

**“FOR HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION”:
A FEMINIST ECCLESIOLOGICAL STUDY
ON THE
GAP BETWEEN GENDER POLICY
AND PRACTICE IN THE
METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
(MCSA)**

By

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DECLARATION

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I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, (Howard College Campus), Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.



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25 November 2011

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission.



Professor Sarojini Nadar - Supervisor

28/11/2011

Date

DEDICATION

For my daughters ...

*... may their feet one day again walk
in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*

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“Mercy [Amba Oduyoye] remains an important role model as we continue to create an African feminist theological ethics that reaffirms women as moral agents and as agents of transformation” (Nyambura J Njoroge 2006:68).

I acknowledge with gratitude the work of African women theologians and count it a real privilege to engage with their feminist theological scholarship. My dream is to hear the Church acknowledge that ‘women are agents of transformation’.

I acknowledge the many people who have encouraged me to fully explore the opportunities I have had in my life. The direction in which I chose to study these past ten years has not made it easy for my family, my colleagues or my friends to understand me or, at times, to even relate to me. I pay a special tribute to all of them whilst at the same time acknowledging that this study is a personal quest.

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ABSTRACT

The main premise of this study is that while gender justice is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa and in the declared statements of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), in practice gender justice receives minimal attention in this church. The existing ‘gender policy’ of the MCSA, which is a mere recommendation, endorses an equitable representation of women, youth and men at every level of Church governance. Since this ‘policy’ is couched in the language of ‘recommendation’, this study argues that a gap continues to exist between policy and practice in the MCSA. Using Letty Russell’s (1993) ‘Table Fellowship’ analogy in her book *Church in the Round – Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, and Musimbi Kanyoro’s subsequent (1997) *In Search of a Round Table: Gender Theology and Church Leadership*, the discussions in this thesis focus on ‘the Table’ of the Church.

The research question this study seeks to address is: *Why does the MCSA continue to marginalise and exclude women, even though its mission is to be a church of healing and transformation and its gender policy is meant to prevent such marginalisation and exclusion?* Hence, the objectives of this study are firstly, to demonstrate the ways in which the MCSA continues to be patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices and secondly, to analyse the reasons why the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchy.

In order to respond to the research question this study utilises a feminist ecclesiological theoretical framework, which examines and analyses the MCSA’s source documents, its liturgies and its hymns.

The theoretical framework is also used to consider the stories of five Methodist women from a narrative perspective. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral – *Sacred Scripture, Church Tradition, Human Reason and Personal Experience* – was engaged in this research, when deemed relevant.

Transformative models of being church, that will enhance and enable the healing and transformation that the MCSA has declared to be its mission, are proposed in the conclusion, thus fulfilling the third objective of this study. It is here where the hope for gender-healing in the MCSA is expressed, along with a dream that this study will be ‘one more voice’ that is heard.

Key Terms: *African Feminist Theology; African Feminist Ecclesiology; Gender Justice; Gender Policy; Women in Ministry; Church Women’s Organisations; Community; Healing and Transformation; Women’s Narratives; Feminist Leadership Principles; Ecclesiological Practices; Alternative Models of Being Church; Circle Leadership Styles; The Methodist Church of Southern Africa.*

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome
BCE	Before the Common Era
CE	Common Era
DEWCOM	Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee (in the MCSA)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IBRA	International Bible Reading Association
MCSA	Methodist Church of Southern Africa
NIV	New International Version (of the Bible)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (of the Bible)
NYLTP	National Youth Leadership Training Programme
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
SA	South Africa
The Circle	The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
TEEC	Theological Education by Extension College
UDW	University of Durban-Westville
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNISA	University of South Africa
WA	Women's Auxiliary (in the MCSA)
WCC	World Council of Churches
WFMW	World Federation of Methodist Women
WFM&UCW	World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women
WOW	Women's Ordination Worldwide (in the RCC)
YMG	Young Men's Guild (in the MCSA)

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“For Healing and Transformation”:

A feminist ecclesiological study on the gap between gender policy and practice in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)

Chapter One

‘Laying of the Table’ – the Foundation of the Research

May the voices gathered here become sustenance.
May the voices gathered here become transformation,
May the voices gathered here be for all.

by Mary Margaret Parent ¹

1.0. Background and Introduction

The selected lines from the above song by Mary Margaret Parent point to the hope that I have for writing this thesis. The hope that I have is for sustenance and transformation in terms of gender equity in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa² (hereafter referred to as MCSA). This desire for transformation is borne out of my personal experiences in the MCSA. Nine years ago, when my husband and I were sent to minister in a small Free State town, in South Africa, I embarked on a year’s empirical research project with a small group of Methodist women who came from a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking background. This focus group³ research formed the basis of my unpublished Masters Dissertation, entitled ‘Faith, Fear and Feminist Theology’ (Sprong 2002). The painful experiences, which emerged from the yearlong research conducted with this small group of women, highlighted what various scholars, including Musimbi Kanyoro (1997) and Letty Russell (1993), have been arguing for a long time – that is ‘women **are** church’, and yet women have been sidelined in leadership and in other structures of the Church. Women are church but women are continuously excluded from being church. Aruna Gnanadason (2005:6) writes, in the preface to *On Being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions*, that

¹ From a song entitled ‘Listen to the Voices’ in the *Women’s Concerns* magazine (Spring 2002:23) of the United Church of Canada, edited by Anne Martin.

² The name is registered as the Methodist Church of **Southern** Africa because this Connexion includes Methodist Churches in South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho and Moçambique.

³ Named *Anaphaino* – a Greek word, which means ‘show’, ‘cause to appear’, ‘have pointed out’ or ‘discover’ – Number 398 in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (1977:12).

women in Africa are determined to be church even though there are so many ways “in which the institutionalized Churches have marginalized their experiences, their theological voices and their gifts”. This publication was a product of the World Council of Churches’ (henceforth WCC) effort to put the ‘Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women’ (which spanned the ten years from 1988 to 1998) on its member churches’ agendas. Despite this gesture of solidarity on the part of WCC, the need for the project of **Women’s Voices and Visions** highlighted that gender polarity still exists within the Church. This forms the greatest rationale for my thesis, but I shall discuss this in detail in the next section.

1.1. Rationale for the Thesis

The WCC project, conducted in several parts of the world and entitled ‘**Women’s Voices and Visions**’, was based on an understanding that despite the strides that have been made in terms of achieving gender parity within churches, women theologians still need to engage with the institutional Church. Aruna Gnanadason, the coordinator of the project, and the team recognised that the need for a ‘Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women’ emphasised that many churches were not in solidarity with women but needed to join a programme to assist them to become so. This highlights that women are often kept on the outside or on the periphery of ‘the institutional church’ and that women do not often fill leadership positions in their churches. Churches still operate within patriarchal structures and male-dominance is prevalent within many denominations. Nadar (2005:16), one of the editors of and a contributor to the ‘Women’s Voices and Visions’ project in Africa, suggests that we need to heed the words of Jesus and also “be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves”⁴ in our “determination to transform the patriarchal traditions that exist within the Church”. Moreover, she asserts that the Church needs to develop “more holistic, liberating ways of engaging with Scripture” in order that the Church might “become a place for gender justice and equality” (Nadar 2005:21 and 22).

Russell (1993:12) writes in her preface to *Church in the Round – Feminist Interpretation of the Church* that although she finds it difficult to walk away from the Church she finds it equally difficult to walk in it because the institutional Church is “struggling to become a household of freedom, a community where walls have been broken

⁴ See the Bible: Matthew 10:16.

down”. In the second chapter of her book Russell (1993:63) suggests that women are church in an inclusive way, ensuring that “their circle includes not only all the Sarahs of the world but also the Hagar’s”. Traditionally the ‘Hagar’s’ are those excluded by society and even in the Church.⁵ Furthermore, Watson (2002:53) in *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, argues that women

... are church whether they choose to remain within existing institutional frameworks or to find other spaces for their discourses of liberation from the restrictions of the patriarchal church.

I have chosen to remain within the MCSA even though I share some of Russell’s sentiments about staying in or walking away from the institutional Church. This thesis, then, is part of my continued engagement with the Church, especially with my own denomination, the MCSA.

In the light of feminist theology, the ecclesiological practices within the MCSA remain exclusive and its gender policy⁶ that calls for 40% women in leadership, is not implemented. At present (2011) in twelve Districts⁷ there are no woman Bishops and the office of Presiding Bishop has never been filled by a woman. During the term of office of the only woman Bishop in the MCSA the male-dominance of its leadership was brought sharply into focus with a woman in this church’s leadership’s midst. This call for full participation is acknowledged in women’s ordination in the MCSA but its paternalism has not yet been dealt with. If women **are** church, then men cannot have the right ‘to let women in’. Women were always ‘in’ the church, they had merely been excluded from full participation. I include here the following three examples of practices in the MCSA, which provide support for my rationale:

1.1.1. Invitation System

In the MCSA, which has been ordaining women since 1976, the vast majority of women ministers still do not receive invitations and many need to take the initiative to

⁵ See the Bible: Genesis 21 records the story of Sarah and Hagar – Hagar is Sarah’s slave woman, whom she gives her to Abraham so that he can father’s Ishmael. After Hagar has been used Sarah falls pregnant with Isaac and Abraham sends Hagar away.

⁶ This gender policy recommends 40% Female, 40% Male and 20% Youth representation at every level of Church leadership (see the Yearbook 1999/2000:174).

⁷ The following Methodist terms will be used throughout this thesis:

A ‘Connexion’ is similar to an archdiocese and is the name for a group of Districts.

A ‘District’ is similar to a diocese and is the name for a group of geographically located Circuits.

A ‘Circuit’ is similar to a large parish and is comprised of several Societies.

A ‘Society’ is the name given to a local congregation.

negotiate their own station. The usual invitation procedure or stationing process, through which the majority of male ministers are placed, ensures that not too many stations or ministers end up at the ‘foot of stations’, i.e. a church without a minister or a minister without a church. Many women ministers end up there and the injustice of this system is that the problematic Societies are usually also at the foot of stations. Women ministers are, therefore, often stationed unjustly in remote and difficult congregations as that is all that is available after the male ministers have chosen the ‘cream of the crop’.

1.1.2. Same-Sex Orientation

In 2010 the MCSA discontinued a woman minister because she chose to be open about her sexual orientation and entered into a faithful and legal union with her same-sex partner rather than living a lie. I acknowledge that she acted against the MCSA’s *Laws and Discipline*⁸ but include it as an example of the inflexibility of these laws that often cause much pain and distress for many ministers – especially for women in ministry.

1.1.3. Representivity

Women are seldom included in the major decision making processes of the MCSA because we are absent from ‘the Table’.⁹ The MCSA decreed that women would be ordained to Word and Sacrament in 1976. For almost four decades women have been serving in this church as its ministers but yet we are still held on the periphery of ‘the Table’ or excluded from it entirely. In the past thirty-five years, in twelve Districts, only one woman has held the office of Bishop for nine years – she served three consecutive three-year terms. The MCSA has not yet had a woman serve in the office of Presiding Bishop. Only a few Districts have yet voted for a woman to serve as a District lay leader and two women have held the office of Connexional lay leader, each for one term of three years. For the first time in the life of the MCSA, five Districts out of twelve have a woman serving as their District lay leader at present (see the 2011 Yearbook) – this is 41.66% but

⁸ The legal document of the MCSA that states: “The purpose of the “Laws and Discipline” is to facilitate the work of those who share the administrative and leadership responsibility in the ongoing life, ministry and mission of the Church. It provides the legislative framework for good governance and defines spiritual truths and practices in keeping with new revelations of God’s Spirit” (2007:3).

⁹ Using Letty Russell’s (1993) ‘Table Fellowship’ analogy in her book *Church in the Round – Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, and Musimbi Kanyoro’s subsequent (1997) *In Search of a Round Table: Gender Theology and Church Leadership*, the discussions in this thesis focus on ‘the Table’ of the Church.

almost 59% still remains male as the Connexion has not yet had a lay leader who would qualify as ‘youth’.

In recent times, many churches have recognised the disparity between the contributions which women make to their churches and the lack of recognition for such contributions. Hence many churches now boast ‘gender policies’. Unfortunately these policies remain as such – policies! For example, the MCSA has the following mission statement: “God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation” (Methodist Yearbook 2009:2) but for many women these remain merely words. The MCSA also embraces an ambitious vision: “A Christ-healed Africa for the healing of the nations” (Methodist Yearbook 2009:2). Women of the Methodist Church throughout the world embrace this theme, illustrated by the emblem of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women is the Tree of Life.¹⁰

Although the Christian Gospel stands for equality for all people and confesses an inclusive practice,¹¹ the experience of many women in the MCSA does not yet reflect this. The women shared their painful experiences at a women ministers’ consultation near Johannesburg in September 2003, at which I facilitated a workshop on feminist theological perspectives. It was during this session that the women’s pain alerted me to the need for further research in this field. I sensed that women in the MCSA, both clergy and lay, needed to feel included – to be church.

A discrepancy exists between the policy of having 40% women and 20% youth in leadership positions at every level of church structure in the MCSA, and the actual representation of women and youth in leadership.¹² Although this gender policy seems balanced, it is not implemented – neither at local nor at Connexional¹³ level.

At a Connexional Mission Congress in 2004, Mvumelwano Dandala (2004:2) affirmed the MCSA’s vision in his sermon, saying that he believed that the MCSA had an important role to play in the life of the wider African Christian Community. Gender

¹⁰ See the Bible: Revelation 22:2 “On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

¹¹ See the Bible: Galatians 3:28 “... for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

¹² In the twelve districts of the MCSA connexion (similar to an archdiocese) only one district has yet had a woman bishop and she is no longer in office – after serving three 3-year terms in a row from 2000 – 2008.

¹³ The Methodist term used for the whole geographical area of the MCSA: South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Moçambique and Botswana.

equality was on the agenda of the Mission Congress but it had been appended to one of the topics. My experience of doing research with the group of women in the MCSA in 2002 for my Masters research; listening to many women's stories, including my own as an ordained minister; and seeing the ways in which gender is sidelined or included only as an addendum to the main agendas of church meetings, convinces me that a gap between policy and practice exists in many churches – notably in my own church, the MCSA.

1.2. Research Question, Hypothesis and Objectives

Hence, my research question is:

Why does the MCSA continue to marginalise and exclude women, even though its mission is to be a church of healing and transformation and its gender policy is meant to prevent such marginalisation and exclusion?

Although the desire of the MCSA, as expressed in statements recorded in the MCSA's Yearbooks and through the ordination of women in 1976 is gender equality, this has, for many years, not been implemented. The intention of the MCSA is that systems are put in place to ensure equal representation and to include clauses in the MCSA's *Laws and Discipline*,¹⁴ which would be a tool to ensure that the Church and its leaders were held accountable to the process of gender equality. However, this is not the practice.

Therefore, my hypothesis is:

Despite having as its mission, to be a church of healing and transformation, the MCSA continues to be patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices and, unless these patriarchal systems are transformed, women will continue to be marginalised and excluded.

¹⁴ Resolution: "1.36 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN - the Executive urges the Synods and the local level of the Church to take seriously the inclusion of women at every level of Church life" (*Laws and Discipline* 2007:234).

For this reason the objectives of this thesis are as follows:

1. To demonstrate the ways in which the MCSA continues to be patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices.

(These ecclesiological practices include the MCSA's hierarchical structures, the male-dominant language of its liturgies and hymns, its failure to implement equal representation at every important level of church leadership, the unjust stationing of women ministers and the absence of a budget for gender justice.)

2. To analyse the reasons why the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchy.

(Here the theories of feminist ecclesiology, as developed by Oduyoye and Watson, and African feminist theology, as expressed through Phiri, Dube, Nadar, Ackermann and others, will assist in the analysis.)

3. To propose transformative models of being church that will enhance and enable the healing and transformation that the MCSA has declared to be its mission.

(The work of Russell and Oduyoye will be used to put forward these models.)

These three objectives are of primary importance for this thesis. I do acknowledge that other broader issues would also need to be discussed. These are briefly outlined in the next section.

1.3. Research Question: Broader Issues to be Investigated

Some broader critical questions, which relate to the gap between gender policy and practice in the MCSA, also need to be examined. These include the invitation system for ministers, the stationing of women in the ministry and the disparity between male and female clergy stipends – especially when a woman minister is also married to a minister. The expectation of female clergy to take responsibility for the care of the elderly and the infirm, for the teaching of the children and even of the domestic chores at meetings and in the local churches they serve, perpetuates patriarchal perceptions of women's roles. The obstacles women face within the traditional structures of the MCSA will be considered throughout the various discussions.

1.4. The Title

The title of this thesis

“For Healing and Transformation” - A feminist ecclesiological study on the gap between gender policy and practice in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is linked directly to the mission statement of the MCSA, “God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation”.

This mission statement was formed during the *‘Journey to a New Land’* process that began at a pre-Conference gathering in 1990 in Benoni, which was called specifically to listen to one another as Methodist people in a multi-racial church. It was clear that South Africa was beginning to face and address the heresy of *Apartheid* and there were signs of an imminent democratic government, which became a reality four years later. The title has been chosen to draw particular attention to the fact that even though political equality has been attained in South Africa, many members – in many Societies more than half – do not yet experience gender equality in the MCSA, and although there are many broader issues at stake, specific attention is given, in this thesis, to the gap between gender policy and practice in the MCSA.

The MCSA declared itself ‘one and undivided’ during the *Apartheid* years but political structures imposed legal restraints, which forced Black and White people to live and, therefore, also worship separately. That ‘separation’ has caused racist attitudes amongst people, and the MCSA has recognised that healing is needed in this area. However, despite the ‘Statement on Women’ in the *Laws and Discipline* (2007:233) of the MCSA, this church seems to be reluctant to acknowledge that healing is also needed where gender injustice has occurred.

Women have traditionally played subordinate roles in the Church and those who do manage to be elected to leadership positions are often marginalised. Women ministers have difficulty being stationed as many congregations usually request the services of a male minister. Healing from the pain of all kinds of discrimination, especially that of gender injustice and exclusion, and the transformation into a ‘new paradigm’ church are crucial for the future of the MCSA.

In his sermon to the congregation at the opening service of the Connexional Mission Congress, held in Umtata in November 2004, the Presiding Bishop of the MCSA, the Rev

Ivan Abrahams (2004:2), called the Methodist people to listen to the voices of the marginalised, especially to:

- The voices of **our mothers and sisters who constitute the majority** in our church;
- The voices of **our young people searching for their place in church and society**;
- The voices of **our children who suffer innocently in body, mind and spirit**;
- The voices of those **who hunger for food and for meaning of life**.

The term ‘healing’ conjures up a variety of images. Theologically, healing relates to the reconciliation and restoration between God and humanity and between people and their neighbours. Focusing on ‘healing’ in this thesis presupposes that brokenness, sickness, pain and discord are among the experiences of people in the MCSA and puts forward the notion that a level of restoration is possible.

The Methodist Church embraces healing principles such as sharing God's hope, love, peace and reconciliation with all people. The MCSA also claims to preach Christ for the ‘healing of the nations’ but brokenness and alienation continue to be the experience of many women in this church. The feminist quest for ‘healing’ has, at times, been overtly confrontational and very proactive indeed. Phiri and Nadar (2006:1 and 2) entitle their introduction to *African Women, Religion, and Health*, “Treading Softly but Firmly” as they believe it “serves as a fitting theme for this book”. This kind of determination of feminist theologians to be firm in the face of male-dominance is understandable as feminism has been a reaction to patriarchal domination and the oppression of women in both society and in the Church. Feminist theological principles of healing, such as equality, freedom from oppression and the right to choose, however, are no different to what I believe Christ’s are. Acceptance, inclusion, trust, respect and equality are all ideals with which many Christians agree. Yet women are not always afforded these values. This research endeavours to highlight the extent to which women have been excluded from reconciliation and ‘healing’ within the MCSA as the Church of Christ.

The term ‘transformation’ suggests that radical change takes place. The Christian doctrine embraces the truth that ‘in Christ’ a person becomes ‘a new creation’¹⁵ and the old life is no more.¹⁶

¹⁵ See the Bible: II Corinthians 5:17 “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything

This thesis aspires to facilitate the holistic ‘transformation’ of women’s experience, as being church, in the MCSA, through the exposure and frank discussion of exclusive ecclesiological practices in the Church. The manner in which I intend to do this is outlined next.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

I am approaching my thesis from an African feminist ecclesiological perspective, which draws on feminist theology of which it is an offshoot.

African Feminist Theology

African feminist theology, according to Chidili, who did a study¹⁷ on the life and work of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, is a discipline that promotes equality for all people and inclusion in the Church. He writes that

[t]he analysis reveals that equal right to participate in all things, co-responsibility, shared power, shared glory and equal respect for both genders are the essential requirement for authentic human dignity. The study further affirms the liberation of men and women from the uncritical acceptance of a heritage that enthrones hierarchies and declares patriarchy to be the will of God. Moreover, the analysis roots the whole idea of human dignity in the image of God. It contends that tracing human beings back to God will halt the imposition of derogative divisions on humanity.

In *The Will to Arise – Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* Oduyoye (1992:9) asserts, when writing about women and ritual in Africa, that “Africans operate with an integrated world view that assigns a major place to religious factors and beliefs”. Feminist theology in Africa therefore takes seriously the rituals, which form such an important part of African people’s existence; whilst at the same time challenges hierarchical structures and

old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”

¹⁶ A Christian youth programme of the Upper Room, Nashville, Tennessee, which is linked to the *Walk to Emmaus* Movement, called ‘Chrysalis’. uses the symbol of the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly to structure the three-day programme. On the first day, the young people are referred to as caterpillars and the theme of the day concentrates on the human condition and the prevenient grace of God. On the second day, the young people are deemed to be in the chrysalis and the theme is centred on overcoming obstacles to God’s grace and on the morning of third day, the young people are greeted as butterflies, God’s ‘new creation’ and the theme for that day is the sanctifying grace of God. This programme is an example of transformation in the Christian context.

¹⁷ Bartholomew Udealo Chidili, "The vision of Mercy Amba Oduyoye an African feminist theologian and educator: Pedagogy of human dignity" (January 1, 2003). *ETD Collection for Fordham University*. Paper AAI3081402. <<http://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI3081402/>> [Accessed 6 April 2011].

the subordination of women. African feminist theology affirms the desire of African women to be recognised for who we are – created in the image of God.

Western feminist theology, which is the sister to African feminist theology, developed out of the notion that traditional Christian theology and the institutional structures of the Church excluded women's voices and experiences. Not only does the Church marginalise women but it has also perpetuated practices that are sexist, patriarchal and androcentric. Both African and Western feminist theologians share the quest of those who seek to re-contextualise sacred texts. Musa Dube (2001) in editing *Other Ways of Reading – African Women and the Bible*, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1993) in editing *Searching the Scriptures – A Feminist Introduction*, share their visions of reading the Bible from a different perspective, which empowers women. They continue to challenge traditional theology, which defined what it meant to be a person from the perspective of a patriarchal, male experience. For centuries, the White male experience has been the criterion by which the value and contribution of women has been judged. During the 1960s, modern-day feminist theologians began to confront and express their opposition to these fundamental doctrines and ecclesiological practices of institutional Christianity.

Hinga (1992:183) suggests that a need also exists “for the evolution of an African feminist christology – or at least, the need to create pointers in the right direction”. She mentions that Western feminist theologians have not yet reached consensus on the relationship between Christology and women and recognises the need for African feminist theologians to examine this discipline within feminist theology. Hinga (1992:187) also believes that “winning Africa for Christ was a major motivating factor in missionary zeal” but she laments the fact that the missionaries intended to erase “most of what Africans held dear” because this only created “an identity crisis in the African minds – a sense of gross alienation”. African women feminist theologians, therefore, seek to make sense of their faith, culture and gender, and seek to situate their faith within their own context.

Feminist Ecclesiology

Oduyoye (2005:151) stresses that “everyone – ordained or not – comprises the Church. We all know this but living it out is a different matter”. In her contribution to the WCC’s African Project on *Women’s Voices and Visions*, Oduyoye discusses the

implications of the ordination of women in Africa. Women were studying theology in Africa but it was a concerned churchwoman who, in Ibadan in 1980, challenged female theologians on ordination. The challenge was for women who do get ordained to foster new and inclusive ecclesiologies rather than the patriarchal and hierarchical ecclesiologies of the past. As this woman put it, she did not wish to be ‘bossed around’ by female ministers in the same way as she was accustomed to male ministers doing. The Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians (hereafter referred to as The Circle) supports Oduyoye’s notion that the ordained ministers are not the Church. Oduyoye views ministry in a similar way to Radford Ruether, who challenged clericalism in an address¹⁸ to a ‘Call to Action’ Conference¹⁹ in November 2006 with the theme "I AM: Rise Up People of God" and held in Milwaukee, USA. Radford Ruether’s key point in her address was that clericalism has largely been responsible for maintaining the hierarchy in church leadership.

According to Natalie Watson (2002), feminist ecclesiology encourages women to reclaim their power to name and define the Church. It is a discipline that clearly addresses gender power constructs in the Church. It seeks to break harmful dualisms and claims the right to question set meanings around the notions of theological concepts, like purity and sin. It is not entirely focused on the institutional Church, but this discipline also deals with ‘the church’ that is made up of ‘the living stones’. Feminist ecclesiology is concerned about practical theology. Women have usually been active within the local church community – even when excluded from the hierarchical decision-making and power structures.

Natalie Watson,²⁰ outlines her perspectives on and expectations of a feminist ecclesiology:

Most feminist ecclesiology has been generated out of the women-church movement and has been criticized for failing to engage deeply enough with the influential ecclesiological traditions which still shape women's experience within the Church. The creation of a critical, constructive feminist ecclesiology

¹⁸ Call to Action News (CTA illustrated newsletter December 2006) Chicago, IL.

<<http://www.cta-usa.org/news3-96/marchCTAnews.html>> [Accessed 9 October 2011].

¹⁹ USA Roman Catholic Women’s Conference (anyone may register) at which they address relevant topics for women in the Church. The CTA Conference takes place annually in Milwaukee and their slogan is ‘Catholics Working Together for Justice and Equality’. www.cta-usa.org [Accessed 5 November 2011].

²⁰ *Theology Sexuality March 2001 vol. 7 no. 14:59-77* Reconsidering Ecclesiology: Feminist Perspectives, [Natalie K. Watson](http://tse.sagepub.com/content/7/14/59.abstract) <<http://tse.sagepub.com/content/7/14/59.abstract>> [Accessed 6 April 2011].

will enable women to participate in ecclesial self-reflection and the informed critique of patriarchal models. Essential to this process will be the self-conscious recognition that women's bodies embody the body of Christ and that they are thus engaged in the embodied performance of God's presence in the world. The traditional vehicles of word and sacrament are means of 'speaking' this presence that needs to be reclaimed and reinterpreted by women. Furthermore, participation in the revisioning of such performances will contribute towards subverting the gendered symbolism that has structured ecclesiological discourse in the past. The task of the feminist ecclesiological theologian is to reflect upon the significance of women being church in the myriad frameworks through which the Church is constituted and experienced. Women require an ecclesiological culture in which their agency and authority become apparent.

In this quote we discover that Watson also strongly agrees with the Christology that affirms women's bodies and puts forth the notion that "women's bodies embody the body of Christ", which is a concept often rejected by the patriarchal belief that because Jesus was a man only men can officiate at the Eucharist. Watson (2002:1) also argues that the

... history of the church needs to be reread and rewritten 'on women's terms'. We need to think about the story of the church as the story of the community of women, men and children who grapple with the story of God and seek to tell it through their lives. This leads to an examination of how women themselves have approached the formation of new communities in which 'being church' takes place in a way that is meaningful for them.

It is important to acknowledge the various theologians' perspectives when examining both feminist theology and ecclesiology. Feminist theological principles, especially those developed by African women theologians and discussed in Chapter 2, will guide me as I argue the various points in this thesis from a feminist ecclesiological perspective. Feminist theology upholds justice and promotes social transformation. It addresses sexism and seeks to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and gender injustice. Feminist principles also embrace women's rights to choose and not to have gender stereotypical roles imposed on them.

Academic feminist theological scholars like Russell, Radford-Ruether, Schüssler Fiorenza and Daly affirm the work of the pioneers who began speaking out against women's subordination. *In Memory of Her – A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983/1994) is a gift to the Church world-wide but much of her valuable research has been ignored or brushed aside by the hierarchy of the institutional Church. Schüssler Fiorenza (1983/1994:289) addresses unjust practices in the Church in her chapter entitled 'Patriarchal Household of God and *Ekklēsia*

of Women' in which she highlights that "the Christian community, as the household of God, has become stratified according to the age/gender divisions of the patriarchal household". The examples we have in the Gospels, of Jesus' interactions with children and women, do not conform to those espoused by the Church today.

Natalie Watson's ecclesiological framework will be used extensively to examine women's exclusion and to address some of the factors related to being church in the MCSA. Watson (2002:30 and 31) examines traditional ecclesiologies "under Feminist Scrutiny" and stresses that it is

... this patriarchal socio-symbolic order which feminist theologians seek to challenge and to replace by a concept of church in which women can live as the particular sexual human beings that they are.

Letty Russell (1987:67) goes a step further and states that in our "journey towards a new household of freedom" feminists are searching for a place to call home. The Church, as we have known it, is not a place women can unanimously call home. Russell (1987:68 and 72) outlines how she and other feminist theologians continue to search for a place that is welcoming to women and she concludes this section by affirming that this "new house of authority belongs to God, the housekeeper of all creation" and that "God has invited us to join as partners in the work of cleansing the temple and rebuilding creation". Listening to women's stories and inviting them to be part of this journey is my responsibility as a partner in this work.

Susan Rakoczy (2004:199) agrees with both Russell and Watson and writes that "Biblical images of the church provide a perspective for a feminist ecclesiology of a discipleship of equals in community". She devotes a whole chapter to 'Church and Ministry: Women Included and Excluded' in her book *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology* and she contributes an essential theological argument to this debate. She clearly states that

... the hierarchical, patriarchal, clerical church in which women in all countries and continents experience [exclusion] is in direct conflict with the life and ministry of Jesus (Rakoczy 2004:209).

Therefore, according to feminist theologians, the patriarchal model of church governance no longer works for women – indeed, according to Rakoczy's perception of the ministry of Jesus, it should never have 'worked' for anyone but more and more theologians do agree –

the Church must change. The tools I shall use to continue to do this research are outlined next.

1.6. Research Methodology

I will describe my research methodology more fully in chapter 3. For the purposes of the introduction to this study, however, it is important to state at this point that this study is a “mixed-methods” study based on qualitative-empirical work as well as textual data. I will use the data collected empirically as well as textually to construct a theological analysis of the ways in which the MCSA continues to marginalise women, using the tools of African feminist ecclesiology. The empirical part of the research involves an in-depth analysis of the stories of five significant women in the MCSA. Focusing on women’s stories is congruent with feminist theorising as Lugones and Spelman (1990:21) assert “[f]eminist theory - of all kinds - is to be based on, or anyway touch base with, the variety of real life stories women provide about themselves”. These “real life stories” are told by women themselves in their own words in order to lend credibility to their voices. While the sample of five stories may seem small, it is important to note that my research is not quantitative but qualitative. The difference is that quantitative research is based on data that can be counted while qualitative research is based on data that is experiential (Jayaratne 1983: 144). Feminist research supports exploratory and narrative investigation and the in-depth analysis of these five women’s stories provides a window into their lives as Methodist women in Southern Africa. Qualitative research does not need to be representative, it focuses on real life situations, which might have similarities to others’ experiences, but are nonetheless unique to the respondent.

In addition to the women’s stories I also use textual analysis as part of my research methodology. For this I will mainly focus on the primary data, the source documents of the MCSA. These include the Laws and Discipline (the legal document of the MCSA) and the *Yearbooks* (the minutes of the Annual Conference, the decision-making body of the MCSA). The Methodist Hymn-Book and The Methodist Service Book (liturgical orders of service) also form part of the sources that will be examined in the chapter on textual analysis. Significant addresses and sermons of the Presiding Bishop are also referred when relevant to the discussion. It is also essential to reflect upon, analyse and evaluate the

works of distinguished scholars in their respective fields. Critical scholarly reviews will, therefore, be done thematically throughout the thesis.

The voices of African women, as heard through the writings of African women feminist theologians, add value to this thesis. I depend on these scholars to enrich my understanding of African theology as well as deepen my insight into the culture and spirituality of my Black Methodist sisters. The resources consulted in this research will be discussed in the following section.

1.7. Literature Review

On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (2005), was part of a World Council of Churches global initiative called **On Being Church: Women's Voices and Visions**. This project of Aruna Gnanadason was an attempt to monitor and evaluate whether the 1988-1998 'Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women' had any impact on the WCC's member churches. The purpose of this project was to highlight the various ways in which women experience 'being church'. Through the stories that women told the world would discover how marginalised women and children in the Church still are and it was hoped that the opportunities created for them, through these publications, would assist them to reveal some of the distressing aspects of patriarchy and male-dominance in the Church. These collections of stories are the most significant contributions on women's 'being church' that came out of the WCC's 'Decade'. I believe its major contribution, however, was putting women's voices and visions back onto the Churches' agendas. The actual 'Decade' had come and gone and very little had changed in the churches. These three valuable books brought together women's concerns about the Church from all of the six world regions.²¹ The publication, which covers African women's experiences, especially Nadar and Oduyoye's chapters, which zone in on feminist ecclesiology, have given my research question an edge. They address the very point I wish to make – even with a dedicated 'Decade', gender injustice continues to mar the experiences of women in the Church. I

²¹ *Women's Voices and Visions of the Church: Reflections from North America* (2005); *Women's Voices and Visions of the Church: Reflections of Orthodox Women* and *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions* edited by Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. World Council of Churches: Geneva, 2005.

believe my thesis will add to this discussion as none of the essays focus specifically on the experiences of Southern African Methodist women.

In the introduction to the book, *Ragbag Theologies – Essays in Honour of Denise M Ackermann, A Feminist Theologian of Praxis* edited by Miranda Pillay, Sarojini Nadar and Clint Le Bruyns (2010), the editors describe how the book got its title and explain why the contributors to this volume do not all fit into the conventional box of ‘theologian’. Ackermann, in her own words, calls herself a ‘ragbag theologian’ because her work has taken her to diverse platforms. The Cape Town branch of The Circle meets in her home and there the context is personal and practical but Ackermann also engages rigorously in the academia, ensuring that gender and social justice remain on the agenda.

Context, spirituality and theology are discussed within a variety of frameworks. Here a rare gift of tributes are presented to a ‘mother’ in the Christian faith and a ‘mentor’ in academic theological discourse. The analogy that Karin Sporre (2010:15), a Swedish theologian and friend of Denise Ackermann, draws is encouraging for African feminist theologians because she emphasises the value of the contributions of all the “ragbag theologians”. She suggests that these ‘cloths’ are recycled and woven into a colourful carpet. The editors note that

This variety of grains and textures also lends the carpet to a variety of uses. It can be used at the entrance to the academy or it can be used at the entrance to a home, a church, perhaps even a shack (Pillay, Nadar and Le Bruyns 2009:15).

Ackermann believes that ragbags “have a common purpose – they aim to be useful the second time around” (2010:15). This inspiration serves to encourage feminist theologians to continue to cover the same ground over and over again until ecclesiological practices within the Church are reconstructed to be inclusive and women are free to participate fully as being church.

Another significant book for my study has been the now classic feminist text within the Circle, *The Will to Arise – Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* edited by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi RA Kanyoro (1992/2006). Although this publication deals mainly with African religious rituals and customs, Part 3 does focus on ‘African Women and the Christian Church’. Teresa Hinga writes about ‘Jesus and the Liberation of Women

in Africa' and her insight is valuable in the light of African women's experience of being church in their own context, as well as how Western missionary zeal impacted on the people of Africa.

An additional important resource is the collection of papers from a Lutheran consultation, seeking "new directions to experience equality and partnership between men and women in our societies and churches" edited by Musimbi Kanyoro (1997:ix), entitled *In Search of a Round Table: Gender Theology and Church Leadership*. The contributors to this World Council of Churches' publication discuss many of the issues that are pertinent to this study.

The book, *Introducing African Women's Theology* by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001), is part of the series entitled 'Introductions in Feminist Theology'. In this book Oduyoye covers the significant aspects of African women's theology, giving particular attention to Christology, Anthropology and the *Oikos* or Household of God. She deals with hospitality and spirituality from an African woman's perspective and, in challenging sexism in the Church, asks "What has religion to say to this experience of women? What is the way forward, if the curse of sexism is to be removed?" (Oduyoye 2001:122). She holds out the hope that African women theologians' commitment to "togetherness, complementarity and harmony" (Oduyoye 2001:126-127) will contribute to a positive way forward in the Church.

"What does "unmasking the ideology of patriarchy" mean? Why is doing this important? What are some of the strategies that have kept women subordinate in patriarchal societies?" (Clifford 2001:43). These are just some of the questions which Anne Clifford asks in her book, *Introducing Feminist Theology*.

Clifford then moves on to dealing with perspectives on the Bible and opens up various points of view for the reader. In her chapter that unpacks the perspectives on God, she pays tribute to Radford Ruether's work on God-language and Oduyoye's groundbreaking work on African feminist theology. The fourth chapter of the book looks at various aspects that affect women in the Church, including ordination and the sacraments,

and the last two chapters deal with feminist spirituality and ecology. Clifford's (2001:263) final words express my hope for gender justice in the MCSA: "I end this book with a very simple hope that Christian feminist theologians in every locale around the globe will continue the work already begun in fidelity to the freeing truth of the gospel."

This hope for a better church is because the Church has for a long time been a place of deep contradictory feelings for women. While the majority of those who attend church are women, women experience hierarchical exclusion and invisibility within its institutional structures. Throughout its existence, women have not participated in the Church's deliberation on its own nature. And yet, feminist theologians claim that women **are church** and always have been church. In her influential book, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology* Watson (2002) explores women's experiences of being church and she urges women to reclaim the Church in order to rebuild it as a meaningful, open, sacramental space where everybody's presence is celebrated. She also proposes a creative and constructive discourse with existing theological approaches to the Church, from different Christian persuasions as well as with modern-day feminist theologians, and she suggests the development of principles, which encourage women's voices to speak of their own experiences of being church and also urges them to reclaim church into speech.

Watson (2002:134) says that the "Church is the embodied reality of all women, children and men whose stories in turn tell the story of the Triune God." Watson also addresses women's relationships with the Church and she examines the constant hierarchical exclusion of women by institutional Church structures and offers insights into how women are reclaiming the church through their own embodied realities. While she provides an excellent feminist ecclesiological framework she does not address the issue of a gap between policy and practice, which this thesis will contribute to the discussion. While in the past women had to contend with churches which simply did not take their concerns seriously as Watson and others point out, now even though the intention to take women seriously may be captured in policies on gender equality, such policies have yet to be implemented in practice.

Rakoczy's (2004) work, *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*, is essential for Southern African women and provides a substantial foundation for my thesis. She perceptively deals with gender injustice in her chapter six, entitled 'Church and Ministry: Women Included and Excluded'. Although she writes from a Roman Catholic perspective, her insights are most relevant for all women in the Church. She highlights several biblical narratives, which are often used to justify either the inclusion or the exclusion of women when it comes to ordination. She maintains that a biblical view of the Church, seen as a loving community and household of God (the *Oikos*), is possible and that the Body of Christ (the Church) is Christ's servant of humanity.

Rakoczy also discusses the leadership and ministry of many women within the early Christian church communities. She examines what went wrong and pinpoints how the patriarchal system caused the far-reaching inequality that the Church now has to deal with. The inclusion of women, which was initially preached and practiced, soon fell into disuse. This biblical model of partnership and *koinonia* (fellowship) that commemorates the talents of all; men and women, clergy and laity, rich and poor, young and old; North and South; can assist us to reinstate a vigorous form of inclusive ministry in the Church. When women are empowered to lead within the present-day institutional Church framework, the Church **will** change. Rakoczy (2004:244) also celebrates the ways in which women are progressively "creating new experiences of church".

The contributors to the book, *Grant me Justice! – HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible* edited by Musa W Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro (2004) have all engaged deeply with the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the Bible and although their focus is not specifically on feminist ecclesiology these articles speak into women's experience of being church. For some the stigma attached to being HIV positive or living with AIDS is directly related to exclusion from church attendance and/or any contact with the church community. Women in the MCSA also experience similar stigmatisation and until the Church embraces all, as Jesus does, true liberation cannot come to the Church. The value of this publication lies in the skilful hermeneutics applied to various passages of Scripture and the re-reading of the texts in the light of inclusion and compassion.

