid themselves of a kind of occupying force. They have engaged in internal conversation and reflected upon why this is so, and how they might break free of male determined theology and spirituality. Each has wanted to discover a truer self (Rogers, C., 1967:164) underneath a morass of largely male determined impositions.

However, identification of spiritual clefts did not mean an end to the legacies they caused. Nor did it mean that inner cleft is entirely negative. O'Donohue (2000:18,19) speaks of a break within what he calls the 'circle of thinking'. He claims this fracture as a necessary imperfection from which creativity flows. It appears as a discrepancy even when we feel socially at home and at ease. He describes this break as the voice of the soul that calls us on and beckons us to believe, even when things are good, that they could be even better. Interviews indicated that the voice from the fracture is more than a subtle creative force that carries us on. It is often the frustrated voice that draws attention to pain, injustice and conflict. O'Donohue's general metaphor of the voice of the soul crying from the fracture is descriptive of the cleft to which respondents responded and acted. It has been the feature from which reconstruction and repositioning has taken its cue.

Facing clefts and reforming life has included the somewhat formidable process of questioning and reshaping axioms considered among the commonsense and untouchable

rubrics of the Christian faith. This has entailed fresh perspectives on the nature and purpose of God, the person of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the role of Scripture. It has also meant a redefining of personal spirituality. Such reconfigurations often resulted from creative dynamics of necessity that surfaced from wilderness experiences. This chapter addresses such issues in the lives of respondents who indicated that, although all processes of redefining were indelibly intermeshed, the process of spiritual and theological reconstruction generally preceded social reformation.

The Problem of Reconstruction

The issue of tradition-versus-critique has been addressed by various theorists (Carr, 1988:41-42). For example, White (1995:121-145) debates this in the respective and opposing perspectives of Gadamer and Habermas. However, for women it is not just a matter of tradition owning us, but *patriarchal* tradition that is fundamentally ignorant of women's standpoint (Delamont, 2003:115-135; Smith, D.E., 1988:181-187). White (1995:121) thus asks,

> Does feminist understanding *rest on* a 'yes' to the tradition modified by a more or less resounding 'no' to its patriarchal aspects, or does it *rest on* a 'no' modified by an unwilling but inevitable 'yes' to what cannot be avoided? Is the basis of feminist theory a critical appropriation of the tradition, or a critique of the very tradition we cannot escape?

This underscores the often unclear distinction between liberal feminism and radical feminism (Wearing, 1996) and indicates the difficulties of purist feminism. However, respondents did not fit radical/liberal models neatly. Rather they fitted Schaef's (1985:167) suggestion that feminist theologians are 'doing their best', and that rigid theology is 'idolatry'. Respondents have done their best to break free of malestream impositions with regard to various aspects of personal spirituality.

As with sociology (Smith, D.E., 1974:1; Harding, 1987:1; Oakley, 1985:4), feminist theologians have sought to reconceptualise theology to intrinsically include the feminine as opposed to simply adding women to male constructs. They have dug deep, as noted in the *God Images and Christology* and *Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics* sections of the *Literature and Theory* chapter. Daly is even reluctant to frame her thinking as 'new

theology' because it leaves the 'basic assumptions of male religion' unchallenged (Daly, 1986:6). Feminist theorists such as Fiorenza (1983; 1992), Trible (1992), Russell (1974) and Ruether (1975) have reconstructed biblical hermeneutics. Some have used their imaginations to illuminate shadow stories and figures by looking at biblical texts from new perspectives (Winter, 1991a: 1991b). Theorists have also reclaimed and reconceptualised God (Johnson, E.A., 1996; Daly, 1986:19; Gross, R.M., 1979). In doing so they have named the social inequalities and abuses born of a patriarchal image of God (Duck, 1991:31-57). Unlike other disciplines, however, interviews indicated that redefining theology is an inner, potentially perilous journey because it means challenging doctrines and institutions that have assumed custody over human essence. Bendroth (1993:99-104), for example, cites the practice of assuming 'old fashioned' structures as God-ordained. For some, to re-redaction Scripture and re-vision God has been like tampering with God's anatomy and facing the fearful question about whether this is obscenity. Formidable concepts have been raised. For example, as mentioned in *Literature and Theory*, Daly (1986:19) speaks radically of God's castration as a means of liberation. Feminist theology has thus met with conservative disapproval. Black (1987:27-33) writes scathingly that Christian feminists, in altering symbols, alter God's chosen frame of relation to humans. The data collated for this thesis therefore differentiated between experimenting with human theory, as in essentially secular disciplines, and tampering with what is perceived to be sacred theory and its custodians.

Daring to embark upon experimental processes was undertaken by those unable to function within traditional religious paradigms that do not synchronise with deep personal spirituality. Interviews indicated the necessity of reformulating Christian theology. Respondents are part of a movement that has transformed both individuals and the discipline of theology. Jones, S. (2000:49-50) notes that 'feminist theory has affected the theological landscapes' of her students. She quotes one student's metaphor of 'a new road map for driving through the old theological neighborhood'. The student reflected, 'I still recognise the place, but I now see things I missed before, and even the most familiar terrain looks different.' Respondents to this thesis reported similar fresh perspectives.

Reformation within the lives of respondents meant changes to the image of God and to Scripture as vehicle of theology and authority for Christianity. Reforming images of God

fell loosely into sections indicated by the following headings. However, it was not always possible to differentiate between God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. More fluid notions of God tended to merge these traditional demarcations. Reformation also meant changes to personal identity and spirituality.

Women Who Change the Face of God

Interviews revealed that, although respondents set about reforming the Rock with varying degrees of confidence, the struggle to find helpful concepts was common to all.

Byrne (1993:159) observes:

> ... when you're groping your way towards seeing what it means to be an adult woman, you're saying something about God, in whose image you're made, and the normative metaphors you use for God begin to change as well... God remains the God of my childhood, and of Toplady's hymn, 'Rock of Ages', but the rock-like presence of God is now much more diffuse. It is not simply God the Father who sits in heaven, it's Father and Mother and Parent and Lover and Friend and Presence - above all Presence.

Byrne intimates that images of God change as a matter of course within the process of growing up. However, respondents reported that childhood images of God die hard and that the male image of God, in particular, did not change with the simple passing of time or maturation. For them, changes were generally deliberate, painstaking and soul-searching. The dominant male image of God was part of their collision with the Rock and it took courage to venture out against a tide of historic opinion and face the prospect of getting it wrong.

Byrne's experience underscores the Christian tradition of anthropomorphising God in order to personalise God. However, this has not always been a helpful restriction. Whilst all respondents reported having changed or amended their image(s) of God as necessary to the survival of their faith, dematerialising God proved easier intellectually than it was at 'gut' or personal spiritual level. Respondents reported residual, often unhelpful, anthropomorphised images of God known from childhood. Almost all acknowledged spiritual clefts caused by the mono-icon of God as Father. Some threw out the depiction of God as male or, at least, as Father; others simply objected to male images as the *only*

icons. Some embraced the idea of God as female and some moved to more shapeless notions of God.

God's Gender Revisited

Ruether (1998a:86) refutes the appropriateness of Father-Son and Parent-Child metaphors. McFague (1989:139) goes so far as to say that when the only model for the God/human relationship is Father/child to the exclusion of all other metaphors, it becomes adulterous. Although, at times, many respondents had felt alienated from mainstream Christianity due to the church's imposed insistence on Father-God, Mother-God was not an assumed remedy (see *Parents*). It needed social rationalisation. Generally, God as female has been considered heretical (Daly, 1975:180-184; Grey, 2001:9-19). The male pronoun has generally been considered the only legitimate manner in which to speak of God. Wren's critique (1989:84-110) on male God metaphors underscores this and Johnson, E.A. (1996:3-6) notes that God-naming is to conceptualise God-function, therefore there is more at stake than the simple substitution of 'women-identified words such as mother.'

To be taught that, simply by being human, you are made in the image of God and then to be confronted with images that do not come close to who you are, is confusing and cleft-forming (Miles, 1994:3). Christians have needed to anthropomorphise God in order to realise the longed-for God/human personal relationship. To speak of God in neutral terms is problematic for both traditionalists (Baillie, 1977:108) and feminists (McFague, 1989:141). Seeking the Grand Spiritual Soul has been part of the process of individual soul finding and spiritual reformation for respondents. Essential to this has been the search for non-androcentric images of God. All respondents, with the exceptions of Annabelle and Jo, reported having given themselves permission to pursue this. Annabelle still struggled with the possibility of committing heresy. Jo still had misgivings about the ability of femininity to be more than insipid and powerless.

Confident in her own ability to be theologically and spiritually creative though she was, Sarah still wrestled with socially imposed images of God. Discerning the dysfunction within her own family of origin (see *Parents*), she was able to identify why she did not find God-as- parent comfortable. Sarah found parenting God-images, including that of

the bearded old man in the sky, unhelpful (Ruether, 1998a:86). She found it liberating to discard both the idea of the church as 'family' and God as its male head (Bendroth, 1993:103).

Mickale commented, 'God's not about gender…it's about being connected to the life force, being connected to each other.' Her stance, in emphasising the importance of connectedness over gender, raises the question of whether or not this devalues the feminist perspective. Women have lived with a male image of God for so long. Now that there are some emerging female images of God within Christianity, to suggest that 'God's not about gender' proved problematic to other respondents given the personal nature of God taught by Christianity (Lewis, 2002:160-165; Brandt, 1969). However, for all respondents, especially for Mickale, 'Father' as a sole image of God needed resolution. As mentioned in *Parents*, Eva, who suffered as a child at the hand of an abusive father, totally rejected the God-as-Father image.

Amira and Tamar could not fathom the kind of Father who needed appeasement by the killing of a son. For Tamar, despite her theological freedom, the cross event was still a 'major' and unresolved problem. Amira, however, who left the church, reported investing no particular intellectual energy into its reconstruction. She said the image of God as any sort of parent and/or mandator of sacrifice 'just dissipated like the morning fog'.

As noted (see *Parents* and *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*), re-imaging God was not simply a matter of switching to God as Mother. Both Margaret and Sarah alluded to mother as manipulator (Secunda, 1993:26-38). They indicated the powerlessness and pathetic-ness of this image (pp.81-94). 'Father' and 'mother' images were not necessarily counterparts of one another. For some the idea of God as Mother carried with it a set of problems that were different from, but just as unhelpful as, Father God (Duck, 1991:55-57; Weber, 1987:47). As noted in *Parents*, the image of God-as-parent bore general relevance to the relationships respondents had with their mothers and fathers. Therefore, for some, the desire to reform theology into more honest and spiritually compatible paradigms necessitated breaking free of the tendency to play the role of a child in the God/person relationship. Kath found God as parent 'disabling' because it negated the

idea of God relating to people as mature adults. Reuther (1993:69), on this score, cites the image of God as 'a neurotic parent who does not want us to grow up'. Departure from God as parent was part of the reformation process by which respondents affirmed the adulthood of women generally (Estes, 1996:4).

However, as a reformed God-image, God-as-Mother worked for some. Like Sarah, Joan drew the comparison between God as Mother and her own mother. By contrast, though she regarded her mother as supportive without being overbearing. Joan was one of two respondents who did not report strained mother/daughter relations. She reported that a feminine image of God 'spoke' to her when her mother died (see *Parents*). She considered God as having the characteristics of her mother 'only much more so'. There was thus an acute distinction between Joan's stance on this issue and those of Sarah, Margaret and Jo. Not only did God have the characteristics of her mother, but in amplified form. She stressed that, especially in times of difficulty, her 'instant' (reformed) reaction was to 'reflect on God in feminine ways'. For Joan, God as mother became the much more 'immediate' confidant who arose from her own mother's ashes to assume the epitome of caring Motherhood. Feminist theology helped Joan discover her eternal Mother.

Mary was also comfortable with the image of God as Mother although not as sole icon. She reported the role feminist thinking, literature and encounters had in re-imaging God. Although she spoke about widening theology and spirituality rather than a substitution of images, there was a hint of confusion and 'double vision' (Kelly-Gadol, 1987:17). She spoke of 'a punishing God' who 'demands' on one hand, and a 'very compassionate God, a Mother who's totally loving' and 'compassionate', on the other. As did Sarah, Margaret, Jo and Joan, Mary attributed certain set phenomena to femininity. For Mary, these included compassion and unconditional love. In keeping with the allocated role of women as the caring nature of God (Kingston, 1977:22), Margaret regarded her clerical role as 'motherly'. By implication, punishing and demanding aspects, whether socially constructed or biologically based, belonged to masculinity (Klenke, 1996:137; Bouma, 1992:123). Although in different religious orders, both Joan and Mary experienced hardship and social isolation in an institution that deprived nuns of what Mary considered a 'normal life' (Flannery, 1980:656-675). Brigitta (1993:288), in *Unveiled* writes, 'I

suspect that many of us have not learnt to be comfortable with ourselves...I spent *years* not wanting to know myself, quite effectively, and it didn't work in the end, it absolutely broke down.' Mary, in particular, spoke of the 'lost' twelve years of her life when she was 'locked up' in a convent. She noted that this could account for her reconstruction of an image of God that was less austere and more caring than she had known.

Tamar, however, who was also comfortable with the image of God as Mother, did not define the feminine in such a traditional frame. She explained that God is not a 'romantic' mother (Ruether, 1975:22), but someone who establishes 'justice', 'right relations', 'friendship' and 'wisdom'. She regarded God as 'Mother of Wisdom, Mother of the Universe and Mother of All Living Things'. Her thoughts resonated with Ruether's (1975:37-46) citing of ancient images. Unlike Sarah and Jo who could not abide God as Mother because of the negative view they carried of their mothers, or Joan, Mary and Margaret who regarded motherhood as predominantly a caring, spending, 'romantic' role, Tamar's idea embraced a different concept of motherhood and femininity (Hampson, 1990:92-102). Her evolution of God-images appeared confident and well thought out. There was little trace of feminine superimposition over what had been a male image. This bore similarities to Mickale's eventual identification of a strong and wise Mother-God beyond Christianity in Celtic spirituality (Husain, 1997:34-35; Stone, 1976:24). Tamar named God as 'Sophia' (Cady et al, 1986; Johnson, E.A., 1996), more accessible than traditional male God images and a personal encourager. She drew an important demarcation between old images and new in noting 'I see God's power as enabling, not controlling.' This represented a significant shift from the stream into which she was originally converted as a teenager with an image of God as mandator and restrictor. All respondents reported this kind of general shift but Tamar appeared to have travelled the farthest.

Shades of stances relative to conservative male God images were evident. Annabelle reported her struggle to image God as feminine. She said, 'I've tried to but I just can't do it'. She attributed such failure to the perception that 'goddess' theology was outside the church and she was reluctant to venture out. As indicated, Annabelle was raised within a strict tradition that preached harsh consequences for heresy. Her angst about making too many changes was evident. This part of her story is testimony to the efficacy of

androcentric Christianity's ousting of feminist expression (McFague, 1989:139). Annabelle was obviously feminist in other aspects of her life. Her stance highlighted the inconsistency among respondents with respect to feminist perspectives and the strength of androcentric enculturation. Morton (1989:112-113) cites reversion to socialised theology in situations of fear. This appears as a 'hand brake' on feminist theological expression and practice. In this regard, Veronica said that she was too self-conscious about 'God as She' to be comfortable but also conceded that such discomfort did not make sense.

Kath noted the social and mental challenge posed by diversion from a male-as-normative model. She identified the area of public prayer as problematic in this regard. Collective prayer is an area where the public and private spheres meet. For the sake of those within a congregation where she is required to pray aloud, Kath acknowledged the mandate to address God as 'Father' but tried to counterbalance this each time by an inward reinforcement that this is not the overriding or *only* image of God. The healing the divide between social and inner life was thus incomplete.

Lyn, like Kath, reported trying to accommodate both traditional images and feminist images of God. As with the *rechem* (womb) imagery in Hebrew tradition (Ruether,1993:56; Duck, 1991:59-83), Lyn said that she thought of God as a woman who has to go into labour in order to give birth and who is therefore 'a God of pain and suffering and sorrow' (Trible, 1990:25; Maitland, 1990:154). For her, birth of new ideas and spirituality emanated from a course that often inflicted grief and pain (Rankka, 1998; Dunphy-Blomfield, 1994).

The process of suffering in order to redefine life was particularly true for Eva. Her background in terms of conservatism was similar to that of Annabelle. Unlike Annabelle, though, Eva broke free of the mandates that still appeared to constrain Annabelle. Eva reported a fluency in her practice of calling God 'She' both publicly and privately. She drew the contrast between the days when she never thought to question the use of male language as generic, and recent years when she rejected androcentric terms and thinking. For Eva, the reconstruction of theology and spirituality paralleled her social repositioning. Her marriage and family life broke down largely because of her clarified

ideological stance regarding women. Perhaps the radical domestic changes gave her extra permission to relinquish more of the old life on a variety of fronts, whereas Annabelle remained in her marriage, and her social status of minister's wife did not change. In the end, as Dempsey's study (1986:87-90) of clergy wives observes, Annabelle had more social pressure to maintain the status quo and much to lose if she did not. Eva, on the other hand, had already lost her marriage and her old social status as a respected farmer's wife.

Of all the respondents, Tamar appeared to be most comfortable with feminine images of God. These appeared to flow easily between inner and social life. Although God was specified by name, 'Sophia' (Ruether, 1993:58), Tamar's image depicted the nebulous feminine wisdom who 'might encourage you to go in wise ways'. Her thoughts revealed wide contemplative feminist reading. They also indicated a general trend among respondents to view God as more fluid than traditional images. For Tamar, God became less pictorial and more to be 'found in encounters with human beings'.

Form and Formlessness

Walker (1982:218-219), in *The Color Purple*, observes of some African theology, 'not being tied to what God looks like, frees us.' In some cases the move away from androcentric God images has also meant a general move away from an anthropomorphised image of God (Johnson, E.A., 1996:20-21; see also Brock, 1984:68 as mentioned in 'Women's Relation to Jesus – Underside Theology' in *Literature and Theory*). This constituted an important and fearful shift in thinking because, whilst respondents regarded fluidity as more honest and flexible than prescribed imagery, it meant that God became less knowable, less predictable, less overtly sheltering and, perhaps, less open to direct appeal.

For some, God became more of a presence than a tangible image. Annabelle observed God to be beyond language and image and added, 'it (the formulation of a specific God-image) doesn't bother me' indicating that she had been through the 'bothered' stage. Amira noted that, for her, God had 'changed dramatically' to a presence with no name, gender or human form. Similarly Kath reported a resolve to live with 'the ambiguity of God', rendering divine identity less knowable. As with Annabelle, she also added, 'this

does not trouble me.' Her comments typified an emerging contentment among respondents with less concrete and less fixed images of God than they had known in the past. This opened the way to creative, inclusive and less threatening notions of God to whom women could relate more directly. For example, Tamar, having revisioned God as 'Wisdom' and as feminine, saw God as 'much more a friend' with whom the relationship was 'much deeper than it was before'.