This significant publication, *In Memory of Her – A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, seeks to address the broad spectrum of traditional theological implications. In her final chapter, entitled ‘The Patriarchal Household of God and the *Ekklēsia* of Women’ Schüssler Fiorenza discusses the notion that although patriarchy has been responsible for the oppression of women in the Church, the

... Gospel story remembers that the discipleship and apostolic leadership of women are integral parts of Jesus’ “alternative” praxis of *agape* and service.

Her astute feminist theological insight makes this book an essential tool and her clear understanding of ‘women being church’ gives feminist theologians the encouragement we need to persevere along this journey of liberation for all.

Last but not least in my literature review is a remarkable book by Letty Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of Church*. Russell (1993:15) invites us to “walk *with* the church as it struggles to become a sign of the presence of God’s household!” She encourages her readers and makes practical suggestions for transformation. She also introduces us to what she calls “kitchen table spirituality” (p189), “welcome table spirituality” (p196) and “round table partnership” (p205), which provided the inspiration for the chapter titles of this thesis. The following online review adds an additional dimension to her work:

Russell sets out her task by asking: What might a church that struggled to practise a sharing of authority in community look like? And responds to the question from the positive perspective of furnishing the rooms of the Household of Freedom, using the round table as a symbol of the church in the round; "the place where the feast is spread is a key metaphor for God's hospitality".

Russell frames her definition of the church as "the community of Christ, bought at a price, where everyone is welcome".²²

Russell conjures up the image that in every season of the year the centre of life, in many people’s homes, is the kitchen table – a place of warm welcome. She suggests that

²² © 1995 World Council of Churches, © 2008 Gale, Cengage Learning, ‘Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church’ by Flora Winfield, the [Ecumenical Review, January, 1995](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2065/is_n1_v47/ai_16420093/) <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2065/is_n1_v47/ai_16420093/> [Accessed 9 April 2011].

not only are meals cooked and consumed there, but many other activities take place around the kitchen table. My experience resonates with this image – it was where we did our homework after school, where our mother taught us to sew and knit, where we exercised various crafts and where we gathered to listen to the radio. For many people this was usually their only table or the one on which newspaper could be spread and paints and glues unpacked. As the kitchen table was once the centre of daily life, it also reflected the basic activities of the family, both good and bad. Russell tells of how, in her ministry to the people of East Harlem, “the kitchen table became a place of struggle for liberation and was every bit as much a part of the Church as the large round table in the brick sanctuary a few blocks away”.²³ Russell (1993:189) also suggests that in

... opposition to the dualistic separation of body and spirit, this kitchen table spiritual discipline would look for wholeness and fulfillment in the moment in which persons are able to express themselves in a way that connects our deepest sense of embodied self, or sexuality, with our strongest feeling of connection to others and to God.

Russell shares her experience of a ministry for healing and liberation in East Harlem and encourages her readers to develop a feminist ecclesiology which is based in the practice of kitchen-table solidarity. This interpretation of the church is rooted in what Russell calls “the sweaty tasks of daily living”, and the church that gathers around her round kitchen table in solidarity, is a rainbow community of colours, cultures, sexual orientations, and life lived on the margins of church and society.²⁴

In this book Russell continues to develop and further explore her work in *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (1987) using biblical material, the tradition of the Protestant reformation and specific human contexts as a basis for feminist ecclesiological reflection on authority, partnership and community. This is understood as one aspect of the ecumenical search for justice; a perspective to which Russell has devoted many years of her life and ministry. This ecumenical search includes the effort to break down every barrier in the human community – racism, sexism, economic divides, inequalities in health and in education, and so on.²⁵ Her work supports my quest for gender

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

justice in the MCSA and even though she does not directly address a gap between policy and practice, her work provides a most useful framework for my thesis.

The following section outlines the structure of this thesis, which has been based on Letty Russell's (1993:205) "round table partnership" theme as outlined above.

1.8. Structure of the Thesis: Chapter Outline

An exploration of the Wesleyan quadrilateral – *Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience* – will also enhance this research, especially from a traditionally Methodist point of view, which encourages people to 'think and let think'.²⁶ I shall endeavour to engage all four of these elements throughout the thesis.

This thesis is divided into six chapters:

Chapter One – 'Laying of the Table'

The introduction covers the background, rationale, objectives, critical research questions and reasons for choosing the title for this thesis. In this first chapter the key elements of the thesis are outlined and the theoretical framework and research methodology are briefly introduced. A literature review, establishing the body of literature which exists on my subject as well as how my own work fits within this body of literature, is described. Finally, the six chapters are outlined and the structure of the thesis is described.

Chapter Two – 'Inviting Ourselves to the Table?'

In the second chapter, which is devoted to the theoretical framework of the thesis, African feminist theology and feminist ecclesiology are discussed in depth in order to provide tools for the analysis of the reasons why the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchy. In this chapter, we recognise that women have not been invited to participate fully in the decision-making processes in the MCSA. As women **are** church this chapter recommends that we invite ourselves into this discourse, even though the key theologians remain men. It

²⁶ John Wesley used four different sources in coming to theological conclusions. These sources were first referred to as the **Wesleyan Quadrilateral** in 1964 by theologian/scholar Albert C. Outler in a collection of Wesley's works edited by Outler entitled simply *John Wesley*.
<http://www.theopedia.com/Wesleyan_Quadrilateral> [Accessed 6 November 2011].

is recognised that although women have been ordained to Word and Sacrament in the MCSA for almost four decades (1976 – 2011) and all laity have the right to hold office in the MCSA, women are still held on the periphery of ‘the Table’ or, at many levels, are excluded from it completely.

Chapter Three – ‘The Table Setting’

I describe the research design in this chapter and go on to explain the methodology used in this research. The first and key methodology, that of literature review, is explained here and the dearth of material in the MCSA, regarding its gender policy, is highlighted. I then give the reasons for including an empirical section in my thesis, starting with the selection of five Methodist women’s stories. I discuss the significance of a narrative approach in African feminist theology. I define my hypothesis and discuss the relevance of African feminist ecclesiology with regard to this thesis. Here I also explain how the women wrote their stories and give reasons for this method of gathering the information. I also explain how the stories are analysed and the significance of these women’s experiences is related to the five features of African feminist ecclesiology (discussed in chapter two). The rationale of electing to include an empirical section is explained and the limitations of this method are highlighted.

Chapter Four – ‘The Crumbs from the Table’

In this chapter space is created to examine some of the exclusive ecclesiological practices of the MCSA. This includes church governance, structure, liturgies and hymns, translations and versions of the Bible, language used in the MCSA’s legal documents, as well as the ways in which sermons are preached from the pulpit and meetings are conducted by the leadership in the MCSA. The merits of new inclusive liturgies in the MCSA will be discussed – with regard to the image of God as well as pertaining to the inclusion of both genders.

This chapter will also address the need to understand the patriarchal social system, within which the MCSA functions and which causes blind spots with regard to its gender policy. One such blind spot is the absence of a gender budget to provide training for churches.

Chapter Five – ‘Expanding the Table’

If women are not fully present at ‘the Table’ then those who set the agenda for ‘the Table’ are predominantly male. This recognition serves to assist with the analysis of the MCSA’s dilemma – unless the hierarchical system of church governance changes, gender justice will remain an intention of the MCSA rather than becoming a reality.

The stories of five significant Methodist women are considered in this chapter. Their stories serve to illustrate how women, often despite being marginalised, find fulfilment in the MCSA. Whilst these women’s experiences expand ‘the Table’ they are also examples of the MCSA’s patriarchal ecclesiological practices, which were described in chapter four. Each of these women in the MCSA tells her own unique story but I believe each story is also representative of thousands of Methodist women. Many of these women are not yet aware of their own marginalisation in the MCSA and, more importantly, their stories are seldom told and their gifts of leadership are rarely acknowledged. In concluding this chapter, I relate something of my own journey towards ordination in the MCSA.

Chapter Six – ‘Hope for a Round Table’

In this concluding chapter of the thesis I shall provide a summary of my study as a whole. I shall propose transformative models of being church in this chapter, which could enhance the healing and transformation that the MCSA has declared to be its mission. These transformative models of being church would include aspects such as circles, lay and youth involvement in leadership as well as non-hierarchical partnerships. Oduyoye and Russell provide some helpful resources but innovative suggestions will also be made with regard to the Southern African context. This final chapter will also deal with the hope for gender healing in the MCSA.

1.9. Conclusion

The voices of Methodist women need to be heard. This is highlighted in the opening paragraph of this chapter. Women have, through the ages, been the key supporters of the Church and provided for those in need. Even though the majority of people, both women and men in the MCSA do not challenge the *status quo*, all of its members are in need of

gender healing. It is, therefore, deemed necessary to address the gap between gender policy and practice in the MCSA.

The research problem and objectives were explained, the chosen mixed methodology was described and reasons were offered why these two methods would particularly enhance this research. The necessity for an extensive literature review, which is thematically undertaken throughout the thesis, was emphasised and some of the key authors' work, consulted during this research project, was briefly discussed. The importance of narrative in African feminist theological discourse was explained and the place of women's stories was emphasised.

The rationale for this thesis was outlined and discussed and the objectives of this thesis were motivated. The gender policy, adopted by the MCSA,²⁷ that would ensure a more just representation at every level of leadership in the church, was explained. This research will endeavour to examine the gap that exists between the gender policy and the practice within the MCSA. The theoretical framework was introduced and the broader questions were briefly posed, whilst also creating space for dealing with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which explores Sacred Scripture, Church Tradition, Human Reason and Personal Experience.

In chapter two, I expand on the theoretical framework of this project, as it is important to understand the various branches of theology, with specific reference to African feminist theology and feminist ecclesiology. I, therefore, firstly describe the theological terms and descriptions of the disciplines discussed in this thesis and then I turn to the in-depth conversations on feminist ecclesiology and African feminist theology. The discussion on the rationale for this research, in 1.1, pointed out that the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchy. Hence, in this next chapter we invite ourselves to 'the Table' in order to establish the theories that provide us with the tools to examine the gap between practice and gender policy in the MCSA, as well as reaffirming that women **are** church.

²⁷ Which recommends 40% Female, 40% Male and 20% Youth representation (Yearbook 1999/2000:174).

Chapter Two

‘Inviting Ourselves to the Table’ – the Contributions of Feminist Ecclesiology and Feminist Theology

In writing formal ecclesiology from a feminist perspective, I am entering a conversation to which I have not been invited (Watson 2002:5).

2.0. Introduction

One of the important objectives of this thesis is to analyse the reasons why the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchy. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the theories, which assist with this analysis and to establish the theoretical framework on which this research is based. I shall discuss the two primary theories used for this research, i.e. *Feminist Ecclesiology* and *African Feminist Theology*, which were briefly introduced in chapter 1.5. I shall then conduct a thorough investigation into the particular theories engaged in this thesis.

2.1. Theological Terms

Theology, in the Christian context, covers the study of God as well as doctrines, creeds, the canon and the various dogmas and sub-divisions of theological disciplines. Because the study of religion and theology is so vast and complex many branches of theology have developed. The following theological disciplines are specifically relevant to this research: contextual theology, liberation theology, feminist theology, African feminist theology, ecclesiology, feminist ecclesiology and African feminist ecclesiology. The valuable work of the scholars who contributed to the *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (Fabella and Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:197), gives an insight into “Theological Methodologies” as they impact on liberation and feminist theology, which is pertinent to this research. They assert that

[m]ost Third World theologians, that is, theologians of the world’s South, now realize that it is impossible to speak about a general and universal method without taking into account that it is inevitably situated historically and socially. One cannot speak about a particular and regional theological methodology without connecting it in its basic foundations with the more general type (Fabella and Sugirtharajah 2000:197).

In a Third World context, therefore, God is made known as the God who sets free those who have been and still are oppressed. Fabella and Sugirtharajah (2000:197) suggest that theology “sees everything with God’s eyes and theology’s proper perspective is the faith perspective”.

Feminism, according to Rakoczy (2004:11), “is based on the conviction of the full humanity of women and is engaged in reconstructing human society”. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:9-10) describe feminism as “the vehicle for us as women to own and express our experience without feeling alienated – it gives us space to accept our experience as legitimate in a patriarchal world”. This description is valid and supports the notion that feminism is an ideology that grew out of a profound discontent with male-domination and the continued denigration of women. Arche Ligo, a contributor to *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, puts forward the notion that

... feminism reached the Third World at the end of the 1970s. It has no single form. Based on an analysis of women’s oppression, its main strands have been classified as liberal, radical, or socialist, although there is some overlap, and the terms “cultural” and “Marxist” are also used (Fabella and Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:87).

Today feminism is embraced by women and men who work for the liberation of all people from any kind of domination, be it sexism, racism, classism or ageism. Many scholars have debated the term ‘feminism’ and asked whether it is not exclusive of men. Others, like Schüssler Fiorenza, have argued for the term to stay, intimating that it is clear that feminism has been a reaction to patriarchal domination and that both men and women have been affected by the injustice of such a system. It is interesting to note that there is no article in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Richardson (ed) 1969) on ‘feminism’, ‘feminist theology’ or even on ‘women’. However, in *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, although there is no entry under ‘feminism’ either, John MacQuarrie, the editor, refers the reader to the section on “Women, Status of”, under which Johanna Mott writes that

[t]he status of women is most frequently raised as a problem or a question. It may well be that in our time the discussion will be centred on the potential and opportunities for women, as persons, to contribute to the Church and the work of the Church (MacQuarrie (ed) 1967:362).

In the past forty years, since its publication in 1967, women's status has changed in many societies and the ordination of women²⁸ has come to some Southern African churches but the system of patriarchy has remained largely intact. This is evident in the hierarchical structures and top-down leadership that has not yet changed. An example of this can be seen in the recent recommendations to the MCSA's Conference from a 'Structures Indaba' held earlier in 2011. The recommendations include points like 'giving local Districts more power' rather than proposing a new model of leadership, which might be less hierarchical and more inclusive.

Feminist theology emerged within the considerable growth that took place in the last century in the field of theology – specifically with regard to liberation theology. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:10) argue that "feminist theology not only conforms itself from scripture, tradition and the Spirit but also from social theory, economic analysis and psychology." All of this is done with a view to promote the full humanity of women. Feminist theology and praxis have always gone together – this is confirmed by Ackermann (2009:270) who is "convinced that all theological theory is inextricably bound to Christian praxis". Feminist theologians do not only talk about changing the world but are usually directly involved in attempts to change it. Feminist theologians are typically activists who work in many different arenas of advocacy, some directly focused on gender justice and some emphasising other social concerns with a distinctly feminist critique.

Maria Pilar Aquino's article in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* suggests that

Third World feminist theology takes into account the diversity of experiences, cultures, and realities, but it also recognizes that the faith experience can occur within a complex and conflictive capitalist societal model that continues to exert its colonial and neo-colonial dominance over the entire Third World (Fabella and Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:88).

She concludes her article by holding out the hope "of a just world order and a reconciled humanity" (Fabella and Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:89).

²⁸ In the MCSA the ordination of women was passed in 1975 and the first woman, Constance Oosthuizen, was ordained in 1976. In Britain the ordination of women in the Anglican Church was approved in 1992 and the first women were ordained there in 1994. In South Africa (in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, as it was still called then) women were ordained as soon as the decision was passed in September 1992. The first South African Anglican woman to be ordained was Nancy Charton, who had been a deacon, like Constance Oosthuizen in the Methodist Church.

In 1991 the contributors to *Women Hold up Half the Sky – Women in the Church in Southern Africa*, were writing from their point of outrage at the decision by the Provincial Synod in 1988 not to ordain women in the Anglican Church. Nancy Charton, one of the contributors to this publication, wrote about her experiences as a deacon in the Anglican Church²⁹ in St. Matthew's Mission. She challenged the thinking that ordination of women would "impose western norms and practices on African culture" when she wrote that

[i]n the cultures of most of the southern Bantu speaking peoples, women could be called as doctors, with power to receive and to interpret the messages of the spirits. They received the same training as the men and could hold and exercise religious authority (Nancy Charton 1991:333).

Charton's perceptions are valid, to an extent, but some African feminist theologians, like Phiri, Nadar, Oduyoye and others, write about the indigenous patriarchal system, which favours the male in African culture as much as it does in Western culture.

Anne Clifford (2001:32-34), who introduces feminist theology afresh in this new millennium, narrows feminist theology down and categorises three types of feminist theologies:

- Revolutionary feminist theology – a post-Christian response.

This category describes those feminist theologians who argue that the Christian Church continues to marginalise women and to view them as being inferior to men. Radical feminists would place themselves in this category, proposing a return to something like the ancient Goddess³⁰ worship, which dates back to pre-history and scholars have interpolated data from archaeological evidence as is seen in footnote 30 below.

- Reformist Christian feminist theology – a mere desire for greater inclusion.

These feminist theologians are probably the closest to maintaining the *status quo* in the Christian Church. This group promotes modest change in the Church. They are usually

²⁹ Then still known as the Church of the Province of Southern Africa.

³⁰ This "old European" [Goddess] culture lasted for tens of thousands of years in what is now Europe. They generally lived in peace; there is a notable lack of defensive fortifications around their hamlets. As evidenced by their funeral customs, males and females appear to have had equal status. Many historians and archaeologists believe that:

- Their society was matrilineal; children took their mothers' names.
- Life was based on lunar (not solar) calendar.
- Time was experienced as a repetitive cycle, not linearly as we think of it.

<<http://www.religioustolerance.org/goddess.htm>> [Accessed 4 May 2011].

found in both the Protestant mainline churches and in the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestants are often fundamentalist evangelical in their approach to theology and they agree with a more literal interpretation of the Bible. They are ‘feminist’ because they do believe that there should be gender equality in the Church and in society. The Roman Catholics are committed to their Church’s tradition the Pope’s authority. They do, however, feel that women should have a greater role to play in the life of the Church. They do not, as a rule, criticise the structures of Roman Catholicism and they support the decree that only men should be ordained to the priesthood. They do encourage women in theological education and some of these feminist theologians teach in Roman Catholic seminaries.

- Reconstructionist feminist theology – a commitment to transformation.

This category of feminist theologians does share its commitment to the Christian Church with the reformists. This, however, is where the similarity between these two groups ends. Reconstructionists propose radical change for the Church – in all its forms. Women, and all marginalised groups of people, are to be freed from subservience and oppression of any kind. Clifford (2001:33-34) suggests that “they believe that reinterpreting the traditional symbols and ideas of Christianity without abandoning the God revealed in Jesus Christ is possible and desirable”.

This thesis is conducted within the reconstructionist or revisionist category of hope for a more complete liberation for women, not only in the Church but also in society. I position myself within this category, recognising my strong bias and demand for gender justice. I believe, with Anne Clifford (2001:34), that “the reign of God, when rightly understood, liberates and empowers women for the fullness of life”.

Patriarchy is a social system in which the male is favoured. The ‘father’ or ‘patriarch’ is the ‘head of the home’ or the ‘chief of the tribe’ or the ‘leader of the church’. This system has also been responsible for centuries of ‘White/Male’ domination of the world and the West’s arrogant behaviour towards those from a different economic status, race, class or sexual orientation, which have been addressed by sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and theologians. Watson (2002:34), a feminist theologian,

draws attention to the myth or the metaphor that views the Church as ‘feminine’. This ‘Bride of Christ’ is immune to ritual impurity, child-birth and

... it is one of her most fundamental characteristics that she is not like other women. The church as feminine and bride of Christ does not have a woman’s body. This is reflected in the fact that the male-dominated church can suffer being described in terms of femininity, but has throughout its history shown ample inability to cope with the reality of women’s bodies.

Watson’s argument relates to patriarchy in the sense that it denies the reality of the feminine and has, for centuries, defined humanity in terms of the masculine. In neither of the two forty-year-old Christian dictionaries³¹ consulted can one find an entry on ‘patriarchy’. In two later dictionaries on theology³² consulted, there is almost as little information. *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Komonchak, Collins and Lane (eds) 1987) has an entry on ‘Patrology’, which refers the reader to the ‘Fathers of the Church’. This entry takes up nine columns in this volume but it does not address the patriarchal system.

Patriarchy is endemic in cultures across the globe. North America, Europe, Africa, South America and the East too, have their own forms of patriarchy that might be a mixture of their own indigenous cultural heritage and the remnants of colonial oppression, which is particularly relevant in Africa. The *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (2000:162-164) links patriarchy and hierarchy in an article that outlines this system as that which has its foundation in the “rule of the father” and emphasises that patriarchy is a “social order”. Aquino (Fabella & Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:163), the contributor of this article, defines patriarchy as a global system that

... is characterized by unlimited competition, possession of goods, greed, and control – both physical and symbolic. Patriarchy articulates a system of privileges that benefit the ruling elites against the subordinated peoples and nature and that maintain women at systemic disadvantages. It has been identified as a system of graded subjugation that evolves and molds the roots of entire civilizations. Currently, patriarchy combines and multiplies neocapitalist exploitation, neoliberal colonization, alienating systems of meaning, controlling religious traditions, dehumanizing racism, social exclusion, cultural oppression, depredation of nature, and the sexual subjugation of women and of homosexuals.

This explanation is disturbing to read in one sitting. Aquino continues to explore how hierarchy and androcentrism are linked to the patriarchal system. She asserts that

³¹ *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (1969) and *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (1967).

³² *New Dictionary of Theology* (1987) and *Dictionary of Theology* (1988).

“Androcentrism is the legitimizing ideology of patriarchy as a hierarchical order” (Fabella & Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:163).

African feminist theology is the discipline, which has emerged out of African theology, liberation theology and feminist theology. What makes it distinct from Western feminist theology is that it addresses the unique need of African women in an African context to be liberated from internal cultural and religious oppression (see the contributions in *The Will to Arise – Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, edited by Oduyoye and Kanyoro 2006). African feminist theology differs from Western feminist theology in the sense that it addresses African cultural practices, which do not include the Western experience of the emancipation of women, which took place in the Western world during the late nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries CE. The two World Wars of the Northern Hemisphere caused a revolution for women in the workplace as the majority of men were fighting in the wars whilst industry and civic life needed to be maintained at home. More and more women embarked on careers outside the home and in most Western countries women obtained the right to vote after much debate and many protests by the Suffrage Movements. Colonialism ensured that most Black people, both women and men, in Africa remained subservient and the liberation movements were inspired mainly by the quest for political freedom.

African women theologians, like Dube, Oduyoye, Nadar, Kanyoro and others, also address the concerns around race, class, language and culture. Colonialism entrenched ideas of White racial supremacy in colonised countries and many of these destructive practices had to be deconstructed – first through liberation movements and more recently through African feminist theological discourses. What African feminist theologians are also doing is re-contextualising stories – both traditional African myths and legends as well as biblical narratives – in order to rebuild a mature and inclusive self-image for Black African women. The contributors to *Other Ways of Reading – African Women and the Bible* (Dube 2001), offer several new insights into the interpretation of stories of the Bible, which have previously, on the surface, been hailed as ‘beautiful stories’. The story of Ruth, for instance, becomes a narrative, which denies ‘Moab’ any rights or blessings. Ruth, according to Dube’s (2001:179ff) interpretation of this biblical book, is nothing more than

a slave (representing Moab), who brings honour to Naomi (representing Judah). These contextual theological discourses offer helpful ways of enabling people to read the Bible in a more open and curious way, with specific reference to an African and postcolonial context. These scholars encourage re-reading the old familiar biblical narratives through a new lens and to continually ask challenging questions of the passage. This discipline persuades readers not to be satisfied with anything less than a new revealed truth – or until having grappled with an issue points towards justice and a deeper level of compassion.

The contributors to *Her-Stories – Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (edited by Phiri, Govinden and Nadar 2002) point out how important it is to tell the stories of previously marginalised women. One of these authors, Letty Russell (2002:247), from the North, pays tribute to an African woman, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a Methodist woman from Ghana, whom she describes as a ‘Wise Woman Bearing Gifts’ from the South. The Christmas story is reinterpreted in such a way that it gives a new meaning to the ancient tale and Russell (2002:248ff) resourcefully draws a picture of ‘Mercy as Mother’ – the one who pours “creative understandings of the church” into the “cracks of colonial theology”.

From the above it is clearly essential to recognise that African feminist theology is a narrative discipline – it chooses to listen to people’s stories – especially to those of African women who have been silent for far too long (see *Her-stories – Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Phiri, Govinden and Nadar).

Nadar (2005:16-25), in her title article *On Being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions*, asserts that any history (or rather her-story) of feminist theologies in Africa has to look to The Circle for information on how feminist theologies developed in Africa. Thus, it would be helpful to briefly relate the story of the beginnings of The Circle here. Mercy Amba Oduyoye had a vision in the late 1970s to gather women together into a circle. She began collecting material and communicating with women theologians in Africa as well as abroad. Musimbi Kanyoro (2006:21) tells the story of when she first met Mercy how “she had files, lists, and letters from many African women. All we needed do was to “sort, thread and make them into nice strands” for them to become The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians” – which was officially inaugurated in 1989 at Trinity College, Legon, Ghana. Phiri and Nadar (2006), the editors of *African Women*,

Religion, and Health – Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye, help to string together some more of the valuable beads of African feminist theology.

Kanyoro (2006:20) also tells how this movement appreciates the opportunities to “record what we do, see and hear”. The Circle recognises that it “is the role of eyewitnesses to keep track of the facts and provide the context and interpretation for those who will come after us” (Kanyoro 2006:20). The main purpose of The Circle was to call its membership to “the commitment to be concerned about the lack of theological literature by women of Africa and the willingness to change the situation” (Kanyoro 2006:21).

In 1996, at a continental meeting of The Circle in Nairobi, “the absence of women in the religious history of Africa was pointed out as a grave concern” (Phiri, Govinden and Nadar 2002:4). The editors of *Her-stories – Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* affirmed the role that The Circle had played since its inauguration in 1989 but agreed, after the gathering in Nairobi, that the biographies and stories of “women of faith in Africa, particularly those of the Christian faith” needed to be told (Phiri, Govinden and Nadar 2002:4).

Kanyoro (2006:38 and 39) concludes her informative chapter, entitled ‘Beads and Strands – Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle’, with ‘A Promise for Tomorrow’ in which she celebrates The Circle’s existence as follows:

The Circle’s future comes alive through our realization that something exciting has been happening on our continent and to us. We see our names in print and read each other’s writings. We see clearly that the stories of women in Africa reflect those of our own lives and those of our foremothers. They speak to our hearts and to our bodies. They give us the impetus to dialogue with one another and with God. Our reflections have created opportunities to pose questions to God about God, our humanity, and the essence of our being.

African feminist theology also focuses on the recovery from colonial imperialism and White/Western domination. It recognises that male-domination and African patriarchy have to be addressed but African women theologians choose to respond to this challenge in their own unique way (see *Grant Me Justice! – HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible*, edited by Dube and Kanyoro). Women, like Phiri, Nadar, Oduyoye, Kanyoro, Ackermann and others, are African women feminist theologians, who are also collectors and tellers of stories – they write these stories and seek to interpret them according to their own religious context and their own culture. For example, in one of the first books of The Circle, *The*

Will to Arise – Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa, edited by Oduyoye and Kanyoro, the contributors covered topics such as African rituals, rites of passage, naming ceremonies, widowhood, marriage, sexuality and polygamy.

Ecclesiology is the study of the Church, its structures and its nature. It is the branch of theology that is concerned with the constitution and functions of the Church. In the 19th Century CE ecclesiology, as a term, was first used in connection with the science of church building and decoration but in the middle of the 20th Century CE it was applied more to the doctrine of the Church. The term ‘ecclesiology’ also draws attention to the differing points of view of various key theologians through the ages, such as Wycliff, Huss, Luther and Calvin.

An article in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Komonchak, Collins and Lane (eds) 1987:140-141) provides information on the topic ‘Ecclesiology’ under the heading ‘Church’ and sub-divides the topic into several sections, for example:

1. Scripture

- a. The people of God
- b. The Messianic community
- c. The body of Christ
- d. The fellowship of the Spirit

2. Definition

- a. Distinguishing the aspects of the church
- b. Defining the attributes of the church

The Church is described here as one of the primary realities of the Christian faith and Holy Scripture is viewed as that which “presents the church as the people of God, the community and body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (Komonchak, Collins and Lane 1987:140). In distinguishing the aspects of the Church only the local church might be viewed as being the church proper and wider gatherings seen as associations of churches or of Christians. The Church may also be defined as universal, in that the local congregation only constitutes a portion of ‘the Church’, of which several make up the whole. In the New Testament context the term ‘Church’ is applied to house and city churches as well as to the whole people of God or ‘Body of Christ’.³³ In defining the attributes of the Church cognisance needs to be given to the creedal statements and to the role of the Church in

³³ See the Bible: 1 Cor. 6:19 and Col. 4:15-16.

fulfilling “the OT symbolism of ceremonial cleanness by a moral purity wrought of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:14)” (Komonchak, Collins and Lane (eds) 1987:141).

The exclusion of women’s meaningful participation in traditional ecclesiology, which favoured all-male priesthood and leadership, gave rise to the emergence of an exploration of feminist ecclesiology, thus making a distinction between conventional ecclesiology, which is distinctly patriarchal in its structure and form, and an ecclesiology that affirms that women **are** indeed church.

Feminist ecclesiology is neither an attempt to discuss ‘women *and* the Church’ nor ‘women *in* the Church’. Watson (2002:1), in the first few lines of her first chapter of *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, is quite emphatic that feminist ecclesiology is about women *being* church! Watson (2002:6) questions

... the function of ecclesiology as a discourse that describes the church as a vital religious space, but does so in a way that supports a particular, predominantly patriarchal social symbolic order. The subject matter of ecclesiology is, from a critical feminist point of view, the church or its theological essence as a means of legitimizing and sanctioning an ordering of society which leaves no space for women’s discourses of faith.

Watson acknowledges that she shares these thoughts with Radford Ruether, who pioneered the way, as early as in 1985, for engaging more fully in a feminist ecclesiological debate. Feminist ecclesiology is, therefore, the discipline that grapples with what the Church is, it is that which examines helpful models and structures and raises awareness about the wholeness of being a woman in the Church. All these aspects of a feminist ecclesiology are important for African women theologians too but African feminist theologians add another dimension to the debate.

African feminist ecclesiology is a narrative and practical response to the situation in Africa, where many people are religious but where women do not enjoy recognition for who they are – especially in the Church. The more traditional church’s stand on domestic violence, sex workers, lesbians, women who are HIV positive and those living with AIDS, often denies women justice and dignity. Oduyoye (2005:154) sees “the Church unable to advocate for women as Jairus did for his daughter”. African women theologians believe that in the same way as Jesus raised that little unnamed girl from her physical bondage to

death,³⁴ so too African women should hear Jesus say to them ‘Daughter, Arise!’ and free us from the death of religious bondage, which has been imposed on us by the patriarchal structures of the Church. The Church is God’s household – the place where God reigns and where everyone should be at home. Oduyoye (2005:155) believes that we “need to struggle towards this implementation”.

The *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* has separated African, Asian and Latin American ecclesiologies and the contributor writes that

[i]n Africa the central task for ecclesiology is how to construct a church that is truly African and truly Christian. African ecclesiologists and theologians in general have proposed various approaches to achieve this goal during the past three decades. The main thrust in all of these approaches, however, is on building the church as a community through participation and sharing by the members (Fabella and Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:72).

This description captures something of what it means to be church in Africa but it needs to go one step further and recognise that the model of community or family is only acceptable for African feminist theologians

... with one proviso: the understanding of family in Africa must be purified of its traditional patriarchal and hierarchical theoretical and structural overtones if it is to serve as an adequate symbol of a just, non-sexist church. Feminist theologians insist that the concept of family in Africa must recognize and integrate within itself the human rights and dignity of African women and children (Fabella and Sugirtharajah (eds) 2000:73).

Having defined some of the theological and ecclesiological terms used in this thesis I now turn to discussing some of these terms more fully. The most important of these is feminist ecclesiology, which is the discipline that provides me with the tools to analyse the gap between gender policy and practice in the MCSA

2.2. Feminist Ecclesiology

If ecclesiology is the study of the Church and the Church consists of women and children and men, then ecclesiology should be inclusive. However, traditional ecclesiology has remained a patriarchal concept of what or who the Church is. One of the earlier definitions of ecclesiology, as mentioned in the previous section, points out that this term is one that evolved and at one stage was related more to a church building and its decoration

³⁴ Luke 8:54 – “Child, get up!”

rather than to its nature or its functions. In a dictionary of theology, published twenty years later, the term was used to describe church doctrine, which has remained predominantly androcentric. In a more recent publication, the *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, edited by Fabella & Sugirtharajah (2000:72-78), ecclesiology is discussed in the context of liberation theology, with specific reference to Asian, Latin American and African ecclesiologies. Here it is emphasised that ecclesiology needs to be contextual – people are church where they are located and within the culture which they live. African feminist theologians add to this supposition that gender justice in the Church demands further investigation. They declare that traditionally hierarchical and patriarchal approaches to being church need to be redeemed by more flexible and open discussions about women's roles in the church and an acknowledgement that women simply **are** church.

Traditional ecclesiology has been used to determine who should be included and who should be excluded and in this section I explore how feminist ecclesiology has entered the debate. In her ground-breaking book, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, Watson (2002:5) confesses that

[f]irst of all, feminist ecclesiology is responding to a situation of profound ambiguity. In writing formal ecclesiology from a feminist perspective, I am entering a conversation to which I have not been invited. Surveying the mainstream ecclesiological literature, I cannot think of many major books written by women.

Watson is fearless as she enters this male domain and explores various aspects of ecclesiology in her book. She presents sound arguments on how a feminist theological perspective begins to make sense of the study of the Church and she opens the door even though she admits that she has invited herself into this discussion. When feminist theologians break new ground, such as this, they not only open the door for the much needed scholarship but they also provide an opportunity for others to explore and engage in the debates that affect them deeply.

The Christian Church, broadly speaking, has been in existence for approximately two thousands years and its present hierarchical structures have evolved within a patriarchal system and framework. Feminist biblical scholars and theologians, point to house churches operating under the able leadership of women deacons, such as Lydia in Philippi (reference in Acts 16) and Dorcas in Joppa (reference in Acts 9). In the first two centuries of the Church's existence women were prominent leaders but by the 4th Century CE the

patriarchal system and exclusive male leadership were once again shaping its structures and its creeds.³⁵

Torjesen also did a study on ‘Research: Controversies over Women's Leadership in Early Christianity’, for which she won the North American Patristics Society Award for ‘Best First Article’ in 1986.³⁶ This discussion is important in the reconstruction of church organisation. Her research shows that women were fully involved in church leadership and gives credibility to the pursuit for full inclusion today. Torjesen (2008) also contributed an article, entitled ‘Clergy and Laity: Christian Elites and Christianizing the Elites’ to *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*. Here she discusses clericalism, which Radford Ruether and Oduyoye also raise as an additional concern, directly related to the quest for women’s ordination. Gender and religion research has to take cognisance of what some scholars have termed ‘the elitism of ordination’ (see Torjesen’s (2008) article).

Schüssler Fiorenza (1983/1994:84) reminds us that

... early Christian women *as women* were part of a submerged group, and *as Christians* they were part of an emergent group that was not yet recognized by the dominant patriarchal society and culture.

This explanation is helpful in understanding why the Christian Church reverted to patriarchy, and became entrenched in hierarchical systems, even though the teachings of Jesus seemed to offer an alternative model of being church. It has taken many centuries for scholars to begin to recognise that the dominant patriarchal system and culture is unhelpful for half of the human race. For many ordinary people in the pew, this journey of discovery has not even begun. In some churches and societies, leaders are becoming aware of gender injustice and the need for change with regard to hierarchical structures. Much of this, though, is still only expressed in goals, visions and academic writing but at least it is being expressed. The theme for the 2011 Annual Conference of the MCSA was ‘An Invitation to a Round Table’. This is clearly a hope, a vision or a goal. I cite two examples to show that this is not thus far a reality. Firstly, same-sex legal unions are not yet recognised by the MCSA – a lesbian clergyperson was discontinued in 2010 for entering into such a

³⁵ See Karen Jo Torjesen’s (1993) book *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*.

³⁶ Curriculum vita of Karen Jo Torjesen, 12/1/2010. Claremont Graduate University. California <<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/1037.asp>> [Accessed 10 August 2011].

relationship with her partner, and secondly, the gender policy on equitable representation of women, youth and men has hitherto not been implemented.

Feminist ecclesiology, according to Watson (2002:3) “acknowledges women’s being church, celebrates it and regards any understanding that does not recognize women as church as incomplete”. Feminist ecclesiology, therefore, is a tool with which gender exclusive practices within the Church are examined and the foundation upon which egalitarian church governance is re-established. Watson (2002:7) also states that women

... cannot be contented with simply being assured that they are part of the church as a spiritual body; their presence and participation has to be expressed in the very structures in which the church as the embodiment of the Triune God manifest itself here and now.

Many conventional church leaders believe that Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28³⁷ was made in the ‘spiritual body’ context of which Watson speaks, meaning that *in heaven* or *in the eyes of God* women and men are equal but here on earth ‘the husband is the head of his wife’.³⁸ Leah Gcabashe (1995:8) declares that in South Africa

[w]omen have experienced a political liberation (whatever its limitations and drawbacks), but to what extent have they been liberated culturally, spiritually and theologically? After all, those cultural practices are an integral part of the practice of an individual’s faith as they define the moral standards that underpin that faith, belief or spirituality.

In asking this question, Gcabashe acknowledges that full liberation for women did not automatically come with the new political dispensation in 1994 for South African Black people. She goes on to say that

... time is not a factor the various religious orders can cite as an excuse for their inability to make a real difference to the lives of the majority of their congregations or followers. The old order of unequal power relations, so typical of the patriarchal social order and, as some argue, of the Apostle Paul’s interpretation of the role and position of women in the church, remains largely unchanged (Gcabashe 1995:8).

Russell (1993:67) points out that engaging in conversation is characteristic of feminist leadership.³⁹ We shall explore new models of being church in chapter five but it is important here to examine some of the principles of feminist leadership. Feminist leaders operate comfortably in networks, our approach is usually relational, we encourage

³⁷ ‘... there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.’

³⁸ See the Bible: 1 Corinthians 11:3.

³⁹ Feminist leadership is not to be confused with women’s leadership.

connecting with one another, we are flexible, intimate, personal and often passionate. Feminist leadership forms circles and acknowledges the value of a narrative approach, which is evident in the work and publications of the members of The Circle. We also encourage contextual analysis, as each situation is different – there is no ‘one size fits all’ in feminist leadership. Although Russell (1993:67) cautions against biological stereotyping of women’s leadership qualities, she nevertheless acknowledges that these are valid. What she believes is more helpful, though, and for which she pays tribute to “Phyllis Tribble’s article, “Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows,” as she works with the texts of Exodus 1, 2 and 15 and Numbers 12 and 20” is to examine examples of women’s leadership – either in local communities or in the Bible (Russell 1993:67). We read in these passages of Scripture, to which Tribble refers, how Miriam took the lead in worship after the Israelites had crossed the waters during their flight from Egypt. As this incident was important enough to be recorded in the Bible, so we have the opportunity to continue letting it have significance as we use Miriam’s example to develop our own ecclesiology. Women are, therefore, encouraged to use major events (or any event) as an opportunity to take the lead and to make a gracious contribution to the life of the Church. There does seem to be a more fluid approach to doing and being church, from a feminist perspective, than there is in merely working in traditionally rigid and hierarchical structures – most often directed from the top down.

Russell (1993:67-68) believes that “*leaders are made for people and not people for leaders*”. She takes her cue from the words in Mark 2:27 in the Bible, in which Jesus is recorded to have said: “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath”. This argument supports the efforts of all those who seek to re-author the story of the Church. If church structures support the institution of the Church, rather than existing for the people within the Church, who in fact are the Church, then its ecclesiology falls short of its mandate. Russell (1993:68) further suggests that feminist leadership

... is a matter to be arranged as a way of expressing the calling and mission of the people. Thus it is situation-variable and changes in different contexts, but as a gift of the Spirit to the church communities in their service of the world, it is exercised in *diakonia* with the communities.

It is important to understand this approach to ministry because many people, who come up against rigid institutional decrees, laws and even constitutions, are disillusioned. They are

disillusioned because they believe the Church should actually be a place of healing, transformation and reconciliation. The MCSA, as an institution, is governed by its *Laws and Discipline* and because it has a long-standing reputation and heritage of being involved in social justice, this institution seems to grow from strength to strength despite its lip service to gender justice.

The final chapter of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's (1983/1994:344) book is entitled 'Epilogue – *Toward a Feminist Biblical Spirituality: The Ekklēsia of Women*' and here she promotes the concept of building

... a feminist movement not on the fringes of church but as the central embodiment and incarnation of the vision of church that lives in solidarity with the oppressed and the impoverished, the majority of whom are women and children dependent on women.