For Sarah, reconceptualising God meant challenging the theology that rendered God totally 'other' to human beings. That is, that God alone is good and that human beings are intrinsically bad and in need of the socialising influence of God through religious structures to make them good. Blaikie (1983:52), for example, talks about the church as 'rescue ship' in this regard. Unlike many other respondents, Sarah indicated a consistent confidence throughout her life in her own ability to reformulate theology. She had few problems tying God's image in with that of a good person. She reasoned that the 'good parts of human nature' provide insight about the nature of God.

Attempts to express the intangible drew on various metaphors. Mickale, as noted, spoke of God as connectedness. Amira alluded to a 'collective consciousness' within feminist thought with regard to God (Plaskow and Christ, 1989a:97). For Audrey the imageless presence of God was integrated with familiar concepts she had applied as a science undergraduate. She explained,

> I worked with concepts of electrons and magnetic fields and all sorts of things that existed and had power without having form so, for God to be of that ilk, was not an issue for me. It was not necessary for me to form an image as such.

With some similarity, Veronica drew upon a mathematical metaphor. She explained that, when asked to prove the theorem of Pythagoras at school, she had told the teacher that there was no need to 'prove' it because she 'believed' it. In adult life this became an apt parallel for her theological stance. She grew to be comfortable with the idea of God as a largely unprovable entity with no definable form and no specific name.

Margaret, who was also comfortable with a more intangible image of God, said that she tended, these days, to hone in on that component of The Trinity (God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that was more fluid anyhow, that is, the Holy Spirit. She described the Holy

Spirit as 'very slippery, very fluid' who 'can't be pinned down' and that 'you can say a lot about the Holy Spirit without frightening people as much as you would if you started saying stuff about the Trinity.' She thus inferred that fixed images of God have been frightening (Daly, 1975:180; Heine, 1989:14-18). Margaret welcomed the idea of God being 'slippery' and therefore less subject to (dominant) human definition.

Whilst interviews revealed that God's largely indefinable images were an important part of reformed theology and spirituality, there were some attempts to verbalise the intangible. Sarah talked about the biblical and ungendered notions of 'breath', 'wind', 'wisdom' and 'caring' as conveyed through Hebrew Scripture. Tamar referred to God as a 'flash of insight', and talked about the shift that she had made from the monarchical view of God as controller to God as 'imminent and in the depths of life' who is 'around and within, and not over and above'. Her image typified the general trend among respondents to seek out notions of God that were less threatening to women. Margaret also commented on this 'imminence' as an intrinsic spirit that is 'integrated' and 'cumulative' and 'constant' within the pursuits of everyday life. She explained, 'Every book I read, every person I have a conversation with changes what I know about God'. Her thoughts also typified a deliberately unfinished view that was open to constant reshaping.

Respondents indicated a broadening view of an all-embracing God who was not confined to the narrow-streamed definitions with which they grew up. Shades of theologies that once separated people into denominations were no longer the focus. There was a general quest to recognise the connectedness of living things as a characteristic of God thus articulating a particular spiritual dimension to the feminist connection between women and nature (King, Y., 1984:59; McFague, 1987). Sarah commented on God as 'carer' for the whole of creation including creatures, rocks and trees. Amira offered a definition of God as 'the sum total of all that is', a spirit who 'shakes in different ways in different places at different times' and 'that inner link that links us all together, whether we're human or animal or vegetable or mineral or whatever' (McFague, 1993). Respondents indicated significant motivation to discover social (Harding, 1991:191-248) and spiritual (Williams, D.S., 1993:178-203) commonality and affinity whether or not they had remained within the church. Amira, who left the church, observed an essential and

profound link that 'never goes away' and that, 'Human beings are a little bit like pimples on an orange skin, they're all raised up and they're all quite separate but they're all linked together'. She said this subliminal link was fairly close to her understanding of 'whatever you want to call God'. Kath described God as 'a profound mystery at the heart of life' and who, for her, 'chooses to be known through our humanity, which is in Jesus most intensely focused.' Although more implicitly Christian than Amira, her comments echoed a general trend, among respondents, to open up and blur the borders of defined spirituality and theology.

Joan reported her own reformed belief that 'God is within and beyond everything that exists, transcendent and yet imminent'. She spoke about her traditional Catholicism as something of a disadvantage because of its narrowly defined theological and social perspectives and said that she now sees God more as Spirit 'filling the whole earth'. For her, connectedness now extends to those who traditional Catholicism may perceive as the weakest. This inclusive theology was quite distinct from the exacting traditionalist theology from which respondents emanated. They indicated that to arrive at such broadened views meant mustering courage to fly in the face of encoded personal and social axioms. For example, many respondents were taught that connectedness with all living things, as expressed in religion, was a kind of pantheism and therefore not Christian.

Interviews indicated that sacred ground was being tilled over, flung around, uprooted and analysed. There was a general strengthening of confidence within the individual to 'know' some things without traditionalist or scientific fortification and to be less anxious about not knowing others, or getting it wrong. Kath said she had learned to trust her instincts with regard to the truth of God's existence and, in jest, added 'if there is no God, I want my weekend back!' Her quip was indicative of the shadow of doubt now allowed and her move away from having to embrace certainty or someone else's inspiration of who God is and how God functions.

Jesus

Coll (1994:51) identifies that, 'Christology has proven to be the most difficult area to critique because some people think that questioning how the symbol of Jesus has been used against women is to deny the very being and message of Jesus.' Respondents needed to overcome their fear of decimating Jesus and the possible accusation of ingratitude for what he had done for them. They varied in their reformed responses. As mentioned, the main problems stemmed from Jesus as male, Jesus as saviour, and Jesus as sacrifice (see *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*). To critique and re-image Jesus proved emotionally and intellectually challenging because of the Christian belief that he is God incarnate (Pannenberg, 1973:38-40; Baillie, 1977; Kasper, 1977:163-196). For some, Jesus as problem was resolved in the reformation process. Others reported that Jesus was not a particular problem *until* the reformation process.

Jesus as Friend

For some, Jesus has sustained continuity throughout their lives. Mary, for example, reported that 'an immense part' of her life was still focused and modelled on a personal Jesus. She conceded that her Christology had changed the least of all her theology. Although her images of a punitive God changed, Jesus, as safe refuge from this, essentially had not.

Joan, also a nun, was raised a Catholic as was Mary. However, unlike Mary, the focus on Jesus came as part of the reformation process. For Joan, there had been distinct lines of demarcation between Divinity and humanity. For her, Jesus bridged this gap. With the discovery of Jesus as friend she reported a shift in the focus of her theology from Divinity to the humanity of Jesus. She described the presence of Jesus as a 'gentle sort of nudging' and an awareness of 'a companionship'. Joan also referred to an image of Jesus 'with his arms around children'. Unlike Kath, Joan found comfort in the parent/child model. For Joan this was a reformed way of regarding God who had previously been conveyed through the somewhat austere practices of the religious order to which she belonged; someone to be obeyed.

As members of religious orders from the 1950s, both Mary and Joan experienced times of loneliness and feelings of personal alienation from the world and even from other

members of their respective orders. They reported the need for a gentler, more accessible, reformed image of God than was sometimes portrayed by the church. Mary hung on to her childhood image of Jesus as both a means of survival and as a means of regarding the faith as an adventure. Jesus developed as a dashing, daring challenger to the status quo. She quipped, with enthusiasm, 'I'm married to Indiana Jones!'(Lucas and Kauffman, 1981). However, this metaphor placed Mary as secondary adventurer. Joan discovered a gentler image as part of the reformation process in later life. Both women struggled to discover a theology of pastoral care for self within their respective, sometimes ascetic, social locations (Snorton, 2000:285-294). Mary and Joan indicated a need for a tangible human personal comforter as part of this process. For them Jesus, although male, offered a personal and humane aspect of Christianity.

Jo took similar refuge from the severity she sometimes encountered in church structures and practice, in the figure of Jesus. In this respect, her concept of Jesus was that of a figure outside the system. For her, like Mary, Jesus developed as an 'unpredictable', 'uncontrolled', 'non-conformist' 'free spirit' who infused her energy levels and gave sanction to her own free spirit. Unlike many of the respondents, Jo was able to see something of herself in Jesus. Jo's notion of Jesus was similar to Tamar's image of God described as 'enabling and not controlling' or 'over and above' and Margaret's depiction of the Holy Spirit as 'slippery' and adventurous. As mentioned, Jo presented as less overtly feminist than the other respondents and claimed that she was comfortable in a 'man's world'. It is significant that she did not relate oppressive, dominating or controlling images of a male Jesus. Her perceptions were of Jesus as an understanding friend whose 'free spirit' she shared. This intensified over the years.

Mickale similarly reflected that, after many years of espousing mainstream church hermeneutics, it was only when she began to *think* for *herself* that 'the image of Jesus became internal rather than external' and that there were significant differences between the two. Jesus was no longer the strict church elder. He now had a more compassionate, woman-friendly identity.

The Figure of Jesus Redefined

Some respondents found Jesus as male, and God as having sent Jesus, problematic. It rendered God androcentric. Interviews revealed much general searching for explanations. For some the problem was not overcome. Theresa, more overtly feminist than Jo, nonetheless reported having arrived at a conclusion that fitted with both the maleness of Jesus and her feminist perspective. She reflected,

> I believe Jesus *had* to be male because men needed to be redeemed and I think that Jesus taught men a whole new way of relating, or *tried* to teach men a whole new way of relating, and I think that only a male could have broken out of a male confine and reached out to women in some of the ways Jesus did.

Her argument was that men needed a new role model to teach them about gender relations. It is notable that she amended 'taught' to 'tried to teach' inferring that the wisdom of Jesus is often unheeded. As Coll notes (1994:66), Theresa indicated that Jesus' maleness had been used against women in a way it was never meant to be. Her ideas echoed those of Jo's 'free spirit' Jesus who broke out of constrictions and, in doing so, 'reached out' to women. Theresa spoke of Jesus as one who 'threw out a lifeline' and offered women 'something that was not available' to them. By this she meant a new way of thinking about women's social position and spiritual identity. She drew upon the biblical story of the Canaanite woman who dared to challenge Jesus when he refused to help a non-Jew, and how Jesus stood corrected by her (Matthew 15:21-28). Theresa took this as proper and honest gender relations. She described it as an 'awesome' revelation and a contrast to many traditional depictions of Jesus as a sinless unchallengeable icon (Baillie, 1977; Bornkamm, 1973; Kasper, 1977). She added that Jesus had 'tried' to save men from a kind of 'sickness (as oppressors) they had created for themselves'. The word, 'tried' inferred at least part failure. She regarded the 'sickness' had, to an extent, pervaded the socially constructed figure of Jesus. She conceded a continuing problem but discounted the 'real' Jesus as part of it. Theresa learned to trust her own demythologising. Mickale's view concurred. Mickale felt that Jesus *was* a saviour but that androcentric hermeneutics had missed the point of Jesus as a figure of social justice and reform and formulated him as an icon that fitted androcentric structures.

Respondents struggled to overcome taught hermeneutics on Jesus. Despite the graphic metaphor of Indiana Jones, Mary also referred to the less gender specific 'Spirit of Christ' rather than Jesus the person, as a transforming catalyst in the lives of Jesus' male disciples (Johnson, E.A., 1996:150-169).

New Light on the Cross Event

As noted in *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*, crucifixion hermeneutics, particularly atonement theories of a God who required his pound of flesh, were problematic. Such theology has perplexed both women and men (Brock, 1984; Johnson, E.A., 1996:158-161). However, feminist theory questions the necessity of honour sacrifices and views them as a fearful aspect of male thinking central to war (Daly, 1986:114-122; Lloyd, 1988). Margaret thus alluded to the potentially 'frightening' aspects of God (Wenham, 1975).

For Audrey, reformation of God's image outside male paradigms meant she could begin to 'risk being in God's presence'. Her comment inferred that some traditional images and notions of God perpetuated through church structure appeared unsafe. These included the God who had required animal sacrifices (Exodus 12:1-13), ethnic cleansing (Deuteronomy 7; Deuteronomy 20; Exodus 23; Wenham, 1975:119-147) and the death of his own son (Matthew 27). As God has thus been problematised as abuser (Blumenthal, 1993:154-155), the question arose as to how individuals could 'risk' being in the 'presence' of such a God. Audrey concluded that atonement and sacrifice theology no longer made any sense, nor did the intrinsic 'otherness' of Jesus.

Women's social position differs from that of men in that they have been socialised to the concept of men dying for them (Farrell, 1994:74-75; Lloyd, 1988). To regard the figure on the cross as a symbol of the self was a major shift in thinking for some respondents. Discovering the humanity of Jesus and its affinity with, as opposed to difference from, women was important to Kath. She spoke of the lack of trust some traditional theology had in humanity. She made the distinction between being 'redeemed *from* our humanity' which she once regarded as 'so thoroughly flawed that we can't trust it' or 'human reason' or 'yourself', and regarding Jesus' humanity as 'our humanity'. She said,

> Jesus did *not* become flesh other than the flesh in God that you and I have *right now*, so we are redeemed through *our* humanity, which means that our humanity *is*, in fact, trustworthy.

In this respect, Kath articulated many of the respondents' original tenets regarding doubt about the inherent goodness of humankind (Coward, 1992:105-118; Cleverly and Phillips, 1988:29-32). Eva reflected similarly, 'You can relate to the cross if you put aside the salvationist side.' Her inference was that Jesus' death on the cross was more a statement about the goodness in ordinary humanity, than it was about 'otherness'. Amira illustrated this. She talked about the many people who had been crucified in the defence of justice and good causes and the many 'Marys' who had wept, thus inferring that the 'Christ' was more than the man, Jesus (Johnson, E.A., 1966:150-169). Amira confided that the idea of a saviour became a 'complete non-issue'. She said that she had 'ditched the doctrine of the atonement', that is, the notion that Jesus died to save us, thus taking our place on the cross (Baillie, 1977). In similar vein, Audrey admitted that now she was 'not big on the saviour stuff.'

As observed, to question taught tenets about Jesus has been considered sacrilegious by traditionalists (Coll, 1994:51). The conditioning of women to distrust their own authority (Belenky et al, 1986) renders this doubly precarious. Mary broached the sacred ground of 'resurrection' theology (Bornkamm, 1973:180-186) and concluded, 'It doesn't really matter whether Jesus rose from the dead or not. But I like the resurrection story…' then added the qualification, 'I suppose that we've been socialised into believing them (that is, androcentric Jesus theologies).' Her view revealed the lingering doubt and the unfinished nature of respondents' reformations. She recognised the dynamics of her own socialisation but could not totally break free.

Respondents risked exploring possible definitions of Jesus outside the prescribed theology perceived as essential for God's approval (Rankka, 1998:70-71). They did so in order to develop theologies that made sense. Sarah argued that to 'give human beings freedom' and 'some level of autonomy', God could not 'totally contain the chaos'. She reasoned that, 'To totally contain the chaos would have been to create robots.' It was with great caution that respondents dared to think outside 'robotic' mode with regard to the sacred cross event.

Saying 'Good-bye' to Jesus

Amira had problems with aspects of Christological hermeneutics. She regarded the historical Jesus as fact but saw 'the interpretation and understanding of what His life meant' a 'very different exercise'. Taught images of Jesus, as with those of God (the Father), had not made sense to her (see *Parents*). Amira decided that trying to reconstruct biblical hermeneutics, in the end, was not worth the effort. Notably, both Theresa and Amira referred to Jesus as a policeman, a metaphor from which they had both moved on. Amira left the church and the notion of Jesus as central to her spirituality. Theresa was able to revision Jesus and stayed within the church. However, both needed to free themselves of Jesus as male rule-enforcer.

Reconstruction of personal faith was not an easy process. It required a confidence in personal 'underside' theology (see 'Women's Relation to Jesus – Underside Theology' in *Literature and Theory*) Tylielle, like Amira, left the faith and the church. Whilst Amira tended to intellectualise the process, Tylielle's account was quite emotional. She spoke of Jesus as a friend with whom she had parted company. She said, 'at one stage I felt that Jesus was the only person who understood what I was going through'. After fifteen months alone in a cottage by the sea (see *Wilderness*) she recalled, with both grief and relief, the last time she had 'anything to do with Jesus'. She said,

> I went for a walk with him on the beach and told him that I had learnt an enormous amount from him and I (said goodbye to him). I felt I'd outgrown him.

The decision to move on from Jesus was not painless. As mentioned (see *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*), Tylielle confided that she had always thought of Jesus as her 'big brother', 'teacher' and 'visionary' who 'understood' her. She had also regarded him as a 'universal brother'. In this respect, Jesus had been her connection to the rest of humanity. Tylielle's heartrending account illustrated that respondents not only faced the shedding of unhelpful theologies but also the pruning of endeared images in order to move on.

Problems Caused by Raised Awareness

Theresa, Amira and Tamar indicated that Jesus was not a problem *until* they began some serious feminist thought and they began to address the rumblings of the clefts within their respective spiritualities. Tamar said emphatically,

> Early on, Jesus was God on earth. *Now* Jesus *is* a problem because Jesus *does* represent masculinity and that's a *major* problem!

Unlike Theresa, Tamar was not able to see Jesus as a purposeful role model for men. Her evolving theology suggested the broad dilemma of respondents. The choice was between the old social or philosophical position that never rang true, and a feminist position that accentuated new aspects of life not previously consciously problematic (Kelly-Gadol, 1987:17; McPhillips, 1994:249; Tolbert, 1990:5). With heartfelt dilemma, Brock (in Brock and Parker, 2001:148) recalls the beginning of her doctoral studies and the 'split' to her soul, due to the challenge of growing feminist awareness, to entrenched Christianity (see thesis *Introduction*). She talks about the *fear* arising from such incompatibility. As with respondents to this thesis, there was no comfortable position except a resolve to keep searching. Tamar reported that she had 'welcomed the work of feminist scholars who've seen that Jesus is the image of the wisdom teacher'. She said, 'Jesus as the true vine is all right' and then added, 'It's not *totally* all right because the masculine images continue'. Her struggle with incompleteness was obvious. It necessitated challenging authoritarian models of God, Scriptural hermeneutics and the assumed authority of the church. The words 'all right' but not '*totally* all right' reflected the lack of neatness and the agony of endeavour to find apt feminist theory for Jesus and for Christianity generally.

Plenary

It was discovered that, with the exception of Mary for whom Jesus as personal friend was a comfort to her in an austere convent environment and Jo who was inspired early by a non-conformist image of Jesus, as a personal faith entity, Jesus needed to change identity and position within the lives of respondents. However, as Tamar suggested, the process of this reformation was not always complete. Despite the preference for Jesus as friend and the problems surrounding the crucifixion, the cross was still the most visual symbol of respondents' faith in their homes and in the form of jewellery at the time of the interviews. Veronica reported, 'I really have no image of Jesus in my mind or my heart now (that is: as a reformed image),' but admitted, 'The house is (still) littered with images of Jesus.' Save for Tylielle and Amira, who have left the church and the faith, interviews revealed that Jesus, though often unclarified, was still important

The Holy Spirit

As cited, one aspect of rethought theology and redefined personal spirituality among respondents was the notion of God as a more nebulous, less gendered and non-delineated Spirit. The Holy Spirit was seen as a more gender friendly option for respondents. The shift in emphasis from the male-gendered God as Father and Jesus as Son, to the Holy Spirit also proved more easily facilitated than some other shifts in thinking. This was partly because the Spirit had always been part of the Trinity and therefore such a shift in emphasis was not seen either by the individual or the faith community as heretical. It was not a new invention as some more expressly feminist redactions were seen to be. Most respondents regarded the Holy Spirit as, at least partly, if not all, female. Some considered the Spirit as either gender free or having characteristics of both genders. Joan referred to the Holy Spirit as both the 'mighty power' and the 'gentle breeze' that is there in feminist theology, conservation (McFague, 1987) and other justice issues (Kaplan, 1996; Bell and Klein, 1996; Allen, 1969; X, 1971). She began to regard the Spirit as both the inner self and the driving force behind collective social movements that, though sometimes unnamed and unacknowledged, is objectively real.

Jo talked about an 'inner core' that has '*always* been there' after all the social layers have been peeled away. She mentioned a 'presence' or 'Holy Spirit' that was with her from earliest memories and that had not essentially changed, to which she had to be true. Jo thus exemplified the fundamental motivation for the journey of the individual to discover the authentic spiritual self and to affect a harmony between spirit and social location. She linked the inner self with her understanding of the Holy Spirit. Jo considered the commonality between the inner self and the 'power' she understood was God, though sometimes buried under variable social prescriptions and traditions, as kindred spirits that essentially do not change.

Links between the Holy Spirit and the self raise issues of affinity and gender. The shift of focus from God as male was facilitated by theoretical work on the Holy Spirit as '*She*' in Old Testament 'Wisdom' literature (Fiorenza, 1995b:133-135; Johnson, E.A., 1996; Ruether, 1996) and its more subtle application in Christology (Fiorenza, 1995b:139-162; Weber, 1987; Winter, 1991b). Biblical evidence was regarded as strong permission to begin thinking of God more gender inclusively (Proverbs 8,9).

Having aligned with a more personal and expressly feminine image of God, Margaret said,

> The Holy Spirit is like the rich eccentric aunt who goes on wild travels into strange places of the world and comes back bearing outrageous souvenirs and rich gifts that she gives with great (gusto and generosity)...just gives people outrageous presents for no apparent reason to whomever she likes. And I identify with that because I'm not rich but I'm an eccentric and I'm an aunt.

This was a colourful depiction of an unpredictable Spirit. It also represented the element within many of the respondents' stories of the courage to face a non-orchestratable God with whom individuals do not always know where they stand. Margaret regarded God as a Spirit who defies known logic and about whom there is a richness that is missed when traditional images are exclusively maintained. She also indicated the component of risk in this theology. She saw it as defiant of neat, predictable paradigms. Margaret also mentioned women's need to find the grand image of God in whom they are reflected; the *imago dei*, as theorists such as Ruether (1993:35) frame it. Like Joan, Margaret found an image that was just like a familiar and valued human image 'only more so' (Joan). Similarly, one of Tylielle's God-images no longer drew a distinct line between the divine and the human, the perfect and the imperfect, comparable to Walker's (1989:101-104) fudging of the line as an Afro-American in a dialogue about everyday feminist God-talk. Tylielle described her reformed relationship with God as one where she and God/Holy Spirit pick each other up after a fall, dust each other off, and then confer on what to do next.

Overall Comment on God

Respondents reported that God as a largely fixed mono and/or male identity was, generally, unhelpful and unauthentic to their experience of everyday life. Reconstructing conceptions of God was considered the most pressing necessity to both inner and social reformation. Respondents indicated that the process has helped to heal clefts in some respects and has uncovered them in others.

Scripture

Personal engagement with Scripture and its stories has been extolled as part of Christian practice (Potter, 1973:11-27; Chapman, 1979:22-27). Respondents demonstrated how difficult this can be for women. The Bible as vehicle of the 'good news' was generally considered sacred ground. For respondents, it has fulfilled the roles of professional resource materia[illegible]ject of study, source of inspiration and comfort as well as 'thorn in the flesh' and e[illegible]a for personal spirituality. They have lived with its contradictions and its topogr[illegible]as been familiar ground. As Ringe (1992:1-9) observes, respondents noted its chequered influence on women's lives and the need to confront its ambiguities. Lawson (1995) addresses the need to free both the text and the reader. Respondents had some sense of this. They reflected upon what Scripture has done to and for their lives, and upon what it has meant to other women to whom they have been minister/priest, chaplain or theological lecturer. They indicated the clefts caused by its androcentric language, agendas and genres and the struggle to seek underlying affinity to their social and inner lives.

Some tried altering biblical and liturgical texts to more inclusive language. However, as indicated this was often publicly problematic and a piecemeal solution at best (Schneiders, 1991a). Margaret, though, had reached the point of conscious effort to use feminine terms with regard to both public and private use of the Bible. As if her own research was in danger of remaining theoretical, she added, 'I mean, I actually wrote my *PhD* on what would happen if you used feminine terms when you wanted to use the Bible in worship, in *Anglican* worship.' Margaret stressed the word 'Anglican' as indicating high conservatism and therefore representing ultimate challenge. In other parts of the interview, she indicated that, whilst she, like Veronica, felt a responsibility to the comfort of others in worship, she also felt a responsibility to help her congregation reach beyond conservatism. Margaret did not consider the process finished with regard to her own thinking or scholarship. The unfinished nature of spiritual journey and what to do with Scripture was common to all interviews.

Altering the language alone is problematic. Women often do not fit the genre (Rae and Marie-Daly, 1990:4-5). Respondents negotiated the problem in various ways. Amira

reported that she would begin at the set lectionary reading on a Sunday morning and then 'depart from it' and that she was 'careful' about which texts she chose. She thus used texts as 'jumping off' points for social comment. Similarly Mary commented, in respect of the biblical material set down in the weekly lectionary for use in church services, 'If it's not for the good of women, then it shouldn't be read.' Tamar ventured further. She determined to see 'other words' in Scripture that had been overlaid and overlooked in androcentric hermeneutics. These depicted female images of God and gave permission to explore wider imagery. All three conceded these approaches meant ignoring and avoiding large slabs of offending Scripture. However, in contrast to Margaret, Amira, Mary and Tamar, Theresa thought that it was a mistake to change biblical language, to reconstruct its genres and to ignore uncomfortable texts. Her contention was that it needed to be preserved as a 'document of patriarchal rules'. To change it meant to risk losing this acknowledgement and the potential future understanding of what its application had done to women.

Whilst respondents varied in their contemporary approach to the Bible, one commonality was that of its changed and possibly diminished authority over their lives. For them, it is now a document with which one can enter into contesting dialogue. In this respect it has lost much of its superstitious 'sacred ground' aura, and is used much more interactively. In this respect, Kath now regards the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, as a 'much more remote book' from distant historical times. For Kath this has brought a relief at not having to strain for its relevance and meaning in every text, with regard to contemporary life. Her sentiments were not unique. Veronica also echoed the remoteness of Scripture, for her, these days. She said, 'God speaks in all sorts of ways, be it novels, poetry' and then added, '*Scripture even!*' implying that this was a more distant possibility, for her, than in the past.

However, Kath was careful to reassign its relevance. She did not advocate its dismissal. She talked about individual interaction with biblical stories as a helpful way of 'reclaiming' Scripture. She said that one of her 'gripes' was that clergy did not teach their congregations how to read the Bible critically. She thought this was essential for 'Scripture to become real for them (congregation members) in ways that are freeing and helpful'. Kath viewed the function of clerical biblical scholarship as knowledge acquired

in order to be 'given away'. Her argument sounded reasonable. However she did not comment on a point made by some other respondents, with regard to how difficult it is sometimes for clergy to advocate critical thinking on Scripture to their congregations. Some respondents suggested that, in some instances, advocating a more analytical approach to the Bible, confronted with conservatism, jeopardises clerical-pastoral relationships, and could even invite allegations of heresy.

The disparity between academic and non-scholastic views of the Bible was a point of frustration for most respondents in parish ministry. Although respondents generally approached early spiritual exploration outside known paradigms cautiously, Sarah proved an exception. She admitted that the Bible was still fairly central to her faith and authoritative in her life, but not as the literal mandate it once was. Ironically, as noted in *Parents*, whilst she appeared to deplore her mother in some respects, her matriarchal family background was supportive of women as analytical thinkers. This infused a confidence in her ability to interpret and apply Scripture. Her story contrasted with that of Mary who initially doubted her own expertise and intuition when it did not resonate with taught hermeneutics, and relied on permission-giving theorists to venture beyond these.

Eva also no longer regarded the Bible as 'the answer book'. With art, music, dance and creative imagery she sought the core relevance of texts that she considered as heavily overlaid with androcentric language, genres and agendas. Eva had to learn to trust her own response to Biblical stories and accounts. She shifted from the mandate to believe in its literal truth in all instances, to engagement with an essential wisdom conveyed through the texts. This took scholarly and emotional excavation.

Similarly Amira commented,

> I've no doubt that there were some amazing and strange experiences that those people had and I'm not prepared to knock those, but I'm not sure that necessarily means now, so many years later, I have to believe what the church taught me to believe about *their* (the church's) interpretation of all of that, which is a different exercise again.

In so saying, Amira indicated that she was not willing to undertake the 'exercise' of biblical reconstruction. She said she was no longer a part of the church because she could no longer listen to what she did not believe. As noted in *Wilderness*, the fact that she left the faith before she left the church, underscores the glaring disparity between social and inner identity. It identifies the Cleft and its need for some sort of resolve, with striking clarity (Smith, D.E.,1988:49-50; Rae and Marie-Daly,1990:40-42).

Unlike Amira, Mary hung on to the possibility of finding personal spirituality within the church. It took her some time to acknowledge the 'distrust' she had in Scripture. She then began to allow herself to embark upon a journey of reconstruction as set out in feminist critical hermeneutics, methodology, and historical reconstruction by Fiorenza (1983). Mary travelled to America for this express purpose. She followed Fiorenza's reconstruction blueprint almost prescriptively as though she needed the weight of another authority for personal legitimacy. As with Eva's journey, the process also involved the engagement of music, dance, art and permission to use the imagination. When interviewed, Mary outlined, in detail, Fiorenza's steps to feminist theological reconstruction. In this regard there still appeared to be some distrust in her *own* right and ability to challenge ancient axioms.

In Summary

Digging below the language, images and the mandates of traditions has been a painful and soul-searching process for most respondents. The construction of more helpful and gender-inclusive God-images and the repositioning of Jesus with regard to the individual has been crucial. Discovery of permission-giving theology to consider the Holy Spirit as feminine and the courage face and to challenge the intrinsic and general androcentric nature of Scripture as it reads and as it has been taught, has also been central to the quest for honest faith. This reconstruction concurred with, and translated into, other areas of personal spirituality. Some of these overlap with what could be categorised as social reformation. However, the sections below are more specifically related to inner journey. They include those areas where respondents indicated a sense of mystical, inner transformation and/or revelation.

Reformation of Personal Spirituality

Intellect as Spiritual Liberation

That religion has dissuaded people from trusting their own minds (Kushner, 1987:132) has been especially true for women (Carr, 1988:41-42; Hageman, 1974). As noted, respondents have endeavoured to broaden bases for spiritual creativity in later years but not without an inner battle. Lyn approached her initial enquiry into theological scholarship tenuously, with little thought of entering the ordained ministry. Upon enrolling in a lay preachers' course, she told the registrar that her purpose was to find out whether or not there was any truth in Christianity and that she wished to study 'with no strings attached'. She asked, 'If, in two weeks, I discover that this is a load of rubbish. can I just leave?' Lyn had successfully completed a degree in pharmacy. In positivist mode she needed to know that Christianity made intellectual sense.

'Making sense' as opposed to rote acceptance was important in the reformation process. Margaret began her story with reference to early personal intellectual appeals. She reported, 'Learning is the change agent for me.' She clarified that learning, for her, was not simply information gathering. It was an activity of the intellect. She underscored the integration of spirit and intellect and the feeding of one into the other. This gave her a basis for less inhibited and less guilt ridden theological and spiritual reformation. It gave her the freedom to create feminist prayers, liturgies, poems and songs. Margaret expressed the 'passion for learning and loving God even while learning'. She differentiated between the rote learning of religious tenets, and faith as a journey of discovery that both builds on, and critiques, the past. Margaret's reformation was not so much a change of direction as an intensifying of a resolve that began in childhood, but had been thwarted by malestream structures. Feminist theological critique, in which she is published, spurred this together with sharing her writings with others. She regarded herself as 'lucky' with respect to the integration of her intellect and spirituality. Margaret observed that many women she met have been taught to distrust their own thinking with regard to the shaping of personal faith (Confoy, 1995:14).

Kath also began to identify the relationship between spirituality and intellect early in her career. She talked about Christians who are 'wilfully ignorant' and rejected the idea of feminine-faith versus reason (Coakley, 1991). Feminist theology gave wings to the inner feeling that God was knowable through personal thinking, as much as Scripture and tradition. She said, 'We Anglicans talk about Scripture, tradition and *reason* as an image of the three legged-stool.' By middle life, Margaret, Kath, Sarah and Tamar were confident in their respective personal pursuits of scholarship. This facilitated the advancement of a workable feminist perspective on Christianity.

Not all respondents reported this level of self-assurance. Joan said that her spiritual and theological reformation started in 1980 when she began her degree in theology. At the outset of her vocation as a nun, tertiary education was not generally open to women in religious orders (Grammick, 1985; Macdonnell, 1985:200). She regretted not being allowed to develop the tools of critical thinking earlier. She inferred that the faith subsequently developed through critical scholarship would have helped her cope with the starkness of convent life had this not been denied her.

The interaction of intellect and spirituality to reformulate theologies and ideas proved easier to some than others. A background of encouragement to use the intellect across the broad spectrum of life's experiences enabled Sarah, Tamar, Veronica and Margaret to apply the same criteria to their personal faith though even these, at some turns, did so tenuously. However Eva, Annabelle, Joan, Mary and Lily found that permission to think for themselves with regard to their faith and belief systems came much later and through a myriad of internal doubts.

Solitary Spiritual Journey and Changed Identities

Lee (1995:43) observes, the body as 'more than flesh and bone, more than a biological or medical entity.' She notes, 'The terms "body" and "spirit" imply a distinction; nonetheless their interconnection is a profound and complex one.' The life journeys of respondents bore out this interconnection.

Tylielle had been a prominent minister and had held a number of decision-making positions at federal and state levels over some thirty years within her denomination before she left the church. Her emergence from that era was not unlike a butterfly

breaking free of its cocoon. Her appearance changed quite radically. Tailored suits and neat hairstyle gave way to colourful, free flowing garments and hair reflecting a spirituality that she considered wider and more inclusive than conventional Christianity. Her new identity included a change of name. As with Veronica's journey beyond domesticity (see *Social Reformation*), the visible and social aspects of transformation were spiritually based. Throughout the interview with Tylielle and the subsequent conversation where the tape recorder was switched off, we talked of what had happened in our lives in the twenty-year void since we had last met. She did not refer to her birth name. However she was comfortable sharing even the painful aspects of her spiritual journey. She recalled fond memories of her long career in the church and indicated a continuing respect for its role in society. Tylielle's reformed stance, in part, supported the theory that the final stage of self-discovery and analysis enables an acceptance of others (Rogers, C., 1967:174). Although Tylielle left the church and Christianity, some traditional Christian wisdom was incorporated into her redefined spirituality. She indicated that, had she been forced to continue with ill-fitting conventions, the experience would have taken its toll on her creative spirit and possibly have claimed her life as she perceived was the case with her mother (see *Parents*).

Tylielle now regards herself as pagan. She illustrated the transformation thus, 'I was born into a well and that well was Christianity and I bubbled up and bubbled up until I bubbled over the top and discovered other wells'. Tylielle, subsequently, referred to herself as a 'Christian' pagan. By this, she clarified, one who remembers, with gratitude, the roots of her spirituality. Her final word on this was, as noted in *Wilderness*, 'I came to love the desert.' Tylielle has never returned to Christianity or the church.

Personal identity, as a specific subject, was important to some respondents. Sarah reported, 'I am now more conscious of who I am,' indicating a previous self-invisibility. The social invisibility of women is well researched (Keohane, 1981; Armstrong, 1993; Smith, D.E., 1988:17-43). Sarah, however, alluded to the kind of spiritual invisibility with which individual women regard themselves (Schaef, 1985:28-33).

Whilst the discovery of a truer inner self and the repositioning of the social self has been encouraged and buoyed along the way through the camaraderie of colleagues at various

junctures, some individuals, and many stretches of respective journeys, have been solitary. This was partly due to the nature of soul work (Finley, 1978; Waldron, 1996) and partly because respondents did not always have kindred conversation networks. For example, Annabelle kept a diary for a year in which she critiqued her entire belief system. This helped to clarify her inner identity. Mickale also said she discovered her authentic self through her own thinking and reading and through a renewed spiritual connection she felt with her late, Celtic grandmother. Like Tylielle, Mickale also changed her name as part of a statement of changed identity.

Kath also talked about being more aware of her individual identity and abilities than she had been in the past. She reported that she had worked hard on developing personal autonomy and that she had moved beyond allowing her life to be directed by other people's expectations (Rogers, C., 1967:170). Kath reported emerging with a better sense of her own self worth and a clearer perspective on her 'place in the scheme of things'. She said that the interview had helped to clarify how far she had progressed with regard to personal identity. Kath, an Anglican priest, drew on the example of her marital status to contrast new personal attitudes with past perceptions of herself. She said, 'I realise how uncomfortable I felt to have my life viewed in terms of the fact that I happened to be married to a priest' (Finch, 1983). Kath then cited an occasion where she had been interviewed by the media and had offered a photograph of herself administering her first Eucharist. She realised afterwards that she had neglected to tell the journalist that the other priest featured in the photograph was her husband. She saw this 'oversight' as symbolic of how far she had shifted from being defined in terms of her husband. Kath said she was now 'very comfortable' with what she termed, 'a purer form of feminism'. By this she meant that she is less willing to compromise her inner self.