Watson (2002:52) aligns herself with this concept and reminds us that the term *ekklēsia* is Greek for "the assembly of full citizens with the right to vote and participate in decision-making" and is a preferred term to 'church', which is after all derived from the Greek *kyriake*, meaning 'house of the Lord'. Schüssler Fiorenza (1997:63), in her chapter entitled 'Discipleship of Equals: Reality and Vision', points out that the

... translation process which transformed *ekklēsia*/democratic assembly into *kyriake*/church indicates a historical development that has privileged the kyriarchal/hierarchical form of church over that of a democratic congress or discipleship of equals.

This change from *ekklēsia* to church indicates an innate negation of what the term 'church' (as expressed in the Christian context) could be. It attempted to merge the notion of the patriarchal hierarchical structure (*kyriake*) of the household with the idea of the democratic assembly (*ekklēsia*) of liberated people, which highlights an egalitarian form of organisation embodying impartiality and companionship. Watson (2002:52) attempts to show that "ecclesiology is a form of theological discourse which is highly gendered and works with imagery that is alienating to women if not reread and reframed in a feminist critical way". This thesis seeks to do just that. Traditional ecclesiology will be re-examined in chapter four, from a feminist critical perspective, and the discrepancies between ecclesiological practices and the gender policy in the MCSA will be pointed out.

Although Watson, Radford Ruether, Schüssler Fiorenza and Russell have examined traditional ecclesiology from a feminist perspective and, therefore, have developed a

feminist ecclesiology, their scholarship is mainly from a Western perspective. Next follows a discussion on how African women theologians are exploring feminist ecclesiology in an African context.

2.3. African Feminist Ecclesiology

African feminist ecclesiology has been and continues to be developed by African feminist women theologians like Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who founded The Circle, and by other Circle members who continue to write and to do research. The books published in the past twenty years are examples of how concerned African women theologians are exercising their commitment to document the ecclesiological practices and to enrich the theological scholarship and knowledge in Africa. The contributors to *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions* (Phiri and Nadar (eds) 2005) propose models of being church and although models of being church are more fully discussed in Chapter 5, these models are briefly summarised as follows:

In Chapter 1, Brigalia Bam claims back women's voices and suggests that whereas women were usually spoken for in the past, they now speak for themselves. She also describes The Circle as a model for non-hierarchical leadership structures and human relationships but mainly affirms it for the platform it gives African women theologians for doing theology.

Sarojini Nadar discusses the book's title in Chapter 2 and she models the 'crafting of a new Church' (2005:16), one that is 'determined to transform the patriarchal traditions that exist within the Church' (2005:16). She believes this can be done through women telling their stories and sharing their visions of an inclusive and liberating Church. This vision would include breaking the patriarchal silence and speaking out against injustice pertaining to both lay and clergy women. This model would also include ecumenical networking and inter-faith harmony.

Isabel Apawo Phiri addresses the Church as a Healing Community in Chapter 3. She links aspects of being 'truly African and truly Christian' (2005:29) and she shows how women from both Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions form community, participate and share. The significance of African Indigenous Churches is highlighted and she models a non-Western way for African people to be Church. The language for God and the value

of theological education are addressed in this chapter and the importance of women participating fully models a Church that is a 'Healing Community' (2005:35).

Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) writes about the expansion of the charismatic African-South African Pentecostal Churches in Chapter 4. She uses the biblical metaphor of the Bible being a sword and suggests ways in which to transform this image into a positive one of 'love, peace, healing and life' (2005:49) rather than remaining an image of war, terror, violence and hate, which unfortunately reflects the image of many African countries. She also addresses how the Bible is often a 'wounding sword' (2005:53) encouraging poor and marginalised people to remain under 'undesirable socio-economic conditions with the hope of acquiring better riches in the future eschatological kingdom [sic]' (2005:53). She concludes her chapter by stressing that the mission of the Church should have a liberating nature.

In Chapter 5, Sarojini Nadar raises Pentecostal women's voices and particularly stresses that 'the Church' is not limited to the member churches of the WCC. She particularly tells the story of South African Pentecostal women from the Indian Community. She refers to the changes that took place amongst the poor ex-indentured Indian people in South Africa. Bethesdaland, a Full Gospel Church, was founded by Pastor JE Rowlands for Indian people. At first Indian cultural practices were incorporated in this church tradition but since the death of this pastor, 'anything that is foreign to an American Western form of Pentecostalism is deemed "demonic" or "evil".' (2005:63) and this has meant that the "middle path" that Pastor Rowlands had created between the established Church and the fanaticism of Pentecostalism was lost. Nadar also addresses the dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual, which some churches teach. This has an impact on the abuse that many women suffer, especially when they are encouraged to 'forget about their real problems and focus on matters that are "spiritual" such as speaking in tongues' (2005:69). In this chapter a united model of the physical and spiritual is demonstrated.

Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde discusses a model of partnership in Chapter 6. She uses Paul's declaration of equality in Galatians 3:28 to model a church based on equal sharing of power. She too refers to the biblical factors, which are responsible for the subordination of women. She highlights those biblical passages that affirm the role of women and stresses that socio-cultural aspects, such as motherhood, affect women in their communities. She

draws on the Pauline letters, which she calls a 'Model for Women in Ministry' (2005:89) and promotes a partnership of women and men in the Church. She concludes her essay by saying that women 'need a Church that should be at the forefront of championing their rights' (2005:90).

Chapter 7 deals with the Rwandan genocide and here Anne Kubai discusses the challenging model of forgiveness and reconciliation. Many women were victims of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, 'having suffered immense sexual violence and trauma' (2005:97) and these experiences have left indelible marks on them. Reconciliation is a complex process, especially given their tribal circumstances. The Church did not fulfil its mandate, quite on the contrary, many churches were actively involved in the atrocities. This makes the reconciliation process even more difficult. However, the question is still posed: 'Is there hope for the Christians of Rwanda?' (2005:105) and the answer lies in the idea that 'forgiveness is a faith principle' (2005:106). In post-genocide Rwanda, Christians need to develop a new theological framework and it needs to include justice. This author believes that 'Women Church' is a 'sign of hope' (2005:113).

Fulata Lusungu Moyo highlights, in Chapter 8, how sex, gender and power affect women in Malawi. She writes about her own experiences and the model of church she wishes to portray takes cognisance of how the challenges of HIV and AIDS affect women in the church and in their communities. She asks painful questions regarding the sexual infidelity by spouses who are committed Christian men and why their wives stay with them. The church model she proposed is one in which church leaders are honest and responsible, especially with regard to sexually transmitted diseases and the 'risk of being a woman in an AIDS-infected Church in Sub-Saharan Africa' (2005:130). She urges women to stop being the protectors of men's dignity and to expect more from marriage, such as 'agape, mutuality and companionship' (2005:134). The Church should not place woman at the mercy of their male counterparts and the statement that 'African women are said to have no decision-making power' (2005:136) needs to be transformed.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye discusses 'ecclesiology in African women's perspective' (2005:146) in Chapter 9. She introduces her topic by pointing to the first disagreement between Churchwomen and women studying theology – the ordination of women. Her model of being church takes into account the feelings of oppression women in the pew

experience because their male ministers treat them as subordinate and their subsequent refusal to allow women ministers to do the same. The challenge is for women clergy to change all that and demonstrate how circle leadership can enhance one's faith and spirituality. Education is an important part of this model as without the necessary theological and ecclesiological education people's mindsets cannot begin to shift. This author draws attention to the WCC studies on "Being Church" and on "Overcoming Violence" (2005:154). This model of being church embraces the notion that the 'Church is God's household, it is the place where God reigns and where all God's children are at home' (2005:155). Implementation is the key.

'Voices from the Periphery: Being Church as Women in Kenya' is Mary Tororeiy's contribution in Chapter 10. She came to the place where she responded to God's call on her life and offered for ordination. During the interviews, she was asked inappropriate questions, quite unlike those asked of her male counterparts. In this essay she advocates for a model of church that is transparent and stands for equality in the Church. She also draws on Schüssler Fiorenza's phrase 'discipleship of equals' as a criterion for a possible way forward. When we visualise the Body of Christ it needs to include both women and men.

Rachel Nyagondwe-Fiedler discusses pastors' wives and patriarchy in Chapter 11. The model of being church she hopes to present is one in which women do not lose their identity when they marry a minister or a pastor and one in which they have a choice. In many traditions, as is prevalent in parts of Malawi, the pastor's wife is expected to be involved in her husbands calling, whether this is her gifting or not. Educational opportunities are stressed as many of the tasks associated with being a minister/pastor's wife demand some training and this would alleviate some of the frustration ministers/pastors' wives experience when they are not equipped for the task at hand.

The final essay is probably one of the most challenging in this publication. Fulata Lusungu Moyo discusses the Phoebe Practice, which seems like a common practice in parts of Africa, particularly, in this instance, among the Yao people in Southern Malawi. This author found out about it when she was candidating for the ministry and it was assumed that she would be offering her 'services' to men in ministry when they are away from their wives at conferences, synods and other church events. At first she did not fully understand what was implied, until a female friend explained the practice to her. She was horrified and

did not continue with her journey towards ordination. The model of church being presented here is one that will break the conspiracy of silence on iniquitous practices that demean and abuse women for men's sexual appetites and, what is more, taking place within the Church. This practice of 'hospitality' (as it is also known) places women at risk when it comes to HIV infection. The writer uses Queen Vashti, in the Book of Esther, as an example of a woman who said 'no' to sexual exploitation and abuse. She paid a heavy price but she retained her dignity. This essay is concluded with a list of nine recommendations as to how to work towards transparency and openness about sexuality in the Christian Church.

This particular brand, African feminist ecclesiology, speaks strongly into the MCSA's role as one of the major Christian denominations in Southern Africa and, in general, feminist ecclesiology puts forward inclusive arguments that support the MCSA's mission statement, which promotes healing and transformation for all.⁴⁰

African feminist ecclesiology builds on the work of feminist theologians from the West, but it also expands 'the Table'⁴¹ by introducing subjects that are important and define the life of the Church in the African context. There are at least five features or themes that have been a focus of and characterise African feminist ecclesiology. (a) Hospitality, (b) women's church organisations, (c) women's ordination, (d) ministers' wives, and (e) cultural community. The work of African feminist theologians, regarding these particular five aspects of the Church, contribute to and enhance the building of the theoretical framework for my thesis. It is important to note, once again, that an African feminist ecclesiology is developing out of a narrative discipline. Women's stories are viewed as crucial and, when analysed within an academic framework, become the points of reference for research, such as this. Firstly then, I turn to the feature of hospitality

2.3.1. Hospitality – Inclusive Church Structures

The first feature of African feminist ecclesiology, that we shall examine here, is the place of hospitality in the Church. In the section on 'Justice and the Church' Russell (1993:128ff) raises the key thought, the *oikos*, Greek for the 'household'. She proposes that in God's realm there is hospitality and that nurturing characteristics should be the

⁴⁰ See chapter 1.1. for the MCSA's Mission Statement.

⁴¹ Many homes today have a table in their dining room that can be expanded for a special family celebration, such as a birthday, an anniversary or a Christmas feast. Feminist theologians wish to expand 'the Table' of the Church in a similar way – such an addition is usually inserted in the centre of the table and not added on around the periphery.

features of the Church. Rigid constitutions seldom create space for generous hospitality and homely conversations, which are both characteristic of feminist ecclesiology. God's household or *oikos* has become much more like God's court of law and this particular analogy is not supported in the Gospels.

In African tradition, hospitality is a key factor to community life. The concept of *ubuntu*, which broadly translated means 'I am a person because you are a person', is a helpful way to view basic African hospitality. This can be translated into 'what I have I share with you, even if it is only a little'. This cultural practice contrasts strongly with modern Western selective hospitality with regard to, for example, wedding celebrations. In an African village everyone is invited to a wedding whereas in a modern Western context only those with an official invitation are welcome at the wedding banquet. This topic is open to further discussion and would make for interesting research outside of this thesis. However, in general, African cultural practices are known for their warm hospitality as Moyo (2005:187) explains: "While theological hospitality has to do with the care of a stranger, in Malawian communities it extends to the care of anyone in need". *Ubuntu* stretches beyond special feasts as this is a day-to-day experience for African people. A well-known saying asserts that 'a village raises a child' and this is characterised by the mothers in the village who take responsibility for feeding and caring for any child who needs love and a meal. Riaan Manser (2007), the adventurer who circumnavigated Africa on his bicycle, writes about the many occasions when he was warmly welcomed into a simple African hut and given hospitality and even offered accommodation by complete strangers. Even in the towns, like in Limbe, Cameroon, Manser (2007:206) recalls the following incident:

I made one of those instant friends I had come across everywhere so far, a man called Nelson, who owned a photo shop where people could have identity and family pictures taken – the sort of place where you can have the Eiffel Tower or Waikiki Beach in the background if you want. Nelson gave me a place to sleep on the floor of his studio, in front of the fan and right next to the Brooklyn Bridge, and outlined Limbe's rather dangerous recent history for my benefit.

Very often, Manser and his hosts could only communicate with each other by using some universal sign language, hand gestures and facial expressions.

In the Church, though, hospitality is often selective. Many will argue that standards of membership in the Church are essential to encourage a deeper commitment and spiritual

growth for its members. African feminist ecclesiology argues for more open doors and greater inclusion of the marginalised, the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the women and the children. Church practices that welcome rather than exclude are supported by the stories Jesus told, for example when Jesus brought a child into their circle and indicated to the religious leaders that if they wanted to be part of God's reign they needed to become like a child.⁴² Another example of inclusion, when the exclusion of a woman in male company was the culture, was in the narrative when Jesus welcomed Mary to stay and to be part of the company with the men.⁴³ The Church today still has many 'rules of exclusion' that makes it an uncomfortable place for women. Sheena Duncan reflects on the Rustenburg National Conference of Church Leaders in South Africa, and mentions how the women present were only there to serve the men at that conference. Her experience there was most uncomfortable. She writes that at

... a very late stage in the planning of the conference someone realized that women had been excluded from the agenda altogether and it was hastily decided to cobble together a "women's hour" at 5:30 one afternoon far on in the conference process (Duncan 1991:386).

Once the women had taken their places on the platform one of "the middle-aged men" addressed the conference and suggested that the women's hour was a "waste of the time of the conference and not a priority at a gathering such as this one" (Duncan 1991:386). It seemed apparent to the women that all the men agreed with him so the women, including Sheena Duncan, walked out. Although some of the organisers of the conference tried to make amends to the women by inviting them to come back into the hall, the damage had already been done. Hospitality had not been extended to half of the Church at a crucial juncture in the life of the Church in Southern Africa, when South Africa was standing at the brink of a new political dispensation. Duncan (1991:387) went on to say that by "limiting the role and ministry of women – as was reflected at this Conference – we have impoverished the church. We have been insensitive to the double oppression suffered by black women under sexism and apartheid".

Margaret Donaldson (1991:207) tells the story of an Oxford professor who continued to ignore the first two women in his class, regularly greeting them by saying, "Good

⁴² See the Bible in Mark 10:15.

⁴³ See the Bible in Luke 10:38-42.

morning, gentlemen”, until all the male students decided to boycott the class so that he would be forced to greet the women but on that day the professor walked into the room and wrote on the blackboard, “Because there are no students present today there will be no lecture”. I acknowledge that the situation in many universities is different today, yet ‘the invisible factor’ regarding women remains a difficulty in many churches. Incidents, like the experience of the first female students at an all-male Oxford University, resonate with the experiences of many women in the Church.

Mary Toreiy (2005:158) writes that women in Kenya are “present but unwanted” in the Church. She suggests that women in the Church in Africa are the ones who provide the hospitality, fill the pews, teach the children in Sunday School, cook the food for church suppers, make the tea, clean the church buildings, visit the elderly and the infirm and form prayer groups to pray for the Church. She asks “why women cannot be involved in the mission field, sit on committees where these suppers are enjoyed, and become servants of the Lord [sic] in the Sanctuary and preside over the sacraments” (Totoreiy 2005:158). In her own interview for the ordained ministry Totoreiy (2005:159) was asked the following two questions:

- Question One: Do you intend to get married? If so, how will your husband handle the responsibilities you are trying to get into?
- Question Two: Women are known to cry. What will you do, so that you don’t cry when chairing serious meetings?

The above questions clearly imply that women who enter the ordained ministry are intruders; intruders, because women dare enter a domain that by traditional convention belongs to men. Later, when openly discussing what I had asked, it became evident that my male counterparts had not been asked the same questions. Maybe they were asked the proper interview questions.

Her response to the questions put to her and to this experience, as a whole, is understandable. Why should women candidates be treated any differently to the men in the group? An exclusive Church cannot be hospitable – these two characteristics go hand-in-hand. Totoreiy (2005:161) feels that although the Church “is supposed to be liberating, the lot of the African woman has not changed. The exclusion that marks her presence in the wider society follows her to the pew; where she faithfully sits every Sunday”. What encourages the African woman, if all she can look forward to is ‘the heavenly banquet’⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See the Holy Communion liturgy – *The Methodist Service Book* (Section B17; p61).

where she, hopefully, will not only be responsible for the cooking and the cleaning but where she will be welcome to participate fully?

Teresa Okure (1992/2006:224) who wrote the epilogue to *Will to Arise*, shares a perceptive insight into hospitality when she relates the story of the healing of Jairus' daughter.⁴⁵ When Jesus tells the little girl to get up, she does so by herself and then Jesus tells her parents to give her something to eat. Okure (1992/2006:224) reminds her readers that Jesus also asked for something to eat after the Resurrection – consuming food proves that the person is alive and food

... keeps each one of us alive with our own life, not with somebody else's life. The daughter of Jairus was raised to life; she was to continue living her own life if she was to be of any comfort to her parents. She had to be personally alive before she could be of any comfort to her parents. On the other hand, her life would be lacking if she failed to be a comfort to her parents.

Jesus is concerned for both the parents and for the little girl. His liberation for her is to be free from the bondage of death but Jesus wants a full life for her – not one lived in the life of someone else (as Jairus' daughter) and so she is to be offered food to prove that she is her own person – fully alive. Only as a fully alive person does she become the kind of comfort her parents needed. Okure (1992/2006:225) views what Jesus did for that little girl as a powerful symbol of what Jesus does for women today – “he was not simply restoring her to life; he was empowering her to take up her life and live”. Hospitality in the Church, therefore, should be offered in order that all its members, including women and children, and gays and lesbians, and other marginalised groups, can take up their lives and become fully alive – not living their life in someone else's life.

2.3.2. Women's Church Organisations – Constitutions

Another strong feature and focus of African feminist ecclesiology is the women's organisations or as many African women's church organisation are referred to, the *Manyano*. Mercy Amba Oduyoye relates the story, in her contribution to *Ragbag Theologies*, of when a group of women were preparing for a session at the Lambeth Conference in 1998. The group had decided to sit in a circle for their presentation, as a visible inclusive model, but when they attempted to move the large rectangular table to the

⁴⁵ See the Bible in Luke 8:40-56.

side of the stage, they discovered that it was in fact fixed to the floor. Oduyoye (2009:30) uses this incident as an effective analogy when she states that

[t]he church's structures are fixed, the church's orders are fixed, the church's ministries are fixed, and none of these seem flexible enough to admit women's visions, women's skills and women's offerings of charismata: God-given gifts the church and the world desperately need. We have got to be more open to what God is calling us to do in this world.

This particular statement comes as a prelude to the section in her tribute to Denise Ackermann on the kinds of ministries in the Church in which women are active and involved. Oduyoye writes about the roles African women do play in the church and affirms the work that we all do. What she questions though, is why women are limited to the work of the women's organisations, which are strong in Africa.

Lyn Holness (1997:21-31), on the other hand, writes positively about the Women's *Manyano* in her article entitled 'Women's Piety and Empowerment – An Observer's Understanding of the Methodist Women's *Manyano* Movement'. Much of Holness' knowledge of *Manyano* members is valid although some of her comments – her paper was originally written in 1996 – are now out of date but it is the issue of 'empowerment' that I wish to examine here. The Methodist Women's *Manyano* is a 'Mothers' Prayer Union' and, like in other *manyano* groups, that is a given. I concur with Holness that for some members their very life is tied up in this organisation. Their routine is scheduled according to their *Manyano* commitments and this has had an impact on domestic service in the whole Connexion. Traditionally, in South Africa at least, Thursday afternoons have been set aside for domestic workers to have their afternoons off in order that they can attend their *Manyano* meetings.

Beverley Haddad writes about the various campaigns, driven by the hierarchy of the Anglican Church, to exercise greater control over the Anglican Mothers' Union (*manyano*). They wanted to ban the *manyano* uniform and curtail their fundraising, preaching, evangelism and extemporaneous prayers but all their efforts failed. "While Thursday meetings continued, complete authority of these meetings rested with the [male] priest" (Haddad 2002:105). It might be true that the Women's *Manyano*, as a church organisation, has enormous power because of its capacity to raise substantial amounts of money and in the identity the members share because of the uniform they wear but I believe that, from an African feminist theological perspective, few members are truly empowered by the

women's organisations of the Church. Cheryl Dibeela (2011) shares my sentiments too in her PhD study on women's organisations in the Congregational Church of Southern Africa. She asserts that while the space created for women's organisations can certainly be a space where "transformational formation" and learning happens, unfortunately these spaces more often than not simply replicate the patriarchal status quo (Dibeela 2011:8). A further assessment of my own experience will lend more support to my statement above.

During the 1980s, when violence and political riots were at their worst on the Reef, I committed myself to becoming a full member of the Women's *Manyano*. I believed that if I was serious about my opposition to *Apartheid* and committed to managing racial diversity I should apply to join the Women's *Manyano*. My application to join the branch at Kathlehong Methodist Church was successful and I started my six-month probation. I soon discovered that the financial commitment to being a *Manyano* member was far higher than it was in the Women's Auxiliary, of which I was then District President of the South Eastern Transvaal and Swaziland District (now called Highveld and Swaziland District). I needed to have a probationer's uniform: a black skirt, which covered my knees, and a white blouse (which I was allowed to sew for myself according to the approved pattern) and I was allowed to wear a plain black hat because I did not own a black beret. Once my probation period was over I had to prepare for my 'blousing' at the *Manyano* Convention, which was held in the Thokoza Methodist Church. I had to appear before a committee and answer a series of questions regarding my faith and my commitment to the Women's *Manyano*. At that time I was the only White woman who had joined the Women's *Manyano* in accordance with the proper procedure. Several White ministers' wives, through the years, had been given honorary membership because of their husbands' positions or because of their involvement in the affairs of Biblewomen but I was one of the women who paved the way for other White women to join the organisation fully.

Holness refers to the rules by which the Women's *Manyano* operate and this was an area of great difficulty for me. Attending weekly meetings was often inconvenient for me but I knew that for others it was even worse. Attendance registers are kept with precision and business protocol in meetings is strictly observed. Even though I was able to keep some of the rules, living and serving in a Methodist Church in the nearby suburb of Brackenhurst meant that I was not always able to fulfil many pastoral care duties in

Kathlehong. My circumstances were taken into consideration but I was aware of my privileged position. I also discovered that the structures, and especially the Constitution of the Women's *Manyano*, did not lend themselves to creative exploration. Nothing could be ventured without the District President's permission and the wheels turned very slowly, as they do within the decision-making procedures in the MCSA. I invited the president of the branch (the wife of a colleague of my husband, whom I knew well) to join us for an experiment to get to know one another across the colour divide. We were encouraged to rather ask members of their church council because the Women's *Manyano* would have to get permission from the District Executive of the Women's *Manyano*. We did this and two Black families from the township and two White families from the suburb began to meet together socially once a week for five weeks.

My clergy spouse and I led a campaign in our Circuit to encourage Black and White Methodist families to get to know one another. It ran on a simple structure over five weeks. Four couples (or families) met in one another's homes and shared a meal for the first four weeks and then during the final week all four families met together in a public place. The other White family in our group had never before entered a Black township. They discovered that, even though there was intermittent violence in the township, that the people lived similar lives to their own. They talked about their children's education and the rise of food prices in the same way as we did in our suburb. It was sometimes difficult to find public places where both Black and White people could share in a picnic together but we managed to find places. Various 'open' shopping malls were emerging during the late 1980s and welcomed multi-racial shopping – and food courts were just becoming the fashion at that time – so there were indoor places to go to in case of inclement weather. I include this story here because I believe that a programme, such as this one, could have been of enormous benefit to the Women's *Manyano*, but they were not free to explore it without permission. At the time it saddened me but today I recognise it for what it is – the patriarchal structures are firmly embedded in the Women's *Manyano* (and all the other women's organisations of the MCSA) even though they organise themselves within their own organisation. They have not yet been freed to see beyond this hierarchical system. African feminist theologians are pleading for this kind of liberation – a kind of freedom that

releases a woman from a system, which she believes empowers her but in fact restrains her within a women's organisation.

Furthermore, although only women attend Women's *Manyano* meetings, the minutes are read and approved by the honorary president (who is a male minister) and he has the power to veto its activities. Since the ordination of women ministers the appointment of a neighbouring male minister's wife (or an Evangelist's wife) as the president of the Women's *Manyano* branch, has been introduced. This ensures that the honorary president remains a male minister.

Haddad (2004:6) believes that, despite these organisations historically being the place where such patriarchal practices happen, and despite the fact that the women were trained in Victorian "devout domesticity", the women "consistently fought for this space and ensured that the control of the meetings lies in their own leadership". Haddad's (2004:11) understanding that "the *manyano* movement is a safe site of struggle for survival against death and patriarchal oppression and resistance to dominant ecclesial forces" has limited validity.

I accept Haddad's argument, to the extent that she questions while feminist liberation theology and its application to Black women's realities. Using the example of Black American women in Harlem, who declined the invitation to explore feminist principles she suggests that "[p]erhaps for too long feminist liberation theologians have tried to make their theology fit all women" (Haddad 2004:11). This is only partially true, especially given that African women theologians locate themselves within the context of poor and marginalised communities. I, therefore, find it difficult to agree with the notion that traditionally patriarchal structures and hierarchal systems are of benefit to women's groups which seek to address the injustice and marginalisation of its members.

Feminist ecclesiology, according to Watson (2002:11), "takes account of women's lives – of women's experiences of faith and sexuality – as a vital source for the reconsideration of ecclesiology". African feminist ecclesiology, writes Oduyoye (2005:151), accepts that the "inclusive community that welcomes all and accepts their offering of self and skills is the image of the Church for women". Both these affirmations of what and who the Church is and should be – especially for women – are not yet the experience of the majority of women in the MCSA and more so, do not appear to be the

desire of the members of the women's organisations. It is indeed true that, as Holness intimates, that for those women in the Women's *Manyano* whose whole life revolves around the organisation and its ministry, especially to the sick and to the poor, I need to show respect. They are serving God in their own way and, even as a feminist theologian, I do not have the right to diminish what they do. What I hope for, though, and what is part of the rationale for this thesis, is that all women, children and men will be liberated from the present unhelpful ecclesiological practices in the Church. Cheryl Dibeela's 2011 PhD study on women's organisations within the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa shares precisely this same hope.

In the previous section we discussed the alternative and inclusive styles of leadership, which feminist theologians prefer. Flexibility would be one of these criteria but in a patriarchal system, where the rules are clearly defined, there is little space for negotiation and flexibility. In life, people's experience is usually not black and white but rather a variation of greys. The creeds, doctrines and rules of the Church and, in the case of the MCSA, its *Laws and Discipline* are clear and conversations to explore any deviation from these rules are not entertained. People's lives are affected but 'the rules' must be obeyed. This is evident in the strict discipline imposed upon members of the Women's *Manyano*, especially with regard to teenage and other single mothers, divorced women and widows. Sexuality is not usually an open conversation but the consequences of what is perceived as sexual misconduct, such as pregnancy outside of marriage, is severely punished through exclusion – usually for a period. HIV and AIDS have changed the way the Women's *Manyano* views sexuality and I believe they are more proactive now, regarding sexual education, than they were in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when I was still an active member.

Oduyoye (2005:152) writes about the many African women theologians, who are part of The Circle, who regularly address violence against women in their books and articles. She says:

Read any Circle book and you will find violence and the challenge to the Churches to rise up and act in the name of the Christ whose body the Church claims to be. It is to the Church as it is that I write, echoing the cry of Jeremiah:
they have treated the hurt of my daughters
in an off-hand manner, crying alafia⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Meaning: 'fullness of life'.

where there is no peace.
They have told of harmony
when the reality is suppression and apathy.
They know no more the meaning of peace
For injustice has become their daily bread (Oduyoye 2005:152).

She believes that the Church in Africa does not take cultural practices, which are harmful to women, seriously. Some hierarchical clauses in church constitutions ensure that women are kept in subservient roles. The Church's treatment of sex workers, lesbians, HIV positive women and those living with AIDS is often deplorable.

Oduyoye (2005:154) believes that the Church is insensitive to its context and

Unmoved by the changing world, it retains many practices and attitudes that minimise the effectiveness of its ministry. It has to hear Jesus say, "Daughter, arise." I see the Church unable to advocate for women as Jairus did for his daughter. Church leaders, who are still mostly men, have to come down from their high thrones, leave aside their insignia as the leaders of the synagogue, mix with crowds that may have bleedings women among them, and fall at the feet of Jesus and cry, "save my daughter."

This plea addresses the Church's rigid constitutions, which perpetuate unjust rules and regulations merely because they have been so for centuries. Here the Wesleyan Quadrilateral could be used to question ancient laws – what do we know now about these rules, which makes them historically, scientifically and morally completely out of date? How has new information added new evidence contrary to customary belief that women are inferior? How do secular shifts in governance add to the gender justice debate and why does the Church ignore some of the evidence that its hierarchical constitutions and patriarchal practices are no longer helpful?

The Church's Creeds and Constitutions have been designed according to sacred scripture. Cheryl Dibeela (2011:206) discusses how the Bible has been used as a tool to subordinate women in her unpublished PhD dissertation entitled 'A Quest for a Liberatory Learning Ethos: A Case Study of the Women's Associations in the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa'. Dibeela (2011:206) emphasises that the

... importance of the Bible as a theological resource cannot be overemphasised in African communities. Unfortunately, the psychological and physical injustices perpetrated against women over many centuries have been justified by obtaining textual and theological support from the Bible. Instead of serving as a resource for liberation, the Bible has added to the political, cultural and economic enslavement of women.

The members of the women's organisations revere the Bible as the holy 'Word of God'. Some of their leaders have struggled to introduce contextual reading of the Bible but for the most part, the women's organisations are themselves still steeped in patriarchy. I thus do not believe that the women's organisations of the MCSA grapple enough (or at all) with any of the questions related to gender injustice in the MCSA. Many of these questions, therefore, remain answered.

My own experiences and frustrations have led me out of the women's organisations but I do believe that this space can be reclaimed to empower women in the MCSA. For a while, during and after my training for the ordained ministry, I remained a country and postal member of the Women's Auxiliary but theologically and spiritually I do not find a home there anymore. Whilst in a Free State station, at the beginning of my training towards ordination, I occasionally attended Women's *Manyano* meetings but because my spouse was the Superintendent Minister, I was treated 'differently' and not as one of the members. Hierarchy, status and protocol are important in the Women's *Manyano* and this certainly does not fit with 'the circle model of leadership', which I shall propose as an alternative model of being church in chapter five.

One more of the challenges that women's organisations face is the ordination of women. In the MCSA this became a reality in 1976 but many members of the women's organisations do not accept women ministers. I now turn to a discussion on this topic.

2.3.3. Women's Ordination – Functions of the Church

'Women in the ministry' is another feature and focus of African feminist ecclesiology. It is something for which African feminist theologians continue to work and to do research around. Some churches in Africa do not yet ordain women and The Circle continues to publish material, highlighting the marginalisation of women in the Church and making a case for women in the ministry but more particularly, for women as church. The following questions, amongst many others, are regularly asked regarding the ordination of women: Do exclusive church structures create adequate space for examining both the Church's ministries as well as women's ministries? Is there a dualism here? Should the Church's ministry not also be a woman's ministry or better still – everyone's ministry? Oduyoye (2009:33) quite rightly states that the "debate regarding the pros and cons of the ordination of women is simply debilitating". What is important, though, is that those

denominations who do ordain women should work towards equal education opportunities for women and men in their churches. The stationing procedures for women in ministry might need to be reviewed until gender education has taken place in all congregations. Justice is important and giving preference to male ministers perpetuates patriarchy.

The dynamics around stationing of women in ministry is one aspect of the Church's ministry. Other aspects of inclusive ministry include the recognition of the gifts and skills of a woman in ministry and a willingness to adapt to the different needs of a woman in the work-place – especially if she is mother of small children. Another concern is that a woman minister, especially when working in a team, will often be assigned to the ministry with the children, the young people, the sick and the elderly. These ministries are vital and I do not wish to take anything away from them. However, assuming that a woman minister should be limited to any aspect of ministry, often without consultation or assessment of her gifts, talents, passion and training, is simply unjust. This would seldom happen when the minister, even in a team, is a man. Oduyoye (2009:33) holds out the hope that with

... our continued study and advocacy, attitudes will change and the 'feel as if' will be transformed into the 'know that' women have a duty to undertake whatever task in church or society that God calls them to.

This thesis forms part of 'our continued study and advocacy' and adds to the academic scholarship on gender and religion. It is true that 'women in the ordained ministry' is not the only exclusive structure in the Church but it does impact on almost every other part of being church today, especially in the denominations in Africa that have not yet opened their doors to women's ordination. It is clear that patriarchy, as a system, continues to govern many churches' ecclesiological practices – including those of the MCSA. However, the voices of African feminist theologians are being raised and their scholarship is expanding.

Another aspect of ministry that suffers because of lack of gender education is traditional practices, with regard to the Sacraments – both Holy Communion and Baptism. This especially affects the Black African congregations in the MCSA. The function of the Church, as I understand it, is to build up the Body of Christ (which is comprised of the people) and to administer the Sacraments in order that the people will be nurtured in their faith and in their membership of the Church. Some churches still exclude women from the Sacraments during their period of menstrual flow, which deems them unclean and until

they have gone through a cleansing ritual, they are not welcome at the Communion Table or even at worship.⁴⁷ Olajubu (2003:54), in an online article, writes that some

... churches in Yorubaland exclude women from leadership positions due to the impure label given to the menstrual blood by missionaries in the early years of Christianity among the people, the influence of which is still discernible today. This ban on women manifests itself in transient and permanent sanctions, depending on prevailing situations. In some cases, a woman may not come to church during her menstrual period. In other situations, she is denied ordination into the priesthood because of her susceptibility to menstrual periods. Worthy of note, however, is the increasing trend of de-emphasizing this notion that menstruation signals impurity. This trend manifests at a personal level among female worshippers, who may choose to attend worship sessions during their menstrual period. This notwithstanding, one of the unspoken arguments used against the ordination of women into the priesthood derives from the impure label placed on menstrual blood. Feminist theologians and other feminist scholars have emphasized the need to reappraise this position, a reappraisal that is increasingly becoming pertinent to the empowerment of women in Yoruba Christian tradition.

This trend to recognise that their menstrual cycle is a natural part of being human is a positive one, more particularly as it comes from the Yorubaland Christian woman worshippers themselves.

Other churches, as well as some congregations in the MCSA, still insist that women cover their heads when they receive Holy Communion and some denominations, including some local churches in the MCSA, refuse to bury, marry or baptise people for a wide range of dubious ethical reasons. A single pregnant woman often has to sit at the back of the church until the leadership is satisfied that the woman has repented and decrees that she is forgiven, and single mothers' babies are often refused baptism. Marriage is not a Sacrament in the MCSA but it is a rite, which is at times refused to someone who is not a member of the MCSA. These exclusive practices are open to debate because many argue for strict discipline and morality in the Church. However, these exclusive practices most often affect women.

Another perspective on women's ordination, which needs to be raised in this section, is that of clericalism. Both Oduyoye (2005:146) and Radford Ruether⁴⁸ have addressed the issue of women's ordination into a patriarchal Church. Some scholars agree with the quest

⁴⁷ See *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* by Oyeronke Olajubu (South-Western Nigeria) <<http://findarticles.com>> [Accessed 7 November 2011].

⁴⁸ In an address to the 'Women's Ordination Worldwide' (WOW) Conference in Canada in 2005.

for churches to open their doors to women in the ordained ministry, whereas others promote a complete change and paradigm shift for ministry as a whole – for both women and men. How do the pomp and ceremony, the separation and the exclusive practices of the ordained ministry of the past centuries, fit in with the image of Christ’s servant-leadership? This is a topic for further research as the magnitude of it lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, mention needs to be made of its importance when addressing gender inequality in the Church and the search for a more holistic ministry, which would lead to healing and transformation.

Sheena Duncan (1991:388) asks the question: “Ordination or Equality?” and adds some other important questions for women ministers to consider. Like some earlier feminist theological debates, Duncan (1991:388 and 389) also poses the question whether ordination is about “reform or reconstruction” and whether women are “victims” of oppression and exclusion or “agents” of change. The huge divide between the clergy and the laity is a growing concern and in the MCSA this has been made worse since the introduction of the term ‘Bishop’, which John Wesley purposely changed to ‘chairman’ (in those days they were all men) because of the exclusive ecclesiological practices in the Church of England in the 18th Century CE. However, the Church Unity Commission proposed to the MCSA that church unity would be enhanced if the MCSA also called their church leaders ‘Bishop’. In as much as this might be true, this ecclesial term lent weight to the position and, in my opinion, Bishops now seem to usurp more power.

Being committed to changing the Church from within is a challenge. When women challenge the *status quo* Duncan asks, are we challenging the men’s authority because we want that authority, or are we challenging the system in order that we might give the authority back to God? Duncan reminds us that the Church agreed that *Apartheid* had to be abandoned – it could not be reformed. We need to find alternatives that state clearly that sexism in the Church needs to be abandoned – it also cannot be reformed. This is infinitely more difficult as there exists no common ‘sexist’ enemy like the ‘racist’ *Apartheid* regime against which to work. Gender justice is written into the South African Constitution and the MCSA has a balanced gender policy. It calls for a complete paradigm shift – in people’s mindsets – and a complete change of people’s behaviour.

The question about being agents or victims is a delicate one. Women, especially some members within the women's organisations, are very comfortable within their gilded cages. As Duncan (1991:389) mentions: "Being a victim can be quite a comfortable state of affairs". She suggests that victims can lay blame elsewhere and complain about the lack of compassion extended to them. In the conclusion to her article, she calls all of us who care about the Church – women, men and children – to hang onto the dream of what we believe we, as church, can be. Finding alternative models of being church and working towards realising them are some goals for women in ministry, while at the same time, refusing to be victims of gender inequality.

The story of Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa is an example of an African woman who refused to be a victim of gender injustice. Even her English name is prophetic regarding the outcome of her call to the ordained ministry. Phiri (2002:119) writes about what happened to Mbanjwa in *Her Stories – Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, relating how she was finally ordained at the age of seventy-three after receiving her call at twenty-seven. This woman's story makes for sad and frustrating reading. Yet, we hear Mbanjwa's words through Phiri's (2002:119) writing: "The point I was trying to make was the desire of being accepted. I will not be accepted if I don't do the things that the people I am staying with are doing. ... I do not want to talk about sexism in the church. Men were men and women were women." After deep disappointments and declining several of her applications, the United Congregational Church eventually ordained the patient and longsuffering Reverend Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa to Word and Sacrament in 2000. Her perseverance and tenacity during difficult years serve, on the one hand, as a splendid example for women in ministry to continue on the journey towards full inclusion. On the other hand, her experience bears witness to the marginalisation of women and the rampant sexism in the Church.

The next feature of African feminist ecclesiology, discussed here, is the plight of minister's wives, which is closely linked to women in ministry.

2.3.4. Ministers' Wives – Two for the Price of One

A preoccupation within studies on African feminist ecclesiology is the role ministers' wives play and their status in the community and in the Church. A co-student, Molly Longwe's current (2011) research towards a PhD alerted me once again to the demands

made upon the lives of ministers' wives in the wider African context. Longwe's research focuses on Baptist pastors' wives (as they are called in Malawi) but some of the issues they face are similar to the experiences of ministers' wives in the MCSA. What seems to be one of the foremost concerns is that a minister's wife has her identity in her clergy husband. This position does afford the woman a certain status – usually it is signified in the uniform she wears. In the MCSA only ministers' wives are allowed to wear an additional red cape over their red blouse – this sets them apart from the other women in the Women's *Manyano* and it gives them elevated status in their local churches. A minister's wife's status does come with a price tag, though, as she is expected to assume the presidency of the branch of the Women's *Manyano* where her husband is the minister and, if her husband is the Superintendent Minister of a Circuit (in the MCSA), she might have to assume the role of Circuit President as well. Some of the drawbacks of this system are that women, who do not have the kinds of leadership skills or the personality that such a position demands, are forced into a role, which often makes them deeply unhappy, for example, Thoko Mpumlwana (1991:371) writes that it “all became worse for me ... I resisted any involvement...” when her spouse was exploring a call into the ministry. When an African woman marries a minister, particularly in the Black African context, she already knows what demands will be made upon her. In the White Western context, it has become more acceptable for clergy spouses to follow their own careers and, in some cases, belong to a different denomination or even be part of a different faith tradition.