Reformation of personal spirituality embraced changes in thinking, feelings and practice. Expressing the unfinished and ongoing nature of this personal process, Eva regarded that a retreat into former ways of thinking inconceivable. She said, 'Even looking at mistakes, I still have to go on' then added, 'You keep facing the pain', thus indicating that legacies of old theology and personal spirituality are not easily exorcised. Eva regarded that such revisiting translated to continuing processes of social redefinition (see *Social Reformation*)

The Peace that Passes all Understanding (Philippians 4:7) – and other Miracles

Respondents' religious experiences manifested generally through personal prayer practices, reading and thinking, but also occasionally through dramatic experiences. Whilst it is acknowledged that religious experience is interpreted through the contexts of personal predisposition and social setting (Beit-Hallahmi and Argile, 1997:90-96), a number of respondents reported life-changing incidents that tapped into a deep longing for an image of God and a spirituality that differed from traditional impositions.

Lily's story was, arguably, the most dramatic. As mentioned in *Wilderness*, on holiday in central Australia she embarked upon a helicopter joy flight. Whilst in the air, the helicopter developed mechanical difficulties and began to plummet. Lily recalled this as a moment of profound personal calm amid surrounding panic. She recalled,

> It was as if Jesus had appeared to me physically and stood there holding my hand as we crashed to the ground. I couldn't have felt more at peace. I just thought we were gonna die. The lady in the back was trying to make bargains with God at that time as we went down and you could hear her screams and her prayers mingled as we went down.

Her account drew the contrast between two responses broadly from within the same religion. For Lily, though she was well aware of the seriousness of the situation, the overriding sense of peace revealed to her an aspect of God that did not evoke strain or fear. Another passenger, however, also attempting to evoke the attention of a God known essentially through Christianity, assumed a victim identity. Lily went on to say that she was not 'conscious of *having* to pray', that is, there was no image of a strict God mandating obedience even under such extreme pressure. For Lily, the experience banished punitive theology. She said,

> It was just that peace that passes all understanding. That was a defining moment, you know, there was Jesus. I didn't have to make any pleas or bargains...and yet...here was this poor lady screaming, trying to make bargains.

The incident had symbolic implications for Lily. It represented two different responses to God, both of which could be identified within her own faith journey. Her reaction on this

occasion, however, signified a change in attitude that she conceded had probably already taken place. It signified she was no longer intimidated by God-identities conveyed by certain church hermeneutics. It was as if the panic stricken woman fitted a paradigm of a taught God-person relationship (Rae and Marie-Daly, 1990:6; Storkey, 1987; Daly, 1986) and Lily had moved to a more liberated position. For Lily, the experience was a sustaining 'glimpse of heaven' (Maslow, 1976:75), a maturation of the image of God she knew from the private moments in childhood (see *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock*)

Potential

Whilst some respondents knew defining moments of insight, the journey of others was less dramatic and not as clearly signposted. Audrey admitted that one of her big struggles was that there had been belief *without* experience. She regarded her faith as a *potential* rather than an *actual* vehicle for the kind of unmistakable divine encounter experienced by Lily (see *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*). The lack of defining inspiration has been so painful to her that she could not conceal her tears in the interview. She still felt, in part, that God had overlooked her in this regard. However Audrey reported more freedom than in past years to speak about this frustration as a spiritual disappointment. This was due to a redefined theology that absolved her from blame, and a supportive network of chosen peers.

Audrey's account echoed, in part, Theresa's discovery. Theresa talked about her 'dawn of conscious entry into a different way of looking at things.' The reformation of her faith came when she abandoned the idea of the 'spiritual perfection' to which she had been socialised. By this she meant prescribed and stereotypical spiritual experiences that tended to base faith on perceived certainties (Spong, 1992). She reported a new freedom in knowing God was more interested in 'wholeness' than 'holiness'. She found this thought 'liberating', a contrast to the guilt she had felt as a child after the inadvertent consumption of a meat pie of Friday (see *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock*). The revelation that her life did not have to be perfect changed the way she regarded God and her notions of the way in which God communicated.

Prayer

Changes in personal prayer practice have been one significant aspect of spiritual reformation. Respondents reported past histories of indoctrination to set prayer practices. Some of these practices were helpful and faith-enhancing, others were not. Unhelpful practices included the mandate to offer exhaustive petitions invoking God's help for suffering people and troubled situations. This was particularly true for those who did not have a contemplative faith background. For some, prayer had become an onus; perhaps even part of the suffering they were taught was necessary for proper feminine piety (Rankka, 1998; Grey, 1993:30-47). The theology mandating that God must be asked, or even pleaded with, in order to effect action (Psalm 143; Job), made the task of the petitioner even more stressful. Some of this tied in with the so-called 'Protestant Work Ethic' (Martin, J.M., 2000; Eardley and Matheson, 1999). The off-loading of oppressive prayer proved a freeing experience and, for some, part of the means by which they have been able to continue in the Christian faith. The idea of 'being' instead of 'doing' all the time, proved a welcome relief for those who felt prayer was a burden. Annabelle said that she now regards the air through which she walks as spiritual, thus relieving the urgency of 'doing' and the efficacy of simply 'being'.

Lyn reported, 'That's the area that's grown most for me, just sitting in silence and letting God's love surround you. I now usually spend at least half an hour every day doing that.' Lyn moved from energy-depleting prayer to energy-enhancing prayer. For her, prayer became unapologetically time for self as well as time with God. She has set up a prayer room in her house for this express purpose. Lyn was one of several who reported such changes in prayer practices. Audrey abandoned the need to sit through the '*long, long, long, long* (church) prayers' that were part of her childhood. Annabelle reported that her prayers are now silences and that, like Lily, she has shed the punitive image of God with which she grew up and to whom prayer was mandatory.

Tamar, through her own contemplation and the sharing of ideas with other feminist theologians, redefined the older, functional notion of prayer as petition. She had come to regard it as 'communication about our concerns,' rather than the evoking of 'a greater power' into action. Her reformed ideology and practice of prayer agreed, in essence, with those of Lily, Lyn and Annabelle. Healing and relief for individuals and social situations

was no longer perceived to rely upon the petitioner's sense of 'ought'. Thus, for many respondents, the onus of prayer has been lifted. Eva reported that she now feels free enough to approach prayer as a time of raising questions. Similarly Tamar now considers prayer as a means of discovering 'greater wisdom' with regard to the 'mystery' that is God.

Generally, for respondents, prayer is more relaxation and re-creation than work. Reformed spiritualities have rendered prayer more integrated with general life and identity.

Beyond the Punitive – Life and Death

Another aspect of reformed spirituality was the move away from intimidating theology. Three respondents chose to draw upon motherhood and childbirth to illustrate reformed spirituality. Their accounts expose points of women's vulnerability, fear and mystic depth. Annabelle reported transcending the 'hell fire' theology of her childhood, the punitive image of God and the idea of either eternal heaven or eternal damnation that was associated with life after death (see *Childhood, Adolescence and the Rock* and *Parents*). The threat of death had been a source of dread to her. This was accentuated when she gave birth. She recalled,

> I can remember when my first child was born, she was blue…she just looked so dead and then she was alive and I suddenly thought maybe this is what dying is like, in reverse. You know, you're alive and then you're dead. I sort of made the connection somehow or maybe you're dead and then you become alive, I don't know. It was all very scary that death and life are just as close in that moment of birth because the baby is not there and then the baby is there.

Given the personal identity Annabelle invested in her children as their mother and spiritual guardian (see *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*), it is unsurprising that she chose this particular illustration and that the precariousness of sitting on the life-death cusp intimidated her. She felt vulnerable because she knew that God had the power of life and death and that the most horrific personal pain would ensue if she were to lose one of her children. This was a contributing factor to a reviewed image of God that is no longer anthropomorphised. Annabelle reflected, however, that although death no longer bothers her because of the intellectual dismissal of her childhood hell-fire theology, the

transcendence is not entirely complete. She observed that sometimes she was 'grabbed' by a 'guilt trip' and that, although based upon theologies to which she no longer subscribed, the *feeling* still had the discomfort of former days. She also commented that this guilt, that she has never managed to eradicate completely, has caused a 'spiritual distance' from her children.

Other respondents reported a troubled journey due to the same phenomena to varying degrees. For example, Joan said, 'I've moved through the guilt stage. I don't feel burdened by guilt' but then added, 'touch wood' hinting that its absence was somewhat tenuous and not entirely within her control. Thus there were lingering residues of dread even within reformed theologies.

Reformation was not only a matter of loads lifted as has been noted in *Wilderness* and in other sections of this thesis. Interestingly, Lyn, who is not a mother, also chose to draw upon the metaphor of childbirth. She reflected thus, upon the experience of helping others redefine their faith,

> Part of being a minister is being a midwife of the new creation, and that's very painful and that's sitting with other people as they go into labour and it nearly rends you apart watching them and sometimes it's a stillbirth and that's even worse.

In saying this, Lyn assumed the role of metaphoric mother or midwife to those engaged in the labour of reforming their faith. Her comments underscored an agonizing responsibility of caring for others, as did Annabelle's account. It also stressed the individual nature of the reformation process and the fact that one person, though they can offer support, cannot walk another's journey. Again the idea of death or 'stillbirth' was conveyed as the ultimate pain and the sometimes futile outcome of the struggle. This general metaphor may have been a means of dealing with a personal illness issue at the time of the interview. Lyn added, in a subdued voice,

> I've been having a fair bit of pain myself. It's a fairly physical thing. Last night I was thinking, 'Boy, I'm getting a real feeling of what the crucifixion was like, at the moment!'

Lyn's experience resembled a kind of responsive stigmata. She and Christ both identified with the sufferings of humankind. Respondents indicated that part of spiritual reformation has been the freedom to align their own suffering with that of Christ. Theresa talked about the connection she had made with what she called 'the Christian cycle'. She talked about 'going back' and 'naming' the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday as her own 'rhythm of paschal mystery'. Whilst much of what she meant by this was left unexplained, it was clear that the alignment of her own sufferings, sense of resurrection and cyclic nature was now considered not so alien from Jesus. This was part of how both Lyn and Theresa found affinity with a (male) messiah.

For Mickale the issue of stillbirth was more than a metaphor. She lived through the actuality on five occasions. She has found the role of minister's wife, with all its social expectations, burdensome, and the restrictions of Christianity, stifling because it did not offer the comfort she needed when faced with the loss of her children. Over time, relief came in the reclaiming of Celtic spiritual heritage. Finally Mickale developed confidence in her own ability to glean helpful aspects from a number of ideologies and spiritualities without fear of the condemnation she had heard ascribed to people who dared to espouse hybrid combinations of beliefs.

End Note

Reformation of spirituality and theology, belief and practice proved a long and challenging but necessary process for respondents. It involved identifying and addressing problematic aspects of Christianity. These have included confrontations with the androcentric mode of church language as vehicle for the faith, constructed images of God and the nature of the God-human relationship, the figure of Jesus, and male-orientated genres and language of Scripture and its taught authority. Respondents indicated that re-theorising these central icons of the faith has not been the total task. The analysis of personal social and spiritual location, facing of personal fears and the desire to act with due sensitivity to, and respect of, things sacred, has rendered this process difficult and sometimes precarious. It has involved a loss of certainty in some instances, and a suffering of the soul (Chittister, 2003). Motivation has been fuelled by desire to discover

a truer self, truer theologies, and a truer form of personal spirituality that can be practised freely and shared with others. Theresa offered, 'Getting your own freedom…it's a slow journey'.

The articulation of soul-felt clefts and the quest for inner spiritual integrity has led to the insistence on a transformation of the outer journey. The following chapter documents key areas of social reformation in the lives of respondents.

Social Reformation

Chapter Focus – Remade Social Identities

Respondents indicated that recognising private spiritual clefts and reformulating personal beliefs is not a journey for isolates. Support and permission-giving social mechanisms have been vital to the individual and collective evolutionary processes. This has been resourced from both secular feminism and its particular application within the church. As intimated in the previous chapter, social reformation generally proceeded as a kind of echo process to internal/soul redefining. This chapter deals with the building of supportive networks and the seeking of kindred souls. It also addresses the social implications and applications of reformed personal spirituality and theology in relationship to traditional church communities.

Movement in the Church

Official Changes – Top Down and Bottom Up

Liberating transformation of church structures is facilitated by the commitment of people to both reform and to church (Parvey, 1983; Franklin and Jones, 1987; Porter, 1989; Furlong, 1988). The deluge of feminist theology from within the church is evidence of this. Despite the struggle with patriarchy, most respondents employed the pronouns 'we', 'us' and 'our' rather than 'they' and 'theirs' when referring to denominational affiliations. They spoke with a sense of personal frustration when referring to matters in which their respective streams had resisted justice reform, and with ownership and satisfaction where positive changes had been effected. For example, Kath reflected, with pride, '*Our* new prayer book has a much greater, a much wider range of images of God and it no longer, in *any* instance, *ever* brings "the almighty" and "father" together' indicating that the Anglican Church was at least beginning to break up the power broker image of God. Her willingness to live with fragmented liberation processes signified her loyalty to, and permanence within, the church, and within Anglicanism in particular.

Like Mary and Theresa, Joan reported what she regarded as harsh, almost abusive, conditions and requirements imposed by hierarchy upon the religious communities in which she had lived early in her vocation. This had taken its toll on her personal spirituality. Despite this, Joan spoke of the Catholic Church as a marriage partner. She referred to the changes in both the church and herself as reflected in, and facilitated by, one another. She spoke of the atmosphere of change for Catholics, created by Vatican Two, in 1943 (Ware, 1985). Joan referred to the 'unleashing' of permission to adopt a more scholarly and less literal approach to the Bible than had been encouraged in the past, particularly within communities of nuns. This had enabled her to undertake tertiary theological studies. She spoke of this change as 'wonderful' but added, 'it took twenty years before *that* got the big tick!' (authorisation).

Joan also spoke of the changed attitude within her denomination to cultures that had previously not been respected by Catholic evangelism. She reflected on the reformed ecumenical Catholic view that had begun to regard Protestants as fellow Christians as opposed to infidels. Mary agreed, observing, 'there's (now) so much more room for different understandings and the ability to hold them in tension.' Joan talked about 'humanising' religion, the church, and the way God is regarded. She said that, had the system not changed, she might have found it unbearable. She might have abandoned her calling and, maybe, Catholicism. According to Joan, however, the process was incomplete. She noted the fact of 'two' churches (factions in Catholicism), those who have embraced the changes and those who have not. The latter are a present reminder of where she may have been left. Although there had been dissent against oppressive systems of the Catholic Church at local levels, Joan regarded the 'humanising' process largely a result of decisions at a global level emanating from the Vatican. She saw her own contribution as negligible. Despite difficult beginnings, Joan and the other Catholic respondents did acquire post-graduate education with the support of the Catholic Church. In this respect, Brady (1986:144-145), whilst not diminishing the oppressive nature of the church for women, cites the instances of encouragement for a kind of independence not common in general society in the past. She talks about Mary McKillop's freedom and the benefit of single-sex convent schools, concluding with her lack of surprise that feminists like Germaine Greer and Susan Ryan have grown from such a system.

Kath felt that her church was less determined by international hierarchy, and that her contribution *had* made a difference. She talked about what had sustained her through what she regarded as 'the height of the women's movement' in the Anglican Church, when the struggle for women's ordination straddled at least the three decades of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Porter, 1989). Whilst Margaret had fled to America for respite from it all, Kath's fortitude was in the fact that she 'had always known that the church was bigger than the diocese' and 'bigger than our own time.' Kath saw her own social location in terms of a wider Anglican geographic and historic setting. Throughout her reflections on some extremely turbulent times within Australian Anglicanism, she maintained the 'our' and 'we' pronouns even when referring to injustices against women. For Kath, the structural changes to her church within Australia were not so much 'blessings from above' as achievements that she owned personally.

Building on What Has Gone Before

The Influence of Significant Theologians

Feminism, with its insistence upon the relationship between the personal and the political (Weitz, 1998; Scutt, 1996; Stanley and Wise, 1993), together with such tools as the Internet and e-mail, has altered respondents' perspectives on books and authors. With regard to the specific work of Fiorenza, McPhillips, (1994:260) cites, with gratitude, the 'niche carved out of the rock' as a 'foothold' for feminist scholars.

Interviews revealed that well-known authors and highly regarded thinkers were no longer considered inaccessible. Authors, in turn, have indicated that a two-way sharing of ideas has been mutually beneficial. Fiorenza (1983:xi) says that feminist books in particular are never the work of just the author and that 'Letters and conversations with women from around the world' have given her 'the courage and strength to continue raising feminist questions in the academy and church during these repressive times (Fiorenza, 1992:ix).' Winter et al (1995:7) articulate that an express objective of their work has been to assure the feminist reader that she is not alone.

Respondents also indicated the direct impact of particular feminist theorists on their lives. Margaret mentioned her interest in Biblical scholarship. She had sought out those

interested in the theoretical side of feminist perspectives on Scripture and their application within her parish and beyond. In this respect, significant feminist theologians influenced her own theological stance, the way in which she conducted her job as a parish priest, and how she was regarded, as an individual, within her local Anglican sphere.

All respondents reported having some communication through conferences, correspondence or direct personal contact with those from whom they had learned and from whose theories they had began to reformulate their own theologies. The stories of Mary, Theresa and Tamar were specific in this respect. Both Mary and Theresa had the opportunity to study overseas under the direction of widely published feminist theologians. Mary reported that her motivation for travel was, quite deliberately, person related. She said, 'I went to Boston because *she* (Fiorenza) was there.' Of all the respondents, Mary stood out as the one most obviously and specifically influenced by a single individual. Throughout the course of the interview, she referred to the feminist theological reconstruction theories, put forward by Fiorenza (1992), as her own.

Theresa, who also had the opportunity of studying at Boston Theological Institute, spoke of the inspiring 'clear sightedness' of Kari Børresen (see Ruether, 1998b:190-193) a Norwegian feminist theologian who was a visiting lecturer at the Harvard School of Divinity at the time. Theresa sat in lectures and also had the opportunity of less formal conversations. It was this encounter that prompted her 'dawn' of inspiringly new perspectives, including the way in which she regarded God. As mentioned (see *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*), she came to the conclusion that God desired 'wholeness much more than holiness' for human beings. This had profound implications that challenged the austere hierarchical structures of her vocational life as a nun.

Of all the respondents, Tamar stood out as one who had not only benefited from personal feminist theological networks around the world, but who had also been an inspirer in this sphere for several decades. Over half the other respondents mentioned her by name, as a theorist and as a personal encourager to those who had encountered discrimination and injustice. This is an example of how distinct demarcations between contributors and students in the academy cannot easily be drawn. Fiorenza (1983:61-64), for example,

includes a substantial insert of a student's creative reconstruction of biblical text from a feminist perspective. The text does not objectify the student. It assumes the student as a social, if not academic, equal whose contribution is valued. Ruether (1996:xi) similarly speaks of her students as colleagues. The seventeen respondents endorsed this ideology.

Joining the Streams

Whilst Joan felt more like a passenger at the mercy of conservative Catholic hierarchy, others did not wait for official changes. They sought inspiration and fortification from across a broader scope. In the 1970s some of the respondents felt cornered in conservatism. Whilst Eva recalled, 'Women couldn't be elders at that stage and it never occurred to me that there was something wrong with it,' Amira, Sarah, Kath, Tamar, Theresa and Margaret indicated that this is when they became part of a cross-denominational corporate journey upon which Eva, Joan, Mickale, and Annabelle embarked much later. Kath recounted her part in feminism and social reform within the wider church with clear chronology. She plotted her feminist journey from 1974 when she first became aware of feminism whilst living in America. Upon her return to Australia, she 'connected with church women who were asking questions' (Porter 1989; 1994). Although an Anglican, she attended a conference organised by Uniting Church women. She also noted that Thiering's book *Created Second* (1973) had a great impact on her. In 1975 she contributed to what she described as a 'major conference' that brought together women from a range of Catholic and Protestant traditions. From this, she and a colleague formed a group to address the particular issues confronting Anglican women, including the issue of ordination.

Kath's account was quite breathless as the list of events and involved individuals needed little amendment. She obviously drew impetus and inspiration from both Anglican and ecumenical feminist movements in the 1970s. Her personal involvement was also part of the facilitation for change within the church. It is noteworthy that, at a time when Kath was campaigning so fervently for reform, Eva, around ten years her senior and living in country Victoria, had not thought to question the patriarchal structure of the church. However, the groundwork for the reform that Eva later grasped with such relief was already underway. Though Eva's personal journey from conservatism was difficult, it was also facilitated by the fact that some of the social framework was already in place.

Tylielle also benefited from those who had gone before her. Her background was not so much oppression as blissful ignorance. In the late 1970s, upon moving from her Perth parish to take up the charge of a central Uniting Church in Adelaide, she reported acute escalation of sexist awareness, like a veil lifted. It was there that she was able to connect to an undercurrent movement that had already culminated within her own parish (see *Wilderness*). She described this as a small but strong women's community within the church and that 'the time had come to articulate what they were feeling.'

Conferences

Conferences sympathetic to Christian feminism were cited in all interviews as important social stepping-stones to both spiritual and social liberation. They provided a venue for the sharing of ideas, the building of scholarship, and the gathering of information. For the most part, they engendered safe, non-judgmental and non-competitive environments in which respondents felt free to articulate doubts, raise issues and express their true feelings about the faith. Respondents reported that most such feminist symposiums engendered solidarity that strengthened the development of individual feminist perspectives. Conferences were often permission-giving triggers that brought aspects of personal struggle into the communal arena and/or gave respondents time off from having to defend or keep silent about their spiritual and theological positions. Identifying with such relief, Russell (1984:76) cites a conference on the issue of women's ordination where, for once, theology, rather than women, was considered the problem.

Amira reflected, 'It was just wonderful to find other people asking the same questions and thinking the same thoughts'. She remembered finding a creative person who had been implementing innovations in the church that she 'was only beginning to think were possible!' There were overtones of the miraculous that echoed those of Margaret and Kath, a sense of making possible things that had seemed impossible.

Amira spoke of the soulful and social 'tumultuous time' in the 1970s and 1980s when women gathered to challenged some of the beliefs and practices of the church. It was both liberating and frightening. Amira and other respondents indicated that denominational demarcations became points of enhancement rather than boundaries that held women apart. She found common threads of feminism through different traditions

revelatory. Amira employed the words 'amazing' and 'wonderful' as one discovering lost blood-relations. Her account attested to the means by which both corporate women's movements and individual respondents have been propelled.

Of all accounts, Theresa's appeared the most emotional. She plotted the events that led to the 'luck' with which she was granted sanction to attend a conference by her local superiors within the Catholic Church. The account of the conference centred upon broad intuitive impressions rather than specific doctrinal inspiration. She described it as 'the most wonderful, wonderful experience', 'a kind of knowing' and 'the most significant and liberating' event in her life. She added that no future struggle could ever be as harrowing as those prior to this liberation. The communal experience enabled her feelings to culminate in 'conviction'. She expressed this as the 'joy of education'. This meant that the isolation of everyday life would never be as bleak. She had been made aware that she did not struggle with patriarchal injustices alone.

As was the case with Theresa, clarification for some of Joan's submerged intuitions surfaced at an initial conference. For Joan, it was the centenary of her religious order in 1986. She too described the source of inspiration as 'wonderful'. She made particular reference to an oration by Tamar on that occasion. Joan reported that Tamar and other speakers at the conference helped her articulate ideas of God-as-Mother since her mother's death in 1978 (see *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*).

As with Eva and Tylielle, Annabelle's awareness of feminism was latent for many years. She reported, 'I didn't become aware of anything do to with the feminist re-interpretation of Christianity until the early 1980s.' She spoke about hearing a feminist lecture on an interpretation of Genesis for the first time and being 'amazed' at a perspective that was so different to the literalist androcentric slant that had dominated her inculturated view of Christianity. The 'amazement' at this 'new' theology was accentuated by the discovery that her cleric husband was already well acquainted with it. It made her feel that men have the monopoly even on things that are 'women's business' (Smith, D.E., 1988:17-22; Weitz, 1998). She resolved to embark on every feminist course she could.

Whilst some respondents took more of a passenger role at initial conferences that helped to shape their future life courses, others were called upon to meet the challenge of active contribution as an opener to awareness. Amira was invited to speak at a Baptist public forum on the issue of women and the church, and recalled, '*that* was where I *really* began to focus my thinking on what feminism might mean in the church'.

She had already begun to think from a feminist perspective with regard to secular matters. However, her life had been compartmentalised, and it was the invitation to speak that prompted her to make the connection between feminism and Christianity/church. After the first speaker spoke about 'the broad spread of changes in society to do with women', Amira particularised issues to women and the Baptist denomination. The conference was part of International Women's Year (1975) when, Amira recalled, people were 'challenging what was'. For Amira, this conference was the occasion that rendered Christianity no longer sacredly exempt from the rigours of feminist critique.

Secular Feminist Influences

Sometimes respondents made reference to the juncture of three strands of chronological journey. These included those of the secular society, the church, and their own personal experience and thinking. For Amira, the above-mentioned conference brought the three together. While she was chosen for her obvious interest in secular feminism sparked by her work as a secular counsellor, it was then Amira began to make clearer connections between world, church and individual. Changing world-views on such issues as sexuality and gender construction (Smith, D.E., 1988:6-9; Kaplan, 1996; Saunders and Evans, 1992), posed a challenge to the traditional church perspectives with which she had been raised. This led to the cleft identification that eventually drew Amira out of the church and the faith. She referred to covert sexuality implied in hymns such as 'I Come to the Garden Alone,' (Miles in Lyall and Saunders, 1959:Hymn 516) that depict the risen Christ's encounter with Mary Magdalene. She regarded these as 'a bit sus (suspect)' in view of the church's general lack of ability to deal with sexuality (Heyward, 1984:83-93; Daly, 1986:98-131; Rudy, 1997). Amira's work with the secular counselling agency also brought into focus areas of communication between Christians that she came to regard as dishonest or covered up. She talked about the church treasurer's wife who 'balanced all the books' while her husband took the kudos for it. She regarded feminism in secular

spheres as part of the means by which dishonesty was challenged in human interaction. She endeavoured to integrate this into the church with limited success. Amira reported that, 'people started to share their *real* lives with each other instead of their rather plastic religious lives.' Amira referred to prescribed, dishonest spiritual and social paradigms that demanded conformity as 'plastic religious'. In her view, this often forced people to live out lies of which they were sometimes only partly aware. The discrepancy was part of her reason for leaving the church and the faith.

Annabelle's introduction to feminist perspectives was also generated by secular thought. She recalled, 'I was also doing art at Auckland Uni and so I was beginning to get into critical mode. You see, I was pre-critical until I was forty-three.' The introduction to secular critical thinking sparked the motivation to apply this to the church. Various strands of feminist movement within the church came into focus and she became conscious that she, 'might have been a little bit behind.' As one who had then missed something vital, she said, 'It was happening (church feminism) and I wasn't doing it!'

Secular feminism was also partly responsible for Veronica's pursuit of the priesthood as a personal career option. Having embraced domesticity and motherhood, she became aware that women's lives could be wider than this and that a life outside the home could make for 'a more sure person,' an 'even more adequate' mother with 'other things streaming in to inform and enrich life.' Veronica eventually saw that the reverse was also true. She resolved that motherhood was the most useful resource for ministry.

New Wine in Old Wineskins - When Personal Spirituality has Moved Ahead of Community

Incomplete Language Reformation – a Continuing Cleft

Feminist theorists have researched the implications of words, meanings and language changes for women (Mills, 1991; Tuttle, 1987; Humm, 1989). One of the primary pursuits of feminist theologians has been to find or invent non-androcentric language that suitably frames women's faith, feelings and sacred icons (Ruether, 1993). However, even theorists have trouble. Cady et al (1986:80), in citing Sophia as a model for feminist

spirituality, describes her (perhaps unwittingly) in masculinist language as a '*master* craftswoman'.

Interviews revealed that respondents, having undergone significant social and spiritual shifts, were often still at a loss to find words that expressed exactly what they wanted to say with regard to both their spirituality and their respective social worlds. As noted in *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*, religious language was a site of cleft formation for respondents. Mickale perceived the language as a pressure to conform and a controlling influence imposed by the church power brokers (Wren, 1989:81-82), and a subtle means by which they identified those considered faithful.

Although some reported that they had always felt vague discomfort with aspects of language, it was as feminist awareness intensified and spiritual reformation was underway that certain words and images became unpalatable. Amira offered an explanation of the link between language and concepts (Spender, 1990). It was whilst involved in editorial work that she 'came to the conclusion that language both informed, and then reflected, and then informed again the realities of the experience.' It was this circular reinforcement of androcentric language and concepts that Amira regarded as damaging. She considered that when the concepts have changed for the individual and the inappropriateness of the language is clear, there is a sense that the spirit does not quite fit into the social world. Wren (1989:82) cites the problem of 'mere metaphors' in this respect. Amira tried to reformulate religious language but eventually gave up and found her social and spiritual niche outside the faith and the church.

Some respondents reported resistance to inclusive language in many areas of the church, because it not only challenged traditional gender relations, but forced redefinitions of aspects of theology and reconceptualisations of God (Daly, 1985:xvii-xx). Thus changes have been welcomed by some Christians and have proved threatening to others (Wren, 1989:216-226). Respondents spoke of continuing personal dilemmas and compromises because of their roles as church leaders. They needed to preserve their jobs and to accommodate those within their congregations who could not cope with conceptual and language changes. Eventually, however, most respondents could not continue the exclusive use of non-inclusive language and patriarchal images.

Theresa recalled that from the 1970s inclusive language was important to her but that the church had generally not then caught up with secular feminism in Australia. She remembered the frustration of hanging 'in a vacuum'. She illustrated the point by recalling the occasion when she gave an officiating priest a copy of inclusive liturgy. He complied in rote mode, verbatim, with all the inclusive language that the nuns had written, but reverted to an automatic, non-inclusive benediction. This was not an act of resistance. He had not understood. Theresa's story indicated that not all aspects of personal reformation were cleft-healing and that the journey was not linear. Whilst felt discrepancies within the inner self may have been clarified and addressed, the social self within a community was often left floundering even more than before *because* of newly identified insights. Theresa reached a juncture where she could no longer compromise language comfortably.

Veronica also recalled the beginning of her own language reformation. It was a 'testing of the water' that began with almost childlike timidity on what she regarded as sacred ground, that is, within a church service. She did not embark on this venture alone. It was safer with a friend. Her account indicated the taboo of altering churchly words. She talked about the 'fun' of substituting inclusive words in the hymns as being 'very badly behaved' despite the fact that it 'felt so comfortable'. This underscored the forbidden nature of the exercise. However, they were 'just doing it quietly', not 'loudly enough for anybody to get their knickers in a twist'.

Veronica's account illustrated that women are sometimes socialised to feel that when trying to effect change, they must do so quietly and without offence to others or to systems (Harrison, 1974; Dempsey, 1986). In this respect, pronouns have proved particularly problematic (Franklin, R., 1986; Saunders, 1993). Christians have been taught to engage with a God in whose image they have been made (Macquarrie, 1977:231-232). Christians have thus anthropomorphised God. To use the gender-neutral 'it' is problematic both from an objectifying (Baillie, 1977:108) and a feminist (McFague, 1989:141) stance. Some respondents reported having switched to 'she' when referring to God, some still use 'he', some use a mixture, and some have tried to avoid any personal pronoun. Such avoidance is often awkward because it necessitates the

continual use of the word 'God' or careful sentence construction. Several respondents admitted that the problem has been not only finding words but rethinking what sounds linguistically 'natural'. Margaret admitted, 'I'm learning to delete saying "he" about God from my vocabulary so that it doesn't sound forced and fixed.' She writes hymns and liturgy and tries to employ language and concepts that have applications at several different levels. They must be ascetically palatable to traditionalists, theologically sound according to her perspectives, and liberating to feminist Christians.

Annabelle, on the other hand, conceded that, for her, in the end, there is no language for God. She now thinks of God as a feeling rather than an image or words. However, Annabelle does not have to lead worship services. It was revealed that, for those who carry this social responsibility to a variety of people, reconstructing language is not a simple task. To this end, Lyn clarified a further dimension. She became increasingly annoyed as her awareness of sexist language within the context of worship was raised, and subsequently changed the words of some hymns. This raised a further problem. Not only was she aware that she could possibly offend some traditionalists, but the issue itself could detract from what she considered should be the *real* focus, that is, the eminence of God. The problem became circular. Reform cannot be easily implemented when it may disrupt aspects that are considered vital to keeping the faith, therefore reform cannot easily emanate from the cornerstones of practised Christianity (Morley, 1988). Reformation was therefore sometimes piecemeal. For Lyn, it was a sorting out process of holding in tension moral responsibility to inner self, others and God.

Despite responsibilities, it was revealed that compromise of self has its limits. Accommodation of systems and mandates became more difficult as awareness of personal clefts escalated. It became less possible to remain compliant *and* comfortable. Sarah reported that she used to be able to attend 'any church anywhere' and 'feel at home'. However, now she does not feel at home. She talked about the alienation of having a 'male triumphant God' who is 'thrust down (her) throat with every hymn and prayer and Bible reading and liturgy.' Oppression was more than language. It was conceptual. This negative image of God indicated little chance of escape and bore some resemblance to the God-as-rapist image expressed by Eva earlier (see *Spiritual and Theological Clefts*). Because of the language, Sarah now often regards the church as

perpetrator. Her thoughts resonated with those of Tamar who also indicated a shift from what was once personally tolerable to almost total intolerance of words like 'Lord' and 'Master' and concepts of 'God as monarchical or in control over and above.' Tamar spoke of 'casting out' the ingrained title 'Lord'. This implied a kind of purging.

Eva who, in the past, like Veronica and Lyn, felt responsible for the comfort of others, also arrived at a point where the compromise to inner self was eventually more than she could bear. In contrast to Veronica's initial whispered 'bad behaviour', she boldly assured, 'Now I change the words of the hymn. I don't care if they hear it over the microphone and all the pronouns and everything. I don't bother telling people now. I just do it.' The resolve of her tone indicated that she was not so prepared to sacrifice the wellbeing of her soul for social protocol. A further change was that she no longer apologised for this. Mary reported that she took this process a step further by not only changing the language of worship unapologetically but by actually *telling* the congregation that she did so for feminist reasons.

For respondents, language reformation was still a work-in-progress. It encompassed a variety of perspectives on changing images of God, spirituality and church authority icons.

Isolation

This section overlaps the chapter on *Wilderness*. For some respondents, wilderness was a recurring experience, part of which was a feeling of isolation, the loss of affinity with significant others and a sense of no longer fully belonging to original community. It was discovered that inner, spiritual reformation gave rise to new possibilities for social location. Practically though, this was not always readily available. Theresa's account typified this aspect of reformation most acutely. With a kind of claustrophobic overtone she remembered the initial inability to share her feminist theology with anyone for fear of being labelled 'as someone who had lost their faith'. Theresa's voice and gestures evoked a metaphor of a wound-up coil needing freedom. Conferences were inspiring, but rare occasions. New insights were spiritually liberating but socially isolating. Because Theresa viewed a shared faith through different eyes, she felt mandated to live with a certain social dishonesty. The inner dichotomy was articulated as she reported,

> I was living in what was a Reverend Mother kind of dominated culture by this stage. It was very structured and very authoritarian and there was one part of me that wanted to remain committed with this group of people and yet I was thinking 'Hey, have I really even still got the faith?' you know, because I felt that I was walking to the beat of a different drum.

This exemplifies a central soul and social dilemma for Christian feminists (see *Loyalty and Love for the Church as Problematic* in *Social Clefts*) and epitomises the core of inner cleft (see 'Social Self and Inner Self' in *Literature and Theory*). Theresa's doubt about her faith, typified some of the anguish indicated by other respondents, when they had moved beyond the thinking of their communities, had begun to respond to quite markedly different spiritual paradigms, but were still profoundly influenced by traditional faith definitions. This fostered a kind of isolating feeling of spiritual dishonesty. Annabelle, Lyn, Joan, Mickale and Lily expressed similar uncertainty. The 'different drum' needed legitimisation.

Sometimes the concept of isolation extended beyond the individual, as respondents saw themselves as belonging to a particular social group. For example, over the years Kath felt that she was part of a 'kind' who had been ousted in certain quarters of the Anglican Church. She spoke of her 'anger and grief' at the failure of the church to take women seriously and of her intentional work with women's groups and committees to bring about change. For Kath, the dilemma was that the more she became aware of feminist issues, the more she fought to overcome injustices towards women in the Anglican system, and the more she felt one of the category of non-conformist women who were, at various junctures, socially isolated from mainstream Anglicanism. It was the fact of her basic love for the Anglican Church that gave rise to the 'anger' and 'grief' (Hirschman, 1970). She belonged to a sorority of social isolates but also needed to belong 'at home'. Lyn, of the Uniting Church, similarly observed that, in her view, men did not understand women's need for camaraderie in ministry that included both genders at all levels.

Having experienced a rebirth of soul and ideology, a number of respondents reported that the work then began on the struggle for social identities that were true to inner selves. This was both a painstaking means of seeking healing for clefts between the spiritual and the social, and the trigger for counter clefts that respondents hoped would be temporary.

These included breaks in friendships at community level and disapproval from hierarchy when respondents did not comply with tradition. To heal the sense of personal isolation, the systems had to be changed. Tamar appeared to have broken the most original ground in this respect. As the first woman minister in her denomination in Australia she was aware of feminist issues in the church generally from the 1960s. Kath was another who braved isolation in order to fight for women's ordination in the early days of the Anglican debate. Reports indicated a sense of building upon the efforts of those who had gone before. There were times of solidarity and camaraderie. Despite this, at whatever stage individual respondents identified with the general movement for women's rights across the church, there were times when each felt the evolution of her own reformation in isolation.