Mpumlwana (1991:369) also writes about her mother, who had trained to be a teacher, but who never actually taught because she married a minister in the United Congregational Church and “it was taboo for clergy wives to work. They were supposed to *support* their husbands in their ministry and be available when people called for them”. In their tradition, as it is also the custom in the MCSA tradition for Black African women, the clergy wives are expected to be the Branch President of the Women's *Manyano*. This has caused some constitutional dilemmas for the Women's *Manyano* in the MCSA since the ordination of women because a woman minister does not have a ‘wife’ to fulfil this duty.

Mpumlwana had moved away from the Church when she became involved in politics as a young adult but later, after her marriage, when her spouse was also called by God and she writes about how she “hated the idea of leaving [her] job in order to *follow* him”

(1991:371). She describes her spouse's church as being of "The Order of Ethiopia with its Anglican style and African traditional background" (1991:371). Mpumwana's perspective on being a priest's wife is a balanced one – she tells how it was both "exciting on one hand and unfair on the other" (1991:372). Like many ministers' wives, she too was expected to be an unpaid assistant in the church. She was not allowed to wear pants and she always had to cover her head. She was not allowed to be demanding of her priest-husband's time and had to arrange her routine around his. She, too, was expected to lead their Women's *Manyano* and, as a clergy wife, if she dared refuse she would have been "regarded as deviant, a social misfit, who is a stumbling block in the ministry of [her] husband" (1991:372).

It is unfair to expect a minister's wife to be the full-time assistant of the minister, without any remuneration, to teach in the Sunday School, lead the women's organisation, sing in the choir, organise church functions and prepare food for events. This is particularly relevant when a woman, like Mpumwana's mother, is denied her calling in another career. A minister's widow is also at a grave disadvantage because when her husband dies she instantly loses her status and her role in the church. If she has been denied a career she can also become financially insecure. She may have to move out of the church manse, which has been her and her children's home and find another place to live. African women theologians stand in solidarity with women who are treated unfairly by the Church and every church would address gender injustice if it were to ensure that these considerations are on its agenda. This would assist both the Church and women in crisis in their quest to seek a way forward towards an inclusive church.

Fiedler (2002:181) tells the story of some pastors' wives in the Baptist Convention in Malawi going "against the flow". This relates specifically to them challenging the missionary policies regarding the gendered role of a pastor. Despite Baptist congregations usually having local autonomy, the "Southern Baptist Mission Board (SBM) in America" (Fiedler 2002:181) attempted to enforce the rule that only men could become pastors. They might concede to tolerate older widows but were against the appointment of younger single women as pastors. One church ignored their directive and appointed a younger widow as their pastor but as soon as she remarried, this woman was forced to resign from her position

as a pastor. This was the case of Pastor Mellia Makina, of whom Fiedler (2002:184) writes as follows:

Mellia was pastor of the church for two years, until 1990, when she married an evangelist (*mlaliki*), Makina. The “dethronement” of Mellia as pastor of the church is a testimony as to how referring to centralised structures of the church in Baptist churches can encourage oppression of women.

What the local church believed to be their own decision, as an autonomous body, the hierarchy of the Baptist Church overruled. This experience is duplicated in many denominations and it serves as an example of ‘power-over’ by hierarchical leadership structures that are often removed from the local situation and have the power to withhold funding, rather than ‘power-with’ local congregations, in order to empower and educate their people.

Molly Longwe’s (Fiedler 2002:195-196) story is another example of a pastor’s wife in the Baptist Church receiving support from the hierarchy as long as it is apparent that she is supporting her clergy-husband. As soon as Longwe’s theological studies became her own independent feminist theological quest, and she was no longer studying theology alongside her husband, the financial support from the Southern Baptist Mission Board stopped. Longwe is the first Malawian woman to teach at the Baptist Theological Seminary and this in itself was a very difficult issue for some pastors. They found it difficult to be lectured to by a ‘pastor’s wife’.

Alternative models for being church will, hopefully, open up new ways of ministry and eliminate some of the unfair expectations, which are often placed on ministers’ wives and give lay people equal opportunities for ministry and service in the community within which they live, work and worship. It is to the feature of this ‘community’ to which I now turn.

2.3.5. Cultural Community – Inclusion or Exclusion?

The final feature of African feminist ecclesiology, discussed in this section, is that of the African cultural community and the Christian church community. Community is a strong feature of African life, spirituality and culture. John Mbiti (1990:108-109), who promotes African religious life and cultural traditions, writes that

[i]n traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He [sic] owes his [sic] existence to other people, including those of past generations and his [sic] contemporaries. He [sic] is simply part of the

whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group....Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am". This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man [sic].⁴⁹

Although Mbiti had not yet begun to grapple with exclusive language and the rightful place of women (and children) in both the African community and religion in 1990, he addressed the importance of the African cultural community. The Church, however, promotes hierarchy and patriarchal relationships, in which women are subservient and children have no status whatsoever. As alluded to in a previous section, this belief has been substantiated by androcentric texts in Scripture.

African feminist women theologians write about Black African rituals and ceremonies and this emphasises their commitment to community. Oduyoye (1992/2006:1-24), in *The Will to Arise – Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, describes the rites of passage rituals and how these include the community. For Black African women to be church, they also need to be in community. Kenneth Mtata (2011:53) addresses Mbiti's lack of sensitivity "to the plight of [the] African woman as the African man was presented as the one whose personhood had been robbed by colonialism". Mbiti's (Mtata 2011:53) brand of African theology was, therefore, "accused of perpetuating sexist constructions of personhood armed with the bible and African culture". African women theologians challenge this position and two publications, edited by members of The Circle, specifically address this concern: *Talitha cum! Theologies of African Women* (edited by Njoroge and Dube) and *The Will to Arise – Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (edited by Oduyoye and Kanyoro). The personhood of women is as important as the personhood of men and African community is often held together, fostered and promoted by the women in that community. African women theologians wish to uphold African cultural community, whilst changing what is oppressive to women and children.

Oduyoye (2001:28) suggests that African women theologians are critical of "the Western Christian culture" as well as of "the African religio-culture" but she maintains that both are

⁴⁹ This description is another way of defining *ubuntu*.

... experienced by women as a tool for domination, but there are aspects that can be liberative so they do not undertake a wholesale condemnation of either. They have to contend, however, with the fact that the Western Christian culture and patriarchal ideology have seeped in, to enhance the power of men or to endow men with power where they had none, while suppressing aspects of African culture that are favourable to women.

This impacts on both the traditional practice of African hospitality and on the life of African community because, as Oduyoye (2001:91-92) points out,

... all this is changing and the hospitality of yesterday is disappearing. People are no longer preoccupied with the safety of the stranger who knocks on the door. No longer are people keen to reserve the best drinking vessel for strangers. Hospitality can no longer be guaranteed to create friendships. All has changed, other cultures, other styles of life, modernity, the technology we acquire with brutality, especially in the urban areas, have undermined the goodwill that was the original of hospitality. They are compatible with traditional African hospitality. And yet the residue remains, namely the right to protection that visitors could expect. In the turmoil of Africa, refugees are received in the 'modern' camps for the masses, but the small groups that arrive meld into the local population, especially if they have the same language. Homes are still open to refugees. Some are given land to build and even decide to stay on when the crisis that drove them out is overcome.

The traditional African cultural community is experiencing challenges, and the concept of community is changing because of the circumstances in many African countries. Many traditional African values are being questioned, especially regarding the rights of women and children, and sexism is no longer acceptable. An inclusive community means that people have equal rights and equal status and that one gender must not be responsible for serving the other. It means that children are accepted as human beings in their own right and that their needs are taken into account in the community. This, however, is valid in all communities, not only in the African context.

Watson and other Western feminist theologians have explored the concept of base ecclesial communities in order to foster the true essence of the Christian faith – 'to love God and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves'.⁵⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether has lived in such a community⁵¹ as an experiment, and Watson (2002:53ff) discusses its merits in a chapter she entitled 'Women-Church: Reclaiming Women's Being Church in Feminine Communities of Worship and Justice'. One concern raised is the question of those who are

⁵⁰ See the Bible: Matthew 22:37-39.

⁵¹ She described this experience in her address, delivered to the WOW Conference in Canada in July 2005.

outside the community because they would be deemed to be excluded from the community in question. This is a difficult issue to side step as any human community has both components; those who are part of it and those who are outside of it.

In African terms, however, the sense of community seems to be more fluid. Those who are present form the community and when others join, they too become part of the community. This was briefly discussed under the section of African hospitality. Although there is a distinct pride in African cultural identity, there is also a pride in extending hospitality and this makes African community warm and embracing.

At times, however, community in Africa has also become distinctly exclusive, as Oduyoye pointed out, and has been witnessed in the horrific genocide that took place in Rwanda and other countries in recent years. Ethnic identity in Africa is a topic that lends itself to further study but it falls outside of the immediate scope of this thesis.

Mary Tororeiy (2005:167) believes, with other African feminist theologians, that the Church is the place wherein people are called to become community, as

... a place where men and women have equal status, dignity and rights as images of the divine, with equal access to the magnanimous graces and gifts of the spirit. It is where each and everyone enrich the discipleship community of equals with different experiences, vocations and talents.

This vision of the Church does hold out the hope for a more holistic community in Africa as well as the hope for transformation of community in the wider world.

Some of the additional concerns are discussed in the next section, as these affect women in the specific context of African feminist theology and ecclesiology.

2.4. African Feminist Theological Considerations

Over and above the selected five features of African feminist ecclesiology, discussed thus far, it is important to note that clericalism, which was briefly addressed under women's ordination, is another crucial debate within African feminist ecclesiology. This became evident during a conversation between Mercy Amba Oduyoye and a lay woman. This woman was adamant that they (the lay women in their church) did not wish to experience the ministry of domineering female ministers.

Oduyoye (2005:146) personally tells the story of this lay woman who

... warned a group of women studying theology: “If you think you are going to seek ordination, to become ministers so as to come and boss us around the way the men do, then forget it. We will not support your quest.”

Oduyoye had to ask herself why women are studying theology. If ours is not a power-hungry agenda, then why do we want to be ordained? Many denominations, in Western countries and in Southern Africa too, do ordain women but this debate is relevant for everyone. In the MCSA the doors to ordination are open for women and they have been open for thirty-five years this year (2011) but sufficient supporting gender education has not yet taken place.⁵² Consequently, women ministers continue to be marginalised. Ordination is not yet open to all African women but the ordination of women and the clericalism debate continues to be rigorously engaged. Feminist theologians continue to ask questions, such as ‘What are the alternatives to clericalism?’ (Radford Ruether 2005) and ‘How can women be church and participate fully?’ (Nadar & Phiri (eds) 2005).

The call for women to stay in the Church is an important one because the Church still is the institution within which the Christian religion is practised and where people are nurtured in their faith. Many small groups of women have left the institutional Church and these groups meet in homes to worship and to share their stories with one another. This might be one alternative model of being church but the heritage and theological resources of the institutional body of the Church make it rich and it would be to everyone’s advantage if the whole Body of Christ could make progress towards an alternative model of being church. This would indeed be the option of feminist ecclesiology.

African women theologians, according to Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2006:1 – first published in 1992), have

... come to realize that as long as men and foreign researchers remain the authorities on culture, rituals, and religion, African women will continue to be spoken of as if they were dead.

African women are not dead – we are very much alive and present in the Church. Our contributions to theological discourses are meaningful, to which the scholarship of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is testifying.

⁵² The gender task team was given a mandate to provide gender education for Societies and Circuits.

Although the term ‘African’ is complex because Africa comprises various cultures and many ethnic identities, African feminist theology specifically addresses the unique response of African women theologians to patriarchy and male-dominant religion and theology. I understand this to stress that there should be an equal right to participate in all things, there should be co-responsibility and shared power between women and men. Chidili, writes that African feminist theology supports a “shared glory and equal respect for both genders” and denies that “the liberation of men and women comes from the uncritical acceptance of a heritage that enthrones hierarchies and declares patriarchy to be the will of God”.⁵³

African woman theologians are clear that male-dominance and gender exclusive ecclesiological practices in the Church are unacceptable. African feminist theologians strive to do contextual theology in order to ensure that women’s perspectives are considered and that women’s theological and spiritual needs are met. The contributors to *Ragbag Theologies* address some of the key feminist theological perspectives for faith and praxis in the Southern African context. Sarojini Nadar (2009:147) writes about The Circle in chapter 14 and although she essentially pays tribute to Denise Ackermann, in whose honour the book was published, she also recognises the valuable contribution of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who founded The Circle in 1989 because of

... the lack of theological literature being produced by Africans at the time, but [she was] even more frustrated by the lack of theological literature being produced by African women about women and for women.

This lack of scholarly theological material by women for women has since been addressed and publications, such as *Ragbag Theologies*, celebrate these achievements.

Liberation theology had been shaping African theologians’ thinking for at least three decades by the late 1980s but even within this liberation discourse women were being marginalised and excluded. The patriarchal system, within which African culture and tradition also developed, was not automatically addressed by the liberation movements. More will be said about the patriarchal system in chapter four but it is essential to recognise that the MCSA was also influenced by the liberation movements, often without its male

⁵³ African feminist theologian and educator: Pedagogy of human dignity. <<http://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI3081402>> [Accessed 3 May 2011].

leaders giving heed to the continued exclusion of women in the Church. Nadar (2009:154) highlights that Ackermann “is clear and adamant that, for all its difficulties, there is a crucial need to engage with men”. This thesis supports that desire in the hope that continued engagement with male leaders in the Church will bear fruit and that women will be freed up to exercise their gifts and be encouraged to reach their full potential, both as ministers and as members in the MCSA.

2.5. Conclusion

Even though those engaged in the study of ecclesiology are still mostly men and are therefore at the decision-making table in the churches, we invited ourselves to ‘the Table’ in this chapter, using the tools provided by feminist ecclesiology and African feminist theology, such as hospitality, the *Manyano* movement, women’s ordination, ministers’ wives and the cultural community. This established the theoretical framework for this research. The theological terms used in this thesis were explained and introduced. The insights of African feminist theologians support the hypothesis that the Christian Church, in general, is steeped in patriarchy and the subsequent discussions in this chapter endeavoured to show that patriarchy is an unhelpful system.

Feminist ecclesiology was juxtaposed with traditional ecclesiology, the differences were examined and the narrative approach of African feminist ecclesiology was discussed. Five specific features of African feminist ecclesiology, namely hospitality, women’s ordination, the churchwomen’s organisations, ministers’ wives and cultural community, formed the basis for an ecclesiological discussion on women’s experiences as being church in Africa. I paid attention to some subsequent considerations, from an African feminist theological perspective, such as clericalism and other ways of reading the Bible.

I now turn to the research design and methodology of this research project.

Chapter Three

‘The Table Setting’ – The Research Methodology

3.0. Introduction

This thesis is based on a “mixed-methods” research methodology – that is a combination of both textual and empirical research is undertaken. In terms of textual research, the literature review forms an important part of this particular thesis as the work of feminist theologians and, more especially, of African feminist theologians guides me in the discussion on gender injustice in the MCSA. The major aim of this thesis, which is to assess the gap between gender policy and practice in the MCSA, will be achieved through engaging with the tools provided by African feminist theologians. The source documents of the MCSA, several key publications, lectures and sermons, as well as five selected Methodist women’s stories, form a foundation on which this research has been built.

My hypothesis was developed against the backdrop of women in ministry, who are not treated in the same way as men in ministry are treated. Few Methodist women ministers receive invitations to new congregations (as their male counterparts do) and many women in ministry work under difficult and stressful circumstances because of their gender. Women, both lay and clergy, are frequently expected to fulfil the menial tasks in the Church and are often relegated to the kitchen, childcare or ministry to the elderly. As explained in the first chapter, both the title and the hypothesis for this thesis are linked directly to the MCSA’s mission statement, which asserts that the MCSA is a church committed to healing and transformation. Before describing the research methodology more fully, it may be helpful to restate the hypothesis:

Despite having as its mission, to be a church of healing and transformation, the MCSA continues to be patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices and, unless these patriarchal systems are transformed, women will continue to be marginalised and excluded.

3.1. Research Methodology

I have developed a theoretical framework by using material from African feminist ecclesiological scholarship. It is within this context that the ensuing arguments are deliberated. The source documents of the MCSA, to which I refer regarding this church's gender policy, also form an important component of the research, as do the hymns and orders of service, which are regularly used during worship.

The empirical component of the research which involves retelling and analysing the selected five Methodist women's stories, is helpful because it is in these stories that I find and examine the strong features of African feminist ecclesiology in the context of each woman's experience. The mixed research methodology is, therefore, textual and empirical. According to Bryman's online article⁵⁴ on triangulation, this method contributes to the validity of what is known as "multimethod research". Bryman⁵⁵ suggests that

[t]riangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings. Since much social research is founded on the use of a single research method and as such may suffer from limitations associated with that method or from the specific application of it, triangulation offers the prospect of enhanced confidence. Triangulation is one of the several rationales for MULTIMETHOD RESEARCH.

A literature review, the examination of source documents of the MCSA and the stories of five Methodist women combine to form a triangulation in order to examine the gap between gender policy and practice in the MCSA.

The following three sub-sections of the research methodology will outline how the sample was assembled, which source documents of the MCSA were included and the method of enquiry followed. I start by discussing the empirical and literary research samples.

⁵⁴ Professor of Social Research at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom.
<<http://www.referenceworld.com/sage/socialscience/triangulation.pdf>>
[Accessed 23 October 2011].

⁵⁵ Ibid.

3.1.1. Research Sample: The Stories behind the Statistics

Although the quantitative research method demands that a sample needs to be representative to be credible,⁵⁶ those statistics usually have their own limitations, as Mouton (2001:153) intimates: “Lack of depth and insider perspective sometimes lead to criticisms of “surface level” analyses”. Qualitative research differs from a quantitative approach in the sense that the focus is on an in-depth study rather than on gathering statistics. Statistics are often helpful and they do enable researchers to draw conclusions with regard to projects involving general consensus or opinion polls. Statistics are necessary for many and varied research programmes but for this particular study, I am focusing on the stories behind the statistics. Feminist research has brought narrative back into the realm of the academia and, as Brene Brown⁵⁷ asserts in her online video talk, “stories are just data with soul”. Statistics do feature to an extent because the MCSA’s gender policy calls for quantifiable percentages of gender and age representivity but in an attempt to address the stated hypothesis of this study, I have opted for a qualitative methodology.

Uwe Flick (2006:30) in the book *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, writes that: ‘The best way to teach and learn qualitative research is learning by doing – working in the field and on material is most useful’. Although in qualitative research statistical representation is not a priority, to be as inclusive as possible within a diverse church such as the MCSA, I have selected the stories of two Black and two White women. The fifth woman refused to be categorised according to her race. Two are full-time ministers and two are lay women. The fifth woman’s position is unique in that she is a full-time advocate and a part-time minister who was born blind. I have included her story because she experiences both the marginalisation of women in the Church and that of people with disabilities in the wider society. Adrienne Asch⁵⁸ writes about her own experience in her article entitled ‘Critical Race Theory, Feminism, and Disability: Reflections on Social Justice and Personal Identity’ in which she says

[I]like the academic feminists and CRT authors I cite, a growing number of professionals with disabilities, including myself, can point to professional

⁵⁶ See Mouton (2001:152) – for example, in surveys: “Studies that are usually quantitative in nature ... aim to provide a broad overview of a representative sample of a large population.”

⁵⁷ <http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html> - “The Power of Vulnerability” - [Accessed 26 October 2011].

⁵⁸ <<http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/lawjournal/issues/volume62/number1/asch.pdf>> - Disability - [Accessed 24 October 2011].

recognition and the joys of doing work we love as well as its relative financial security and social status. Yet like these others, we have all-too-frequent reminders that we are unanticipated participants in workshops or conferences or unexpected guests at social gatherings.

The woman with blindness (whom we shall call Linda), participating in this research, has had similar experiences and these are often exacerbated in the Church because of her gender.

The five women fall into different age groups and this adds value to the research in that the opinions recorded do not belong to only one age group. One of the Black women is in her early seventies and the other Black woman is in her late forties. The youngest participant, who happens to be White, is in her middle thirties and the other White woman is in her early fifties. The fifth participant is fifty-five.

One of the Black women is the only woman to have held the office of Bishop in the MCSA. Her story is significant, particularly because of the slowness of the Church to recognise the leadership abilities of women and to acknowledge the gifts women, as church, are to their Societies, in their Circuits and even in the office of a District Bishop.

I have selected the stories of five women from the submissions I had originally received. These five women's stories are by no means representative, as would normally be required by a quantitative methodology. They were not meant to be that. In the qualitative work being done here I believe the features of African feminist ecclesiology emerge in the analysis of these stories. These five stories were chosen because they share much in common and to avoid repetition it was deemed best to go deeper rather than to go as widely as the original sample.

When I first approached Methodist women to write their stories for this study, I received mixed responses. Some were hesitant and others were keen to participate. I had several refusals because they said they were not feminists and others felt that they could not criticise the MCSA. My approaches were primarily made through personal contacts, the ministers' forum, leaders' meetings and the MCSA's women's organisations. The snowball sampling method⁵⁹ was used at times because one prospective participant would introduce me to another and two women sent me their stories and consent forms quite

⁵⁹ See Earl R Babbie (2009:208) in *he Basics of Social Research*. This is a method of recruiting participants and respondent by word of mouth – people telling one another about the project and them coming on board because of a recommendation.

independently after receiving the information from a third party. Although Babbie (2009:208) suggests that snowball sampling is often used “when members of a special population are difficult to locate”, he also states that it “refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects”.

Initially I used electronic communication, telephone contacts, personal interviews and questionnaires at a Women’s Day event in August 2004. Of more than two hundred possible participants, thirty-two women submitted written stories and one-hundred-and-sixty-eight women completed questionnaires. As the research process developed, I decided, in consultation with my supervisor, to change the focus and use a narrative and qualitative research methodology to examine and analyse the stories of five active and significant Methodist women.

The stories were collected over a period of approximately four months. Some participants e-mailed their stories to me, others posted theirs and some handed their stories to me in person. Some were hand-written but most were typed and one story is a transcript from an interview. All the stories have been placed in a file, which is stored in a secure drawer in my desk. I have attempted to protect the identities of the participants by giving them pseudonyms and filing their consent forms in a separate file. I stress again that it is impossible to fully hide the identities of two of the women as there is only one woman minister with blindness in the MCSA and only one woman has, to date, held the office of Bishop in the MCSA. I shall keep all the data for five years after concluding this research and thereafter I shall destroy the contents of the files by shredding.

The literature review was outlined in chapter one and the books, selected to study in depth, assist with the body of existing knowledge in the fields of feminist theology, African feminist theology and feminist ecclesiology. Many secondary sources were consulted on topics related to women, gender justice, theology and ecclesiology. Online resources also proved to be useful and these are listed below the bibliographical references. Footnotes are used when it is necessary to explain the relevance of a reference.

The literature review provides a foundation of knowledge and the stories behind the statistics give a face to this research but the MCSA’s source documents, hymns and liturgies, which we discuss in the next section, provide the evidence that this study is indeed essential.

3.1.2. Source Documents, Hymn-Books and Service Book

The first and most important document to examine is the *Laws and Discipline* of the MCSA. This is the rulebook of this church and its clauses are mandatory for all members. The process to amend any of its clauses is laborious and time-consuming, and to motivate the inclusion of a new clause is as demanding. Usually a resolution has to be submitted via a Society Leaders' Meeting to a Circuit Quarterly Meeting, if it is accepted there, then it must be referred to the Annual Synod. If the Synod passes the resolution in question, it is then referred to the Annual Conference. The Conference will then decide whether this is merely to be noted and recorded in the Yearbook (Minutes of Conference) or whether it is an important new clause for the *Laws and Discipline*. If the Conference is of the mind that this resolution is an important new clause it could then be referred to the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM) of the MCSA and this committee would be given a timeframe in which to prepare a report to Circuits for discussion and report back to the next Synod.

At present, in the MCSA's rulebook of two-hundred-and-forty pages, the following three points are appended under "Miscellaneous Resolutions", in the *Laws and Discipline* and they are the only points that pertain specifically to women:

1.16 ABORTION (page 227-228)

Conference affirms the Christian view of the sanctity of human life as a God-given gift; recognises the considerable divergence of opinion among Christians of the issue of abortion, especially in circumstances of deprivation and trauma; believes that it is morally wrong to use abortion as a means of birth control; and acknowledges that the issue is complicated by social circumstances.

Conference resolves:

to encourage Societies to provide counselling and support both to those who are struggling to decide whether or not to have an abortion and to those who have made such a decision.

to continue to study and discuss the issue of abortion and the appropriate response to legislation on the subject, bearing in mind the need to consider the right of women to make decisions about their own body, the interests of the father, and the rights of the foetus.

that any body making recommendations on proposed legislation consist of a majority of women and be fully representative of all viewpoints.

1.25 STATEMENT ON WOMEN

(page 233)

In 1988 Conference endorsed the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women and now notes that Churches and Society continue to treat gender concerns lightly, and because the Church is immersed in the problems of violence and economic and political issues women's issues are treated as peripheral, that women are frequently the victims of violence and of misinformation by media and anti-justice structures, and that women continue to be under-represented.

Women are created in God's image, are in the majority in the Churches and in society at large, and have great potential that needs to be unlocked for the benefit of the Church and Southern Africa.

Therefore all structures within the Church should include at least 40% women, the church should play a meaningful role in preparing women through education for elections and voting, should encourage awareness campaigns in our Churches on the issues of violence against women, rape and child abuse, should open its [sic] doors for open debates on public issues, which should include AIDS, Reproductive rights of Women, Family Planning and Family Life, all new documents, reports, publications, liturgies, prayers, songs, hymns and sermons should use inclusive language, the Doctrine committee in consultation with the Unit should prepare a study document on the issue of gender in the Scriptures, a co-ordinating committee should deal with issues concerning women in the Church.

1.36 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

(page 234)

The Executive urges the Synods and the local level of the Church to take seriously the inclusion of women at every level of Church life.

These statements, dated between 1985 and 2005, do not form part of the main body of the document but are appended at the back of the most recent edition of the *Laws and Discipline* of the MCSA under 'Miscellaneous Resolutions'. This section of the *Laws and Discipline* is a controversial grey area. The resolutions here have the character of recommendations but can sometimes be enforced because they form part of the *Laws and Discipline*. For instance 'retirement age for ministers', which only appears here, is mandatory (1.19 p231). Whereas 'tithing and planned giving' which cannot be mandatory also appears here (1.1 p221).

The intent of the 'Statement on Women' is clear but it is not accompanied by the will of the MCSA's leaders and as a result, its directives are not implemented. These seldom-adhered-to recommendations indicate that a gap does exist between gender policy and

practice in the MCSA and this is one of the reasons why examining the source documents of the MCSA is important in this research.

The second source document of the MCSA is the Annual Yearbook. Each year a new Yearbook is published together with a directory of all ministers throughout the Connexion. The 'Yearbook' was previously called 'The Minutes of Conference', which is what the Yearbook is. The Yearbook contains all the reports and resolutions, which were passed by the most recent Conference and ministers and leaders are expected to study its contents and implement its recommendations. The gender (and age) policy of the MCSA is recorded in the Yearbook (1999/2000:174) and it "recommends 40% Female, 40% Male and 20% Youth representation" at every level of church leadership. The **Statement on Women** appears on the same page but its recommendations are largely ignored by many congregations.

Samples of hymns and liturgies also reveal how the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchal ecclesiological practices. The language used in worship, which includes prayers, hymns, sermons, liturgies, Bible readings and the delivery of the notices, still favours the male and the images for God remain exclusively male and usually patriarchal. A hymn like 'Rise up, O **men** of God!'⁶⁰ makes no pretence of including women. The traditional liturgies do not facilitate healing and transformation for many women and other marginalised groups, who regularly have to do 'spiritual gymnastics'⁶¹ in an attempt to include themselves. There is a creedal response in the Holy Communion liturgy, which says: "Through him all things were made. For **us men** and for our salvation he came down from heaven" (emphasis mine). In the Baptism liturgy for infants the congregation is invited to respond as follows after the child who was baptised is given a candle: "Let your light so shine before **men**, that they may see your good works and give glory to your **Father** who is in heaven" (emphasis mine). These are some examples of what is the present practice despite the theme of Conference 2011 being 'An Invitation to a Round Table'. Next we look at how the research was undertaken.

⁶⁰ Methodist Hymn-Book, Number 585 – (bold emphasis on 'men' is mine).

⁶¹ A phrase used by Gina (pseudonym used for one of the participants in this research project), when describing her emotions during a worship service.

3.1.3. Method of Enquiry

I adopted the role of narrative researcher as a narrative approach is conducive to, and sometimes an integral part of feminist research. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:2) define narrative research as

... any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literary work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters). It can be the object of the research or the means of a study or another question.

It is usually the norm for a narrative researcher to interview the participants in the research project. However, because of its therapeutic value,⁶² I opted for the women to **write** their stories down rather than telling them. When originally sounding out a colleague, regarding telling her story for my research, her response was positive but she asked me: “What should I write about?” Her question prompted me to design a story guideline⁶³ for the participants, which is appended to this thesis and inserted below for easy reference:

The Story-Guideline

The following ten guiding questions are to enable participants to tell their stories in such a way that will facilitate analysis and evaluation. You are invited to write approximately three pages or between 1,000 – 1,500 words.

Please tell your story from the perspective of being a girl/woman under each heading with specific reference, wherever possible, to your relationship with the MCSA:-

1. Your family and your childhood memories of the Church.
 - Who spoke to you about God?
 - Who took you to Church?
 - What was your earliest image of God?
2. Sunday School / Wesley Guild / Youth Camps.
 - Which Sunday School teachers do you remember and why?
 - Who were your significant youth leaders and what stands out about them?
 - What was it like being a teenage girl in the Church?
3. Religious Knowledge Exams / Bible Studies.
 - How did you learn the stories of the Bible?
 - Do you enjoy reading the Bible today and why, or why not?
 - Have you done any formal biblical studies?
4. Understanding of God.
 - What is your image of God?

⁶² Dr Dorian Haarhoff on the therapeutic value of writing.

<http://www.bodyandmind.co.za/merchant_nc.php?pid=382&step=4> [Accessed 1 November 2011].

⁶³ See the Story-Guideline in Appendix 2.

- What are the names for God with which you are most familiar?
 - How do you relate to God?
 - Has God become real to you in the Church, or if not, where do you meet God?
5. Language used in Church.
 - What have your ministers been like and did they use helpful language?
 - Have the hymns and songs used in your Church been meaningful?
 - Do you find liturgies helpful and if so, which ones and why?
 - What stands out for you when you think of 'Church language'?
 6. Language of the Bible.
 - Did you ever wonder why so much of the Bible only seems to talk to and about men?
 - Do you understand most of what you read in the Bible?
 - Have you found stories that you could relate to as a girl/woman?
 - How would you describe the purpose of the Bible?
 7. Courtship, marriage and parenting.
 - What is your understanding of the Church's role in family life?
 - Share some joys and sorrows about your family and the Church.
 - What kind of pastoral care have you experienced in the Church?
 - Have there been certain expectations of you because you are a woman?
 8. Tell of times you felt relegated to the 'kitchen' or to 'child-care', etc. (Women's Work).
 9. Tell of times you felt overlooked for a leadership position in favour of a man.
 - Share incidents of pain and alienation and how have you coped with rejection?
 - How have you overcome disappointment, anger or frustration?
 10. Tell also of the times when you were encouraged to celebrate being a woman.
 - Who was responsible for times of growth and why are you still a Methodist?

This guide was not cast in stone but it gave each woman a framework within which to write her story. In his book *The Writer's Voice, a Workbook for Writers in Africa*, Haarhoff (1998:127-128) says about "Writing and Trauma" that

[i]n Muir Woods near San Francisco there is a plaque at a giant redwood tree. The plaque carries information about burls or knobbly mounds on the bark. "Growing, dividing and re-dividing at a pace faster than the rest of the tree, burl tissues are would-be-sprouts awaiting the trauma of fire or other damage to the tree before elongating."

This process is a metaphor for writing. It seems that for the writer creativity is a significant way of dealing with trauma.

Haarhoff (1998:127-128) also quotes the following comments from CS Lewis, regarding his own grief after his wife, Joy's death to cancer: "*I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow however, turns out to be not a state but a process.*"

Believing, as Haarhoff does, that writing is therapeutic, I decided to ask the participants to write their stories rather than me interviewing them. This method has both pros and cons but the advantages for this research made it a relevant option. Each woman

could write her story in her own time – participants were given a deadline – and she would have the freedom to express herself in her own words. She would also be free of interruptions from me, the interviewer, and she would be able to write things that might have been more difficult to say in an interview. On the other hand, one of the disadvantages were that I could not immediately check whether I understood what was written or request some additional information. However, I requested the freedom to follow up on any questions that arose out of the submitted written story. In two cases I did contact the women with regard to their stories, once I had received their submissions. I merely needed to clarify some of the phrases used by one of the women and ensure that I had understood her meaning. The other woman’s story needed follow up on the names she had used for God. These contacts were valuable as they helped to confirm that I understood accurately what they had meant. One of the women, whose story I selected for this research, had in fact asked me to interview her instead of her writing her story down. She was pressed for time and was able to set aside two hours for an interview, but she suspected that she would have needed far more time to write her story down. Her story was recorded (with her permission) and I transcribed it verbatim.

Some of the drawbacks to this method include language in a diverse church. I had given the Black women the choice of writing in their own language and having their stories translated but those who responded were happy to write their stories down in English. This method also assumes that the participants were literate. I do not believe that literacy is a prerequisite for leadership skills but as I mainly approached women, who are or have been in leadership positions in the MCSA, all were in fact literate. Another limitation of writing down their stories was that the engagement, which happens in one-on-one conversations, was absent but on the other hand it also meant that they, as the writers, would not be sidetracked too easily. As stories are important in feminist research, I now discuss the narrative approach.

3.2. Narrative Approach

Anne Clifford (2001:55) suggests that “story is one of the most recognizable literary forms” of research and Phyllis Trible (1984:1) points out that stories “are the style and sustenance of life. They fashion and fill existence”. Stories are often the points of

connection and people eagerly enter into story-telling and they also enjoy reminiscing about their and others' stories. Clifford (2001:55) goes on to say that "[i]magination applied with empathy for the persons in the story and the story's writer is also important". An imaginative reconstruction is often necessary because the reader or hearer cannot fully appreciate the story-writer's context. Clifford (2001:56) also reminds her readers that

[h]ermeneutics of suspicion is but one side of the feminist interpretive coin; hermeneutics of remembrance is the other side. The two belong together. Hermeneutics of suspicion is in service of a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance. Feminist hermeneutics is not satisfied with unmasking patriarchy because it causes human suffering. A hermeneutics of remembrance reclaims the past suffering of women and of all persons subjugated through enslavement, exile, and persecution, and treats it as a "dangerous memory," one that invites us today to solidarity with all persons past and present who struggle for human dignity.

This kind of remembrance is encouraged through story-telling and, according to African women theologians,⁶⁴ stories play an important role in African tradition, faith and folklore. While these stories often tell of a sequence of events, it is the narrative that attempts to join them and make sense of the whole. This following online definition of 'narrative' contributes to how the term is used in the analysis of the stories in this research:

Narrative for cognitive potency

Advancements in the cognitive sciences over the past decade have revealed much about how we think. As David Herman, author of *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*, says, "Research on human intelligence has postulated that studying the structure and use of stories can provide important insight into the roots of self and the nature of thinking." (Herman). The ways we recognize patterns and integrate fragmented bits of information are implicit processes and drive cognition and decision-making. What we are led to expect affects how we think, make decisions, and behave; this cognitive chain is based on experiential patterns or mental models (schema) that filter most of the brain's incoming information.⁶⁵

A narrative is also a form of retelling a story and not the story itself. Whilst recognising that a story is made up of various events, strung together according to a plot, a narrative is usually selective, emphasising those events that belong together. The characteristics of

⁶⁴ See the Introduction to *Her-stories – Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Phiri, Govinden and Nadar (2002). The editors ask the question "What's the Use of Telling Stories?" (p3) and they answer their own question with the five-fold purpose of the publication: "Complementing African Church History" (p4), "Telling our stories from women's perspectives" (p6), "Participating in history" (p7), "Narrative therapy" (p7) and "Transforming our world" (p9).

⁶⁵ *Medical Informatics Review* online – Volume 3, No.1. April 2008.
<http://www.icsciences.com/images/MedIR_0408.pdf> [Accessed 20 October 2011].

narrative are investigated with this methodology. It is, therefore, essential to understand how we live our lives through stories. Amia, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) assert that narrative research is becoming a more popular research method. African feminist theologians agree with these sentiments as Oduyoye (2002:xii) writes in the 'Preface: Naming Our Mothers' to *Her-stories – Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*:

The Circle has begun this ministry of retrieval. There are many hidden stories, treasures we need to unearth so we can know where we are coming from and who got us where we are. We need to know the foundations so we can understand the edifice we have inherited. We owe this to our predecessors and our successors alike.

Two descriptions, which I shall borrow from narrative therapy,⁶⁶ are 'thin descriptions' and 'thick descriptions'. Early in their meetings with people, narrative therapists often hear stories about the 'problems' and their 'meanings'. These 'meanings', reached in the face of adversity, often consist of what narrative therapy calls 'thin description'. Thin description allows little space for the complexities and contradictions of life. It allows little space for people to articulate their own particular meaning of their actions and the context within which they occurred.

These thin descriptions of people's actions and/or identities are often created by others – those with the power of definition in particular circumstances (e.g. parents, teachers, ministers, health professionals, researchers, etc.). However, sometimes people come to understand their own actions through thin descriptions. In whatever context thin descriptions are created, they often have significant consequences. Thin descriptions, therefore, often lead to thin conclusions about people's identities, and these have many negative effects.

Thin conclusions are often expressed as a truth about the person who is struggling with the problem and their identity. Thin conclusions, however, disempower people as they are regularly based in terms of weaknesses, disabilities, dysfunctions or inadequacies. Often, these thin conclusions also obscure broader relations of power. For example, if a woman has come to see herself as 'worthless' and 'deserving of punishment' after years of being subject to abuse, these thin conclusions make invisible the injustice she has experienced. They hide the tactics of power and control to which she has been subjected,

⁶⁶ See Alice Morgan's (2000) book *What is Narrative Therapy?*

as well as her significant acts of resistance. Once thin conclusions take hold, it becomes easy for people to engage in gathering evidence to support these dominant problem-saturated stories. Thin conclusions, therefore, often lead to more thin conclusions as people's skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies become hidden by the problem-story. This is what has happened for many women in the church. Women have been indoctrinated, for centuries, into believing that they are to remain subordinate to men.

In contrast to 'thin descriptions' of people's experiences, the term 'thick description' is used to indicate the richness in a person's story. It is an affirmation of how various events, woven together into a plot, become the celebration of who a person is.

Epston and White (1990) developed a way of working in which narrative conversations are guided and directed by the interests of the individual. It therefore seems appropriate to begin any exploration of narrative research with a consideration of what is meant by the 'narratives' or 'stories' of people's lives. When exploring narrative research we engage in what is also known as "re-authoring" or "re-storying" conversations.⁶⁷ As these descriptions suggest, stories are central to an understanding of narrative ways of working. The word 'story' has different connotations for different people. When using narrative discourse in research we recognise that stories consist of events, linked in sequence, across time and according to a plot.

Human beings are interpreting beings, who all have daily experiences of events through which they seek to make life meaningful. The stories about people's lives are created through linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a period of time, and finding a way of explaining or making sense of them. These meanings form the plot of the story. People constantly give meanings to their experiences – and continue to do so throughout their lives. A narrative is like the thread that weaves the events together, forming a story.

The significance of this kind of story-telling for this research project is that the participants were asked to tell their stories (or weave the plot) with particular reference to their relationship with the MCSA and their faith experiences.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Phrases used by Michael White (1995) in *Re-Authoring Lives: Interviews & Essays*.

⁶⁸ Refer to Appendix 2 for the Story-Guideline.