Standing One's Ground

Throughout the reshaping process, the challenge was to stand one's ground in the face of those who would preserve the status quo. Putting ideologies into practice proved both frustrating and rewarding. Eva talked about the convention into which she had originally been expected to fit and the continuing assertiveness needed to move beyond it. She observed,

> I've compromised a lot of things and often it's out of respect for others, ...but there's the compromise where you compromise your own integrity, your own soul and you think, 'No! No more!' And to come to that decision is hard and you don't easily jump into it all the time. It's always a decision to keep coming to.

Eva developed a trust in her own path but indicated that decisions have to be revisited in order to reinforce self-confidence. The risk of slipping back into the old ways of thinking and imaging were ever present. Eva referred to imposed ways of thinking as the ethos that 'gets into your bones'. Healing the cleft was not merely a matter of throwing off an unwanted mantle. She indicated that peeling off layers of encrusted theory that clings is often painful, like something whose removal also metaphorically rips off skin and hair often leaving raw and fragile membrane.

Mickale also stressed the need for periodic reinforcement of new thinking and social location. She was obliged to live in the church manse because of her husband's career but found this particularly problematic. She had suffered through what she regarded as

extreme breaches of her privacy (Dempsey, 1986:84-85; see *Social Clefts*). In Mickale's church tradition there was the expectation that the minister's wife would also participate in work for the church in an unpaid capacity (Dempsey, 1986:81-99; Finch, 1983:56-58). Tenets of conformity (Dempsey, 1986:92-96) even extended to dress code. Mickale always broke this as a protest against not getting sucked into the mould entirely.

Finally she put pressure on her husband to move from parish ministry into school chaplaincy, so they could live in their own home. She said this gave her the social room she needed. Some fifteen years later, when her husband indicated that he would like to return to parish ministry, Mickale felt haunted by old contentions. She set down some conditions. 'Number one,' she said, 'is that our home's our *home. It is not* an extension of a (church) office.' It was only after some years away from parish ministry that she felt strong enough to express this. She assured her husband of her support, but made clear her intention to live her own life. She also clarified that ministry was *his* job and that she would not accept responsibility if 'all of Q (large country town)' did not come to church. Mickale also told the power brokers of her husband's intended parish that she had her own professional life and would not be fulfilling their expected role of the minister's wife by presiding over the church Women's Guild. On this occasion she felt the physical pressure of her husband's hand on her knee attempting to steer her away from sounding too radical. She thus felt alone in standing for what she regarded as ordinary fairness. She said the occasion also drew attention to the pressure on women to conform and to resist self-defence and embarrassment for others (Dempsey, 1986). In this respect, Tylielle also touched upon the aspect of social tools traditionally used to perpetuate women's male-prescribed roles. She commented, 'It takes a lot of learning how *not* to be nice.'

Mickale's unreserved reinforcement on these matters eventually won her husband's co-operation if not his entire approval. A measure of this was indicated when the gates at the manse into which they were moving were not affixed as had been agreed upon. Her husband, unprompted, told the church, 'Mickale's not moving in until the gates are put on!' There was a note of triumph in her voice when Mickale reported, 'They had the gates up next week!' This was a symbolic moment when Mickale identified her own autonomy within the marriage and within the sphere of the church.

Interviews revealed that respondents' insistence upon a revised social location sometimes facilitated at least part of the liberating process for others, both men and women. For example, Mickale reported that the ground rules she had set up with the church, in the above illustration, had not gone unnoticed by other clergy and their spouses. It had prompted the venting of anger, by other ministers and spouses, about the lack of privacy in manses. Mickale concluded, 'They said that they were quite envious of the way I've actually set this up here'.

Kath also had her view on standing one's ground. As one who presented as being further along the social reformation track than some other respondents, she offered the following comment in relation to women's place in the church:

> Why would you give the territory away to the men? When I thought about leaving (the church), one of the things that experience taught me was that I had a right to claim my place in society and that nobody could actually take it away from me unless I gave it away to them.

Kath indicated that she was not simply speaking for herself but coining a general workable practice. She then gave account of the strong groups of autonomous women to which she has belonged and spoke about her encouragement of others. Though committed to helping other women, her comment assumes that all church women own at least some of the 'territory' and therefore have the option to 'give it away'. It ignores those who do not have such a sense of strength, those who would not consider that they were giving the 'territory away' so much as never having possessed it (Wood, 1993:37-47; Williams, D.S., 1993:89). Kath's reflection appeared to throw the onus of disempowerment back on women (Coward, 1992; Rankka, 1998:30-31, 36-37). Respondents generally did not fit this ethos, nor did Kath in much of the rest of her story. In the main, respondents felt that men in the ecclesia had genuinely displaced them *without* permission.

Eva's story exemplified this. Her background was devoid of personal autonomy. Abused and disapproved of as a child, by her parents, and having lived most of her adult life in what she now considers an extremely conservative rural community, Eva reported feeling that there was little she could do to break free of conventional norms. She recalled the mandate to 'niceness'. She reported occasions of outward gentleness when she should

have been assertive, and instances of swallowing her anger in order to 'do what a good girl does', when her inner self wanted to yell in defiance. She wanted to make people see that they were requiring her to live a role into which she did not fit, for the sake of convention. She marvelled at the distance she had come since those days. Compared to the other respondents this was a long time coming. Eva was the oldest respondent. She, like Annabelle, described herself as a late developer with regard to feminist thinking. Eva attributed this to what she regarded as a disadvantaged background and reported needing much professional counselling along the way in order to accommodate new perspectives on her changing social location. It would be hard to construe that, in the first instance, she had given the territory away. Eva also learned how not to be nice all the time, but her early steps to liberation were tenuous and took their toll on her family relationships and on her health (see *Wilderness*). Standing firm often meant doing so at great personal cost.

Corporate support was reinforced at conferences and other gatherings. Some respondents had more access to these than others. However, the business of holding one's ground often belonged within the sphere of occasions when individuals were alone and surrounded by those with opposing perspectives.

Reforming Lifestyles: New and Old Communities

The Reformed Self and the Church

Respondents who remained loyal to their respective denominations generally sought reviewed perspectives of the church that were spiritually and socially affirming, even though some of its practices remained problematic. As spiritual and social confidence developed, some respondents began to regard themselves as part of the decision-making apparatus within church structures as distinct from those who were simply at the mercy of male power brokers. Again the process was not linear or complete but rather a general trend within individual lives. This was particularly true of the three Anglicans interviewed. Kath, although committed to the wider cause of feminism beyond her denomination and the church generally, indicated a staunch and primary dedication to the application of feminism within the Anglican Church. This grew as her social position within the structure strengthened. She said she '*always*' regarded feminism as a 'means

to a better church' rather than an 'end of the journey.' She cited people who use feminism 'as a way to punish the church for not being a perfect parent' and added in its defence,

> The church never will be (perfect) because *we are* the church and it's this kind of contingent human institution that has to keep defining and redefining itself and I see my own church doing that. We're now talking about women bishops.

Kath thus consolidated her place within the church. In the interview, her story progressed almost chronologically. In another part of the interview, when recollecting the injustices against women in past years, the concept of 'always' was not quite so convincing. Earlier, as she recalled the struggle women had for ordination within her denomination, Kath appeared more singularly connected to the women lobbying for the same. However, later in the interview, she appeared much more forgiving of the church and much more a part of the institution. It was as if she had progressed from being a child of the organisation to being part of the parenting/power apparatus (Schaef, 1985). Feminism was later regarded as an asset to be pooled for the good of the whole and not to be used to 'punish' the church. Kath did not, at this juncture, challenge injustices. The possibility of women bishops as an illustration of a progressive and redefining institution appeared to ignore the centuries of injustice where women were denied equal opportunities. Several other respondents were of the opinion that women clergy, at any level, should *never* have been a contentious issue. They argued that women always had the moral right but were denied the means. Theresa, as noted in *Social Clefts*, argued that the admission of women to clerical ranks was no cause for either gratitude or celebration because this merely seconded women to an androcentric hierarchical system. To speak of the mere *possibility* of women bishops as a sign of progression, could, therefore, be interpreted as an establishment or 'parental' perspective. Kath's feminist perspective therefore had inconsistencies as did that of most respondents.

Margaret chose to speak about the covert foundations of feminism as a means of reforming ideas on the church. She too talked from a standpoint of loyalty to the Anglican Church, not as one who appeared to have joined the ranks of the establishment so much as one following another historic line. She reported, of her years prior to entering the priesthood:

> I was involved with women who'd been working in the church, in the *Anglican* church for yonks as deaconesses, for *decades* and *decades* and *lifetimes* and who were very faithful to the church as it was and would have been *horrified* at any suggestion that they were feminists, but they were women doing cutting edge ministry without any recognition or appreciation or any song and dance.

Like the other Anglican respondents, Margaret stressed the particular challenge Anglicanism posed to feminism and general change. Deaconesses were women workers who fulfilled recognised roles within the Anglican and other churches (Feith, 1990). They were not endowed with the power or apostolic role of priests or ministers. In fact Bendroth (1993:36) holds that, within fundamentalist groups, the order was initiated as a means of controlling women's ministry. The words, '*decades* and *decades* and *lifetimes*' and the dragging tone of Margaret's voice emphasised the long-suffering dedication of women who worked behind the scenes largely without recognition. Margaret acknowledged the dichotomy of those who abhorred the overt notion of feminism but practised it anyway, providing a foundation upon which feminists could build. Margaret attributed her present social position, as an ordained parish priest and feminist, to the ground broken by deaconesses, and said that this was largely the means by which she felt connected to all women and all people, however conservative or different to herself. She concluded that to deny this 'connection' would court 'deep spiritual trouble.' She and other respondents identified the 'connectedness' as part of the reason why leaving the church and/or the Christian faith was not a personal option.

However, despite new insights regarding connectedness, the search for ecclesiastic social location without compromise to individual integrity was not a tidy or complete process. Sarah raised the issue of spiritual reformation and its social implications with regard to the practical issue of needing to retain her employment as a minister within the Uniting Church. She said, 'If I pick over the traces too badly, then I won't be able to find another position' (Frye, 1983:98). Such reality was pitted against the fact that her understanding of God aligned with that of 'a lot of people who wouldn't have a bar of the church.' It left her in two minds. She wanted to change the church so that non-church people could fit in but concluded that there was something about the process that felt 'really unsafe and insecure and dangerous'. Whilst the church could do with reforming, she did not ultimately trust it to respect wider scopes of theologies or socially accept people who

espoused them. Part of Sarah's reformation was to clarify this dilemma and bring into focus clefts with regard to both her own social position and the felt complexity of relations between herself, the church, and friends outside the church.

Beyond Domestic Identity

Victorin-Vangerud (2000:67-88) suggests a liberating social redefinition of family and its implications for theology and church structure. Breaking free of an imposed mono-domestic identity was necessary for some respondents. Whilst this section is classified under *Social Reformation*, respondents indicated that this redefinition was more than a change of social identity. It was vitally spiritual. Eva, Jo and Kath, through their respective divorces, were obvious examples. They felt the 'call' to the ordained ministry was part of the catalyst. Eva reported that, if it were not for rite of ordination that signified the 'God' factor, she would not have made such drastic changes to her life.

Redefining the domestic role proved complex for Veronica. It did not involve the simple shedding of one identity for another. Some aspects of domestic identity were woven into the new as treasured components. This kind of social and spiritual reformation defied the idea of espousing male characteristics for a male-dominated and male-defined career (Dillon, 1986; Spender, 1988b). Veronica described the giving up of male-prescribed 'icons of good wife, good mother, good church woman' (Stevenson-Moessner, 2000:313-314) as 'very painful' and by no means a 'one day thing'. Again she stressed the painfulness of the process, as did Lyn in her metaphor of labour and childbirth (see *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*). She talked about giving up ironing the tea towels and other symbols of what she had considered constituted a good woman. The things she considered 'as much a part of (her) education as an arts degree and (her) degree in theology'.

Veronica's account was impassioned. Her reformation involved the crumbling of domestic perfection as a reason for being. When, having raised her children, she decided to pursue a career as a priest, it was not simply a matter of finding other goals. She thought not only about who she needed to become, but who she already was in terms of skills and essence. Whilst she had to relinquish the role of a highly conscientious mother who never employed other people to care for her children and who had invested almost

all of her energy in home-making, these, in fact, began to form the basis of a new identity. She reflected,

> It took me a long time to understand...that all my richness of experience as a wife and mother, the mother particularly, far from being in opposition to being a minister, was actually *for* being a minister and that they would *inform* the ministry. The mothering thing was not only okay, but, in fact, my treasure chest. I could barely believe it. I could not really believe it as I was finding it out.

Thus Veronica marvelled at the discovery that the role women played in the private sphere, prescribed or chosen, was not simply a valuable extra to ministry, but vital to it. The resource of her domestic experience as a prerequisite to priesthood progressed from 'not okay' to 'okay' and then to solid basis. The astonishment of this revelation was still evident in her voice. It underscored the devaluation of women's 'treasure chests' in terms of epistemology and skills (Garry and Pearsall, 1992; Belenky et al, 1986). Cranny-Francis et al (2003:182) note the transformation of women to power-bearing categories as objects espousing male paradigms rather than bringing with them precious essences of former identities. Veronica could hardly believe that she did not have to totally reinvent herself in order to make a success of ministry.

Respondents as Reformers of Local Communities

As part of a chronological 'cartography' of her personal 'struggle' with church and androcentric theology, Fiorenza (1993:3) clarifies,

> I do not argue that feminists must remain members of biblical religions and churches that they experience as oppressive and dehumanising. Rather, I argue that those of us who have experienced the liberating power of religion must claim this power as our own estate and inheritance.

Her point encapsulates the motivation of many respondents to this thesis. As noted Kath asked 'Why would you give the territory away to the men?' With two exceptions, respondents have stayed formally connected to church and Christianity. The need has been to find ways of individual survival and creativity within old structures. However, personal survival was not the only concern. As observed in *Social Clefts*, respondents also shared a sense of moral obligation and genuine desire to share new insights, establish connections with kindred spirits, and foster liberation theology in other people,

especially those among their own congregations, students or religious orders for whom they felt a duty of care.

For most respondents it was not a case of hiking off on one's own. Margaret spoke most succinctly on this. She described herself as 'a church body' connected to other Christians and said, 'I can't separate my sense of who I am from my sense of who *we* are.' She talked about the benefits of shared intellectual resources and pointed out that, although individually she could go 'full steam ahead', those who were not 'cutting edge feminists' also needed nurture. Margaret reflected,

> It's all very well for me to understand about feminist thinking but what about the eighty-three year old in my pews on a Sunday. How can the delight that *I* have and the nourishment that *I* get from using the Bible critically, and thinking feminist thoughts about God, how can that bear some good fruit for the rest of the community? Not everybody has got the ability to read the book and process the data and all that so it's very self-indulgent if I'm just doing it to help my spiritual growth.

In thus saying, Margaret epitomised the sincerity and the commitment with which the respondents generally embraced both their respective ideologies and careers. Her sentiments echoed those of Heyward (1984:124) on reformed spirituality and faith community, 'I want to reflect on strength – to share some of my own ongoing struggles in order to see more clearly what is worthwhile and what is not in our life together…'

The contrast was reminiscent of a church picnic I once attended with my own congregation. The men had formulated a sports program for the afternoon that included a 'women's race'. The women, largely, did not want to participate and would have been happy to sit in the shade of the trees and talk, but the men kept insisting that the 'women's race' must be run. The women were athletically unequal, aged between twenty and seventy-five. Finally badgered into compliance, they lined up at the start and spontaneously agreed that no one would win or lose. When the starting whistle blew, they linked hands, ran at the pace of the slowest and reached the finish line together. The men were disgruntled and accused them of bad *sportsmanship*! Margaret, though a rigorous feminist, expressed the commitment to 'run at the pace of the slowest' where this was needed, as an acknowledgement of spiritual connectedness with other women (and men) despite their conservatism. Margaret talked about sharing the 'good stuff

(feminist theology)' with others who might not otherwise have access to it. She regarded the relationship as reciprocal adding,

> If they (her congregation) believe that I really care, they believe that I'm committed to being one with them, then they will do remarkable things that they wouldn't do otherwise in terms of stretching their own horizons but there's got to be a deep respect.

Margaret thus indicated that the ties between minister/priest and congregation should be based on personal relationships more than automatic respect for clerical office per se. Kath expressed a similar commitment to using her insights for the empowering of people, particularly women. She described her role as an encourager for women within the Anglican Church to take religious rites 'into their own hands' in order to remedy the fact that there are so many moments in women's lives for which the church has no rites, an omission that feminist theological practice has sought to rectify (Neu and Upton, 1984:347-350; McRae-McMahon, 1998:255-275; Winter et al, 1995:132-136; Starhawk, 1989:326-335). Kath concluded that a basic tool for change was the personal integrity of the individual minister/priest. She regarded this as crucial for challenging church members to push boundaries of theological concepts and spirituality. Like Margaret, she believed, 'Once people trust you, you can take them into thinking beyond what they ever imagined was possible.'

Veronica also talked about cleric/church member trust and what she believed to be an intrinsic human healing resource, traditionally accessed more by women than men (Estes, 1996:374-375) and often regarded as weakness (p.409). She spoke of salt water as a 'healing, bathing' balm for 'wounds'. She said,

> I find when people now seek me out to come and talk to me they say, 'I don't know why I'm crying.' And I say, 'Well, I do, I know why you're crying. Just let it happen. It's okay to cry' and I see it as a compliment.

Veronica's account highlighted the mixture of feelings she regarded women sometimes have about tears. 'I don't know why I'm crying' could mean, 'I should not be crying. I should be stronger' or 'I am confused about how I feel' or both, together with a range of other meanings. The journey from androcentric thinking to a more liberated stance has helped Veronica and others to be more articulate and confident about the way women act

and think. This excerpt underscores the role women play in the lives of each other, one woman assuring another that the shedding of tears is both healing and appropriate.

Commitment to community among respondents was thus quite prominent for varying reasons. Lily stayed with a particular local church for some years, determined to weather the gender discrimination meted out to her, not simply for the sake of 'toughing it out' but because she also felt a sense of 'us'. Tylielle's views were similar whilst she was still with the church. Like Kath, Tylielle reported having 'always had a vision that was wider than the little local church.' This stood her in good stead when three strands of the Christian church came together to form the Uniting Church in Australia. At the time of union, she had been a parish minister with the Congregational Church. Faced with the challenge of amalgamating with the Presbyterian Church around the corner, Tylielle, of necessity, took on the role of integrator as local level union progressed. She regarded this as 'an opportunity to be really creative with a community of people.' She recalled, 'I didn't have to take sides' and that she could help them to understand and accept one another.