People have many stories about their lives and relationships, occurring simultaneously. For example, they have stories about themselves, their abilities, struggles, competencies, actions, desires, relationships, work, interests, victories, achievements and their failures. The way they developed these stories is determined by how certain events are linked together in a sequence and by the meaning attributed to them.

In feminist research⁶⁹ the researcher plays an important role. Next I position myself as part of the research and not as a mere bystander.

3.2.1. The Role of the Researcher

My own story, as a Methodist, as a woman of faith and as a feminist researcher, adds value to this thesis. I assert this because I have, for the past eleven years, passionately engaged with many Methodist people and studied the source documents of the MCSA. My own feminist awakening began approximately fourteen years ago, in 1997, when I was experiencing a personal crisis. A narrative therapist suggested that I join their feminist spirituality group. I am still a member of this group and I deeply value the spiritual and emotional connections with these women. We study feminist theology together and we support one another in various ways. As a feminist researcher I have valued their opinions, their insights have often inspired me and at times their suggestions have been helpful. These women have journeyed with me through my call to the ministry, they have listened to my deep struggle with clericalism and nevertheless supported me in my quest towards ordination.

I was ordained in 2007 after six years of study, formation and training for the Methodist ministry. At times, especially in the face of marginalisation, ridicule, humiliation and the sheer arrogance of male co-student ministers, lecturers and even mentors, the temptation to throw in the towel was strong. However, the members of my spirituality group encouraged me to persevere and reminded me of the value of being a feminist presence in a patriarchal environment. My theological training was of a very high standard and I was exposed to a wide range of contexts and provided with many

⁶⁹ See Nadar's (2011:10-11) unpublished paper (for presentation only) entitled ' "Stories are data with Soul" (quoted from Brene Brown's video) – Lessons from Black Feminist Epistemology': "While positivistic research argues for the "invisible" researcher, feminist narrative research calls us to be reflexive about our positioning. Rather than bracketing our emotions and our ethics from the process, we embrace it as part of the process. Being reflexive means that one recognizes that the process of research is as important as the product. Emotion and intellect find a meeting space in narrative research."

exceptional opportunities to do ministry, practice mission and apply theology. I discovered, though, that feminist theology is a component of systematic theology that many student ministers appear to view as ‘hoops they need to jump through’ in order to pass their exams. Whereas I was energised and inspired by the work of contextual and feminist theologians, some of my co-students for the ministry seemed to find them controversial and even irrelevant.

I acknowledge the privilege of facilitating the process of this research. As a narrative researcher, I accept responsibility to retell the stories of the participants in such a way that the reader hears their opinions and that, through the analysis, the reader is exposed to some of the underlying principles of gender injustice, as experienced by the women whose stories are retold. I acknowledge my Afrikaans background, my White privileged upbringing and schooling in an *Apartheid* South Africa and I wish to state my commitment to racial and inter-faith integration in South Africa, long before full democracy was achieved in this country in 1994.

I have been an activist for change since my teens and my present position as the Social Justice Coordinator at the Diakonia Council of Churches⁷⁰ in Durban is no accident. Soon after my ordination, on being offered this position at the Diakonia Council of Churches, I applied for secondment by the MCSA to serve in this faith-based organisation. My key responsibilities are gender justice in the Church and facilitating the organisation’s biannual Social Justice Season. I also view the feminist researcher as someone who not only takes from the participants but who also gives back to the community. The contribution to existing scholarship, that this thesis will make, thickens the story of the MCSA and the Church in general.

I make no claim to objectivity because subjectivity is a value of feminist research, as asserted by Gayle Letherby (2003:70-72) in her book *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*. Subjectivity does not mean that ‘anything goes’ or that there is no rigour in my analysis. It merely acknowledges that the process of research is as important as the

⁷⁰ The Diakonia Council of Churches was established in 1976 by the late Archbishop Denis Hurley. It is a faith-based ecumenical agency in the wider Durban area, serving its sixteen member churches as a Christian organisation, committed to justice, empowerment and social transformation. www.diakonia.org.za – [Accessed regularly as part of my work].

product. Drawing on Letherby, Phiri and Nadar (2010:13) claim that all researchers are subjective:

While Letherby's assertion focuses on the *product* of research making a difference, we suggest that the *process* of research can also be a space for transformation to occur in the lives of the participants and the researchers. This kind of subjectivity includes the researcher's opinions and experiences.

What I do claim, though, is the quest for and right to gender justice in the MCSA. I now turn to how the data will be analysed.

3.2.2. Analysis of Data

Once I had decided on an in-depth retelling of five Methodist women's stories, the methodology fell into place. This means that the experiences of these women would be taken seriously and documented for future research. It also means that this research project was being steered in a constructive direction. African feminist theology embraces a narrative approach to theology and spirituality, as it is a way of relating how people live their lives. This is particularly evident in the publication, which was edited by Phiri, Govinden and Nadar (2002), entitled *Her-stories – Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*. These stories allow the experiences of women to come alive and the skilful storytellers draw the principles of feminist theology out of the stories. Various features, such as hospitality, women's organisations, ministers' wives and women's ordination, which are identified by African feminist ecclesiology, are also used during the analysis of each of the stories.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter on research design has focused on the method, through which the gap between the MCSA's gender policy and practice is analysed. The decision to tell five Methodist women's stories was explained and the samples were described. Statements related to gender justice, in the MCSA's source documents, were quoted in support of the hypothesis of this study. Reference was made to the exclusive language of hymns and liturgies in the MCSA and the method of enquiry was described. As one of the priorities of this study is to engage with the tools provided by African feminist theologians, it was helpful to determine how this would be done. The story-guideline was introduced and the therapeutic method of writing down their stories was explained. Some key publications,

lectures and sermons, as well as the stories of five selected women, form the basis for this research, which I believe is groundbreaking in the MCSA.

The narrative approach to research was described and the role of the researcher was outlined and explained. I was able to tell something of my own story in this chapter as feminist research recognises the subjectivity of the researcher and encourages the involvement of the researcher in the process of the research. Njoroge (2001:vii) writes in the preface to *Talitha cum! Theologies of African Women*, that African women theologians

... are concerned to ensure that their many unrecorded experiences, perspectives and reflections in different fields of theology and ethics become visible in bookstores, in libraries and on the shelves of students, scholars, women and men of faith who congregate to hear the Word of God. Whilst African cannot stop others from researching and writing about them, they yearn to develop their distinctive written voices and to have their rightful place in the academic world. Moreover, they want to invite all those who care about African affairs to engage with them in critical listening and conversation as they creatively articulate the many oppressed voices of children, youth, women and men.

The researcher, therefore, joins in and expresses her or his own opinions and shares experiences with the reader, which are not always objective and value free.

The next two chapters, which are the heart of this thesis, will provide both textual and empirical evidence that supports the hypothesis that the MCSA continues to be patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices despite its best intention to be gender equitable. Firstly, in chapter four, the focus is on the textual aspect of celebrating being Church, from which women continue to be excluded – that is the liturgies, hymns and language used in Church.

Chapter Four

‘The Crumbs from the Table’ – the Hierarchical Nature of and use of Exclusive Language in the MCSA

4.0. Introduction

Lord, we come to your table trusting in your mercy and not in any goodness of our own.

We are not worthy even to gather up the crumbs under your table, but it is your nature always to have mercy, and so on that we depend.

So feed us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your Son, that we may for ever live in him and he in us. **Amen**⁷¹

I begin this chapter with a quote from the Holy Communion or Eucharistic liturgy to draw attention to the need for re-reading this, and many other liturgies, through a gendered lens. A connection exists between the excerpt above, which is commonly referred to as ‘The Prayer of Humble Access’, and the story (provided in the footnote) of the Syro-Phoenician woman.⁷² In this story, Jesus refers to the Gentile woman as a ‘dog’ but she is not put off by him as her need is greater than the insult she receives. In a Western context, ‘gathering the crumbs under the table’ is a symbol of humility and lowliness but this phrase takes on a new and an uncomfortable meaning in the context of African sociology and African feminist theology, a theology that focuses on precisely those who have been marginalised – treated like dogs – in a similar way to which this ‘Gentile woman’ had been in the time of Jesus. Making the connection between this biblical story and this Eucharistic prayer, reminds me that every time we, especially ‘Gentile’ women, come to the Communion rail, we stand in solidarity with the Syro-Phoenician woman. The

⁷¹ From the Holy Communion Liturgy in *The Methodist Service Book* (1975:B15).

⁷² See the Bible: Matthew 15:21-28 ²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.” ²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” ²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” ²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. ²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” ²⁷ “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment. (From the *New International Version* [NIV])

Eucharist is perhaps the most defining ecclesiological practice of any church and countless stories of how women have been excluded from ‘the Table of the Lord’ exist.

In this chapter I aim to demonstrate the ways in which the MCSA continues to ‘throw crumbs from the Table’ to women, expecting them to be satisfied and grateful for what they are given – rather than to dare ask to share in the bread which is served at ‘the Table’. The patriarchal ecclesiological practices extend beyond the Eucharist in the MCSA. The patriarchal ecclesiological practices can be found in (1) the MCSA’s hierarchical structures and exclusive structuring, (2) the male-dominant language of its liturgies and hymns, (3) the unjust treatment of women in ministry, and perhaps controversially (4) the women’s organisations – the *Manyanos*.

Here space is created to examine some of the long-established exclusive liturgies and popular hymns of the MCSA. I shall propose what some of the merits are of making these liturgies more inclusive – with regard to both the image of God as well as pertaining to the inclusion of both genders. The language used in the pulpit will be examined and some of the traditions of the MCSA will be discussed. In this chapter I shall also refer to aspects of feminist ecclesiology that specifically indicate how this theological discipline raises awareness of patriarchal domination and gender exclusive ecclesiological practices in the Church.

Feminist ecclesiology affirms that women *are* church and yet the MCSA does not commit itself to constructive and systematic gender education. One of the direct results, as mentioned earlier, is that the majority of women ministers do not receive invitations. Women ministers are, therefore, often stationed in difficult congregations with economic and other social challenges. Before these challenges are outlined below, some background with regard to the MCSA and its governance is necessary.

4.1. Hierarchical and Exclusive Structuring

Peter Senge (1996:1-2) writes as follows about hierarchies as he introduces Jaworski’s book, *Synchronicity – The Inner Path of Leadership*:

Hierarchies are not inherently bad, despite the bad press they receive today. The potential of hierarchy to corrupt would be dissolved, according to Greenleaf, if leaders chose to serve those they led – if they saw their job, their fundamental reason for being, as true service. For this idea we owe Greenleaf a great debt. His insights also go a long way toward explaining the “leaderlessness” of most

contemporary institutions, guided as they are by people who have risen to positions of authority because of technical or decision-making skills, political savvy, or desire for wealth and power.

Senge pays tribute to Greenleaf, a business writer, for the notion of ‘servant leadership’ but Christians have known about this concept for two thousand years. The Church is the one institution that should be able to get this principle right, yet it seems to struggle as much as business institutions seem to. The MCSA regularly talks about ‘servant leadership’ but its key leadership’s practice seems to be more ‘power-over’ than ‘power-with’ or ‘power-to’.⁷³

The annual reports of organisations and the various mission projects, inter-faith and ecumenical initiatives and Circuit and District offices tell the story of ‘church as usual’ in the MCSA. Little has changed in fifty years if one compares the format of annual reports for 2011 with those from 1960. The amount of money spent is much more but the recipients and the involvement of the groups in their communities seem to be much the same as before. Much work is being done and mission continues in the Church. Yet, it seems to have been ‘church as usual’ for a very long time.

In order to demonstrate the gender injustices of the present system, it would be necessary to examine and analyse examples of exclusion and marginalisation of women in the MCSA. Firstly, however, I relate some general examples of gender injustice and of church leaders’ lack of commitment to gender education and the implementation of the policy of fair representation at every level of church life.

In 2007, a colleague related to me that their District had sent six Black men (their total quota) to the Annual Conference of the MCSA. Delegates are elected at their Annual Synod where Bishops are required to motivate a delegation according to the policy of 20% youth, 40% female and 40% male representation. When informally confronted with this unbalanced delegation, which had no representation for women or White members, the Conference was told that one of the men was thirty years of age (fulfilling the requirement of ‘youth’) and that democracy needed to be upheld. In my own District (the only District with a woman Bishop in office at the time) the election of Conference delegates was preceded by a careful explanation of the process and the policy of inclusion of the MCSA. The Bishop called for nominations and only closed nominations once she was satisfied that

⁷³ These terms emerged in a gender workshop I attended with the KZN Network on Violence Against Women in 2011. ‘Power-over’ refers to those in charge (in hierarchical structures), ‘Power-with’ refers to equal power-sharing situations (colleagues at the same level) and ‘Power-to’ refers to situations in which people empower one another and also give up their need for power.

a balanced group of people had been nominated. The Synod was then again instructed to keep the MCSA's gender policy in mind as the delegates voted. This district had a fully balanced delegation whilst maintaining the democratic process and electing worthy representatives. It is, therefore, possible to bring healing to the previously marginalised by being proactive and committed to the process of transformation.

A member of Conference reported to a ministers' seminar in 2010 that at the commencement of the Annual Conference in 2009, the Presiding Bishop indicated to the delegates that in light of the MCSA's gender policy the Conference could not be formally constituted, as the representation of delegates did not reflect 20% youth or 40% female. This meant that Districts had not adhered to this church's gender policy. After some disquiet and discussion amongst the delegates, the Conference resolved to continue with its business even though this unbalanced delegation needed to be minuted.⁷⁴ At Conference 2011 in Maseru, it was resolved that each secretary and statistical secretary of every meeting in the MCSA needs to ensure that age and gender of those present are recorded on attendance registers in order to monitor representivity and to address and correct any imbalance immediately. I had drafted this resolution and it had been submitted to the Annual Conference by my own District.⁷⁵ This was one more practical way in which I contributed to the process of healing and transformation in the MCSA. It did come with a price tag because many colleagues in the ministry view these measures as unnecessary administrative burdens and this resulted in further ridicule and marginalisation. It remains to be seen whether this new resolution will in fact be implemented in the MCSA. I acknowledge that the route of resolutions is an inadequate, yet necessary, route towards a transformed society and church. A change of heart and new mindsets for leaders in the MCSA (and every other denomination) are what is required and research, such as this, hopes to raise awareness and continues to put gender justice on 'the Table'.

One of the major obstacles to achieving gender equality in the MCSA is church tradition. This is surprising in a church that contributed to turning 18th Century England around at a time when social injustice was rife. The Methodists, who started out as a Society within The Church of England in Britain at the time, challenged classism – see

⁷⁴ The Methodist Yearbook 2010, in which are recorded the minutes of Conference 2009.

⁷⁵ Refer to the Natal Coastal District Synod 2011 'Resolutions to Conference'.

Charles Wesley's hymnology.⁷⁶ The Church of England was comprised of wealthy nobility and the poor were not usually welcome – this was particularly evident in the communities of coal miners. John Wesley established ministries in these communities and he regularly preached in the coal pits.⁷⁷

Consequently, Methodism soon became the denomination for the ordinary people. Some severe demands were made of Methodists⁷⁸ in the early years of its existence, as Wesley believed social evils had to be eliminated through strict adherence to 'Church Discipline'. One such stringent rule was the banning of all alcohol consumption by Methodist leaders, who were to encourage the members in their classes⁷⁹ and congregations to do the same. Methodists were ridiculed (and this label survives until today) because they were teetotallers but John Wesley offered alternatives to those who were economically and socially deprived and who often succumbed to the abuse of alcohol. Leonard Hulley (1987:81) writes in his book *Wesley – A Plain Man for Plain People* that "for him moral behaviour rather than moral theory is what mattered. Moral convictions which did not issue in moral acts he would have dismissed as of no consequence and worthless".

Another strict rule Wesley imposed was that all Methodist local preachers had to read. A preacher who did not read was not allowed to preach. Baker (1982), quoting John Wesley's (VIII:315) instruction to preachers, as found in *The Complete Works of John Wesley*:

Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or at least, five hours in four-and-twenty. 'But I read only the Bible.' Then you ought to teach others to read only the Bible, and, by parity of reason, to hear only the Bible: But, if so, you need preach no more.

⁷⁶ "For all my Lord was crucified, For all, for all my Saviour died." Hymn Number 114 v7.

⁷⁷ Preaching at Gwennap Pit - (for a further reference) 'Our coal and our coal-pits: the people in them, and the scenes around them', by John R. Leifchild, p303. By a traveller underground. London – Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans 1855.

<http://www.cornwalls.co.uk/Redruth/gwennap_pit.htm> [Accessed 5 September 2011].

⁷⁸ Even the name 'Methodists' was originally a derogatory nickname given to the 'holy club' to which John and Charles Wesley belonged during their Oxford years and when they did everything according to a strict routine and time schedule – methodically. <<http://www.godonthenet/wesley/>> [Accessed 5 September 2011].

⁷⁹ All new converts and new adherents to Methodism were placed in a class. In these classes members were held accountable with regard to their spirituality, discipline and personal relationships. It was in these classes where they did Bible study and learnt how to do theology. Some new Methodists also experienced their first formal education in their class.

This simple rule meant that in a relatively short period of time many more people were being educated, which also improved their social standing in their community.

John Wesley developed and introduced ‘The Rules of a Helper’,⁸⁰ which are still to this day read and agreed to by delegates at each annual District Synod before the Synod rises. These rules include topics such as consulting with colleagues and leaders when considering entering into a marriage and being diligent in how leaders spend their time.

During the *Apartheid* struggle for racial justice in South Africa, the MCSA played a leading role, was active and committed to social change, advocated reform and continually challenged the racist government. When it comes to gender injustice, however, there is a peculiar and general silence amongst the male leadership in this church. This seems to speak of a power issue. If women were to gain more power, would it then mean that men have to give up their power? The idea of power sharing does not seem to be attractive to the majority of male leaders in the MCSA and, as Sheena Duncan (1991:389) suggested, we are all called to give the power back to God.

Directives along the lines of gender justice and a more equitable representation of women do not seem to filter through to all the groups within the Connexion. Sexist language continues to be used in reports,⁸¹ liturgies and hymns and the gender policy is largely ignored by many church leaders. Women support the *status quo* and both women and men continue to favour men as leaders. Gender education is not high on local churches’ agendas and many women ministers find it easier to “go with the flow” (I quote a colleague’s phrase to me recently). She said that doing this makes her life more comfortable.

Feminist scholars and feminist theologians alike have documented the effects of patriarchal discursive practices and patterns. Oduyoye (2001:82) perceptively writes as follows about African women’s experience in the Church:

What, then, is the Church to Women?

The language of women about the Church often indicates that the Church dismisses the pain of women or treats it lightly. Often the language of the Church puts women down. Women speak of the Church’s neuroses and double standards with regard to human sexuality. Hypocrisy reigns in the Church when

⁸⁰ See *Laws and Discipline* of the MCSA (2007:191-192): This is applicable to all who preach. Refer to Appendix 1.

⁸¹ Here I particularly refer to several reports in the Synod Report Book for 2011 in which the male pronoun has been used without regard to the fact that many of the members are women..

it is men who need to change their ways. Often women's power is denied and their experiences rejected. Very often women work in the Church and men take credit for the outcome. The sin, sex and women triad has warped the community of women and men in the Church.

The patriarchal system is so ingrained in every part of life that its effects are subtle. Often, unless a specific incident of gender injustice is identified, it would go unnoticed by the majority of people. Oduyoye's comments in the above quote resonate with many women's experiences but few would have described these incidents as being extraordinary. Breaking the silence on gender injustice is one of the first steps to take when addressing patriarchy in the Church.

There is no easy way in which to deconstruct 'the gender other' but many people, women as well as men, are committed to pursuing wholeness in relationships and will thus continue to work at finding a way forward. Oduyoye (2001:89) expresses her hope for the Church as follows:

The ecclesiological emphasis that women bring, is that which holds the Church accountable to being a community that lives the life of Christ, that preaches the reign and love of God by its being and doing, serves God's people and God's purposes and presents itself as a sample of *koinonia*⁸² approved of and by God, and in which God participates.

This companionship Oduyoye refers to and in which she declares God participates, should be a servant-leader model the business world draws upon but, according to Senge and other business leaders, the Church seems to be the last place they would look for such a model. Their perceptions of the Church and their opinions on its leadership styles are important if the Church is to be serious about lay involvement.

The structures within the MCSA are evidently hierarchical and even though there have been attempts, since the early 1980s, when the MCSA embarked on *A Journey To A New Land*, to work from the grassroots up, the trend remains top-down leadership. At the helm there is a Presiding Bishop and a Lay President serves in a part-time capacity alongside the Presiding Bishop. Both these officers are elected by general election at District Synods. Each District has an elected Bishop and a Lay Leader and together with Connexional unit leaders, they form a Connexional Executive. At Connexional level there

⁸² Greek for sharing in common, togetherness, fellowship or companionship.

are two decision-making bodies: Firstly, the Annual Conference (instituted by John Wesley) and secondly, the Connexional Executive, which operates between Conferences.

In addition to the Connexional Executive, the Bishops hold their own exclusive meetings, from which lay leaders are excluded. At District level District unit leaders (both clergy and laity) are appointed or elected and they serve on a District Executive with the Bishop. District officials are usually leaders in their own local societies and Circuits and they provide the links between the Circuits and the District. Circuits are comprised of several congregations who serve under the direction of a Superintendent Minister. Each local Society (congregation) elects lay leaders who serve on the church council or leaders' meeting and who take responsibility for leading the various mission, education and service initiatives in each congregation.

Gender consideration at various levels of leadership at present in 2011:⁸³

Presiding Bishop	-	this position has always been filled by a male
Lay President	-	since 1996 there have been 3 males (serving 9 years) and 2 females (serving 5 years)
Connexional Executive	-	more than 60% of representatives remain male
District Bishops	-	in 12 Districts only 1 female yet (1999-2008)
Lay District Leaders	-	in 12 Districts at present 5 are female (2011)
District Executives	-	more than 50% of representatives remain male

At congregational level the percentage of women in leadership has increased in recent years – this is more common in a city than in a rural community. In the Society I served in Durban until the end of 2009 there were 3 women and 3 men (no youth) serving as Society Stewards but at Circuit level the majority of key office bearers were male: 8 men and 3 women. At District level this ratio is even bigger in favour of men. At my District Synod in 2011 the only women on the stage were the assistant to the District Secretary (who is not a member of the District Executive) and the Lay Leader. During the Synod a new vice chairperson was elected and this time the Synod elected a woman to this position.

If the ratio between men and women in the church is considered, then the gender and age representation policy is inadequate. To date it has been difficult to compel

⁸³ See the Yearbook (2011) of the MCSA.

congregations to implement the gender policy as no records of gender or age are presently kept at meetings or at worship. Most congregations do have more women than men on their membership lists but these are seldom analysed according to male, female and youth. As mentioned earlier, a resolution was passed at the Conference of 2011 to ensure that gender and age representations are recorded at all meetings in order to monitor whether Societies, Circuits and Districts are complying with the MCSA's gender policy. The format of all attendance registers throughout the Connexion will now have to be edited and in 2012 gender and age statistics ought to be available at Conference. This will enable the MCSA to monitor its gender policy more carefully. The hope is expressed that this will indeed be followed through.

Over and above the church's leadership roles there are women's, men's and youth organisations within the MCSA. These organisations elect leaders within their branches and they follow the same structure as the church. A local Women's *Manyano* branch would then report to a Circuit, which reports to the District, which reports to the Connexional Committee. The only difference in their structure is that they are gender specific (except for the Wesley Guild). Difficulties have emerged, however, since women are being ordained. Traditionally the minister has been the honorary president of the Women's *Manyano* and the Young Men's Guild (YMG). The YMG have brought notices of motion to Synod requesting that because they are a men's organisation, they cannot have a woman as their honorary president. However, the Women's *Manyano* has had no choice but to accept a male minister as their honorary president. These issues are currently being debated at the various levels of these church organisations' leadership.

Mission task groups, HIV and AIDS committees, ecumenical and interfaith initiatives, youth ministries and ministry support groups are often spearheaded by women but many of the decisions are usually taken by the men – either because they are the clergy or because they have assumed that they are the experts on that particular topic.

Representation is a key word when discussing mission and other service initiatives. The mere fact that women are the majority of worshippers in most congregations means that women are also the ones who do most of the work in the church. Traditionally women do the cooking, cleaning and childcare chores but we also care for the elderly, organise and establish food gardens, teach and facilitate self-help groups and assist the minister in the

church. Women, especially the grandmothers (*Gogos* in isiZulu), are involved in establishing schools and homes for orphaned children and many take care of orphans out of their meagre pensions. In a congregation where 500 people worship regularly and 400 of these are women, women clearly make up more than the recommended 40%. Men are usually elected to leadership, even in such instances, because the traditional heritage of male-dominance is not challenged. This particular issue is addressed in this thesis.

Feminist ecclesiology affirms that women *are* church and yet the MCSA has not committed itself to constructive and systematic gender education. One result is that many women ministers do not receive invitations. As an outcome of not receiving invitations, women ministers are often stationed in difficult congregations with economic and other social challenges.

As quoted earlier, feminist ecclesiology “takes account of women’s lives – of women’s experiences of faith and sexuality – as a vital source for the reconsideration of ecclesiology” (Watson 2002:11). A woman minister of the MCSA was discontinued in 2010 because she chose to be open about her sexual orientation and entered into a faithful and legal union with her same-sex partner rather than living a lie. It is argued that she knew that she had acted against the *Laws and Discipline* of the MCSA and that she was, therefore, liable to be charged. What adds to the injustice of the situation is that although she was open and disclosed her status, many gay and lesbian Methodist ministers are forced to continue to hide their orientation because if they declared their sexual orientation they, too, would open themselves up to be charged. In the light of feminist ecclesiology, this situation calls for reflection on the inclusion and exclusion of people in the Church and, with regard to this research, specifically in the MCSA.

One of the clear signs of gender inequality in society or in the Church is the language used – both for talking about and to God, as well as how people talk to and about one another – and this is discussed in the next section.

4.2. Male-Dominant Liturgical and Biblical Language

The instruments used in narrative are multiple and varied but the foremost remains language. Although many African languages are more inclusive of both genders, the English language has developed within the patriarchal system. Many English terms do not

even have a feminine counterpart. Students study for a Bachelor or a Masters Degree. Faculties speak of academic fraternities and most, if not all, of these associations today include women.

Mary Daly (1985:9) discusses the generic term “man” in the introduction to her book, *Beyond God the Father – Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*, and she asserts that

“Intellectually” everyone “knows” that “man” is a generic term. However, in view of the fact that we live in a world in which full humanity is attributed only to males, and in view of the significant fact that “man” also means male, the term does not come through as truly generic. For this reason many feminists would like to erase the specious generic term “man” from the language, and rightly so.

Daly claims to only use the term “man” to demonstrate how “contradictory and problematic” its use is – the example she gives in her discussion is “the sisterhood of man”, which raises the question of other aspects in a sexually oppressive world. She suggests that the point is “not to legitimate the use of “man” for the human species, but to point to the necessity of the death of this false word, its elimination from our language” (Daly 1985:9).

The MCSA has not campaigned for inclusive liturgies and hymns, even though the Yearbook (1999/2000:174) clearly states its intention to do just that. Some individuals are committed to designing new inclusive liturgies but one of the ways, in which patriarchy is still supported in most congregations, is through the MCSA’s hymns and liturgies. Hymns like ‘Good Christian **men**, rejoice with heart and soul and voice!’⁸⁴ and the many hymns with military themes⁸⁵ uphold firstly, a perceived male supremacy and secondly, a culture of male-on-male violence and war. Here it is essential to indicate that the English language bears a large portion of the blame as the Christian Church, in its English and Western contexts, was shaped by its male-dominant language and this was endorsed by the translation of the King James Version of the Bible. The argument that God is portrayed as a ‘male’ throughout the Bible and that the historical figure, Jesus, was a ‘male’ seems to confirm for many people that this is the way it is and the way it ought to remain.

Hymns and psalms, liturgies and creeds have all been grounded in the sacred and traditional scriptures of the Judaeo-Christian religion. This year (2011) marks the four-

⁸⁴ Hymn Number 143: *The Methodist Hymn-Book*. (Emphasis on ‘men’ mine.)

⁸⁵ See example: Hymn Number 822 – ‘Onward! Christian soldiers, marching as to war...’
The Methodist Hymn-Book.

hundredth anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible.⁸⁶ It is, therefore, acknowledged that at least four-hundred years of tradition needs to be deconstructed and recontextualised for today's usage – especially in the Southern African context.

4.2.1. Popular Methodist Hymns

“Methodism was born in song.”⁸⁷ Singing is an important part of worship in the MCSA and Charles Wesley, the brother of John Wesley – who originally founded a ‘Methodist Society’ within the Anglican Church – wrote hundreds of hymns, which are published in several denominations’ hymnals. Although socially aware and deeply spiritual, many of the old hymn-writers were products of their time. The English of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and continuing through to the Twentieth Centuries CE was distinctly male-dominant. Perhaps in these times our understanding of social awareness has changed. Being gender inclusive in our language is one important way of acknowledging the worth of women and children in the face of a church tradition that has excluded them for centuries. Some modern-day hymn-writers do pay attention to inclusive language but for many the *status quo* remains. Excerpts from the following four hymns, from *The Methodist Hymn-Book*, are hymns that Methodists sing regularly:

Hymn Number 116 Hymn-writer: Charles Sylvester Horne (1865-1914)

1. Sing we the **King** who is coming to reign,
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain,
Life and salvation **His** empire shall bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is **King**.

Refrain:

*Come let us sing: Praise to our **King**,
Jesus our **King**, Jesus our **King**:
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our **King**.*

2. All **men** shall dwell in **His** marvellous light,
Races long severed **His** love shall unite,
Justice and truth from **His** sceptre shall spring,
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is **King**.

(Emphasis mine.)

⁸⁶ ‘Celebrating the Bible in English - KJV 1611-2011’ – www.biblesociety.co.za
[Accessed 10 August 2011].

⁸⁷ See the preface to *The Methodist Hymn-Book*. MCO, London 1933 (30th Edition – 1963:v).

Hymns of praise to Christ propose a challenge when transcribing hymns into gender inclusive language as historically Jesus was a man. However, the Christ of God, in the post-Resurrection concept is neither male nor female but Spirit. This hymn focuses on the ‘Kingdom of God’ and draws on imagery of war and peace. In the second verse all people are referred to as ‘men’. The terms for God, used in subsequent verses, are ‘Father’ and ‘Lord’ – ‘God’ is not used at all.

Hymn Number 313 Hymn-writer: Frances Jane van Alstyne (1820-1915)

1. To God be the glory, great things **he** hath done!
So loved **he** the world that **he** gave us **his Son**,
who yielded **his** life an atonement for sin,
and opened the lifegate that all may go in.

Refrain:

*Praise **the Lord**, praise **the Lord**,
let the earth hear **his** voice!
Praise **the Lord**, praise **the Lord**,
let the people rejoice!
O come to the **Father** through Jesus **the Son**,
and give **him** the glory, great things **he** hath done!*

(Emphasis mine.)

This very popular hymn is probably one of the best-known English hymns – most English speaking Methodists know at least the first verse and the refrain by heart. This is a praise hymn and both God and Christ are referred to as ‘he’. The concept of a ‘perfect’ hereafter is espoused in this hymn and its theology is simplistic.

Hymn Number 75 Hymn-writer: Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

1. **Father**, whose everlasting love
Thy only **Son** for sinners gave,
Whose grace to all did freely move,
And sent him down a world to save;
2. Help us thy mercy to extol,
Immense, unfathom’d, unconfi’n’d;
To praise the Lamb who died for all,
The general Saviour of **mankind**.
4. Jesus hath said, we all shall hope;
Preventing grace for all is free:
“And I, if I be lifted up,
I will draw all **men** unto me.”

(Emphasis mine.)

This is one of Charles Wesley's hymns and immediately we discover depth in theology and beautiful poetry. God is male and 'Father' for Charles Wesley and the analogies he uses for people are also male. He does promote the traditionally Methodist theology that salvation is for 'all'.

Hymn Number: 377 Hymn-writer: Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

1. How can a sinner know,
His sins on earth forgiven?
How can my gracious Saviour show,
My name inscribed in heaven?
What we have felt and seen,
With confidence we tell;
And publish to the **sons of men**
The signs infallible.

(Emphasis mine.)

This well-known Wesleyan hymn uses only the male pronoun to refer to 'all' in the first verse – this was the custom in the 18th Century CE. Feminist theologians have suggested simple amendments to exclusive language so that all people may feel included. An example of how a verse from the hymn above could be amended is as follows:

How **then can sinners** know?
Their sins on earth forgiven
How can **our** gracious Saviour show,
Our names inscribed in heaven?
What we have felt and seen,
With confidence we tell;
And publish to **humanity**
The signs infallible.

(Transcription and emphasis mine.)

Copyright needs to be investigated but many hymns are in the public domain and obtaining permission for slight changes is usually not a problem. Feminist perspectives are recognised and gender justice is an essential aspect of social justice. African languages are fortunate in that they are less gender specific. However, the term for God used in African hymns, is often 'Father' (*Baba* in isiZulu) even though the term *Nkosi* (Chief) is gender neutral. Although, in theory *Nkosi* could be used for a woman, it is primarily used for a male tribal chief.

Hymns like ‘Dear Lord and Father of mankind’⁸⁸ are great hymns but women need to do ‘spiritual gymnastics’⁸⁹ when singing them. It is deeply respectful to sing ‘Dear God, Creator of humankind’ and still retain the metre and the poetry. Some hymn-writers have written new verses for hymns with verses that are too difficult to make inclusive by editing. One of the merits of making hymns inclusive of gender and of images for God is that it raises the awareness of the congregation that the hymns are exclusive. Another positive aspect is that many women then feel included and as though they belong. I say ‘many women’ since many women think it is petty to believe ‘mankind’ does not include women but many of them would work hard for a woman’s right to protection at home – another gender justice issue. Some women do not yet recognise linguistic gender injustice in the Church and they would be irritated if anyone changed the words of the hymns or the liturgies, to which we now turn.

4.2.2. Methodist Liturgies

Although the Methodist Church is less liturgical than the Anglo-Catholic tradition, it does follow liturgies for special services and for celebrating the two Protestant Sacraments; Baptism and Holy Communion. Orders of service are provided in *The Methodist Service Book* for Baptism; A Sunday Service (without Holy Communion); Holy Communion; The Covenant Service; The Marriage Service; The Burial or Cremation of the Dead and The Ordination of Ministers. The following excerpts from these liturgies are examples of how they exclude women:

Baptism – As Baptism is the Christian ritual at which a child is named, it is usually a family celebration. It is the first liturgy in the Service Book (pA1) as it is also viewed, together with Confirmation, as the Sacrament for entry into the Church.

By Baptism we receive this child into the congregation of Christ’s flock, and we pray that *he* may not be ashamed to hold fast the faith of Christ crucified, to fight against evil, and to persevere as Christ’s faithful soldier and servant to *his* life’s end. **Amen**

I give you this sign, for you now belong to Christ, the light of the world.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may ever see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

(This is a response and therefore in bold type– the underlined emphasis is mine.)

⁸⁸ Hymn Number 669 in *The Methodist Hymn-Book*.

⁸⁹ A term Gina (one of the participants) uses in her story to describe her emotions during a service of worship when she is expected to sing a hymn about being ‘a son of God’ or respond in a liturgy using exclusive gender language.

This response by the congregation is both exclusive of women as well as excluding any feminine image of God in the Church. This is confirmed in all the prayers and the creeds in the Baptism liturgy, as they too, address God as ‘Father’. In a spiritual ritual where the mother usually plays a particularly vital role, she is not recognised by the Church.

Holy Communion – this Sacrament is the most celebrated ritual in the MCSA. Some congregations celebrate Holy Communion every Sunday and others, at least once a month. This liturgy remembers and re-enacts the ritual of Jesus’ last meal, a Jewish Passover meal, with the disciples before the Crucifixion. It is also the most difficult liturgy to make inclusive – in its image of God – as the biblical story of the Crucifixion portrays Jesus as a man. Apart from that aspect, the liturgy refers to God as ‘Father’ and the closing prayers are as follows:

Let us pray,
We thank you, Lord,
that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
prepared for all mankind. Amen

The blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, remain with you always.
Amen

(The underlined emphasis is mine.)

Many people are attached to the words of the liturgy and if one changes ‘Lord’ to ‘God’ they feel offended. There is merit in making these liturgies inclusive because when the liturgy is inclusive it might be expected that the practices in the Church would also be inclusive. The following poem by Steve Taylor⁹⁰ is an example of what we hope for in the Church:

We find ourselves today gathered in a circle
equal
in a flow of love

We find in our centre a table
circular

⁹⁰ <<http://www.emergentkiwi.org.nz/archive/this-table-remakes-us-a-creationary-communion-introduction/>>
[Accessed 23 November 2011].

And a loaf of bread
round

And a cup
circular

This table has remade us
changed the way we sit
changed the way we relate
as equals, in a flow of love

One of the additional prayers in the ‘Sunday Service’ (‘D’ on pB30) is an example of what to avoid:

Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world:

Establish justice and peace among all men.

(The underlined emphasis is mine.)

This prayer is addressing a social need but in their response, the congregation is ignoring more than half the population. It is necessary to put some effort into revising our hymns and liturgies and it would behove the DEWCOM⁹¹ to consider the presence of women and children in the Church.

The emergence of African feminist theological perspectives, which challenge the male-dominant tradition and perception of God in Africa, also calls people to read the Bible within the context of postcolonialism. Musa Dube (2004:115) asks the following question in chapter five of the book *Grant Me Justice! – HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible*: “How would such a story read from the multiple levels of postcolonial, feminist and HIV/AIDS perspectives?” In this chapter, she examines some of the critical questions with regard to a biblical narrative and the perspectives within which the story is read or retold.

Language and its cultural connotations influence the ways in which people perceive a story, a situation and the world as a whole. This supports the notion that careful deconstruction and recontextualisation are necessary when reading the Bible. The story of the healing of Jairus’ daughter⁹² has become a key passage for African women theologians. According to Dube’s (2004:115ff) reinterpretation of this story, African women are also being invited to respond to ‘*Talitha Cum!*’ (meaning ‘Little girl, get up!’). Dube (2004:118) draws a poignant analogy between the little girl and African women and refers

⁹¹ Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee.

⁹² See the Bible - Mark 5:21-43.

to the people who were amazed when the little girl “got up and began to walk about” (in verse 42 of the passage) – in both cases, after being healed of their ‘diseases’ and resurrected from their ‘death’. Liturgies in the Church could, therefore, be designed to include women and men and also children. Women are worthy of participating in the rituals as well as officiating at the altar. The MCSA’s liturgies could also be de-colonised in order to reflect an authentically Southern African tradition rather than perpetuating the tradition of its British heritage.

Feminist theologians, from various cultural and ethnic traditions, continue to promote the study and praxis of contextual theology. Oduyoye (2001:48 and 49) discusses ‘Theo-Logos’ as follows:

Theology, God-talk, is about God, the divine, the sacred. Hence, all that is, is related to this unique source of being. Derived from this is the strong focus on contextual studies. The study of African Religion, the sociopolitical, economic and cultural experiences are all relevant to the sacred. ...

Affirming the Bible as a source for God-word brings women into the arena of biblical hermeneutics. In addition, African women have to ask: ‘Whose voice is the voice of the ancestors, the voice of tradition?’ and ‘Where is the voice for today coming from?’. ... African women theologians seek a way to the word that God speaks through and about the practice of religion. ...

The theology of the total depravity of humanity is not in African Religion and has not taken root among African women even though certain types of Christian theology insist on it. African women see God at work and they recognize humans who collaborate with this work.

Here the voice of tradition and the voice of God are questioned. African women theologians recognise that both women and men are part of humanity and so the voice of the ancestors cannot only be a male voice. Oduyoye also challenges the aspects of Christian theology that deny the validity of African religion.

The old English and Western cultural tradition, which viewed the word ‘man’ to be inclusive of ‘woman’ too, is no longer acceptable because knowledge, experience and human reason have influenced theology, along with the natural and the physical sciences, as well as ethics and social justice. Recognising this as a valid point, Susan Rakoczy (2004:208) asks the question “What went wrong?” in her book *In Her Name – Women Doing Theology*. Rakoczy (2004) underlines the reality that the minimising of women’s experience is related to the language intentionally perpetuated by patriarchy. Whilst continuing the debate on excluding or including women, she begins to answer her own question as follows:

One insight is shown in the contrasting words for “church”. The first biblical term was *ekklesia*, which means “assembly” and connotes the sense of a community gathered together in the name of the risen Christ, a discipleship of equals. But the preferred word began to be *kyriakos*, which means “belonging to the Lord” but also “belonging to the patriarch, the master” (Rakoczy 2004:208).

This argument supports the reason why the term ‘Lord’ for both Christ and God remains the most popular and most often used during worship – in liturgy and extemporaneous prayer in church as well as in people’s personal devotions and conversations about God.

Over and above the slights of exclusive language and perceived cultural and racial supremacy, the ‘Christian Creedal Statements’⁹³ pose other threats to inclusive ecclesiological practices in the Church. These creeds⁹⁴ emphasise the exclusive maleness of God in “his fatherhood” and affirm Jesus as “the son” of God, who came down from heaven “for us men, and for our salvation”. According to feminist ecclesiology, these creedal statements are problematic, as expounded upon in section 2.1.

The contemplative theologian, Richard Rohr (1999:133), says in his book *Everything Belongs*: “It is a mystery we are dipped into”. He does argue for the mystery of faith to be preserved but he also teaches that spirituality should not be obscured by creeds and dogma. Rohr, himself a Roman Catholic priest urges his readers to open their minds to new possibilities and opportunities within the Church. It is a source of great pain for many Roman Catholics that the door to ordination remains shut for women.⁹⁵

The lack of gender sensitive language, used in meetings and from the pulpit, in the MCSA is related to Rakoczy’s argument of intentional male-dominant language perpetuated by patriarchy. Local Methodist Societies are urged by Conference, through ‘The Statement on Women’,⁹⁶ to engage in gender education, especially congregations that have not had women ministers serve there previously, but few leaders arrange for a gender workshop for their members or design and implement a gender policy for their church. I speak more specifically for my own District, where gender sensitivity is no longer a primary concern. This District’s previous Bishop was a woman, who introduced gender

⁹³ Two important ones are the Nicene and the Apostle’s Creeds.

⁹⁴ Quoted on the inside front cover and first page of the Methodist Hymn-Book.

⁹⁵ See the online campaign for the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church – <http://www.womenpriests.org/index.asp> [Accessed 6 November 2011].

⁹⁶ Excerpt from ‘The Statement on Women’: *Laws and Discipline*, p233. See 3.1.2

sensitivity, but as soon as she went out of office the emphasis on gender equality faded and balanced representivity received only the minimum attention.

Few ministers, throughout the Connexion, are committed to gender inclusive language and no clause has been added to the *Laws and Discipline* of the MCSA, to ensure that gender equality becomes mandatory in this church. Therefore, congregations cannot yet be held accountable for their sexist and exclusive ecclesiological practices as a clause to this effect does not exist. The only gender policy that the MCSA promotes is the one which ‘urges’ all sectors of the church to be mindful of balanced representation.⁹⁷ Until a clause is formally enshrined in the *Laws and Discipline* of the MCSA, gender inclusive liturgical language will remain merely a hope and those who experience gender marginalisation will have no foundation on which to base their objections.

Even when transformation has occurred, it has often not been positive. Some congregations have embraced a more conservative and legalistic approach to theology and worship and have placed even further limits on women’s involvement in leadership in the MCSA. With this in mind, one of the most radical changes, which congregations seem to resist fiercely, is that of inclusive liturgies and hymns.⁹⁸ The journey towards the language of inclusion is one of the most arduous in the feminist theological journey. Here I speak from a Western perspective, as the challenges in an African feminist theological journey might be different. Changing exclusive language when reading from the Bible or a liturgy is not received well by many members in the MCSA. When asking a congregation to sing ‘all’ instead of ‘men’ in a hymn, I am often met with cold resistance. The issue of gender education is raised once more. If there had been an efficient programme in place, since 1999, when the Conference recommended that inclusive language be introduced in liturgies, hymns and language used in the pulpit, then this might not be such a huge problem more than ten years after that recommendation. However, the gap between policy and practice is once again demonstrated.

In response to Oduyoye’s earlier comments about the Church being a community and fostering *koinonia*, Jaworski (1996:192) suggests

⁹⁷ See the Methodist Yearbook (1999/2000:174).

⁹⁸ The writer’s own experience bears witness to the reluctance of an inner city congregation to embrace inclusive language hymns and liturgies, even though these were introduced sensitively and creatively.

... that when our way of *being* shifts, our sense of identity shifts, and we see ourselves as connected to one another and to the whole universe. In this state, we accept others as legitimate beings, no matter what their race, gender, or national origin may be.

African women theologians are calling the Church back to its roots, reminding the Church of its calling to be Christ in the world.

Another area in which a gap between policy and practice exists is in the area of attitudes and practise toward women in the ministry in the MCSA.

4.3. Unjust Practices toward Women in Ministry within the MCSA

Does the MCSA preach mere existence or transformation for women?

Hargreaves (2005:3) writes the following affirming tribute to Sister Dorothy Hincksman Farrar, a pioneer Deaconess in Britain:

In 1952, the year in which Dorothy Farrar served as Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, The Wesley Deaconess Order, the largest deaconess order in the country, reported a 20 per cent increase in membership in the seven years since 1945.

South African women at first had to belong to the British Deaconess Order until the South African Deaconess Order was established in 1944. At that time deaconesses had to be single women and if they married they had to resign from the Order. In 1969, this rule was amended and married women were allowed to either remain in the Order after marriage or to candidate to join the Order, as a married woman. A list of the deaconesses who served in the MCSA from 1944 to 1988 is recorded in the book *Conquerors Through Christ – The Methodist Deaconess in South Africa* by Constance Oosthuizen (1990:83-88). Oosthuizen (1990:83-88) records that out of the twenty-one deaconesses nine had had to resign from the Order when they chose to marry, four candidate for the ordained ministry to Word and Sacrament, once they were allowed to do so after 1975, and one returned as a married woman when she was eventually permitted to do so.

When considering the ordination of women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it is interesting to note that the Congregational Union of Southern Africa⁹⁹ ordained women as early as 1930. However, they were only receiving White women into the ministry at that time. The first Black woman to be ordained in the newly established (1997) United Congregational Church in Southern Africa was Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa and this service only took place in Richmond on the 12th February 2000. Victory had entered the Adams Theological School in 1954 when she was twenty-seven years old. Phiri (2002:128,132,133) tells Victory's story, of which I share a brief excerpt:

First application for ordination – 1968

When the London Missionary Society, the Bantu Congregational Church of the American Board Mission and the Congregational Union of South Africa united to become the United Congregational Church of South Africa, I lost my job as a Christian worker in 1968. ...

The Meaning of Ordination

Ten ministers from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa and the Anglican Church came to my ordination. There were very few people who attended the ordination because it was not widely publicized by the regional office. Mpaphala, Groutville, Magoda and Ndaleni congregations could have all come here to celebrate with me as I was the first African woman of the United Congregational Church in South Africa to be ordained. ...

I am not the kind of a person who would like to be advertised. But this is important for younger woman to know that there is a possibility for them. What I mean is that some men are undermining the ordination of women. They still do not want to see Black women in ministry. May I tell you of what one of the ministers said when we were at a meeting? He stood up and said 'I really don't know what is wrong with women. They asked to be ordained and that was given to them. Now they ask to be representatives of women organization at the Central Committee. I don't know what is wrong with women. They just want to take the church away from us.' That is exactly what they think. I know that during the time when women were Christian Education workers, the men did not like it either.

Although I am ordained now, I am still facing problems. Ordination did not solve my problems. The first problem is that I still have to work under a male minister. It seems to me that my appointment is still the same as Christian Education worker. I am still not in charge. Yet the two ministers who are supposed to look after me do not come to see what I am doing.

⁹⁹ A history of Congregationalism in Southern Africa, *The Harvest and the Hope* (Published in 1970 by the UCCA), in writing about the growth of the church in the new northern Johannesburg suburban areas says: "The growth has been remarkable, particularly at St Stephen's Church, due mainly to the energetic and versatile leadership of Dr Unez Smuts who offers a preaching, teaching and healing ministry. The influence of which is felt far beyond Congregationalism." (See page 152) – This is a quote from an e-mail I received from Rev Bernard Spong of the United Congregational Church on 28 October 2011.

Victory's story is an example of both race and gender marginalisation. She acknowledges that even though she is ordained, she is 'still not in charge'.

After waiting eight years from the time she experienced her call to the ministry, Constance Oosthuizen too was finally accepted 'on trial' for the Methodist ordained ministry to Word and Sacrament in 1975, being ordained the following year. Reviewing the historical perspective of the MCSA gives some clear pointers on the issues of justice and reconciliation.

The African proverb 'until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter' rings true in the Methodist context in Southern Africa. The colonial era affected Southern African Methodism directly as the first missionaries and early ministers were sent to Southern Africa from England or even if they had been born here many of them had to go to England for their ministerial training up until 1942. Both ministers and deaconesses received their academic and pastoral training in the Wesleyan tradition in England. Independent local ministerial training, in the MCSA, was introduced comparatively recently in the history of this church and even then (in the 1950s and 1960s) ministers were still being sent to Southern Africa from England to supplement the local contingent, which was too small to meet the needs of the Methodist people in Southern Africa.

Edward Schillebeeckx (1987:10), in *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, writes that the

Facts only become history within a framework of meaning, in a tradition or interpreted facts. This is the first level of meaning: human liberation is achieved and also experienced there. Within a religious tradition of experience or belief in God that human element of liberation is interpreted on a second level of meaning: in relation to God. Believers then confess that God has brought about deliverance in and through human beings. The secular event becomes the material of the 'word of God'. In this sense revelation has a sacramental structure.

Women, if the implication of Schillebeeckx's argument is considered, have not then experienced any real liberation in the church. Inadvertently the Gospel writers have recorded how Jesus viewed and related to women but in practice the church universal has for the most part ignored many of those stories. What Jesus did in his dealings with a Samaritan and a Syro-Phoenician woman, what was said in his many parables about women and in his compassion for widows, reflects much more than mere story-telling.

Jesus challenged the *status quo* of his day and modelled how he believed everyone should treat women and have dealings with them.

Schillebeeckx (1987:47-48), when he talks about “experiences subject to the criticism of stories of suffering”, writes that

[a]lthough in any human life there are many experiences of meaning, it is nevertheless above all experiences of meaninglessness, of injustice and innocent suffering which *a priori* have a revelatory significance. It is a fact that both everyday and scientific experimental experiences owe much to unexpected happenings: to experiences of resistance and the intractability of the reality in which we live.

Schillebeeckx’s comments undergird the value of the resistance movements of the last century. Women’s suffrage, liberation, feminist, womanist and green peace movements have contributed to the exposure of injustice – injustices with regard to women, oppressed peoples, animals and the environment. In the MCSA women were, in principle, given an experience of ‘meaning’ as long as they related that meaning to the life and witness of the men in their family and in their church. Their personal identities often had to be developed within the women’s organisations or not at all. Only in very recent years have women been encouraged to serve in senior leadership positions in the church. I believe that part of the ‘work’ of feminist theological scholarship is to deconstruct and reconstruct the ‘history/her-story’ in Scripture, challenge an all-male view of God and defy the patriarchal assumption that when the Bible talks about ‘man’ that woman is included.

Mutual accountability and responsibility are what is called for, and the hope is that at every level of human development women and men will be encouraged in their quest towards wholeness and fulfilment in life. The section on women in the ordained ministry is one that is offered with disenchantment but also with hope for the future. The knowledge that the DEWCOM¹⁰⁰ of the MCSA is considering the paper entitled ‘We are Church – a Kindom of Priests’, presented by Professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza¹⁰¹ to the Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) Conference in Canada in July 2005, gives hope to Methodist women in the ministry.

¹⁰⁰ Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee.

¹⁰¹ See a list of papers – organised by the year presented.

<<http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/ordain.htm>> [Accessed 6 August 2011].

In August 2005, when the MCSA celebrated thirty years of women in the ordained ministry, the theme¹⁰² of the Conference was completely unrelated to this event! This is another example of marginalising women, whether clergy or laity. On questioning why this special event came and went almost unnoticed at the Annual Conference, the women were told that the Women in Ministry Committee should have submitted a resolution, reminding the Church of this anniversary. Men, however, need no committee to place their issues on the agenda of the Church, only women seem to.

At that time (2005) the MCSA had one woman Bishop, who served the Natal Coastal District. She presented a challenging Bible study in November 2004 at a Mission Congress, in which she challenged the church on the issue of ‘Violence against Women and Children’. She made a significant contribution to the church and to the wider community during her terms of office. Her District was run efficiently and she was a champion for Methodist women in the Connexion. She supported informal gatherings for the women in ministry from the wider Durban area and she served on the Connexional Women ministers’ Committee. Women ministers, who experience sexual harassment, still approach her for guidance and advice on how to deal with such a situation, even though she is no longer a Bishop. Her re-election, by an overwhelming majority, for a second and third term was proof that her effective leadership was appreciated and that she had her District’s full support.

This woman Bishop did not advertise the fact that her first term was extremely difficult but in small groups,¹⁰³ where she felt safe, she shared some of her pain and disillusionment with the male hierarchy of the MCSA. Her task had not been made easier for her because she is a woman. On the contrary, her performance seemed to be scrutinised more closely because of it.

If, looking at the bigger picture, so much ground seems to have been won for women and things sound so positive, then why is it still a reality that women ministers are being marginalised? Perhaps some other questions need to be asked first. How long does it take for people’s attitudes to change and for trust to be established? Here, in my opinion, is

¹⁰² Each Conference has a theme upon which Bible studies and key note addresses are based e.g. “Let the Flame Burn on!” (This was the Conference 2005 theme, with a reference to Pentecost).

¹⁰³ Here I refer to a Women in Ministry event, hosted by the Diakonia Council of Churches at the end of 2008.

where some of the problems lie. Many people, from every culture and tradition, within Southern Africa continue to want things to be just as they were in the past. The old saying, which many people use to avoid change: ‘We have never done it that way before, why should we start now?’ gives a clue to an important reason for the discrepancy between practice and policy in the MCSA. Some people might be happy, or at least comfortable, with the political changes in South Africa, but many are not yet ready to accept similar changes within the Church. A White male in a small town in the Free State told me that affirmative action may have taken away his authority, as a man, in his workplace but in his church and in his home he is still the boss. In my opinion that is the way he believes God ordained it to be. Needless to say, he felt he had no alternative but to forbid his wife from attending our feminist spirituality focus group. This group was created to support my empirical research for my Masters. If he did not do that, he believed his authority in his own home might also have been challenged.

Many women ministers have been rejected by congregations to whom they have been appointed and Bishops have had to make last minute changes to stations on the eve of their departure. A female minister seems more acceptable when she is a male minister’s ‘assistant’. Someone recently commented to a female colleague of mine that her ministry is not ‘the real thing’. These issues are tough ones, especially when one considers the pastoral load that many women ministers carry. According to reports, Synod orals, examination results and assignment marks, women ministers are definitely holding their own in their theological training and formation for the Methodist ministry – some women achieve outstanding results but that is not enough.

Because many married women ministers are able to offer their services to a disadvantaged congregation on a non-stipendiary basis, some Circuits and Societies have begun to take unfair advantage of such situations. There was a Connexional call on all Circuits to assess their lay leadership and clergy positions to promote a more equitable distribution of services in the Circuits.¹⁰⁴ I designed this assessment form in 2005 and it was hoped that this exercise would raise every Circuit’s awareness on this diversity justice issue. Unfortunately, few Circuits paid any attention to it.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix 4.

Another aspect of women in the ministry that is becoming more prevalent is clergy couples. I candidated for the ministry when my husband had already been in the ministry for twenty-eight years. This has had an impact on his ministry because I could no longer fulfil the role of ‘minister’s wife’ and this has caused some difficulty for us. I also cannot depend on my spouse’s support because he has his own congregation to pastor and administer.

This section will be incomplete without stating that there are vibrant congregations being led and served by successful and competent women ministers in the Connexion. Many women also work well in team ministries. A Church, which brings together both the masculine and feminine qualities in ministry, has the opportunity to explore what that means. Rohr and Martos (1996:155) write about ‘Doing and Being’ in *The Wild Man’s Journey* by emphasising what the commonly accepted masculine and feminine archetypes are and by showing how theologians have traditionally operated from within a distinctly feminine manner when they, like “Thomas Aquinas and other scholastics in the Middle Ages”, have been doing theology

... by sitting and reading, thinking and reasoning, seeing the logical connections between ideas and drawing conclusions from them. It was a very sedentary activity that took place not in the world of action but in a secluded seminary.

In their previous paragraph they suggest that it is usual that the “masculine style puts doing over being. It prefers action in the world to sitting back and thinking about it” (Rohr and Martos 1996:155). Opening the doors to female clergy, then, seems so right from this reflective perspective. An inherently different way of perceiving the world could become an asset for any congregation.

The stationing of women ministers in the MCSA and the failure to implement the gender policy that is supposed to ensure that “all structures within the Church should include at least 40% women” (Yearbook 1999/2000:174) are concerns. As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, these concerns would demand empirical research, in order to do justice to them but they cannot be ignored in this thesis. I, therefore, offer a short discussion, although acknowledging the need for further research in this field.

In the District where I am presently (2011) seconded to work at the Diakonia Council of Churches in Durban, I do not know of a single woman minister who has received an invitation to work in her Circuit. Some have received a subsequent invitation for a second

term but all were originally Conference appointments because these women found themselves at the foot of stations. I know of one Black woman minister who has been moved every year for the past five years because of difficulties related to her gender. She is presently hoping to receive an invitation to stay on in her current Circuit on the outskirts of the city of Durban. She indicated to me that her own experience as a woman minister, serving in a rural area, was very difficult. As this still seems to be a major concern for the MCSA in the rural areas, the need for gender education is crucial, yet it does not happen. As mentioned earlier, married women ministers are often expected to accept lower (or no) stipends or waive receiving a living or other allowance, which is part of the package for a male minister. Many women, including me, have offered our services to congregations that cannot afford the stipend of a minister and I do not wish to diminish this sacrificial gift of ministry. However, what is unjust is that this is becoming normative in many Circuits. They ‘employ’ a woman minister because she will cost them less. I relate an incident here from my own personal experience. I worked in a very poor congregation for two years and the Circuit was very grateful for my ministry there but stated clearly that they could not afford to pay me anything – not even a travel allowance. The township where I worked was approximately twenty kilometres from my home. As I had a daughter at university at the time, I negotiated another station with a neighbouring Circuit that could afford to pay me a small allowance. I subsequently left the township ministry after my two-year term. A short while afterwards my previous Circuit agreed to the part-time ministry of a male candidate for the ministry. He indicated to them that he could not work for no stipend so the Circuit found the money to pay him an allowance. It might be true that if I had insisted on an allowance that they might have found the money for me too, but I was not given that impression at the time. Incidents, such as these, are painful for women in the ministry.

The absence of a gender budget to provide training for churches in order to comply with the directive of **The Statement on Women** in the MCSA’s Yearbook, which urges that “the church should play a meaningful role in preparing women through education for elections and voting” (Yearbook 1999/2000:174), is one more way in which the MCSA pays lip service to its gender policy. The experiences of women ministers, especially in rural areas, alert us to the need for gender education in the MCSA but their experiences are not the only concerns in the area of gender injustice and lack of education in this church.

Both women and men traditionally vote for men for leadership positions in the MCSA and a strong influence is the image of God, which has been instilled in its membership through the patriarchal system. Gender education, therefore, ideally needs to be an all-embracing campaign, which starts with preschool and goes into adult education. People need to learn to read the Bible from a new perspective, new non-hierarchical structures of governance in the MCSA need to be introduced and resource material needs to be published to help congregations in this new journey. Thorough attention needs to be given to this concern from every sector of the MCSA – women and men’s organisations, youth and children’s ministries, and the leadership. I believe this clause in the Yearbook needs to be expanded because not only women need to be prepared, but men, children and young people too.

While the above section has dealt with women in the ministry of the church, women also occupy other specific spaces within the church. One of these significant spaces has been that of the women’s organisations – the *Manyanos*. It is to these organisations that the discussion now turns.

4.4. Persistent Patriarchy within the Women’s Organisations of the MCSA

The women’s organisations’ Constitutions are in line with the MCSA’s *Laws and Discipline*. In the MCSA the women’s organisations play a vital role in the life of the church. Below I will introduce these various organisations and give a brief background to each of them:

- The Women’s *Manyano* – this organisation was established by and for ‘Black’ women in the MCSA. It was founded on 7 December 1907 at a Convention in Verdriet, Dundee, KwaZulu-Natal.¹⁰⁵ The uniform has symbolic spiritual meaning, even though it was originally based on the military uniform of the British soldiers. They wear black shoes, black stockings and a black skirt, which all symbolise the sin of humanity. Fully ‘bloused’ (the term used when a member is inducted into the organisation) *Manyano* members wear a red blouse with red buttons and a red belt, which all symbolise the blood of Christ, shed on the Cross for the salvation of humanity, and the uniform is completed with a white collar that is clasped in the front with the Women’s *Manyano* membership pin and a white hat, which both symbolise the purity that comes through the blood of Christ. A minister’s wife wears a red cape over her blouse to signify her status as the president of the branch and the wife of the minister. The uniform sets this women’s organisation apart from the other women’s

¹⁰⁵ See the unpublished Masters Thesis of Fanie S. Mkhwanazi, entitled ‘The mission and the role of the Women’s *Manyano* movement in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa’. UDW: 2001.

organisations in the MCSA as they are the only ones to wear a uniform. The uniform is one of its trademarks and the Women's *Manyano* ascribes enormous importance to it and it is deeply respected by the members. Holness (1997:23) suggests that it was "really a culminating of a birthing process across the country, spanning several years" of planning. The Women's *Manyano* responded contextually "in the face of the failure of many missionaries to understand the cultural and emotional needs of African converts" (Holness 1997:23). This organisation is arguably the biggest church organisation in the MCSA and continues to make a vital contribution to the life of the Church. The Women's *Manyano* is an organisation for married women. A 'daughter' organisation, the Young Women's *Manyano*, was established for unmarried women. Although they have recently obtained more autonomy, the Young Women's *Manyano* operated under the wing of the Women's *Manyano* for many years.

An excerpt from the MCSA's web page:

Our organisation – The Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union as it appears on our pin – is commonly known as the Women's *Manyano*. Women with full membership of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa are eligible for membership within the organisation. Our current membership Connexionally stands at a total of 62,000 members, who are all committed to fulfilling the common vision of the organisation. Our vision for the period 2008-2011 is "Dealing with the Scourge of Women and Child abuse". In line with our theme, our activities have been centred on bringing hope and a future for women and children in distress. We aim to generate funds for missionary work and to encourage a missionary spirit among our people for the upliftment of those in need within our communities. We believe in, and work towards, achieving the global Millennium Developmental Goals, and we also continue to remember, support and pray for all who are infected and affected by HIV and Aids [sic]. Ultimately, all of our efforts are to the service and glory of God, as well as for the extension of His [sic] kingdom [sic] on earth. Postal Address: PO Box 562, Alice, 5700, Republic of South Africa.
Telephone: +27 40 653 2220
Facsimile: +27 40 653 1718¹⁰⁶

- The Women's Association – this organisation was established by and for the so called 'Coloured' women of the MCSA during the *Apartheid* years. Together with the Women's Fellowship (in Namibia) they are among the smaller organisations in the MCSA. During the 1980s and 1990s, when the male hierarchy of the MCSA proposed an amalgamation of the three South African women's organisations, the Women's Association raised their objections strongly. I was a member of a District Joint Committee¹⁰⁷ during this period of

¹⁰⁶ <<http://www.methodist.org.za/organisations/womens-manyano>> [Accessed 14 October 2011].

¹⁰⁷ District Presidents of the three South African Methodist women's organisations had been called together by the Bishop of each district into a committee to work towards amalgamation. This initiative did not succeed, even though these joint committees continued to meet for networking and socialising between Methodist women.

our church's story and it was clear that the male hierarchy did not understand the significance these different women's organisations had for the women in this church. (It is interesting to note that the Men's League – a White men's organisation – and the Young Men's Guild [YMG] – a Black men's organisation – were not urged to amalgamate.) This organisation is strongest in the Western Cape and in Gauteng and it has never had a branch in KwaZulu-Natal. The Women's Association has been actively involved in the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women and members have served on the Area and World Committees of this international body. The Connexional Committee encourages local participation in World Federation Day activities throughout the Connexion.

An excerpt from the MCSA's web page:

The mandate of the Women's Association is to know Christ and make Him known through:

- Mission and evangelism;
- Social and moral care in our communities and society at large;
- The empowerment of our women within the church and secular context;
- To give practical assistance in our societies.

Our membership is currently 1,910 and in decline, which is a challenge for our organisation. During our last Conference in October 2010, resolutions were tabled to try and address the issue.¹⁰⁸

- The Women's Fellowship – this organisation was established by and for the women in Namibia, especially as membership of the Women's Association proved too complicated once Namibia had become an independent country. This is a very small organisation but they are determined to grow in numbers. The Women's Fellowship sent a delegation to several Connexional Women's Consultations, hosted by the Methodist Women's Network. The Methodist Women's Network has unfortunately ceased to exist because of lack of support from the MCSA.

An excerpt from the MCSA's web page:

The general mandate of the organisation is:

- The unification of women's participation in the broader church;
- The promotion of evangelism at Circuit and Society level;
- To encourage women of all ages to join the fellowship;
- To empower women.

The Fellowship consists of ten branches, spread over the District. In total, we have 124 members and new branches will be opening soon.

Postal Address: P.O. Box 4689, Rehoboth, Namibia.

Telephone: +264 62 52 2018

Facsimile: +264 62 52 4948¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ <<http://www.methodist.org.za/organisations/womens-association>> [Accessed 14 October 2011].

¹⁰⁹ <<http://www.methodist.org.za/organisations/womens-fellowship>> [Accessed 14 October 2011].

- The Women's Auxiliary – this organisation was established primarily for the 'White' women in the Connexion. Attwell (1997:3-7) records the beginnings of this organisation, which was started in 1907 by the Reverend William M. Allcock, in Berea, Johannesburg. Between 1907 and 1916 several small groups of women were organised and in 1915 a committee of interested women was formed in order to prepare for the first Women's Annual Conference, which was held during Synod 1916. Attwell (1997:5) records that in 1917 the second Women's Annual Conference was held. A busy year ensued. A Constitution was drawn up. Letters were sent to all ministers in the District asking for information about existing women's groups. It was discovered that there were twenty-nine, with a combined membership of 800.

Two main bodies were established – “one in the Transvaal” (as Gauteng was then known), “which was then a Missionary District of British Methodism, and the other the rest of South Africa which has its own autonomous Conference. Each began independently of the other” (Attwell 1997:3-4). The Conference of 1916 approved the women's committee's report and the Women's Auxiliary was launched. The first name chosen was 'The Guild of the Wesleyan Methodist Women of South Africa' but in 1917 the name was changed to 'The Wesleyan Methodist Women's Auxiliary'. Attwell (1997:9) records the following statement, which formed part of the Annual Report of the Women's Auxiliary in 1946:

The members of the 1946 Annual Meetings of the Women's Auxiliary approve the principle of admitting women into the ordained ministry of the Methodist Church of South Africa.

The Women's Auxiliary had recommended ordination of women thirty years before the MCSA finally ordained the first woman. In KwaZulu-Natal, even before 1994, when *Apartheid* was officially abolished, Indian and Coloured women were encouraged to join the Women's Auxiliary, as there was no Women's Association in the District. The Women's Auxiliary members fulfil many pastoral care functions in the MCSA. Branches often take responsibility for funeral teas, arranging flowers, organising crèche facilities for worship services and pastoral care for mothers with young children.

Some branches are active in social justice programmes and in the running of feeding schemes and other outreach projects. The Women's Auxiliary was originally responsible for the training and pastoral care of Biblewomen.¹¹⁰ District Biblewomen Secretaries organised their courses and monitored their employment conditions. During my term of office as District President of the Women's Auxiliary, I discovered that many Biblewomen suffered abuse from their ministers

¹¹⁰ A Methodist Biblewoman wears a royal blue uniform with a white collar and white hat. She is trained in pastoral care and basic biblical studies. Biblewomen assist ministers, especially by visiting the elderly and the sick and by teaching in the Sunday School. They are often employed on a part-time basis and they receive a small stipend. Some Biblewomen do become local preachers. They belong to the Order of Biblewomen and Evangelists of the MCSA – the term 'Biblewoman' has also been used by other denominations.

and, what was even worse, from their ministers' wives. Biblewomen were often forced to do domestic work in the manse even though that was not in their job description. Eventually the Church took responsibility for the Biblewomen and their order was merged with that of the Evangelists and their working conditions are now monitored by the MCSA rather than by the Women's Auxiliary, which has little power to address issues of injustice. Together with the other women's organisations in the MCSA, the women usually ensure that the mundane tasks in the churches are taken care of.

An excerpt from the MCSA's web page:

The Women's Auxiliary was established in the early 1900s, with the mandate, "To advise the various associations as to the best ways of helping the womanhood of the Church to reach the highest and the best character and service".

The first Women's Annual Conference recorded was held on Saturday 26 June 1915. Our Aim is also our Motto – "To Know Christ and Make Him Known" and our goals include the extension of the kingdom [sic] of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit by building up and spiritually revitalising women in societies, engaging in and encouraging evangelical outreach, being part of the ministry and mission of the Church, keeping postal contact with women unable to attend regular branch meetings and encouraging involvement in District and Connexional joint projects.

There are approximately 4,600 Women's Auxiliary members.¹¹¹

All the Methodist women's organisations make valuable contributions to the life of the denomination, throughout the Connexion and today all the women's organisation of the MCSA are open to anyone, regardless of race. However, each has its own distinctive features and members enjoy their own organisation's autonomy. Without these organisations, the MCSA would indeed be poorer – both financially as well as spiritually.

In my experience in the MCSA the president of the Women's *Manyano* is the minister's wife and the male minister remains its honorary president. The following excerpt of selected points from the *Constitution of the Women's Manyano* (pp17-18) indicate the options open to a Branch when electing a Committee:

9. BRANCH ORGANISATION:

9.3 Each Sub-Branch of the Manyano shall be managed by a local Committee consisting of:

- The Chairwoman, who shall be the wife of the Resident Minister, being a member of the Manyano.
- Five (5) members of the Manyano elected by the Sub-Branch in its Annual General Meeting for a three (3) year term. Save for the wife of the Resident Minister, any one Office Bearer of the Sub-Branch may be

¹¹¹ <<http://www.methodist.org.za/organisations/womens-auxiliary>> [Accessed 14 October 2011].

re-elected for one further three (3) year term only, and shall not thereafter be eligible for re-election.

9.4 The Branch of the Manyano shall be managed by a Branch Executive Committee consisting of:

- The wife of the local Minister, being a member of the Manyano, shall be the Chairwoman of the Branch, and all other Minister's wives who worship in the same Society shall also form part of the Branch Executive Committee provided that they are members of the Manyano.

9.5 Should there be no local Minister's wife who is a member of the Manyano, the Branch Chairwoman shall be appointed by the Circuit Manyano Executive Committee in consultation with the Superintendent Minister of the Circuit. The wife of an Evangelist¹¹² may also be appointed as the Chairwoman of a Branch.

As Holness (1997:29) indicates

[t]he 1995 Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa reached a decision that the minister's wife is no longer automatically president, and the Manyano groups have been instructed to democratise. This injunction has to date been largely ignored.

Even though male ministers were responsible for encouraging women to form their own organisations, the hierarchy still wishes to exercise some control over what the women do. Oduyoye (2009:31) argues that

... it is clear that as long as women's activities are carried out for themselves, or serve the church's hospitality needs, or give the church a charitable face vis-à-vis the wider society, they are accepted as non-threatening to the status quo of the patriarchal ethos of the church. However, women theologians and many others see women beyond these activities.

What remains problematic, at least in the MCSA, is it appears the majority of the members of the women's organisations do not yet 'see women beyond these activities'. The exclusive hierarchical church structures, which have governed the Church for centuries, guide the women's organisations because they are enshrined in the MCSA as sacred. These patriarchal structures are supported by our Judaeo-Christian Scriptures and many church members, including women, find it offensive when a woman minister (or anyone) changes the exclusive language when reading a passage from the Bible.

¹¹² A person trained in preaching and pastoral care and a member of the Order of Evangelists and Biblewomen in the MCSA – this position is now open to both women and men.

4.5. The Ordinary Woman in the MCSA

In the previous section I have examined some of the aspects of the four women's organisations within the MCSA and although a large percentage of female members of the MCSA does belong to the women's organisations, many women do not. It would then be amiss not to provide space to discuss the options open to the ordinary woman in the pew in the MCSA. The reasons some women do not join the women's organisations are varied. For some the reason would be the relevance of the women's organisations to their personal understanding of being church. Yet for others it might simply be that they do not have the time that commitment to a woman's organisation demands. However, lay women like Gina, whose story will be told in chapter five, need to have a voice in the Church.

Women are eligible to be elected to leadership positions in the Church regardless to whether they belong to a woman's organisation or not. They can respond to a call to preach and they can be a Bible study group or 'Class Meeting'¹¹³ leader. On paper, therefore, the ordinary woman in the pew has equal opportunities to the ordinary man in the pew. In practice, however, the majority of Society leaders remain men and the majority of Sunday School teachers remain women.

4.6. Reflections and Analysis

To summarise this chapter it is clear that the Church, including the MCSA, has a patriarchal heritage in terms of organisation, practice and in some cases even in some policies. Its earliest formal organisation, according to the creeds and manuscripts of the Bible and other documents, has been according to this system, which places 'the father' at the helm in every sphere of life. Symbolically, in the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope is 'the father' of the Church and every local parish has its own 'father' (in the person of the priest). Every home should revere 'the father' as the head of the home and each married woman should view her husband as the 'head of his wife'.¹¹⁴

It is very difficult to fully reconstruct the origins of the early Christian Church because much of the literature scholars base their historical views on were recorded from a patriarchal bias. The Bible provides narratives in the Gospels but these are very seldom

¹¹³ John Wesley's term for the small groups into which all members were placed – traditionally Black congregations in the MCSA still use this term for the small groups in their churches.

¹¹⁴ See the Bible: Ephesians 5:23.

referred to by Paul, who was the missionary largely responsible for spreading the Christian faith throughout the Roman world of the first century CE. Schüssler Fiorenza (1983/1994:100-101), drawing attention to the fact that two movements originally developed in the period immediately after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, explains that

[a]s a religious missionary movement the Christian movement intruded into the dominant patriarchal cultural-religious ethos of Roman Hellenism, while, as an alternative Jewish renewal movement, the Jesus movement was in tension with the dominant patriarchal ethos of its own culture.

Although this movement was coordinated by faithful Jewish women and men, sections of the ‘Jesus Movement’ or ‘The People of The Way’, as they were also known, soon stopped restricting their membership to Jewish people. Gentiles were welcomed as full members without having to first convert to Judaism. Both the originally Jewish ‘Jesus Movement’ and the Gentile ‘Christian Movement’ claimed that “the reality signified by these two symbols¹¹⁵ is experientially available here and now in the work of Jesus Christ and his discipleship of equals” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983/1994:104).

Simply because Jesus, according to the Gospel writers, only appointed twelve ‘men’ to be disciples does not automatically exclude women from the priesthood. The context needs to be examined along with the current theological thinking of the day. God’s revelation to human beings continues to expand and grow in the same way as human beings obtain greater knowledge, wisdom and understanding. If the theological understanding of humanity does not grow and develop it will become stunted and fossilise.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her address entitled ‘Clericalism Versus Ministry’ to the WOW Conference in July 2005, claimed that

The Christian church from the beginning was understood as a community of liberation from slavery and oppression, drawing on the ancient theme of Israel as an exodus community from slavery in Egypt and a journey to enter into the Promised Land. Baptism was at first embraced as the sacrament of conversion and transformation through which one entered this community of liberation that overcame all social hierarchies of ethnicity, class and gender, a baptism into the Christ-nature in whom there is no more Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female. But this vision of a community of discipleship of equals was quickly spiritualized and the concrete reference to changing social hierarchies denied.

¹¹⁵ For the Jesus Movement in 1st Century Palestine the key integrative symbol was the ‘*Baseleia* of God’ and for the Gentile Christian Movement it was that of becoming ‘a new creation’ in Christ (paraphrased from Schüssler Fiorenza 1983/1994:103).

The patriarchal system favours the ways in which the male-dominant hierarchy of the Christian Church has for too long sought to exclude or limit the participation and ministry of women. The discussion as to whether women should in fact be ordained caused much pain for some of the already ordained women at the WOW Conference but Ruether's point is valid. Hierarchy, to a large extent, has unfortunately usurped the purpose of Christian ministry and in too many instances clericalism has become the aim of the Church rather than servant-leadership and self-giving ministry.

Women, as well as laity in general, have suffered under the Church's hierarchical structures. Ruether (2005), continuing with her address to the WOW Conference in Canada, suggests that although the Roman Catholic Church is talking about sharing power

... the Vatican quickly rejected real power sharing with the bishops, and the bishops with their priests. Partly due to extreme shortage of clergy, there has been some progress on lay ministry in parishes and the participation of laity in church councils. ... But because there is no final accountability to the people, this remains a benevolent despotism at best, not true democracy.

Such challenging statements indicate that whether Protestant or Roman Catholic the hierarchies within the official structures of the Christian Church have been responsible for a definite lack of fulfilment in the spiritual experiences of women in the Church.

Women bring a peculiar gift to the ministry, which might be seen as fulfilling and complementing the incomplete male-oriented ministry of the past twenty centuries. Scholars have no doubt that women played important roles in the early Christian Church but by the 4th Century CE patriarchy was back in full force. However, Schüssler Fiorenza (1983/1994:85) writes that

... like historians of other oppressed groups and peoples, feminist historians seek to comb androcentric records for feminist meaning by reappropriating the patriarchal past for those who have suffered not only its pain of oppression but also participated in its social transformation and development.

If this thesis could do both it would provide a resource for the MCSA. Celebrating the achievements, experiences and contributions of women in the world and in the Church is something which everyone can do. The big historical silence on the achievements of woman artists – poets, painters, authors, sculptors, composers – can and should be reversed.

So the story of the Church is tainted with forced or coerced conversions, forced removals from homelands, religious intolerance and racial or social discrimination. The

challenge for the MCSA at present is to find how healing and transformation can take place in such a way that everyone finds fulfilment, and that members begin to reach their full potential as spiritual, physical, intellectual and social beings.

4.7. Concluding Synopsis

We began this chapter by referring to the Holy Communion liturgy. It might be appropriate to conclude the chapter with reference to what Melissa Marley (2009:79) calls “The Boldest Meal” in her tribute to Denise Ackermann in *Ragbag Theologies*. Marley (2009:80) asks whether there is any “transformative power in the cup” or whether healing is “actually possible through the grains of bread in the common meal”.

The various ways in which the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchy were examined and the conclusion reached is that many women do experience a meaningful relationship with God in spite of their limited leadership roles in the MCSA. The Church and, in this instance the MCSA, is for many women ‘a venue’ where they worship God and a place that facilitates for them the connection with others.

In this chapter, I provided arguments that support the relevant theories, which are used to demonstrate the ways in which the MCSA continues to be patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices.

When viewed through the lenses of the theoretical framework, presented in chapter three, it becomes clear that the MCSA remains steeped in patriarchy. The information gathered and documented, therefore, offers a foundation for the ensuing chapter, which forms the second part of the heart of this thesis. In chapter five, I retell the stories of five Methodist women and analyse their experiences from an African feminist perspective. The following questions emerge when recognising the exclusive liturgies, hymns and language of the MCSA: ‘Whose needs are considered?’ and ‘Whose recommendations are debated?’

The lack of attention given to gender justice, especially at the local level of church life, will be explored more fully in chapter five, in which the experiences of five key Methodist women will be investigated and assessed according to this denomination’s gender policy and the features of African feminist ecclesiology. This next chapter will ask these important questions and relate them to the experiences of the five Methodist women, who were selected to contribute to this research. The hope remains that ‘the Table’ will be

expanded to include and liberate all, in the true Wesleyan tradition,¹¹⁶ and that those at ‘the Table’ will not expect that women will be satisfied with just the crumbs thrown at them from ‘the Table’.

¹¹⁶ All need to be saved; All can be saved; All can know that they are saved; All can be saved to the uttermost (credited to John Wesley – a traditional summary of Methodist teaching).
<<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1361>>
[Accessed 3 June 2011].

Chapter Five

‘Expanding the Table’ – Including the Stories of Five Methodist Women

5.0. Introduction

In chapter two, I asserted that women still have to invite themselves to ‘the Table’ in the Church because those who ‘design the menu’ for ‘the Table’ are still predominantly male. However, when we do invite ourselves ‘the Table’ is expanded and an opportunity is created not only to highlight the ways in which women continue to be marginalised within the structures of the church, but also the ways in which such structures may be transformed so that the church becomes a real place of healing and transformation by expanding its table. The MCSA has already taken the first step by recognising gender injustice but this now forms the foundation of a dilemma in the MCSA – unless the hierarchical system of church governance changes, gender justice will remain an intention of the MCSA rather than becoming a reality.