Perhaps Tylielle was complying with a traditional female role of reconciler and peacemaker (Bendroth, 1993:15). However, her initial encounter with feminism as a response to overt sexism in a new parish was a different story. Tylielle could not remain neutral. She recalled attending a gathering of women who had been hurt by male hierarchy, and trying to determine her role. Her identity as peacemaker would not fit this group. Discussions struck at the heart of her own issues. For the first time she was acutely aware that, though the church is 'us', 'we' are divided. It occurred to her, for the first time, that men held the sway. Tylielle tried for a while but could not effect enough change within the church to accommodate the radical changes within her. Soon after this, Tylielle left the church. She applied her new insights to tertiary women's studies and other social spheres and is considered, among many of her peers in the church, as 'alternative' to mainstream.

Although Tamar has remained within the church, her path bears some similarity to that of Tylielle. Tamar also lives and works in what many would consider 'alternative' to mainstream. She gave a detailed account of the reciprocal relationship she has with her

inner suburban congregation. She spoke of her church as a shelter for those disenchanted or abused by the church. This included lesbian members 'forced out' of other congregations or those 'on a different spiritual path' with 'no place to turn' and even some who were 'traditionalists' but needed to break free of dominating and/or sexually abusive clergy. Respondents, generally, indicated that traditional church (Ruether, 2000:36-53) and androcentric theology (Althaus-Reid, 2000:205-222) coped badly with issues of sexuality. Tamar spoke of the need for alternate ways in which to express faith. She said some had even been 'dismissed' from their congregations and concluded, 'I don't think there would be anyone here who, however you label them, (are) mainline, traditional Uniting Church.'

I have watched Tamar spearhead feminist thought and support marginalised groups within the wider church over three decades, and weather various tirades of disapproval from church traditionalists for doing so. Her church is one where victims of various ecclesiastic situations have gathered. Perhaps the safe 'alternative' and non-judgmental environment has been made possible, in part, by the fact that the minister presents as one whose personal reformation process is reasonably advanced. Although the church had actually requested a feminist minister before they employed her, thereby ensuring strong support from the beginning, it was under her guidance that liberationist programs and practices developed. Reciprocal impetus has shaped both individual and community.

Unlike Tylielle and Amira, who found it necessary to leave the church and the faith in order to find communities that were compatible to their respective spiritual journeys, Tamar and her congregation appear to have developed a feminist/liberationist Christian faith. This has been achieved locally despite the fact that large numbers within the wider denominational membership have often discriminated against the practices and theological stances of those represented within this particular local church. Tamar summarised the aspects of faith and community solidarity in the face of social marginalisation. She spoke of challenging traditionalism as 'going with God in risky ways'. By this she meant the precariousness of creating new paradigms without a prescribed blueprint. It resonated with nebulous God-images of reformed thinking and Audrey's comment about feminist theology facilitating a means by which one could 'risk being in God's company'.

Tamar stressed the need for 'strong support and help' in the process as a means of building solid ground for alternative paths. Interviews revealed that an important part of the reformation process within the life of the individual was the establishment of networks supportive of new ways of thinking. For the most part, these were not within the congregations, religious orders or learning institutions that constituted the daily working lives of respondents. Respondents generally indicated that they were compelled to develop 'other' lives for support, with varying levels of overlap in the traditional church. Tamar was the one exception to this. Her daily community was also her 'soul' community.

Before she left the church, Amira's situation bore close parallels to that of Tamar. She spoke of a freedom within the local congregation to explore philosophies and to question tenets regarded, by her denomination, as religious fixtures. Her group also embraced social issues that affected the lives of women and included people outside mainstream Christianity. There was one important structural difference, though, between Amira's situation and that of Tamar. Although Tamar's congregation comprised many people who felt marginalised by mainstream denominationalism, often because of the gay/lesbian versus straight Christianity issue, her ministry and its mission has been tolerated and partly funded by the state Synod of the Uniting Church. It has been officially recognised. Amira's was not. She reported, 'We had a great time' but indicated that the actual practice of the small congregation was very separate from the Baptist Union. It was self-funded and struggled financially. She also had some doubts about its ultimate good. She explained her role, 'may not have done them a favour in the long term' because the congregation had to 'bond' back into the system when she left.

Although Tamar eventually found and built upon a haven within the system, this proved unique among respondents. The lack of such opportunities contributed to Amira and Tylielle's break from the church and the faith. The majority of respondents continued flying solo within androcentric structures as week-to-week negotiation. Their respective influences of reformed ideas and concepts upon local churches, learning institutions in which they taught and religious communities of which they were a part, were often slow and sometimes only seen in retrospect. Sarah described her country ministry as

essentially a 'really bad experience'. It was only at the end that she realised the congregation had 'moved' and were 'set to continue to move.'

Like Margaret, Kath, Lily, Eva and Jo, Sarah gauged her personal impact upon the local church by the direct feedback. She said, they had begun to appreciate the 'flexibility' and the assurance that 'it wasn't going to be the end of the world' if they made a mistake, nor would they 'get yelled at and disapproved of.' The inference was that rule-keeping custodians lived with the perceived danger of making a mistake. This carried with it the threat of possibly offending God and incurring the 'end of the world' (or some nebulous, irreversible disaster). The fear was then of being 'yelled at' and 'disapproved of' by local hierarchy. Like Kath, Sarah was thus a boundary pusher who encouraged people, especially women, to take the process of exploration into their own hands.

Jo also based the impact of her ministry on feedback from her congregation. Like Sarah, she spoke of a kind of 'free spirit' and 'lack of stereotyping' the members of her church indicated she had brought to them through the re-imaging of Jesus and other religious precincts. Jo prefaced the account by underscoring her deficiencies. She began, 'I'm not a great preacher. I'm not a Biblical scholar' and continued, 'but…my congregation tell me that the Bible lived for them through my presentations in a way that it hasn't before.' Her point was that, despite her ostensive lack of scholarship, she was somehow able to move the group forward.

Lily similarly spoke of the impact she had at denominational level when she was the keynote speaker at the annual denominational conference (see *Social Clefts*). She too drew attention to what she perceived as personal limitations and appeared awestruck by the fact that people remembered various aspects of what she had said. Both of these stories tie in with another woman cleric outside of the group of respondents who described her role as one who often creates with 'broken tools'. Stepping outside controlled spheres was reported to be essential to theological, spiritual and social progression. This was sometimes threatening because respondents first had to believe that they had some valid contribution to make.

Klenke (1996:257) observes, 'most women have been concerned with trying to change themselves, rather than their places of work'. In this respect Eva reflected, 'I just hope

that I say enough here and there, that those who just need that little bit of permission (to be themselves) can pick it up.' Her comment reflected the piecemeal nature of both the corporate and individual feminist journeys as told in the interviews. The 'permission' meant the sanction she found people often needed to dare to conceptualise beyond prescriptive theology. Like Margaret, Eva also linked her spiritual and social journey closely to those entrusted into her care. She said, 'When you're dealing with other people's lives, you have to be dealing with your own too.' Eva was trying not to duplicate the negative attitudes of clerics she had experienced in some of the vital stages of *her* development (see *Social Clefts*).

Unlike protestant respondents who, after designated periods, changed congregations, the Catholic respondents stayed long term within their respective communities. Whilst Mary, Joan and Theresa were engaged in daily work beyond their respective communities, the challenge to live in, and make sense of a lifelong commitment to orders within old structures brought its own set of problems. All three admitted that, without the re-ordering edicts of Vatican Two, some of the local changes might not have been possible. Theresa reported that exposure to feminist conferences and a personal commitment to feminism made her an agent of change within her religious community. Her life was linked to those within her convent 'family'. Whilst inner reconstruction constantly begged development, social individualism was limited. Theresa considered herself largely responsible for introducing consultative ways of 'doing' community that were outside hierarchical models.

All respondents indicated that the individual journey was tied to the corporate journey. Amira and Tylielle moved out of the church to make their contributions in other spheres. Mickale and Annabelle hovered around the margins of their respective denominations due to their husbands' careers. All other respondents have remained within the church and have indicated a high commitment to sharing what they have found.

Finding New Networks

Fiorenza (1993:334) speaks of a theoretical frame that 'could displace the "otherness"-construct of woman with the democratic construct of the *ekklēsia* of women', creating 'a feminist public that seeks equality and citizenship of women by articulating, confronting,

and combating patriarchal divisions' (p.346). She stresses that entrenched structures be challenged at their most basic and ingrained levels. Respondents have indicated the seeds of this ideology. It has taken strength to challenge entrenched hermeneutics and widely accepted religious concepts and to make feminist contributions to essentially conservative communities or to survive without the church. Consolidation of initial permission-giving phenomena, the vehicle of which has been conferences, literature and general personal contact with feminist thinkers, was needed, as indicated above. This was crucial not only for the development of creative theory, but also for ongoing emotional and spiritual support and for emerging feminist leadership. Identifying social associations as spiritual connections was thus a vital part of the process. Veronica described her home as littered with religious icons given to her by friends. She reported this as an important means of daily connection with significant and supportive others.

Personal support was therefore a defining influence. This was true of all respondents at various stages. Some cited the loneliness women ministers/priests felt through their marginalisation within clergy *fraternities*. This was said of both their own denominations and cross-denominationally within respective local areas. They also said that this factor often went unnoticed by male clergy. Joan offered, 'I think that unless you have a couple of *really good* friends in your life, then you don't know what friendship or love's about.' Her comment was a deliberate overthrow of bygone austerity when, as observed in *Social Clefts*, according to Mary, Theresa and Joan, 'particular friends' were forbidden (McLay, 1992:391) and the feeling of isolation was sometimes overwhelming. With obvious defiance and conviction, Joan concluded, 'You *can't* just have a *general* friend.'

Respondents indicated that interdenominational networking among women clergy, women academics and nuns was an important balance. Tamar stressed that cross-denominational networking was necessary because she was not optimistic about her own denomination's ability to provide the depth of acceptance needed. However, establishing new networks was not always simple. Some respondents related the substantial efforts undertaken in order to find communities in which they felt accepted. Margaret recalled the 'battles and struggles' to women's ordination and said she 'teamed up with different people along the way'.

Barrier breaking was part of the search for supportive community and took various forms. Some respondents fostered openness to dialogue and discovery of commonality with women of other faiths. For some, th : challenge to accepted religious tenets within Christianity opened the door to question precepts that had taught them to fear multi-faith dialogue. Sarah reported belonging to e-mail feminist theology groups that included Christians, Jews, neo-pagans, a few Quakers and 'the odd stray Buddhist.' She also stressed how such a network de-compartmentalised religion, implementing a dialogue that earthed religion to other spheres of life. Sarah talked about the freedom that she felt she had in this sphere to verbalise frustrations about the church and to link up with people who allowed this. She said, 'you can say, "the church stinks" and "it's driving me crazy"'. She said it was a relief to hear from someone who understood both her frustrations and the fact that she could not simply leave the church, but added as contrast, 'There are not many people in the little rural community that I live in that feel the same way.'

Whilst there was a richness of camaraderie through the crossing of various faith, geographic and ethnic boundaries, Sarah pointed out the limitations of e-mail support. She said that ultimately it was no substitute for a 'physical community'. She stressed the need for ways of being with God together 'where you don't feel alienated, where you don't feel unaccepted.'

Mickale, like Sarah, reported the importance of being understood. She spoke of the relief and affinity she found in the Jungian community, a group with whom she could speak her mind without having to 'apologise' or 'translate' into socially acceptable language. By this she meant the dialectic traditions of her evangelical strand of the church. She continued,

> I'm mixing much more with a totally different community and I don't know where it's going to take me. (husband) was very a..ious about it and about me meeting all these other people who he knows nothing of. In the last ten years, I've developed friendships that (husband) has never met. I'm going on a hike with these women who are interested in the same things as I am.

This excerpt explained three points of vitality for Mickale. Firstly she found a community that was 'totally' other to the church circles that had dominated her personal

sphere for so many years due to her husband's clerical career. Secondly her role in the new found community gave her an important separate identity from her husband, and finally, although she gave geographic details of a physical walk that would cover several days, the 'hike' upon which she was embarking with the other women had metaphoric overtones. It tied in with the notion of a more general journey and the idea of an unpredictable adventure implied in the words, 'I don't know where it's going to take me.'

Unpredictability, with a hint of adventure, was also central to Amira's story. She spoke of new networks and ideologies as more nebulous than those she left behind in the Christian church. She observed that 'community building stuff' is now 'hard to crystallise'. She said, 'It's not like here's the Anglican church on the corner and you know where it is and you can go whenever you like. You can pick it up and drop it whenever you like.' She defined community outside established structures as having nebulous boundaries and less identifying factors. She indicated that groups are often loosely linked, lack precedents and frameworks, and do not share long-term memories and established traditions. Both Amira and Mickale indicated that newly-formed networks have to evolve as those participating travel along.

Respect for Differing Stances

The various contributions of respondents with regard to feminism, existing social structures and re-networking generally challenged any tendency to draw clear theoretical demarcations between radical and liberal feminism (Wearing, 1996:9-21). Individual stories revealed a mixture of correlation to theories in this respect. Respondents generally demonstrated much tolerance for a variety of intellectual feminist perspectives. Kath drew an insightful reflection on varying social locations of the women theologians she knew with regard to the Rock as institution, secular society and appropriate ways to bring about changes that challenge injustices against women. Kath said,

> In the end I do think God calls people to be different people and that means that you take up different locations and that somebody who is out on the margins who might see the critique much more sharply than I do, has to be supported to do that with as much integrity as they can because I can function in the centre of the system and I am happy to go to committee meetings and be on boards and do that kind of work in the church, then I think it's only right that I be supported too.

Kath's comment was true to the basic feminist ideology that avoids objectifying and oppressing women and fosters mutual respect, as opposed to conformity, for the common good (Acker et al, 1983:423). However, whilst not specifically directed at racial, cultural and socio-economic differences (Townes, 1993; Fiorenza, 1993:256-257; 346; Gray and McPhillips, 2001), it also bore faint echoes of Fiorenza's (1993) wider theory on differing feminisms and her metaphor of varied strands entwined in the same rope to form a strength without having to be the same (p.326-328). Most respondents indicated an appreciation of varying perspectives on a range of issues, including shades of feminism itself.

The Journey Out and the Commitment to Stay

West, A. (1995:63) observes,

> ...there were many who became weary or disillusioned by the slamming of the door in their faces and have turned away in disgust. Why waste energy and time on a futile effort? Why not leave the old men prisoners in their tiny castle? And so, answering the summons of radical feminism and Mary Daly, they walked proudly and scornfully, out of ecclesiastical enclosure, to set up a women-only camp on the margins of the male stockade, and pour contempt on those who remain within...

There is a sense in which all respondents have abandoned aspects of church structures that defined traditional faiths and prescribed personal spiritualities with varying degrees of the contempt and resolve indicated in the above quote. Of the seventeen respondents only Tylielle and Amira, however, have substantially left the faith and completely left the church. Mickale and Annabelle have stayed under sufferance due to their husbands' careers, and thirteen have indicated ongoing commitment to reforming the church and the faith from within. Their stories bear similarities and diversities.

As mentioned in *Wilderness*, Tylielle's career as a central identity within the Uniting Church was thrown into turmoil and ended when her awareness about feminist issues was raised comparatively rapidly. This launched her into a period of wilderness from which she emerged with different perspectives and a visible change to her physical appearance (see *Spiritual and Theological Reformation*). Tylielle eventually found her

social niche among women who espouse various forms of spirituality and etched out a career teaching tertiary women's studies. However, Tylielle retained a respect for many aspects of the church's contemporary contribution to society, fond memories of church communities of which she had been a part, and an appreciation for many of what she considered its core values. She noted, 'even after all my work (to move and develop beyond the bounds of Christianity and within other groups), the greatest community I experienced still has been a (local) Congregational Church.' She described this as a 'circle of human beings' the memory of which was still of great value to her.

Amira's story had a different order. Feminist awareness and its clashes with church structures was, for her, a longer process. She compared the church to a marriage breakup and observed 'The dumper often has done a lot of the goodbyes before they go and the dumpee hasn't and has to do that work afterwards.' Identifying as the 'dumper', Amira thus indicated that much of the process of moving on had taken place whilst she still technically occupied a place within the Baptist Union. As mentioned in *Wilderness*, Amira's spiritual departure from the Christian faith predated her official resignation. Mickale's circumstances bore resemblance to this. Although somewhat compelled to stay socially within the church, Mickale reported that the situation was tolerable because she considered herself to be 'on a path out'.

Whilst Amira, Tylielle and Mickale eventually saw very little worth salvaging or reshaping with regard to the practice of exclusively Christian personal and corporate spirituality, Veronica's reformation was inspired by looking past social tools of oppression within church structures. She was determined to delve deeper than such aspects as socially-prescribed role models for women within the church and focus on what she regarded as the purest form of God within but also transcendent of church tenets and practices. Though a staunch Anglican, Veronica made a clear distinction between what she deemed to be basic truths of Christianity and the vehicles by which they travel down through the ages and to individuals. She did this by focusing on who she understood God to be and resolved to stay within the church, flawed though she saw it, as a challenge to build a better structure. For Veronica, the social and spiritual ties with Anglicanism were too strong for her to move anywhere else either within the wider sphere of Christianity or outside its bounds. For her, the church, with all its faults,

remained the vessel for her spirituality. Veronica's commitment to the Anglican Church bore nuptial characteristics.

Mary also talked about the painful experiences of community fostered by the restrictive practices and ideologies with which nuns were encoded in the past. However, despite bad memories, and the fact that the original community of her order is now geographically scattered throughout Australia and New Zealand, they have maintained contact. Mary reported that they still feel there is something intrinsic that perpetuates a sense of belonging.

Kath was also determined to extract personal meaning despite oppressive structures. She said that she regarded the essence of Anglicanism as bigger than the individual and the systems, something worth retaining. She acknowledged a non-punitive God-image as 'a gift from childhood', a permission-giving device that allowed her to challenge the system without guilt. The challenge for Veronica, Kath and Margaret was to remain Anglicans and to explore ways of feminist theological development. The overall stories of these three suggested that some church systems, restrictive though they have been, also had inbuilt permission-giving devices that allowed people to wage war with tenets and practices.

However this was not the case for Lily. She hung on to a concept of the broader church as a way of survival and social redefinition. Discriminatory treatment meted out to her by both hierarchy and local church entities within her denomination took a different toll. She eventually felt free to take up an invitation to minister at a church of another denomination.