Since the inauguration of The Circle in 1989, writes Oduyoye (2005:153), it has become essential for African women to “seek to be the Church” and this has often been very costly as several “Circle members can testify”. For Oduyoye (2005:154) and others, African feminist ecclesiology calls African women to hear Jesus say to them: “Daughter arise!”

It is within this context that five stories of Methodist women are retold and analysed in this chapter. The objective is to show through these women’s stories how the Methodist Church continues to be patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices. However, more than that, this chapter points to the resilience of the women, and their courage in confronting unjust structures within the church. They do certainly prove that women are indeed church.

Before turning to their stories, I shall first expand on the research methodology, which I briefly introduced in chapter 1, and explain the narrative approach from the perspective of narrative therapy. After this discussion, I shall outline the Methodist background, against which the women’s stories will be retold, focusing on the MCSA’s

commitment to social justice and, more generally, on the call of John Wesley to social reform in England during the 18th Century CE.

5.1. Research Methodology and Narrative Approach

Flick (2006:76) states that “[f]eminist research and qualitative research were often synonymous due to the methods opening up more to women’s voices and needs in general”. Most African feminist theologians concur with this sentiment as African feminist ecclesiological practices take cognisance of women’s voices and these voices are heard in the stories that they tell. Chika Eze, SHCJ¹¹⁷ (2011:114-134), uses the story-telling methodology in her article, entitled ‘Catholic Religious Sisters’ Gender Dilemmas of Identity Construction: A Narrative Approach’. Eze has extracted portions of the transcripts from the participants in her research and analysed them according to the criteria that determine these religious sisters’ experiences of patriarchy in their religious order. I intend to do a similar analysis in this chapter. Oduyoye (2001:11) reminds us that

... story was a traditional source of theology, which seems to have been superseded by analytical and deductive forms. It has taken the feminist movement to bring back the personal into academic studies and thereby revive the importance of story. The approach to theology, that has characterized women, is to tell a story and then to reflect upon it.

The five Methodist women’s stories being retold in this chapter will be reflected upon and some of the features of African feminist ecclesiology will be examined in relation to each of their experiences. Like Phiri (2002:120ff) did for Nomvete Mbanjwa, in *Her Stories – Hidden Histories and Women of Faith in Africa*, I too will allow each woman’s own words to tell her story. Oduyoye (2001:11) intimates that when women do theology they allow other “people’s thoughts and arguments [to] become stimulants, and not points of argument aimed at establishing what is definitive”. This is the hope that I hold in the retelling of these stories – that they will become stimulants not in order for their stories to become definitive as in HIS-story – but that these stories will become part of a larger “tablecloth” of stories – HER-stories (note the plural).

This is why I agree with Ryna Grobbelaar’s (2001:178) comment that “feminist researchers” prefer the use of “a qualitative research perspective” because it seeks to draw

¹¹⁷ Society of the Holy Child Jesus (in Nigeria).

out the experiences of people. As events are selected and gathered into the dominant plot, the story gains richness and thickness. As it gains thickness, other events are remembered and added to the story. The story is thus never stable, the way HIS-story has been. Throughout this process, the story thickens, and it becomes increasingly easy to find more examples of events that fit with the relevant meaning. In retelling of stories, there are always events that are not selected, based upon whether or not they fit with the plots. Stories are never produced in isolation from the broader world. In this thesis the stories reflect the experiences of women as the ‘second sex’ in the story of the Christian Church. Chung Hyun Kyung (1996:51) writes

[w]hen we talk about culture, we bring with us many heritages. People ask me, who are you? I answer that I am an eco-feminist, Asian, post-modern, Christian, liberation theologian. And people laugh at me! What a grand name I have given myself! But to name myself in that way took a lot of inner struggle, and struggle in various people’s movements to transform their societies. As a result of these struggles, when I speak about religion and culture I speak as an Asian woman, as a liberation theologian, as an eco-feminist theologian, and as a person who considers post-modernity very seriously.

African feminist theologians grapple with similar issues of identity in the Christian Church. We too struggle towards the transformation we want for our communities and our churches. Next I describe something of the MCSA’s background.

5.2. Methodist Background

The MCSA would be surprised to find itself described as exclusive when it has such a history of struggling for justice. It probably believes that the statements it has made about gender justice reveals its commitment to the role of women in the Church. However, as established in the previous chapter, through an examination of the hymns and liturgies with the lenses of feminist theology, the ecclesiological practices of the MCSA remain exclusive. The women’s experiences that are presented in this chapter supplement and augment the research view established above. Before describing and analysing the women’s experiences, it would be helpful to briefly sketch the MCSA’s past commitment to social justice.

During the *Apartheid* years, this church was at the forefront of campaigns to end racism and discrimination across the colour bar. The MCSA declared itself to be ‘one and undivided’ defying the laws of the country which forbade Black and White Methodists to

worship together. However, the MCSA's commitment to address and eliminate gender injustice does not enjoy the same fervour. Even though the call for full participation of women in ministry is acknowledged in women's ordination in the MCSA, the paternalism of many male leaders within this church has not yet been dealt with.

This MCSA background of commitment for justice contrasts with the stories of the five Methodist women whose stories are told in this chapter. The features of feminist leadership and African feminist ecclesiological practices will be engaged in the analysis of the stories of these women in the Church. I shall include excerpts from each of their stories, which will serve as additional discussion points under each narrative. The participating women themselves wrote four of the original stories and one of them is a verbatim transcript. The form in which these stories appear here might be slightly modified in order to make them more understandable or to protect the identities of the participants. I now turn to retelling these women's stories and to analysing some of the ecclesiological practices, which affected and continue to have an impact on their experiences in the MCSA.

5.3. Introducing the Women

Women have been ordained in the MCSA since 1976. A woman, who had felt called by God to serve in the church before 1976, could offer to become a deaconess. Women have, however, always taught in the Sunday School and were encouraged to lead in the women's organisations within the MCSA. It is interesting, though, that whilst the Women's *Manyano* has it enshrined in their Constitution that the wife of the minister shall be the president of the local Women's *Manyano* branch, the male minister remains its honorary president. This clause has caused some difficulties since women have become ministers – there are no 'wives' of ministers to fulfil this role in the instance where the minister is a woman. Although the Circuit¹¹⁸ *Manyano* Committee is responsible to appoint a president in such a case, a neighbouring congregation's minister's wife is usually approached or the Superintendent's wife takes on the role of president in a situation like this.

¹¹⁸ Elected representatives from all the branches of the Women's *Manyano* in a Circuit form a Circuit Committee.

The stories of the women included in this research help us to hear something of women's experiences in the MCSA. I have given each woman a pseudonym, in order to protect her identity and to honour her story as personal.

The first woman, whom we shall call **Phumzile**, was raised in a Black rural area but she now serves as the minister of a large inner-city church. She trained at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa, situated in Pietermaritzburg, and read for her Masters Degree at Harvard University. She is an accomplished clergyperson – the only woman who has held the office of Bishop in the MCSA. She is a single mother, having adopted her brother's two daughters after their birthmother's death. She has a keen sense of justice, freely displays a passionate relationship with God and, through establishing regional teams, has done significant and ground-breaking work with those living with HIV and AIDS. She spoke of opportunities that opened up to her during her training and she acknowledged her great teachers and mentors in the MCSA, who encouraged her to follow her calling and her dreams. She actively promotes women in leadership in the Church and supports initiatives for women in ministry. Two such events, at which I was present, were a consultation for women in ministry in the MCSA and an ecumenical gathering for women in ministry, organised by the Diakonia Council of Churches in Durban. At both of these events, women were encouraged to tell their stories – to share their joys, acknowledge the progress within the Church, regarding gender justice, and to lament their pain, continued exclusion and marginalisation.

The second Methodist woman shall be known to us as **Dawn**. She is a young White minister, originally from Zimbabwe but now serving in a South African city church. Her early memories of God and faith came to her through two women – her mother and a beloved Sunday School teacher. She herself is now a mother and she is also married to a Methodist minister. Dawn tells about the added dynamic of being part of a clergy couple family and what unrealistic demands are often made on her because of that status. She shared that her dream is to one day plant a church, which “looks different from any church anyone has ever seen because its leader is a woman!” Whilst serving in a large suburban team ministry it was automatically assumed by her male colleagues that her ministry would focus on the children and the Sunday School. She did this for three years. Once she raised this issue with the leadership of the church it took them a whole year to employ a

replacement for her and finally free her up to fulfil her calling as a minister. The leaders eventually realised that she had been excluded from the ‘adult’ ministry of the church merely because she was a woman. Perhaps Dawn’s male colleagues also recognised this as an injustice but her experience is an example of what takes place in many churches in the MCSA.

The third woman, called **Busisiwe** for this research, is an elderly Black lay woman. I have specifically included her story here as I believe her story reflects something of the stories of many Black women in the MCSA today. She grew up in a township in the Cape. Her grandmother and her mother feature strongly in her experience of God and they were the ones who influenced her faith. Her Methodist roots are strong and she has been a faithful member of the MCSA right from her Sunday School days. Busisiwe loves singing and has been a member of a church choir since her youth. Tradition plays a very important role in her life. Even as a Women’s *Manyano* member she is most comfortable with God ‘as a father-figure’ as that is how she was taught and that is how she experiences God in the Bible. Throughout her story she refers to God as ‘He’ even though she admits to being familiar with other images for God in the Bible. After 1994 she moved to the Reef and joined a large suburban church. She believes that women should cover their heads, especially at funerals and when they receive Holy Communion, and she is distressed at how things have changed “in modern times”. She does not believe that there are unrealistic expectations of her in the Church because she is a woman – she views those domestic tasks as ‘a woman’s work’ in any event. The most important thing in her life is for her whole family to become committed Christians, to pray and read the Bible every day and to attend church. That would make her very happy. I believe her story speaks of a selflessness and deep care for others.

The fourth woman, known to us as **Gina**, is a middle-aged lay woman (she declined to be classified by her race) and she grew up in the Eastern Cape. Her journey in the MCSA has provided her with many highs and lows in her experience of faith and of God. Her opening paragraph reads as follows:

The Story of my Journey within the MCSA

This is something upon which I have pondered for a number of years and has become a major source of pain. I am at present in the process of completing a Masters thesis, much of the content of which is a rejection of the ‘things’ I grew up believing – at least ‘things’ the church taught me (in that I have not rejected

God but other 'stuff'). This in itself has been a painful and difficult process (quoted from participant's story).

Gina married a Methodist minister and has grappled with the internal church politics of the MCSA as well as witnessed the continued marginalisation of women in the Church – lay and clergy alike. She tells how the Bible is not a book that she enjoys reading anymore – “especially the Old Testament” – as she struggles through her studies of the Sociology of Religion. She also finds it difficult to find stories in the Bible that speak of ‘brothers loving each other’ so the term ‘brotherly love’ is a misnomer as far as she is concerned. She has remained in the MCSA mainly because her spouse is a minister and she continues to hold onto the hope that things will change. Her final comments were:

Lastly, it is with sadness that I write this. I am aware that I am ‘the Church’; but I experience this ‘belonging’ as being disempowering. Many people know my standpoint and will discuss it with me, but I see little changing – even in the lives of many women who do not want to change and/or accept the responsibility that would come with empowerment and the embracing of life as ‘whole people’, fully created in *imago Dei*.

Linda is the name by which we shall know the fifth woman, whose story I tell in this thesis. Her story is unique as it goes beyond gender and also highlights the plight of other marginalised groups of people. Linda is a fifty-one-year-old White minister who grew up in the Cape but who now ministers in a city church in Namibia. I relate her story because what makes hers unique is that she was born blind. Hers is obviously a double-bind story – she is a woman and she is a woman with blindness. Linda faced many more obstacles during her training for the ministry than those her sighted female colleagues did but none of them dissuaded her from fulfilling her calling. When telling her story, as a child in the MCSA, she described experiencing her greatest joy the day she received her first Braille Hymn-Book and Bible. The first book she ever read in Braille by herself was the Gospel according to John, in Afrikaans, as that was the only book of the Bible her hostel in Worcester had at that time. Even as a child, she remembers asking many questions and her enquiring mind is a distinctive feature of her vibrant personality. She became aware of the importance of using inclusive language through an address by an American Professor in the early 1990s. She has since become very aware of the exclusive language of the MCSA's traditional liturgies and many of the Methodist hymns.

Although she is not married she pastorally promotes non-hierarchical partnering in marriage and respectful relationships in all partnerships. She highlighted that, in her experience, single people find it most difficult to have a place in the Church as it is designed for the ‘perfect family’ (mother, father and two children – preferably first a boy and then a girl). She has studied the subject extensively and believes the MCSA needs to accept people of all sexual orientations – this in itself marginalises her for her outspokenness on the topic. Linda is a qualified advocate, who is now also an ordained part-time and non-stipendiary minister in a congregation that cannot afford to pay her a stipend. Although she has had many positive experiences in the Church, her pain arose during the period of her training for the ministry. She writes:

The only pain I have suffered in the church has been as a probationer minister; I guess being a woman has not helped. I have felt not listened to or taken seriously. This has been at the hands of clergy colleagues and not the laity. I find the abuse of power in some quarters in our church unacceptable. The structures ought to be much more a means to an end and not an end in itself.

This quote does not refer to the exclusion this participant often experiences because liturgies or programmes at Synod, Conference or other Church events are not printed in Braille. She is accustomed to being excluded in this sense and would not mention this as it would draw attention to her personal need. Although the purpose of this thesis is to examine the gap between gender policy and practice, I believe this woman’s story adds the dimension of all marginalised people to the picture of justice in the MCSA. Being a woman, who also has blindness, has prevented her from being elected to positions, which she could ably fill.

These women’s stories will be analysed further below. They each have relevance in their own unique way. Not every woman’s story is the same and that is what makes this research intriguing. Even in the midst of the marginalisation and stories of exclusion, many women still find fulfilment in the MCSA. Some women don’t feel marginalised at all. Many women stay within the institutional Church because their faith in God keeps them in hope that things will change and that the Church will indeed recognise that patriarchy is an unhelpful system.

As a prelude to these stories, a few of the experiences of Constance Oosthuizen (I have her permission to use her real name), who was the first ordained woman minister of the MCSA, are shared and some aspects of the development of women in the Methodist

ministry are traced. I met with Constance Oosthuizen (1990) in April 2005 and she agreed that I could include her memories, most of which are documented in her book *Conquerors Through Christ – The Methodist Deaconess in South Africa*. Oosthuizen (1990:54) tells how the Deaconess Order came to be established:

The Conference in 1943 “approved the training of suitable women to serve the Methodist Church of South Africa as Deaconesses”; and resolved in 1944, that a South African Order be established.

It took seventeen years before the Methodist Conference in Britain finally recognised the Orders as Departments of the Church and the cautious South African Conference delayed adopting the Constitution of the South African Order for nearly nine years (1953).

During these nine years, several South African women travelled to the Wesley Deaconess College in Ilkley and joined the British Order. After ordination¹¹⁹ they were stationed in South Africa.

Rev Constance Oosthuizen



Constance Oosthuizen, the retired warden of the Deaconess Order,¹²⁰ believes hers is a triumphant story of perseverance and faith. This ‘deaconess’ had a call from God and she intended to fulfil it with all her might. Although her call into the ministry of Word and Sacrament came to her in 1967, whilst sitting in an air-raid shelter during the Six-Day War in Israel, she decided to continue with her work as a Methodist Deaconess until the MCSA opened its doors to women. Constance applied immediately after the decision was made by Conference and, in 1975, she was accepted as a minister on trial. Before going into the room for her oral examination, one of the ministers on the panel told Constance that he had no intention of passing her. According to him the ministry was no place for women. During our conversation Constance laughed and said to me that they could not catch her out as she had memorised the whole book! She had obviously passed her oral examination with flying colours and even the minister who had threatened her with failure was unable to block her candidature. After one year, she was ordained to Word and Sacrament at the Annual Conference of the MCSA in 1976. Constance was fortunate in that she only had to wait nine years from the time when she was convinced of her call to when the MCSA opened its

¹¹⁹ To **Word and Service**.

¹²⁰ Or the ‘Order of Deacons’ as it is now known because it has since opened its doors to men.

doors to her, whereas Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa had to wait forty-six years for her call to be recognised by the United Congregational Church as Phiri has noted (Phiri 2002:119).

When doing research on the stories of the women who entered the Methodist ministry in those early years, it becomes clear there were very few who were brave enough to candidate for the ministry in the first ten years. On many occasions, Constance was the only woman present at the Synod ministerial sessions (clergy and laity sessions were separate then but are now combined), ministers' retreats and in the first few years, even at the Annual Conference ministerial session. Constance became the first woman minister to be a Circuit Superintendent and a Secretary of Synod. She was also the first woman to be approached to stand for the position of chairperson of the District (this term has since been changed to Bishop), for which she declined. She has since retired and she delights in reminiscing with others about the struggles she overcame. Women in the ministry today owe much to Constance Oosthuizen, as she was a pioneer, exhibiting determination and boldness.

More women have been candidating for the ministry since the late 1980s but we remain in the minority. Many congregations in Southern Africa have not yet experienced the ministry of a woman in their Society or Circuit. A non-itinerant category for ministry was established in 2001 to enable part-time ministry which often suits women, especially those with small children. The Methodist ministry is traditionally considered an itinerant ministry. Originally, a minister was moved by the conference every five years. When this practice became prohibitively expensive, ministers were permitted to stay longer in a Circuit, providing their congregations extended an invitation to them to stay. The non-itinerant category means that a local congregation would extend an invitation to one of its own people, who felt a call to ministry and did not wish to be moved from place to place. It had been decided that the services of ministers in this category would be renewable annually in order to free a congregation up of their responsibility for such a minister if the situation changed and they no longer needed the services of a non-itinerant minister. Non-itinerant ministers could also apply to serve either full-time or part-time. Since the introduction of this category of ministry it has been fraught with difficulties. Each year the goal posts for training have been moved and this year (2011) the Conference placed a moratorium on non-itinerant candidates. This indicates, yet again, that the MCSA does not

place the needs of women in the ministry high on its list of priorities. One of the reasons suggested for this moratorium is that the newly established (2010) seminary needs to be filled and non-itinerant ministers usually study by correspondence and often do so part-time.

Women in ministry meet regularly at 'Women Ministers' Consultations' and a core group has expressed support for one another. Study documents and memorandums for the leaders of the MCSA have been prepared at these consultations but very little support has been forthcoming from the leadership of the MCSA. Many women in ministry do not feel a need to deal with the specific issues that face women. Their philosophy is often one of gratitude that they have been allowed to be ordained and they get on with their ministry alongside their male colleagues. Many of these women still fulfil the traditional role of a woman by doing the domestic chores and fulfilling the secretarial duties in their Circuits. African feminist theologians recognise that many women do not support gender justice in the Church. They in fact promote patriarchy by working against feminist principles. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is community and family socialisation. Oduyoye (2001:31) writes as follows about the results of the kind of socialisation that happens to African women:

African women are programmed to live for others. They live for children, family and community as these constitute the locus of one's worthiness. This in some cases has come to mean that women live to please men and pride themselves with being the providers of continuity and the carriers of tradition.

Women's opinions regarding their role in the community and in their family have significant effects on their self-worth as Oduyoye (2001:81) goes on to show when she asserts that

... African women have so internalized this low esteem of women in the Church and other prevailing values that they become accomplices in the suppression of their own gender. This is most obvious in the question of ordination, but that is not the only instance in which the Church is divided against itself. Women see the Church as divided against itself for as long as it militates against and marginalizes women.

One of our participating women's stories bears witness to the mindsets of some male ministers and many congregations when a woman minister joins the staff – Dawn (the pseudonym of one of the participants) was assigned to run the Sunday School as a minister in a team. Many women in the ministry have had good experiences and their ministries are

appreciated. Many others, however, continue to be marginalised and are even harassed by colleagues and members of their congregations. The stories of women, both lay and clergy, play an important part in the analysis of the gap between gender policy and practice as it is within these women's experiences that we discover something of what life in the MCSA is like for women. Ackermann (2006:225-226) believes that "feminist theologies take a special interest in the lives of women, their stories, their hopes, their beliefs, and their experiences of oppression and liberation". Feminist theologians wish to weave women's stories into the life of the Christian Gospel and include them, as church, as they discover meaning for their lives, and in their pursuit of gender justice and transformation in the Church. Phumzile's is the first story being woven into this intricate 'Tablecloth'. ('Phumzile' is the pseudonym given to this participant.)

5.3.1. Phumzile's Story

Phumzile, whose story I gladly retell here, became the first woman Bishop of the MCSA. As it is impossible to hide her identity, it is vital to document that I have her explicit permission to include her story in this thesis. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, her ancestral home is situated in a rural area. At present, this woman is the minister of a large inner-city church.

Although she began her training for the ministry at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa¹²¹ in Pietermaritzburg, she obtained her Masters Degree at Harvard University. This woman is a gifted minister – serving three consecutive terms as a District Bishop of the MCSA. She is a professional and a single mother, having adopted her sister-in-law's twin daughters after their mother's untimely and unexpected death. At times, Phumzile has been judged because she is an 'unmarried mother' – obviously by those in the Church who assume she gave birth out of wedlock and have no idea what a noble thing she did when she adopted her twin daughters. Phumzile is passionate about justice and has a meaningful relationship with God. Whilst Bishop she launched an AIDS ministry in her

¹²¹ Fedsem had to close its doors, due to many challenges and the fierce resistance to racism in South Africa, during the last years of *Apartheid*. "Established in 1963, the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa, also known as Fedsem, occupies a unique place in South African history. Despite its controversial closure in 1993, it is regarded by many of its former students, staff and associates as one of the most remarkable achievements of the Christian church in South Africa. A symbol of ecumenism, it also exemplifies the churches' resistance to apartheid. This is why ... it continues to evoke powerful emotions (Denis and Duncan 2011:Cover)."

District, which is called ‘Methodists Challenged by AIDS’, which is continuing its essential work in this District. She accepted the additional challenge, once her term as Bishop was completed, to become the minister of an inner-city church with an AIDS hospice. This church provides residential nutritional care for people living with HIV who are ill and once their condition is stabilised they are encouraged to follow a nutritious diet and discharged from the hospice. Trained nurses offer health and nutrition education at the hospice and the care patients receive considers their total well-being.

When telling her story, Phumzile acknowledged the opportunities she experienced during her training for the ordained ministry and spoke highly of her advisers and tutors in the MCSA. Unlike many other women, she received encouragement to pursue her calling. Today she enthusiastically supports and mentors women in leadership in the Church. She has also spearheaded initiatives for women in ministry. During her term as Bishop, she called women in ministry together to meet socially. This social circle was designed to build a sisterhood in the ministry that is still sorely lacking. Among many other initiatives for women in ministry, this woman minister led sessions at a consultation for Methodist women in ministry and at an ecumenical gathering for women in ministry, organised by the Diakonia Council of Churches in Durban, both of which I attended. We were invited to share our stories – we were encouraged to talk about our positive experiences in the Church and to acknowledge our pain and our struggles. We also learnt, from one another’s experiences, how to manage the continued marginalisation of women in the Church and in the ministry. What was helpful is that we were not asked to only concentrate on what was good and to minimise the lack of gender justice. Our pain was being heard and gender injustice was acknowledged as being ‘wrong’. A time for celebrating the progress being made in the Church was created but our lament against exclusion was neither ignored nor reduced in any way.

As explained earlier in this chapter, it will be helpful to hear parts of each story in the participant’s own words. A discussion will follow after each excerpt. This is how Phumzile’s story begins:

Excerpt 1

I was the eldest child in our family and so I worked outside and inside the home. I took care of the cows and I helped my mother in the kitchen. This stood me in good stead because I grew up believing that I can do anything. I had a joyful

childhood. We lived in a small village and I had a close relationship with my grandfather, who encouraged me to work hard. Having many chores as a child provided an excellent foundation for my life because I grew up knowing that life is about hard work.

The circumstances of a person's life might either support or negate the feminist principle of non-gendered roles in a family or community. Some people are fortunate to be brought up in a similar environment to Phumzile. The majority, however, are introduced to gender-specific roles from birth. Minding the cattle (which is considered a traditional male role) as well as doing domestic chores (considered a traditional female role) as a child ensured that she believed she could do anything and that her dreams need not be restricted by gender. This contrasts with the gender dilemma her tainted experiences in the church and ordained ministry created. Phumzile's childhood, especially as a girl-child, serves as a positive example that both girls and boys can have a sound relationship with their grandfathers and that both boys and girls can help with domestic chores. It also encourages families, into which children of only one gender is born, not to lament the fact but to give those children the opportunity to experience hard work and to become proficient at anything they set their mind to doing. Gender roles are socially constructed in childhood – people are generally socialised by their environment and by their family and community situation. Clifford (2001:17) makes a distinction between sex and gender in her discussion on 'What is Feminism?' and suggests that nursery rhymes, like "What are little boys/girls made of?" and the toys we encourage our children to play with, cause gender specific images to stick in children's minds. She goes on to say that feminism

... explicitly rejects biological determination as a reason for assigning specific roles to either males or females. ...

Feminism brings to bear its vision of woman by raising questions about blatant and subtle gender stereotypes that inhibit women's healthy self-determination (Clifford 2001:17).

Phumzile's gender-balanced childhood set the foundation for her future perspective on life in the Church and in the community. Her story continues:

Excerpt 2

When I was a little girl, there were no women ministers. Our congregation was made up, literally, of 99% women. There was **one** elderly man and **he** was the leader. When he was not there the women did everything so I was familiar with seeing women in the pulpit, even though they were not called 'preachers' but only allowed to give their testimonies. The women, including my mother,

helped with everything in Church. I did, however, associate any 'Church Leadership' with elderly women (when they were allowed to lead).

Feminist ecclesiology, through women theologians like Oduyoye and Watson, says 'women are church'. The experiences of our childhood, however, leave lasting impressions. Firstly, it was embedded in Phumzile's early experience that a man needs to be the leader of a church and secondly, it instilled in her the idea that even if women were allowed to lead, only older women had leadership abilities. Feminist leadership principles encourage all forms of leadership and, as Margaret Wheatley (1999:196) suggests in her book *Leadership and the New Science – Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*: "We define a leader as anyone who wants to help, who is willing to step forward to create change in their world". Wheatley's definition, therefore, includes women and children as leaders. The Church has begun to affirm the leadership of women but it has not yet recognised children, as leaders.

Phumzile's childhood church situation also supports my argument that when a congregation is comprised of more women than men, the percentage for the representation of women needs to be increased accordingly. The context is important when listening to these stories because, in Phumzile's situation, the main reason for the absence of men in the congregation was directly related to the system of migrant labour – African feminist theologians recognise the links between gender, race and class and the system, within which people are often trapped (see for example Dube's (2004) recognition of how HIV/AIDS impacts on the academia). Phumzile's story continues as follows:

Excerpt 3

As I grew up I believed teaching would be the career I would follow so I focused my education in that direction. I became a teacher and taught for five years until the call to preach became really strong and I started the process to candidate for the Methodist ministry. I had a supportive Superintendent Minister and my entry into the ministry of the MCSA was relatively easy. As a probationer minister the MCSA placed me in a Circuit where the Superintendent Minister did not believe that women should be allowed into the ministry, and that is when my difficulties began.

Although Phumzile was one of the first Methodist women ministers to be ordained, her entry into the ordained ministry was not fraught with the same difficulties as Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa's forty-six year wait to be recognised by the United Congregational

Church (Phiri 2002:119). Phumzile was fortunate in this respect but her good fortune did not last very long.

Mary Tororeiy (2005:158-159) writes about her own experience of being “present but unwanted” in the Church. In her interview for admission to the ministry Tororeiy was asked irrelevant questions, such as what would happen if she were to get married and how was she going to control her tears in important meetings, questions her male co-applicants had not been asked.

Having a choice is a feminist principle. Susan Rakoczy IHM (2004:387) asserts that African women choose to “drink from their own wells” and “they experience the power of the Spirit to create the new from the old, the fresh from the old and broken”. Phumzile’s early experiences of adulthood affirmed her choices in life. To this day, she is grateful for her training as a teacher as those skills enhance her ministry. Discovering that she eventually had to face the stark reality of gender injustice in the Church changed her story and from this point on, she became a champion for gender justice in the MCSA. Her training for the ordained ministry had begun and she continues:

Excerpt 4

I was not welcome at staff meetings and the Superintendent Minister suggested that I help his wife in the kitchen. She tried to be motherly to me and suggested that we go shopping but I cried every time there was a staff meeting. She did, however, take me with her to share in the women’s ministries in the Circuit. I was supposed to be trained to do God’s work in the church but this Superintendent Minister would not do anything to help me. At the end of my two years there I was sent to College, which was the Federal Seminary in Pietermaritzburg.

I thought that my first two years as a probationer minister were difficult but nothing could have prepared me for the challenges at College. There were only two women and twenty-eight men studying there in my first year and the men literally wondered what on earth us two women were doing there. The problem ranged from being rejected, excluded and marginalised as women studying theology (by fellow students as well as lecturers) to sexual harassment and humiliation. It was at College that I learnt to stand my ground. The strength I had been given through my rigorous upbringing began to stand me in good stead. The challenges were huge and at times, it even became ‘physical’. I had to be firm in order to let male fellow students know that I was serious about not wanting to be harassed by them. I reported an incident once but it did not come to anything. The hierarchy decided that it wasn’t so bad and he was just given a warning. At this stage of my life, I felt hatred and it was a negative and a most uncomfortable experience. Reconciliation did take place at a later stage for which I am grateful.

Phumzile's experience as a probationer minister once again points to what Donaldson terms the 'invisible factor',¹²² especially with a Superintendent who refused to see or acknowledge her in her role as a minister in training. Phumzile's experience with the dutiful wife of her patriarchal Superintendent resonates with what Fulata Moyo says about women who are the chief custodians of patriarchy and "Protectors of Men's Dignity". Within the context of HIV/AIDS in Africa Moyo (2005:134) suggests that if

... women begin to acknowledge their own human dignity as God's image, and decide to break the code of silence within the Church, there will be a breakthrough in the efforts to bring meaningful healing and transformation, particularly in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

I believe the healing and transformation will be for all members in the Church and when spouses of patriarchal male ministers begin to raise their voices and stand up for women in the Church, change **will** take place. I do acknowledge the difficulties and hear the concerns of Rachel Nyagondwe-Fiedler (2005:179) when she writes:

Although Pastors' wives lead women in these groups, they are never without challenge from men. Most of these organisations have uniforms which are a means of identification within society and also of imparting theological instructions. Connected to this uniform tradition is a special ceremony of ordaining women into their ministry. In most of the organisations the ordination services are supposed to be conducted by the Pastor's wife; however, it very frequently happens that the Pastor conducts the service, contrary to the requirements of the programme.

Phumzile's tenacity in continuing with her work, regardless of the embarrassing circumstances, speaks of great strength of character, displayed in the same way as Nadar (2009:150)¹²³ affirms the women who take "little steps ... outside the circles which men draw for them". At least she did learn how the women's organisation and other women's ministries operated during her period in that first Circuit to which she was appointed. The story about her challenging student days is disturbing, even though it echoes the plight of many woman theologians throughout the world. Having to hold her own in an almost all-male college environment, as one of the female pioneers in the Methodist ministry, only

¹²² See the Oxford University incident recorded in 2.3.1.

¹²³ Nadar relates a 'blonde joke' in her article in which 'the blonde woman' defies the man, who literally draws a circle on the ground in which he tells her to stand. Because she had almost caused an accident this furious driver proceeds to cut her vehicle's tyres and seats but each time he looks at her she is laughing. Finally, not amused, he asks her what she finds so funny and she boldly exclaims that every time he looked away she stepped out of the circle.

served to strengthen her resolve to promote feminist principles and to apply feminist theological thinking in her ministry and approach to Scripture.

The sensitive issue of sexual harassment in the ministry and in the Church, and an appropriate response to this scourge, is another universal theme in the field of feminist ecclesiology. Many men have been socialised in a society that views women as sex objects to be used by men. Although sex and sexuality have been areas about which there still exists a taboo in many African churches, some denominations are addressing these topics because of the high prevalence of HIV infection in Africa. Fulata Moyo (2005:184ff) writes about ‘The Phoebe Practice’,¹²⁴ with which she was unfamiliar until she herself explored entering the ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Malawi. In conversation with a recently ordained colleague, she discovered that women’s services were ‘given’ to ministers as an offer of ‘hospitality’. Moyo (2005:185) writes that she was “dazed into disbelief” and, being compelled to do more research, says:

I discussed this further with a fellow theological sojourner. Unlike me, she was actually not disoriented, as she knew of such a practice, which was called in her Church “the Phoebe tradition.”

Moyo writes about this practice within some quarters of the Presbyterian Church and acknowledges that she discovered that this ‘secret tradition’ was well known and very much practised, especially during Easter Conventions, Synods, Conferences and other major church events. It is a sensitive subject but relevant, as anecdotal evidence suggests these practices exist in other denominations too. Phumzile had to respond personally, to the men who harassed her at college, and she had to take full responsibility for herself as the college male hierarchy did not think sexual harassment was a major offence. However, having stood her ground added another dimension to the ‘thick description’ of her story and of the stories of all women ministers who would come after her. Phumzile’s story continues:

Excerpt 5

I worked hard at College, achieved excellent results and secured a scholarship to study at Harvard University in the USA. That experience provided me with exposure to women in ministry at an international level. That experience was life-changing for me. On my return to South Africa I served in a Circuit for a period and I then worked at the Theological Education by Extension College in

¹²⁴ ‘The Phoebe Practice’ is a kind of ‘hospitality’ that is extended to male ministers and it includes providing a woman to serve their sexual needs.

Johannesburg whilst also teaching at the John Wesley College in Pretoria. It was during this time that I was nominated to serve as the District Bishop in the Natal Coastal District.

Several women ministers have since emulated Phumzile's example by applying themselves diligently to their theological studies and obtaining excellent results. Phumzile's commitment to feminist leadership principles was fostered by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who had been one of her lecturers at Harvard University. Her desire to create and introduce feminist ecclesiological practices in the MCSA has deepened and she remains a champion for both women ministers and lay women in the Church. Phumzile's commitment to social justice, ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue contributes to the features of African feminist ecclesiology, especially with regard to community. Forming circles in which to have conversations is a strong aspect of Phumzile's ministry. This stands her in good stead as we hear in the next part of her story:

Excerpt 6

Coming in as Bishop was full of challenges and the most difficult of these was non-acceptance – by congregations as well as ministers. Everywhere I served there was this unspoken challenge that I had to prove myself – prove that I was going to 'make it'. Why was it that this question was so easily asked of a woman in leadership? (It is just assumed that a male leader would 'make it'.) I knew that I had to work harder than a man in order to prove that this position was well within my capabilities. It was difficult to deal with people's lack of trust. I wondered what other women's experiences were like because I did not believe that people's lack of trust was based on 'fact'. It hurt that questioning my position and resistance came from both men and women. It is harsh when it comes from men but it saddened me deeply when it came from women. I could deal harshly with the men but I needed to deal gently with the women because many times their 'resistance' was phrased in words, such as "We are so worried about you!" Why do women not support women in leadership? This phenomenon must be addressed because women need to be educated and trained in leadership in the Church.

The principle of 'solidarity' is a strong feminist principle, asserts Rakoczy (2004:273). "Solidarity is a very important ethical principle for women since it is linked to the option for the poor which is at the heart of liberation theology" says Rakoczy (2004:273). Unfortunately practicing solidarity with other women is a principle that is deeply hampered by patriarchy, which forces women to not only compete with each other (for example Sarah and Hagar) but to actively support men in their pursuits. Fulata Moyo (2005:133) writes about how women are brought up in Malawi through what is called "*chilangizo*" – a

process that ensures that “girls are socialised in the ways of being “proper” Christian women”. She explains how women are urged to protect the dignity of men at the expense of their own dignity (Moyo 2005:133). Women seem hesitant to support women, especially when the situation seems to be in direct conflict with the traditions of male leadership in the Church.

Phumzile’s experience, as a Bishop, highlights not only the lack of solidarity from women but from men too. Both women and men have been socialised in the patriarchal system and without intentional education and training to reverse this kind of thinking, women will continue to be marginalised and people will continue to find it difficult to accept women as leaders. African women theologians have been calling men to be in solidarity with them for a long time. Drawing on Tinyiko Maluleke, Nadar (2009:154) points out that men have not responded positively to a call for inclusive theology or partnership with women. She further states that

[f]irst, they have been on the defensive by arguing that when African women raise these questions, they are actually doing so not out of their own volition, but because they have been influenced by Western women. And second, they have simply argued that they cannot possibly participate in issues concerning women, as they themselves are not women.

The MCSA’s intention was to provide gender education, especially for congregations that will be receiving a woman to minister in their Circuit for the first time. To my knowledge, this has not happened, particularly not as an initiative from the hierarchy of this church. The story continues:

Excerpt 7

Is total acceptance a dream? Many ministers (male and female) are too self-centred and busy making ‘a name for themselves’. We need to do some self-reflection on this. Ministers have also tended to bad-mouth their successors – what chance does a woman minister have if she is already disliked before she even arrives in the new station? Yes, we need to work towards ‘full acceptance’ but more especially, we need to work with the majority of members in the Church – **women** – women are to be empowered and trained to accept women in the ministry. Our journey, however, is to include everyone, men and women, young and old. Our struggle continues and we have to be sensitive to the circumstances in each situation.

Partnerships in Africa, ecumenical partnerships and especially partnerships with men are essential if feminist principles are to be promoted and engaged in the Church. The editors of *Ragbag Theologies – Essays in Honour of Denise M Ackermann: A Feminist Theologian*

of Praxis write about the importance of partnerships in their introduction to this volume. They suggest that “the relationship between God and creation is not one of ‘deification’ or domination, but one of partnership and meaningful relationship” (2009:14). People in the Church are called into emulating this kind of partnership. In this final excerpt, the concept of equality reiterates what feminist theologians wish to promote. One gender is not more valuable or more important than the other.

Phumzile, a Black woman minister, the only woman elected Bishop in the MCSA, has provided women in ministry and this church with hope for change. She ushered in a new dimension in church leadership and governance during her three consecutive terms of office. She is passionate yet flexible and a strong person, who has persevered through many difficult situations. A Bishop’s role, in general, is a demanding one but hers was exacerbated because she is a woman. One minister had a disciplinary hearing as, amongst other things, he refused (on biblical grounds – according to him) to accept the Bishop’s authority because she was a woman. This minister was discontinued from the MCSA and although we would rather have witnessed a change of heart in him, it set a precedent that a woman leader and women in the ministry, in general, **are** church.

Other, more light-hearted, dilemmas were that immediately after Phumzile’s induction service as Bishop, she received gifts in the form of hats. The majority of older Black women in the MCSA believe strongly that a woman should cover her head when she worships, especially when she receives Holy Communion. This woman Bishop’s refusal to wear a hat was a problem for many Methodists throughout Phumzile’s terms of office and continues to be a difficulty for many people in her current place of ministry. Tradition can often cause much pain. Education and growth in understanding why a woman chooses to act in the way she does is essential for gender justice and harmony to take place in the MCSA.

The context of the following story is different but the content is no less valuable. The pseudonym for this next participant is ‘Dawn’.

5.3.2. Dawn’s Story

Dawn, a young White minister, is originally from Zimbabwe and now the minister of a suburban church in a large city in South Africa. She fondly recollects the stories about God and Jesus, which she learnt from a Sunday School teacher. Her mother nurtured her

young faith and she pays tribute to these two women in her early life. Dawn is part of a clergy couple as her spouse is also a Methodist minister. Her experiences in a two-clergy family have not always been positive.

Soon after her ordination, Dawn was stationed in a large suburban church in another city. She worked in a team with two male ministers. It soon became apparent to her that it was understood, by her male colleagues, that she would work with the children and the Sunday School. She would gladly have taken her turn in this ministry but she did not believe that she should be assigned to the children's ministry merely because of her gender. After two years, Dawn frequently raised this concern, and within a year the leadership of this Society appointed another person for the children's ministry. Dawn was finally able to fulfil her calling as a minister. What happened to Dawn is an example of how gender injustice is at times perpetuated in the MCSA.