End Note

Interviews revealed that personal social reinvention and relocation with respect to structures was helped by some official changes in church policies and practices. Instances where these lagged behind personal development were problematic. All respondents cited occasions such as conferences and lectures by feminist theologians as important steppingstones and, in some cases, initial awareness raisers of feminist

relationships with individual male clergy, and alienated respondents from church communities. Extra internal strength was needed to challenge the status quo with a socially perceived 'deviant' stand, particularly in earlier individual situations where fewer firm feminist networks had been established. However, despite the fact that social organisation was traditionally bonded within the church, respondents valued shared experiences and memories within congregations and held dear the faith and the church community. Again these rendered the simple answer of desertion, in the face of hurts and injustices, inoplemetic.

The detection of social and spiritual clefts within the lives of individuals was not a once-and-for-all experience. New theologies, spiritualities and social locations had to be reinforced repeatedly. As the implicit sense of social unfit was explained by clearer feminist awareness, inner clefts became more articulated and identifiable in particular social situations. Personal social reorientation was facilitated, in some instances, by official changes in church policies and practices, but many of these were piecemeal and inadequate. New social spheres were vital to spiritual and social survival. Feminist theological conferences were key catalysts. Some respondents were instigators in the early days of feminist awakening in the church and fought for such causes as women's ordination. Others gained from those who had prepared the ground. All commented on the importance of reciprocality and camaraderie but also indicated frustration at the growing chasm between their two social worlds. The sense of compassion, general human connectedness, and a desire to share new insights, even where others had not indicated awareness of liberated theology and spirituality, motivated most to remain and work as agents of awareness-raising within church structures.

Implications

Maslow (1954:304) observed, 'Self-actualisation comes when one does not complain about water because it is wet, not about **locks** because they are hard...', (author's emphasis), (p.307). This implies the kind of mellowing that comes *with* wisdom, experience and an end to life's torrid struggle with things that cannot be changed. It suggests forgiveness, peaceful coexistence, and a willingness to let things be as they are. Although multifaceted, it is the kind of deconstruction\reconstruction process in which the participants for this research have engaged. However, Maslow's suggestion does not

theology. Respondents joined the streams of feminist theology at varying personal ages and historical junctures. Some could be described as pioneers within feminist theology movements in Australia, some benefited from those who broke the ground before them, and most were a mixture. Networking was a crucial means of individual survival in the church and the faith. This included secular feminist contacts. Such connections underscores the historic roots and ongoing nature of women's 'ekklēsia' despite patriarchal structures (Fiorenza, 1983; 1993).

There were also times of felt isolation. These included instances where theology and personal spirituality had significantly moved beyond respondents' local faith communities, and frustrations with inadequate language to express their reformed faith. Most stayed as agents of reform, two were hovering on the edges due to their husbands' positions, and two saw no point in staying. This thesis has documented and analysed the means by which individuals reached these respective spiritual and social positions. The following and final chapter is a summary of the main features of the journey. It specifies what has been learned and looks at possible applications for ongoing research.

Conclusion

'Unfinished'

At a school of ministry I attended in 1988, an elderly priest, a scholar of ancient Hebrew, delivered a lecture on Ecclesiastes, 1:2. He was of the opinion that the phrase usually translated as, 'all is vanity' and sometimes as 'all is meaningless' (New International Version) or 'all is useless' (Today's English Version), is better interpreted as 'all is unfinished'. He then went on to talk about the theological basis for the normality of loose ends and unfinished business. He concluded that, in his senior years, he was therefore 'happier to live in a mess' than he had been before this enlightenment. As indicated in the introduction, my initial aspiration was to somehow solve the problem of how to integrate the practices and core ideologies of Christianity, and feminism. In seeking to consult the experts, the inevitability of living with unfinished-ness has been underscored. Each faith journey has presented as a work-in-progress. On respective journeys, there have been points of resolve and integration, together with an ongoing 'mess' of ambiguities.

The theory and literature chapter testifies to the deluge of feminist theological literature over the past few decades. This has set before us reformed ways of regarding women's spiritual status, women-friendly images of God and Jesus, refreshing language paradigms, challenges to traditional biblical hermeneutics, and ways to better gender relations within the church. The focus of this thesis was to see how the theory translates into real, personal spirituality and social life. I set out to discover how new paradigms are acted out, on the ground, in the lives of some women whose livelihoods and social home has been within the Christian church, and whose spiritual home has been Christianity.

As indicated in the introduction, no hard and fast trends were forthcoming. Instead, each respondent indicated the difficulty of neat answers with regard to formularising Christian feminism as applied to lived experience and interior life. They related personal and shared aspects of the ongoing journey to spiritual and social liberation. The grand struggle was the general pressure on respondents to conform to ill-fitting prescribed

spiritual, theological and social identities. In this regard, the Rock, as hardened church traditions and structures and the Cleft, as the crack or dislocation within the individual, presented as apt metaphors for the journey.

Significant Areas of Rock/Cleft Encounter

Childhood - Beginnings of Clefts Caused by the Rock

The journey to a truer soul identity was spiritual and social, necessitating theological and social shifts deemed crucial through identification of clefts. These often had their roots in childhood church experiences and families of origin. Reflections on childhood experiences of church were useful starting points to understanding the spiritual and social locations of adult life. These included observations on church and parents. Occasions of hypocrisy, where church social practices sometimes did not resonate with the taught Christian ideologies of truth and fairness, were remembered with a sense that something was not quite right. These included the practice of gender inequality. For the individual, such discrepancies were set against the church as sense of 'home' and belonging, or perhaps a longing to belong, however damaging or remote that may have been. These were the earliest recollections of an inner spiritual cleft caused by the divide between perceived purest Christian ideologies, and church and family realities.

Childhood relationships to clergy and others in authority were mixed. Some respondents felt accepted and respected by expounders of the faith in Sunday School, confirmation classes and church services. As female children, others felt off-centred to what was regarded as important. Moreover, the spectrum of childhood encounters with Christian teaching ranged from captivating appeals to the intellect and analytical approaches, to fear-instilling theology and rote learning. Private encounters with God outside church structures were also significant. Kinder God-images sometimes presented as a dichotomy to the stricter images propounded through the church and parents. Whilst gender differentiation was not always obvious to the child, the retrospective realisation was that of a 'glass ceiling' for girls/women, with limited social expectations of the intellectual engagement most respondents found inspiring.

The church also propounded androcentric images of God. As a problematic, this had its roots in childhood. The reshaping of personal spirituality involved much more than simple adoption of some suggested theoretical feminist images of God. Concepts of God were often directly related to embedded impressions of Mother and Father within respective families of origin. Fathers proved the overwhelmingly preferred parent in most cases. To begin a journey away from patriarchy, in itself, was therefore cleft-forming. God as exclusively Father was not easily discarded spiritually or socially. In this respect, traditional hermeneutics were difficult to decode. There was confusion about what was 'natural' or God-ordained, and what had been androcentricly imposed. Fear of getting it wrong, and feelings of betraying something that was essentially right, were among the obstacles to be overcome. Nor was it a simple matter of replacing male images with female images. With three exceptions, respondents regarded Mother as weak and/or manipulative and therefore an unsafe icon. God as Mother was often problematic.

To progress from the discomfort of being men's 'other', respondents had to redefine the meaning of feminine and face the clefts caused by the negative memories they had of their mothers. They also had to face the cleft-forming dilemma of detaching from traditional male perspectives and the perceived consequences of disobeying God the Father. This was humanly manifest through the strong disapproval of parents and church authority figures when some respondents entered the ordained ministry. For some, this was at a time when individual feminist fortitude was tenuous. Thus the journey from patriarchy to more liberated spiritual and social positions was often lonely, and embarked upon with fragile confidence and, in some cases, a sense of peril.

Spiritual Sites of Struggle and Reformation as Aspects of the Journey

Clefts within individual souls, caused by androcentric religion, were set against mandates not to 'rock the boat'. These became identified sites of spiritual and social struggle, some of which were evident from childhood and crystallised in adulthood. Interviews revealed that, prescribed theology, with all its conceptual implications, has been at the heart of oppression. Central issues included the dichotomy of a male God as both oppressor and comforter and the problematic image of Jesus, the human face of God, as both male and saviour. For some, liberating aspects of Jesus have been interpreted from the underside.

However, for others, a male Messiah became more problematic as feminist awareness grew.

Matters of traditional Scriptural contexts, language, issues and historical hermeneutics, perpetuated through the church, were also problematic. Clefts formed at both intellectual-theological and deep spiritual levels. Healing has not been a simple matter of leaving the church and walking away from entrenched theologies. Despite its hypocrisy, fear-orientated theology, and role restrictions for women, the church engendered a deep sense of community and was generally regarded as a vehicle for God's mystic revelation to the individual. To confront and transform the Cleft caused by the behaviours, teachings and structures of the church has entailed developing confidence in newly-discovered personal essentialities that challenge encoded ways of thinking.

From the Cleft, varying degrees of creative reformation was possible. One important aspect was a redefining of ill-fitting prescribed theology and spirituality. This almost always involved an inner wrestle to transcend deeply entrenched ideologies and concepts perpetuated through endeared institutions. Respondents have sought a Grand Spiritual Soul. The search has culminated in a reconceptualising of God from male authority figure, or even child abuser with regard to the cross event, to various images including the naming of the Holy Spirit as female and other concepts that are more nebulous than traditional images. Such redefinitions have fostered a new regard of the God-human relationship that more readily affirms female spirituality, is less punitive and less hierarchical. Such images have also evolved as more nebulous and fluid.

Male-orientated genres, language and hermeneutics of Scripture were also challenged with growing self-confidence and corporate permission that painfully and gradually evolved. Redefined theology also incorporated a radical look at previously deemed unchallengeable meanings of the cross event and the concept of 'Saviour'. Such new theological path ; have not been glibly embarked upon. They have been the result of damaging and ill-fitting theologies where respondents have battled to make sense of what has been traditionally propounded, but were confronted with growing personal evidence of the cleft between who they were underneath encoded cultural layers, and what man-made theology had to say.

More liberated theologies also resulted in changed personal spiritual identities. As each journey progressed there was generally better confidence in personal intellect, less confined spiritual creativity, a better sense of general human connectedness, some changes in actual personal physical appearance and an identity beyond domesticity. Respondents also determined to find better fitting personal niches in the scheme of things even if this was not always acknowledged by male-orientated structures. Redefinitions proved bc eeing and perplexing as raised feminist awareness resolved some problems and unde ed the 'unfinished-ness' of others. The process was often painful and perceiv dangerous. But even partial liberation prompted a sense of responsibility to inform and interact with others on the voyage of discovery.

Within the dance/weaving of non-linear journeys, there was a phenomenon best described as Wilderness. This was when growing feminist ideologies had impacted upon old ways of thinking and traditional social locations to the point where entrenched paradigms were no longer sustainable. It was the hiatus between the old and the new – the marking time or the nowhere-land from which some different life foundations were sorted out. This was the point at which something snapped. There were feelings of chaos, isolation, exile, insecurity, vulnerability and loss of identity. Some respondents became physically and/or emotionally ill and some marriages broke down. Some respondents broke with set routines, and two left the church and the faith. Retrospectively, all respondents regarded these as watershed experiences necessary to the reforming of themselves and their faith, for the discovery of a truer self, and as a vital component to spiritual and social reformation.

Social Sites of Struggle and Reformation as Aspects of the Journey

Social clefts became obvious when respondents named the sense of displacement they felt to men's schema, particularly when they traversed the line of prescribed gender roles and aspired to church leadership. Friendships reliant upon traditional roles became strained. The most prominent single issue was that of the ordination of women. Male decision-makers often reacted by using their power to inhibit respondents' careers and autonomy. This happened at both local and hierarchical levels. Respondents noted that this made them feel marginalised and invisible within church structures, strained

relationships with individual male clergy, and alienated respondents from church communities. Extra internal strength was needed to challenge the status quo with a socially perceived 'deviant' stand, particularly in earlier individual situations where fewer firm feminist networks had been established. However, despite the fact that social organisation was traditionally gendered within the church, respondents valued shared experiences and memories within congregations and held dear the faith and the church community. Again these rendered the simple answer of desertion, in the face of hurts and injustices, problematic.

The detection of social and spiritual clefts within the lives of individuals was not a once-and-for-all experience. New theologies, spiritualities and social locations had to be reinforced repeatedly. As the implicit sense of social misfit was explained by clearer feminist awareness, inner clefts became more articulated and identifiable in particular social situations. Personal social reorientation was facilitated, in some instances, by official changes in church policies and practices, but many of these were piecemeal and inadequate. New social spheres were vital to spiritual and social survival. Feminist theological conferences were key catalysts. Some respondents were instigators in the early days of feminist awakening in the church and fought for such causes as women's ordination. Others gained from those who had prepared the ground. All commented on the importance of reciprocality and camaraderie but also indicated frustration at the growing chasm between their two social worlds. The sense of compassion, general human connectedness, and a desire to share new insights, even where others had not indicated awareness of liberated theology and spirituality, motivated most to remain and work as agents of awareness-raising within church structures.

Implications

Maslow (1954:204) observed, 'Self-actualisation comes when one does not complain about water because it is wet, nor about **rocks** because they are hard...' (author's emphasis), (p.207). This implies the kind of mellowing that comes with wisdom, experience and an end to life's torrid struggle with things that cannot be changed. It suggests forgiveness, peaceful coexistence, and a willingness to let things be as they are. Although unfinished, it is the kind of deconstruction/reconstruction process in which the participants for this research have engaged. However, Maslow's suggestion does not

acknowledge aspects of systems and structures that are damaging to women and are therefore fundamentally wrong by feminist definition (Abbot, 1991; Acker et al, 1983; Harrison, 1974). Some 'rocks' have been particularly hard on women. They therefore deserve to be complained about and changed rather than tolerated by mellowed ex-freedom fighters.

But are the freedom fighters and the higher profile people the only ones with stories to tell? The core of this thesis has addressed theological, spiritual and social change within the lives of seventeen women theologians with varying feminist perspectives. They were chosen, in part, for their known reflective and analytical abilities. Their stories have highlighted the costs, gains and internal workings of the journey. As interviews progressed the express need to relate particular aspects of struggle and enlightenment became obvious. It could be that they are not alone in this. Their stories have coincided with many threads of changing theologies, shifting thoughts on human spirituality and gender role redefinitions within much of western society generally (Uhr, 1992; Curthoys, 1994; Soelle, 1990; Kaplan, 1996).

A comparative study of non-clerical church-women, and non-clerical women who have left the church, over the same chronological period, would be an area for further inquiry. There could be merit in studying the journeys of women who have not necessarily engaged directly in feminist theological reading and camaraderie and who therefore have not experienced the same permission-giving networks, women whose livelihoods have not been dependent upon the church. It would be interesting to plot, not only their social affinity and clashes with the church, but the changing or static timbre of their respective and corporate ideologies and spiritualities. This would help to establish whether or not the issues raised in this thesis are just as vital to those who, by virtue of their non-clerical roles, appear freer to explore and develop personal spirituality. It would also help to determine whether the Rock has caused the same deep Cleft to women generally.

Another complementary field of inquiry would be the stories of men whose lives have been directly influenced by the Christian church. This thesis has explored the particular clefts caused in women by androcentric religion and male-erected church structures. However, some aspects of theological, spiritual and social dichotomies may not pertain

to women exclusively. Blaikie's (1979) study addresses the spiritual and social 'Plight' of the Australian male clergy, Ballis's (1999) work is an analysis of the personal dynamics of why men leave the Adventist clergy, and Sanford (1982) names the phenomenon of 'ministry burnout'. 'Wounded healer' is also a term used of clergy (Prior, 1986). These are examples of ongoing discourses acknowledging the crises of faith and social dislocation that happens to individuals in clerical roles. It is therefore clear that male clergy also struggle with systems and social expectations. Whether or not there are core aspects of their journey that coincide with respondents to this thesis presents a field for further study. It could be that some aspects of androcentric Christianity have also caused clefts for male clergy and men generally. What I have attempted is thus part of an unfinished picture. Hopefully it sheds light on the Rock and Cleft factor in the lives of a fragment of Christian spirituality and social life. The following summary may therefore apply, with differing implications, to many people in the church who identify discrepancies between felt inner spirituality and lived social existence within the Christian faith and church.

In a Nutshell – A Message to the Church

This thesis indicates a heartfelt need for more than structural changes and mindset shifts that conform to enlightened thinking about women. Interviews revealed that there was a need among respondents to have the journey to liberated theology, spirituality and social location, as told in their real stories, heard, appreciated and digested. They needed to tell what the struggle to a more honest faith position had cost and continues to cost them. As mentioned in the introduction, respondents were less interested in theorising feminist/Christian formulae, than in revealing feelings and stories about what they had been through in trying to engage with androcentric systems, individuals and ideologies. As one woman commented, 'I don't want you to just listen to my story, I want you to listen to what it cost me to get you to listen to my story' and then added, 'You're still not listening!' This goes beyond simply conforming to political correctness. Therefore, in summing up, it seems appropriate to use a monologue to encapsulate respondents as a kind of corporate first person and the androcentric aspects of the church as a corporate second person. Here is what respondents appeared to be saying:

There were teachings and practices in the church that did not take me into account.
I was uncomfortable on the Rock.
I looked into the deep crevices of my discomfort.
I read books, went to conferences, talked to others, talked to myself.

I identified the causes of a gaping Cleft in my soul.
It was disquieting because it confronted convention and threatened the foundations of my beliefs, my relationships with dear ones, and my relationship to God.
I could no longer socially, spiritually or theologically, be where I was.
I set out on a journey of discovery to rebuilding the foundations.
I set out to find myself.

You did not like it.
I had to withstand your disapproval, even though you were the powerful one.
Look what I needed to do in order to take a stand.
Look where I was.
Look what it cost me to move.

It tore me apart inside as I was changing a set of entrenched theologies for the kind of freedom the traditional ones promised but did not deliver.
It impacted upon my spirituality at soul level.
It impacted upon my relationships.
It impacted upon my health.
You accused me of having no integrity and no brains.
You accused me of insubordination and heresy.
My home in the church was threatened.
I felt hated by some.
It threw me into a time of not knowing where I was going or who I was.

I gained some strength.
I redefined many of my ideas and directions.

I dared to look beyond Father God and all the 'man-speak' myths to discover treasures that had been eclipsed by formidable traditional forms.
I found some support with others along the way, some good friends,
some freedom and some areas that would allow my contribution.
Gradually, though not completely, I found God and myself in a new way.

Evidence in this thesis suggests that the Rock of Christian tradition and practice has effected a cleft in feminine essentiality. This is supported by much of the cited literature. However, to adhere to the political correctness of non-sexist religion is inadequate. For the grand Cleft to heal and for wholeness of communities and individuals, stories of the journey need to be articulated by those who have struggled, and the church needs to respond with an ethos of true listening and deep appreciation. The Rock of Ages needs to become the genuine mainstay for the faith of all Christians, and its Cleft the true sheltering crevice from which inclusive creativity can flow.

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