Some male ministers assume when a female colleague joins the Circuit staff that she would take minutes at meetings, set up before the time, provide and pour the tea and clear up at the close of the meeting. In Dawn's case, the assumption that women do the domestic chores did not go unchallenged. What makes Dawn's situation interesting is that although she was younger than the men, she was more highly qualified in theology than her two colleagues were. This did not seem to make any difference to them. What is also interesting to note, though, is that neither of the two male ministers took over the Sunday School ministry from her. The Society employed an additional member of staff – a children's pastor. The hope exists that her persistent plea to be released to fulfil her calling to an all-round ministry may have alerted her male colleagues to the injustice that had been done to her – and to the many other women who find themselves in a similar position. Dawn now tells her story in her own words:

Excerpt 1 (a)

I grew up in Zimbabwe. Mom would talk to us about church, and Dad would do a prayer with me at bedtime, but my greatest influence came from two women. The first was my Sunday School Teacher. I think at first that my Mom thought I was going to a Presbyterian Sunday School, but it turned out to be an Assemblies of God Sunday School. It was a wonderful little Sunday School, with some very dedicated teachers. Aunty Lorna was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Her grey hair and twinkly crisp blue eyes had me besotted. I was determined to be as gentle and as graceful as she was, and always vied for her approval. She gave me the most wonderful prizes – books by Patricia M St.

John that helped me to understand that God had a personal relationship with children and took them with the utmost seriousness.

Childhood rituals and experiences are important in every person's life. Dawn grew up with the sense of wonder about God, which two special women had imparted to her when she was a little girl. Holness (2009:67) reminds us that

[c]hildren are in fact at the very centre of the Christian faith. Yet it remains one of the enigmas of Christianity that, despite Jesus' unequivocal 'option' for children, it has taken Christians nearly two millennia to begin to bring children in from the margins of faith, taking note of the real significance of those six short words in Isaiah's prophecy: "a little child shall lead them" (Is. 11:6).

Excerpt 1 (b)¹²⁵

However, one of my greatest successes was felt this past weekend, and it is a typical 'woman issue' – at 3 of our 5 services we had children's addresses, children's songs, even pew activities for the children – and loads of young families. This is a turn-around for our church. When I arrived, children were seen and not heard! Now moms can relax more in the service, and feel welcome together with their children!

Dawn had an inner struggle whilst serving at this church, as she knew she needed to serve in an all-round ministry but the children and young mothers' ministry was her gift. The way Holness (2009) interprets the role of children in the Church is both challenging and refreshing. She asserts that the

... theological undergirding, provided by the Incarnation, should have an impact on the way we view and treat children. As with other groups consigned to the margins of life, implicitly regarded as not-quite-as-human-as-others, it becomes easy for an idea of the provisional nature of childhood to express itself in ways that overlook the value and the rights of children *as children* (Holness 2009:71).

Dawn wanted to emulate graciousness and gentleness from an early age and the idea that God is interested in children was planted in her mind whilst still young. This formed a strong foundation for her commitment to feminist principles in her adult life. Her story continues as follows:

Excerpt 2

Mrs Murray became my day mother for a year. She was frumpy but very kind to me. She told me a story about a little boy who dreamt it was his birthday, and had a party and everyone came, but ignored him and gave him no presents. I vowed that that year, Jesus would get a gift – that of my life. I waited till Christmas Eve and then I could wait no longer and knelt at my bed, and knew I

¹²⁵ This portion of excerpt 1 comes later in the story but because of its relevance to children I have placed it here.

was indeed God's own little girl. About this time I had a dream and told a close friend that I had had a dream and that God had told me I was going to marry a preacher [which in fact I did do – but I think the dream was a way of describing the longing I had in myself to be one myself].

The myths about Christian traditions are strong in children's stories and the kind of story that Dawn heard from her day mother, is the kind that instils guilt in many Christians. The innocent childlike yearning to love Jesus, expressed by Dawn in her story, is not to be diminished by this, as 'a passionate love for God' is a precious part of human spirituality. However, Dawn's experience is typical of an approach to theology, which focuses on 'original sin' rather than on 'original blessing'¹²⁶. Holness (2009:73) also reminds us that

Because Schleiermacher's understanding of humanity is thoroughly relational, his understanding of sin is anchored here, too, implying that sin has to do with threatened and broken relationships (Jensen, 2005:84-85).

I belabour the issue of sin, because the way we understand it has a profound effect both on how we understand children and on how we equip them to recognise and manage the things in themselves and others that we might understand to be tied up with the 'condition of sin'. Indeed, we might ask, is sin a helpful term to introduce to children or is it not?

What is special is that soon after Dawn had had her 'conversion experience' she also had a dream in which she believes, in retrospect, that God was calling her to preach. Women **are** church and we experience similar calls from God to those, which men receive. African women theologians too have recognised the importance of songs, proverbs, stories and also dreams as means and sources of theologising. Njoroge (2001:viii) writes that

... women have already spoken about their inner feelings and experiences of sorrow in songs, dances, novels, stories, tears, deep silences and through the stripes on their bodies. Unfortunately these voices have fallen on the deaf ears of Christians and their churches. With Jesus the women sigh and shout "*Eph'phatha*", meaning, "Be opened!" (Mark 7:31-35).

Njoroge's words are very relevant as Dawn tells of her formation in biblical knowledge in the next excerpt of her story.

¹²⁶ The doctrine of 'the fall' of humanity from grace, juxtaposed against Matthew Fox's (1983) idea that God created 'and it was good' in his book *Original Blessing*. (Matthew Fox regarded himself as a contextual and feminist theologian at a time when these views were definitely unacceptable in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church.)

Excerpt 3

Because I had always attended Sunday School and was part of SU [Scripture Union] and the SCA [Students' Christian Association], I was always considered something of a 'religious nut'. We had religious instruction at school. I used to get Quest notes, and loved using them as my quiet time. When I grew too old for them, I got a Living Bible for teens called 'The Way', and I steadily worked my way through most of it before leaving school. Even sharing my room in a dormitory, I would read aloud to my roommate from the Bible at night. She remarked that the Bible had never made so much sense before! I have always been passionate about the Bible – none more than as a teen or as a varsity student.

This part of Dawn's story paints a picture of her love for the Bible and her commitment to God during her teenage years and young adult life. These passionate convictions were channelled into her life and service as a Methodist minister. Dawn became familiar with the content of the Bible at this stage of her life but in more recent years she has developed a contextual approach to theology and now reads the Bible from a new gender-sensitive perspective. Masenya (2001:150-151) in her article 'A Bosadi (Womanhood) Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31' suggests that "the Bible is used to subordinate women. Indeed, in some African church circles, Prov. 31:10-31 is cited as containing the qualities that a "good" Christian wife is expected to have".

Women, in general, are the carers for and the nurturers of the Church. Yet, many men are good at this too, just as many women are also good at preaching, teaching, administration, management and mission. All persons are called by God and should be affirmed for the work they do. Oduyoye (1990:78) shares some insights regarding how slow changes are coming about in the churches of Africa:

There is in Africa a conspiracy of silence over all forms of interpretations of the Bible except the literal and the spiritualizing, that enables hierarchical and domineering styles to prevail.

The paternalism put in place by missionary strategy has little reason to exist today but it does, and it goes together with the patriarchal system that hands down knowledge in a hierarchical manner and treats it as patrimony reserved for the few who claim direct succession to the teachers of the ancient church.

It is important for ministers to be aware of these nuances in Africa when ministering in cross-cultural situations. In a local Circuit a Biblewoman is well received in the Circuit but the new Black woman minister is not as well-accepted. Opposition to the woman minister comes mainly from the women in her two congregations. Women in the pew are also

amongst the first who object to a gender sensitive approach to Scripture. Cady Stanton (1895-1898 [1974]:281) wrote in Part II of *The Woman's Bible*:

And yet women meet in convention and denounce "The Woman's Bible," while clinging to the Church and their Scriptures. The only difference between us is, we say that these degrading ideas of woman emanated from the brain of man, while the Church says that they came from God.

Many women routinely vote for a man for a leadership position in the church rather than for a woman. An example of this happened in the MCSA at the Annual Conference 2005 when, in my opinion, a less qualified male was elected to the position of executive secretary rather than the female nominee, whom most delegates knew possesses the necessary skills and talents for this high office in the church. A situation such as this, points to the lack of gender wisdom in the MCSA.

Yet, Dawn's passion, as a preacher, was definitely formed during her young adulthood. She continues:

Excerpt 4

My image of God has changed most in the last ten years or so. Patricia M St John painted a picture of an incredibly loving God who revealed Himself in beautiful leaves and pretty stones, and in the kindness of a shepherd or of a little poor boy caring for his blind sister. I would take long "praise" walks through a farm nearby, looking for things to thank God for, and be totally overwhelmed by the grass, the insects, the mud, a little rapid, and love God the more for it all. God was for me the path of life primarily. After an AOG camp where we studied the Book 'Song of Songs' as a 16 year old, Christ became my lover, and I 'gave up' dancing [which I loved] and boyfriends for a year in order that He may be my only 'lover'. I would sing love songs to God, and became infatuated with Him, although this love was still very much nature based.

Here her story shows how Dawn was influenced by a particular approach to theology, church and sexuality. Her theology was informed by her environmental experiences and this is to be deeply appreciated. Some would argue that this experience might have been a helpful way to deal with adolescent sexual urges but it also resonates with a denial of human sexuality or at least a suppression of these urges, rather than encouraging a healthy way of managing those years when sexuality seems so important to young people. Moyo's (2005:130) description of *chilangizo* in Malawi again comes to mind, especially as she asserts that

In the Church in Africa, not only is sexuality a taboo issue, but it is also a power issue at the mercy of those who have the decision-making power – in this case, men. The power of men is affirmed and safeguarded by a range of local

religious and cultural sexual practices that frustrate the mutuality of sexual decision-making between the genders.

Images of God were mainly grounded in eco-feminism for Dawn and she acknowledged how her images of God changed over the years. This period of her life was significant as she became aware of God in a personal way. The feminist principle of full acceptance of one's own sexuality was obscured by the suggestion that the denial and suppression of our sexuality was preferable to other healthy ways of working out teenage relationships. Dawn did not say why her 'fast' from boyfriends and dancing only lasted a year but it is encouraging to hear the rest of her story, as she continues:

Excerpt 5

Language was not a problem for me, until I began studying the effects of language, and how socially constructed our realities are. I think the fact that my early faith was mostly formed by 'choruses' which were either scripture to music or used 'me/I' language was helpful in this regard. And until I understood the power of social construction, I was sceptical of feminism. I wanted to be my husband's 'helpmeet' and Jesus' 'handmaiden', as they were such nurturing, comforting images and seemed so 'safe'. But when I began to realise that it was patriarchy that was at the heart of my slowness to come to believe in my call, I realised that my belief that I couldn't be a minister 'to men' [who were 'after all' 'wiser' than me, and not able to be 'reduced' by telling their problems to a woman] was influenced by the language and stories of the Bible. And so I feel the need to constantly expose the stories of women's terror in scripture and question the submission of women in scripture like Sarah. Hagar has become more of a role model now than Sarah, Mary Magdalene more than Elizabeth.

Dawn describes how her journey into embracing feminist principles began when she studied English at university. Here she was confronted with social construction and how the English language was formed. She also began to question some of her perceptions about herself as the 'lesser' sex. Once Dawn realised that patriarchy is responsible for women's subordination, she could not go back to believing otherwise. This opened up a way for Dawn to read the Bible differently – she began to read the Bible contextually and challenged the way the Bible portrays the stories of some women. Dube (2001:50) tells the biblical story of 'the woman with the flow of blood' (in Mark 5:35-43), in relation to "an oral African tale of a young girl buried by her friends but who sings from her grave, telling her story". Dube (2001:50) uses these tales as an analogy, from a totally different perspective, to emphasise that the

... woman exists both as one who defies death by continuing to sing from her many graves and as a bleeding woman who fully participates in the search for

healing and survival on the African continent. Evidently, it is still *a luta continua!* – the struggle continues.

Dawn began to identify with ‘the oppressed woman’ in the Bible and today she continues to raise awareness about gender injustice in the Church. Worship is important for Dawn, as she indicates in the next excerpt:

Excerpt 6

I abhor ‘traditional’ church language – whether that be thunderous ‘*PPPPraise JJJesssus*’ from the Pentecostals or the pretentious cathedral holy voices from some Methodists, or even the misty ‘just love Jesus’ of ‘prayer warriors’ of every denomination! I love language to be fresh, to be shocking, to be comfortable, to be challenging – and then when it is warm and comforting it does so needfully – not to cocoon women into a false sense of security and then leave them sixty, disillusioned, without income, trapped in marriages that offer them no love, with the children left home and with no way of becoming independent! Hymns like ‘I cannot tell ...’ stir me, as they help us to see mystery and beauty side by side with pain and questions, challenge and hope. I LOVE well written up to date, relevant liturgies.

Dawn’s open expression of a love for fresh and new liturgies and her love for stirring hymns shows how important worship is to her. She is aware of the difficulties in changing exclusive language in church but she is committed to assisting members in her congregation to grow in their understanding of a much bigger God than the God that many churches have tried to put in a box. Oduyoye (2005:150) writes that in her context, in

... all this display of religiosity, women are intensely involved. They patronise calls to the altar, they attend prayer cells to pray for themselves and their families. They fast just as fervently as they prepare feasts to celebrate life. They are the majority in Church choirs and many even have their own “Gospel Singing” groups and have cut CDs of their songs. ... The image of women as religion’s chief clients has not changed much, though I suspect the statistics will show that men compete favourably in their attendance at Sunday morning worship. Christianity is expected to be an agent of *alafia* (fullness of life), shalom, salaam, total well being. It is in this context that African theologians do ecclesiology.

Dawn’s criticism of some of the approaches to worship and singing in church comes from her own experience in both her Pentecostal and Mainline Church experiences. She strongly advocates a sensitivity to inclusive language and ecclesiological practices that are woman-friendly. This is supported by what she shares next:

Excerpt 7

I am enjoying ‘unlearning’ stories from scripture. I love preaching about how painful and disappointing it must have been for Sarah to have Abraham pretend

she was his sister, and send her off to be Pharaoh's latest concubine, and wonder aloud what God thought of Abraham for doing that – and how God protects her by sending plagues on the Pharaoh. I love Deborah's strength, the way that Jesus honoured Mary Magdalene and her recovery from shame, Ruth's determination, and Esther's courage. I wish there had been more named women in the scriptures, just as I wish there were more women ministers to give more little girls the courage to stand to their full height and dream of becoming ministers. I believe the Bible is a record of mostly men's encounters with the Divine, and their explanations of those encounters [some scholars believe the Song of Songs was initially written by a woman]. Because of God's magnitude, God regularly explores the boxes that these writers place God in, and reaches out to women even when some men try to ignore them. Not all men are our opponents in our dealing with scripture. I think that there are writers like the disciple John, who gave more prominence to the stories of Mary and the Samaritan woman. Others, who interpret scripture in a way that highlights a concern for women's rights, help men and women.

This part of Dawn's story tells of her feminist theological journey. She now reads the stories of women in the Bible from a different point of view and she assumes the responsibility to teach and preach from a feminist theological perspective, challenging the patriarchal views of the traditional Church on women and the Bible. Dawn now draws attention to the fact that many women in the Bible are unnamed and that their stories are significant for today. Her commitment to gender justice is extended to other marginalised groups as well, especially to gay and lesbian people. She continues her story:

Excerpt 8

My call to ministry came through the baptism liturgy where the congregation promises that they will maintain the life of service and worship of the church so that the little ones among them might grow up in the knowledge of God and His care of them. Thus I think the church is crucial in the raising of families. I don't know how people manage to raise children on their own. I believe the African proverb – it takes a village to raise a child. My village is my church. I make huge statements about 'knowing people who know people who cook', and statements that I assemble food, I don't cook. This joking has been to diffuse expectations that I enjoy 'feminine' tasks. I also highlight the fact that my husband and I share every aspect of housework and child rearing, and that gender roles are not set in stone. This frees men as much as it frees women.

Dawn briefly shares her call to ordination, revealed in the baptism liturgy, and it is interesting to note that her love for children is strong and her ministry to young families an important part of her life. Dawn also talks about the responsibilities of raising children and acknowledges her gratitude to her church community for the support they offer in parenting. The African feminist ecclesiological feature of community comes through in Dawn's story, especially in relation to raising children in a church community. She also

talks about how she now consciously attempts to change people's stereotypical expectations of her and of other people too. The issue of choice is as important to Dawn as it is to Rakoczy (2004:389) when she affirms African women as they

... practice a spirituality of resistance when they refuse to acquiesce to the demands of men and cultures that will undermine their God-given human dignity. This can involve many types of resistance – from “Vashti types who simply refuse to comply with the dictates of those who would dehumanize them (Esther 1:9-21)” (Oduyoye 1996:165) to mothers who refuse to have their daughters undergo female genital mutilation, to every act of risk and defiance in the defence of life.

Dawn both celebrates the care extended to her by many members in her congregations as well as lamenting the denigration she had to endure from some. From these she walked away, as she explains in the next excerpt from her story:

Excerpt 9

As a minister I have experienced unbelievable pastoral care from each congregation I have been a part of. There was only one church that insisted on stereotyping feminine behaviour, and cast the women in the role of ‘temptress’ [I once wore brightly coloured stockings, and my husband was told to tell me I shouldn't again], I soon left – even though both my husband and I were on the staff. It was the beginning of me refusing to accept ‘the God’ of that patriarchal minister, and beginning to find ‘my own’ God. I continue in that journey, and have found tremendous help from people like Sue Monk Kidd, Isherwood and McEwan¹²⁷, and Phyllis Tribble.

This section of Dawn's story pays tribute to the Church and at the same time, she challenges any congregation that is unable to view women as being church and not as the ‘traditional temptress’, who should be subdued by her husband. Her theology was shaped by these experiences because recognising that the God of the ‘patriarchal minister’, who wished to subdue her through her husband, was not the God she loved and worshipped, was an affirmation that she was on a different journey. Dawn continues to find encouragement and support in the writings of feminist scholars and feminist theological principles were being confirmed for her in reading and identifying with these authors. She continues:

Excerpt 10

I have never been overlooked for leadership positions in favour of a man, and I have never really experienced any direct rejection for being a woman. People have been surprised by my ability, and very accepting. I don't think, though, that had I been a man I would ever have been asked to run the Sunday School –

¹²⁷ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan.

as a minister for three years – but on the other hand, that is one of my strongest gifts! I made a fuss, and within a year of my speaking, I was supported to leave the Sunday School ministry by the leadership of my church and they employed someone to take my place. That has been a huge relief, and an affirmation of my ministry among them.

Unlike some women ministers, Dawn does not feel as though she has been passed over for leadership positions in favour of a man but she does acknowledge that members in her congregation are often surprised by her ability. She does not say whether that is because she is a woman or whether it is that she is young, or not! It is, however, in this part of her story that Dawn tells about being relegated to the Sunday School (as a minister) for three years.

What happened to Dawn is not the usual practice in the Church. I do not know of any male minister who has been assigned to the Sunday School for three years. Feminist ecclesiological practices embrace equal sharing of what might be perceived as the ‘mundane tasks’ in the Church. Dawn mentions what I believe is an important aspect of her journey in the ministry, merely in passing. Gender injustice in the MCSA continues because, for one reason, many women ministers accept to be assigned to the children, the elderly, the sick or other ‘traditionally feminine’ ministries. Like Dawn, women need to ‘make a fuss’ about this kind of unfairness. Finally, Dawn claims her space as a woman in the ministry and as a person in her own right:

Excerpt 11

I believe, together with my leadership that simply by being a woman in the pulpit, I am being prophetic and I am fulfilling a call by God to our congregation. I celebrate being a woman, but reject definitions of femininity from outside of who I am. I am not a ‘typical’ ‘nurturing’ woman. I don’t think about how many ovens we need in the kitchen, and I battle to care. I am very grateful to those women who do care, and refer to them as a resource!

Dawn concludes her story with both a prophetic statement and an exclamation of hope. She, as a woman in the pulpit, regularly reminds people of the value of women **as church** and, with regard to children in the Church, Dawn is excited about opening up new ways to include them and their parents. Women in church leadership are being nurtured by a woman leader and biological essentialism is being rejected for what it is – a social construct.

The next story is from a lay woman.

5.3.3. Busisiwe's Story

The third participant, Busisiwe, is an elderly Black lay woman. I include her story here, as I believe that she tells an important story, as a Black woman in the MCSA today. She grew up in the Western Cape and her grandmother and mother were influential in her faith journey. Busisiwe has been a loyal member of the MCSA since her Sunday School days and her Methodist roots are deep. Tradition is very important for Busisiwe and the trend for women to go to church without a hat is distressing for her. Her view of women's roles in the Church is conventional. Her story is also one of acceptance of the *status quo* and one, which does not question gender injustice. According to her interpretation, the Bible is clear that men are the leaders and that a man must be the head of the home. Her service in and her love for the MCSA are not diminished – quite the contrary is true because she is the epitome of sacrificial love and commitment.

She and others like her do nearly all the work in the church – they care for the sick, visit those in hospital and in prison, they look after the elderly and children, they cook and sew and clean and take minutes at meetings. They ensure that the church buildings are cared for, they arrange the flowers and they bake and make the tea. These are the women who assist the minister, prepare the Communion elements, wash the altar cloths and help with administrative work in the church office. These women are church! However, they continue to vote for men for leadership positions and they firmly believe that only men should be Bishops or Superintendents and, in many instances still, only men should be ministers. They are, unfortunately, often the women who complicate the lives of women ministers. Gender education might go a long way towards helping to build bridges and facilitate reconciliation between these lay women and women in the ministry. Now we turn to Busisiwe's story, as she tells it in her own words:

Excerpt 1

My mother and my grandmother spoke to me about God when I was little and my mother used to take me to church with her. When I was in Sunday School our minister's wife used to tell us interesting stories about Jesus and His love for us.

As is the case for many people, Busisiwe's mother and grandmother were the ones who nurtured her faith and who initially taught her about God. She also pays tribute to a minister's wife who taught her in the Sunday School and introduced her to the stories of

Jesus. Busisiwe's early understanding of church and of God was formed during those early years of attending church with her mother. She would have witnessed and experienced the community that is so characteristic of Black traditional Methodist worship. She was, however, also given an impression that women teach children and right from an early age some unhelpful social constructs were being set in her mind. As referred to earlier, Moyo (2005:133) writes about the tradition of *chilangizo* in Malawi, through which girls are taught by the older women how to be "proper" Christian women. Busisiwe's story continues:

Excerpt 2

Growing up in a Black township during *Apartheid* we did not really have youth leaders or mentors but I was very active in the choir and I belonged to the Young People's Department (YDP) in our church. I was the leader of our YDP at some point.

Busisiwe does not elaborate much on her experiences during her teens but we know, from our South African history, that growing up in a township when she was young was very difficult. Racism was legislated and racial prejudice and injustice were rife in our land and even in our churches. Kumalo (2009:126) writes as follows about the situation in Durban, at the Central Methodist Church in 1970:

Central was a solely-white congregation by virtue of its actual membership. Indeed there is no shred of evidence that the leadership of the church saw this as any form of anomaly or regret. Indeed, against the background of apartheid South Africa, everything points to the fact that this was accepted as the norm and hence the church continued from day-to-day with business as usual. There is no record of black people being encouraged to join the church during this period. Put crudely, the church was a spiritual heaven for those who appreciated the political status quo of the country. This, in spite of the fact that the MCSA had, two decades before, declared itself to be a "one and undivided church", and had vowed to defy the Group Areas Act. In real terms, at the local level, churches were divided on racial grounds; a painful reality that haunted the National leadership of the church.

People in the city and in the townships were disadvantaged in many respects and poverty was widespread. Yet, besides all this, Busisiwe recalls that at some point she was the leader of their Young People's Department (YPD). This statement alerted me to the leadership potential of this participant and she does not refer to any other times of exercising leadership in the MCSA.

Busisiwe continues:

Excerpt 3

I remember the stories about Jesus well because they were taught to us in Sunday School and at primary school. I definitely still enjoy reading the Bible because, firstly, I get answers to my questions and guidance from scriptures. Secondly, I get a better understanding of the life before and after Christ. Lastly, I gather my strength through and from the Bible, especially when I feel like I have a “disconnection” with God. I read the Bible everyday of my life.

Here Busisiwe expresses her love for the Bible and indicates that reading the Bible is her way of staying ‘connected’ with God. She places her faith in the power of God’s Word to guide her and to provide answers to her questions about life. She appreciates the historic, as well as the spiritual value of the Bible and declares openly that she reads the Bible everyday. I speculate on whether Busisiwe would appreciate Musa Dube’s re-interpretation of some of the Bible stories she loves so dearly. Would she be able to make the connections between the racial oppression, often perpetuated in the Bible, in Dube and other African feminist theologian’s ‘new ways of reading’, and the experiences she and all Black people were subjected to in South Africa for so many years? However, Busisiwe’s relationship to the Bible is characterised by a hermeneutic of trust as she continues her story:

Excerpt 4

I see God as a human father figure to whom I can speak and relate anytime. I have done some biblical studies and have learnt new names for God. These include Jehova Jireh, Jehova Mkadesh and Elohim, but I usually call God ‘Father’ and I relate to Him through prayer, song and conversation. God has become real to me in my life i.e. church, home, work, wherever I am I always speak to Him.

Busisiwe has a personal relationship with God, evident in the way she describes her prayer and worship experiences. Nyambura Njoroge (2006:70) pays tribute to the feminist theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, and describes her as “a woman of prayer and spirituality”. This is an important reminder, as many people have a limited impression of feminist theologians as being only activists and scholars. Busisiwe’s Bible studies introduced her to some Hebrew names for God but ‘God as Father’ takes precedence for her. She has been strongly influenced by her community and the traditional way of relating to God is all-important for her. Like in many other African communities, religion is a priority for Busisiwe.

She continues with her story:

Excerpt 5

I joined this church about nine years ago and have found that the ministers are very helpful and church language has never been an issue for me. I find the hymns and liturgies of the Church very helpful. I understand that men were very active in the Church when the liturgies were written and women had roles specifically defined for them. I understand that is how the Bible says it should be.

Busisiwe's position resonates with the 'loyalist' or 'reformist' Christian feminist perspective, which seeks to maintain the *status quo*, that Anne Clifford (2001:32-34) outlines in her book *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Her move from a township church in the Cape to a suburban church on the Reef seems to have been quite difficult for her. For her, 'the language in church' meant more than the use of English because it also meant that she had to get used to worshipping in her second language. She views the exclusive language of the older versions of the English Bible as how it was ordained by God to be. Busisiwe also has no problem with gender-specific roles, as in her experience and understanding that is how it was meant to be. Busisiwe continues:

Excerpt 6

There are things in the Bible that I can relate to as a woman, like where the scripture says a woman must cover her head in church – this is how we grew up in our community. Women had to cover their heads in church or at a funeral. It is sad how things have changed now with modern times. The Bible is there to guide us, to help us cope with our challenges, to provide God's message – it's like a vitamin to keep us going while we try to live like Christ. It's vitamin B.I.B.L.E.

This section points out that Busisiwe has been conditioned into believing that the Bible is a law book of God that must be obeyed. Even though she has a most meaningful analogy of how the Bible nourishes her soul, she seems to be locked into a belief that there are rituals and certain biblical behaviour that are cast in stone. However, the Bible could come alive for her and other women like her and provide contextual stories of real freedom and liberation. Ezra Chitando (2007:21) calls churches to act and to speak out in the face of violence against women in his book *Acting in Hope – African Churches and HIV/AIDS 2*, referring to the experience of Tamar:

Churches should be prophetic in their denunciation of violence against women. The Tamar Campaign, based on the story in 2 Samuel 13:1–22, needs to permeate all levels of society and reach the most remote parishes in Africa. The

campaign seeks to mobilize the church to act decisively against violence directed at women in homes, schools and society. It challenges churches to become angry when women are exposed to violence. The campaign has generated a lot of interest, although the male leadership of the church has fallen short of demonstrating its commitment.

The pulpit must be appropriated as a resource in the quest to end violence against women. Sermons declaring violence against women a sin must be preached.

In postcolonial and gender-justice readings of Ruth, Tamar, Rahab and even Jezebel, feminist biblical scholars unpack the patriarchal perspectives and retell these ancient stories from a different perspective.¹²⁸

Busisiwe's story continues:

Excerpt 7

The Church's role in family life is to explain God's purpose of marriage, parenting and courtship and guide couples/families. Being in church as a family, the baptisms of our children, the confirmations, the singing - for me these are joys. Some sorrows are that some of my family members, especially the males, do not go to church.

Busisiwe longs for her family to be part of the Church. She has an idea of what the Church's role is and this is meaningful for her. The community activities and the shared liturgies inspire and give meaning to Busisiwe's life. Contrary to the way in which Busisiwe's story reflects her church membership, Tororeiy (2005:161) experiences the exclusion of women in the Church, and she writes:

While the Church is supposed to be liberating, the lot of the African woman has not changed. The exclusion that marks her presence in the wider society follows her to the pew; where she faithfully sits every Sunday. She survives the oppressive notions of the Church by looking on the brighter side – the heavenly banquet and the vision of walking on streets of gold. What great strength an African woman draws from the heavenly banquet where she is sure she will not be involved in the cooking, but only sitting at the table with her Lord to celebrate!

Busisiwe did not directly talk about her view of the life hereafter but her story does resonate with many other women's experiences in the Church – they attend on their own or

¹²⁸ For Ruth, see Dube, MW (ed) (2001:179ff), for Tamar, see World Council of Churches, <http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccmain/documents/p4/ehaia/ActingInHope.pdf>, [Accessed 1 November 2011], for Rahab, see Dube, MW, <http://hannelund.wordpress.com/2007/11/05/week-6-reading-reflection-musa-w-dube-rahab-says-hello-to-judith>, [Accessed 1 November 2011], and for Jezebel, see Landman, C (1996).

with their children – many men do not see a need to commit themselves to God or to the Church. The story continues:

Excerpt 8

Women are expected to cook for the feasts and conventions but I am happy because that is our work, as women in the church. I go to church to strengthen my relationship with God and I deal with difficulties through prayer. I know I sometimes ask for His help and then I still do it my way. My mother and my eldest sister were the ones who encouraged me during my times of growth. My future dream is also my daily prayer, for God to give Salvation to my whole family because I believe we can be the happiest family in Christ.

Busisiwe views the domestic chores as part of her work, as a woman, in the Church. It is difficult to change such a socially constructed mindset. From an African feminist theological perspective, Busisiwe has succumbed to the dogma and teachings of a church that devalues women's lives. Oduyoye (2005:154) asserts that

African women's perspectives on ecclesiology reflect both concerns.¹²⁹ Being Church is about being Christ to the world. What women's ecclesiology demands is that Christians in Africa and elsewhere tell the truth about the Church and that the Church lives the truth of Christ. African women seek to join in this truth-telling. We do so in the hope that when these studies are over, by God's grace, at least the Church in Africa will engage in truth-telling:

Truth to tell about ordination of women
Truth to tell about the lack of analysis
of the sources of the many challenges
That Africa faces.

The next story is also from a lay woman, whose pseudonym is Gina, but hers is different, yet again.

5.3.4. Gina's Story

Gina, the fourth participant, is a middle-aged lay woman from the Eastern Cape (she refused to be categorised according to her race). She too, is doing research and she indicated that during her sociology of religion course, she was compelled to shelve much of what she believed about 'the Church' – she had been taught many of these things since childhood. She articulated her disenchantment with the Church and indicated that had she not been a Methodist minister's spouse that she would probably have left the Church. Gina's experience relates to that of the revolutionary feminist theologian, Mary Daly. Daly (1985) felt that the Church, with specific regard to its sexist ecclesiological practices, is

¹²⁹ "The WCC launched a study on "Being Church" at the same time as another on "Overcoming Violence".

beyond reform. The hope that does exist, not only for this participant but for all women, is that the MCSA will in fact support the quest to become a gender inclusive church that operates on non-hierarchical lines.

Gina's experience of faith and of God in the MCSA has been filled with both high and low points. I quoted the opening paragraph of her story earlier but do so again, as her words are significant.

Excerpt 1

The Story of my Journey within the MCSA

This is something upon which I have pondered for a number of years and has become a major source of pain. I am at present in the process of completing a Masters thesis, much of the content of which is a rejection of the 'things' I grew up believing – at least 'things' the church taught me (in that I have not rejected God but other 'stuff'). This in itself has been a painful and difficult process.

Feminist theologians have all traversed this very same road before her – discovering that the practices and beliefs we held dear before, no longer make sense to us. Gina, who is married to a Methodist minister, has struggled to come to terms with church politics in the MCSA. She is dissatisfied with the ongoing gender injustice that marginalises women in the Church – both lay and clergy.

Gina does not find the Bible to be a particularly woman-friendly book and she no longer reads it for pleasure – “especially the Old Testament” – and her studies are supporting her suspicions. The Bible confirms for her that the term 'brotherly love' is incongruent with biblical narratives. There are so few stories in the Bible that support the cherished concept of brotherly love. Hence, Gina, who still belongs to the MCSA largely because her spouse is a minister, looks forward to the day when real change will take place in the Church. Her story continues:

Excerpt 2

My mother's family has a long history in the MCSA – a history of involvement as a Circuit/Society Steward (my grandfather), a Sunday School teacher (my grandmother) [at least these are the roles I recall when coming on holiday and staying with my grandparents] and an uncle who became an ordained minister in the MCSA. The hymns I am meant to sing today were the ones I heard in my mothers womb and much time was later spent counting the lines and verses of hymns - to work out how far we were in singing them and how much was left.

Gina's family background is steeped in Methodism. She grew up with a grandfather who was, not surprisingly, the leader and a grandmother who was, equally not surprisingly, the

Sunday School teacher. Gina's experience supports the notion that African communities are religious – at least the older people definitely were. “Methodism was born in song” (see the Preface to *The Methodist Hymn-Book* 1933:v) and it sounds as though Gina is saying the same thing about herself here. The models of church leaders, firmly embedded in Gina's childhood experience, are that men are the leaders and women teach the children and sing in the choir. However, she continues with her story:

Excerpt 3

My parents took us to church regularly and my first experience of The Divine was during an Easter Service (aged I would say between 4 and 6). During this service the preacher told the story of Christ on the Cross – in a detail that to this day I recall the image of this person who died for me because – according to the preacher (or at least the way I heard the sermon) - I was so bad; it was me and my sin that had done/caused this thing. I remember going home and crying my eyes out because of what ‘I had done to Jesus’.

Gina, like Dawn, was also subjected to the ‘guilt theology’ as a child. The salvation story is a difficult one to impart to a child without blaming the child for ‘Jesus’ Crucifixion’. Another question, which Rakoczy (2004:99) poses, is whether a “Male Saviour” can save women. Rakoczy (2004:99) goes on to say that Jesus’ maleness “has been used together with the fatherhood of God to justify patriarchy, the rule of the father over the family and therefore men over women and children”. Gina grappled with these concepts too, as is evident in later excerpts of her story. She was, however, fortunate that both her parents were involved in her early experience of Church and God. Easter remains a constant reminder for Gina of her emotional experience in her early childhood. She reminisces about her Sunday School and Youth days as follows:

Excerpt 4

It would therefore come as no surprise that I excelled at Sunday School and although I don't remember any teachers I do remember getting all the prizes; and then one year ‘nogal’¹³⁰ another prize (a Bible) for having got all the others prizes. (In those days very strict marks were kept – one for attendance; one for knowing your Bible verse; one for paying attention, one for having done your homework and another for something else but I can't remember what). I later became a Sunday School teacher (the youngest ever in that church) got very involved in youth (Wesley) guild, was a group leader and a speaker on youth and confirmation camps while still at school and led the guild for a term in Std 9/10 (Aged 15/16) when the guild leader (a man in his early twenties) was away. God – and the ways of God – were of prime importance in my life, and the

¹³⁰ ‘Nogal’ is an Afrikaans exclamation meaning something like ‘remarkably’.

MCSA was the place where I learnt what I did and where my devotion found expression. My relationship with God was that God was my Father – to the point that I recall one day telling my own dad that he was not my father, but that God was.

Gina acquired excellent knowledge of the Bible and was a faithful Sunday School pupil, winning all the prizes each year. When she entered her teens, she attended youth camps and became involved in the Wesley Guild. Gina's commitment to God and church was complete. However, later in life Denise Ackermann's (1998:85) insights would ring true for Gina when she asserts that the "cry for healing is inseparable from the need for justice".

Gina showed leadership potential when she was still very young and had an opportunity to test her skills at an early age. The traditions of the Church were strong and Gina accepted that the male God of the Bible was her 'Father'. The story continues:

Excerpt 5

Strangely enough the Youth camps was also the place where I met and 'caught' the guys. My parents were very strict but I was allowed to go to youth so it became the place for 'boyfriend' relationships when I was between the ages of about 14-16. Further than that the church held no significance for the fact that I was a teenager – I was just very involved – often in leadership roles. While in Matric (age 16) I met my husband – after a church service but that is another story - and he became involved with me; later confirmed/transferring his Anglican confirmation to the MCSA in order to teach Sunday School.

Gina enjoyed freedom from her parents at youth meetings and, like other young women too, was able to explore relationships with boys during her teenage years. Church was not significant for her during this time of her life but youth meetings played an important role. Relationships and a sense of belonging are very important – these features are covered in this part of the story and Gina tells us more:

Excerpt 6

With regard to the Bible: I was pretty good – given all the concentration and input at Sunday School and my own personal discipline of daily devotions etc. However, the Bible is not a book I enjoy today – especially the Old Testament. In fact, the IBRA 'Read the Bible in a year' programme would have caused me to give up the Christian faith all together if I had persevered through the Old Testament. It has become impossible to believe in the nature of God as recorded (supposedly revealed) in the Old Testament. I am aware that even the New Testament is so tainted that it is a miracle that one can find and believe in a Divine Being who is perfect love and grace. I only have first year Biblical Studies (through UNISA), but an honours from UCT focusing on Christian Theology and am presently struggling through a Masters (with Rhodes) in Sociology of Religion.

Gina's more recent studies, informal as well as formal, have caused much concern for her regarding her faith, God and the Church. African feminist woman theologians, like Rakoczy, Phiri and Nadar, support this kind of discipline, where we study and inform ourselves of new approaches and develop a deeper understanding of theology and the Bible. Gina has recognised that much of what she had learnt as a child has to be unlearned but even though this process has been an exciting one for her, she has become disillusioned with the hierarchy of the MCSA. Elaine Graham (1997:117) writes that this "set me thinking about the possibilities of subverting these dominant paradigms of 'clericalism' and 'sexism' via the recovery of marginal traditions of woman-centred support and care" in her article entitled 'Feminist Theology: Myth, Mystery or Monster?' Many feminist theologians endeavour to 'recover woman-centred traditions' and in Africa this is being done very successfully through the scholarship of the members of The Circle.

Next, Gina shares about her names for God, as these have changed and even as they have stayed the same for her during a crisis:

Excerpt 7

With regard to my image of God I have journeyed from absolute dedication to 'God as Father', through God only as a Spirit and now – although I concentrate on God as Mother – I do sometimes recall the image of God as Father; simply because it is a valid image as 'one among many'. In crisis I still find myself returning to 'Father'; it is almost as if that image is so ingrained that I have to consciously work at replacing it with less idolatrous, more liberating and more 'true' images. [I say 'true' because while I recognize that I cannot know absolute truth, not the whole nature of The Divine, the image of Father alone is very 'untrue']. In sermons, public prayers, liturgies and talks I only refer to God as 'God', and in my Thesis only as 'The Divine;' the term with which I am most comfortable but which does not easily facilitate a personal relationship since it is too abstract. The God I have come to love is a God of love, grace and forgiveness, whose only laws are for our own sake. I cannot believe in a God who demands a blood sacrifice or order to forgive, neither in the evil one who is so powerful that God has to 'buy us out'. As you can imagine, these ideas are – in my experience at least – foreign to the Creeds, hymns, choruses, liturgies and thinking of the church – leaving me in a very, very lonely place. I therefore meet God in those whom I see during the day [being aware that even the most disconcerting person (be they a poor beggar or a rich fraudster) is created in the Image of The Divine and holds somewhere within them something of that Image]. My husband, daughter and son-in-law reflect God's acceptance of me, while The Divine Within is the source of most peace. For me, God is a pantheistic Being – present in all that has life, involved in the process of life (process theology) and on a journey with humanity. I meet God in my personal life, in those I love and who love me, in the beauty and strength of the sea, in the

personality of my pets, and in the fragile strength of foundling birds which I hand-rear; among other things,. The Church is perhaps the place where I feel the least 'at one' with The Divine. "Father", 'Lord'. 'King', 'Master', etc. are all terms which are now foreign to my understanding and when I am forced to hear The Divine addressed in these terms I am unable to participate in corporate worship experience; and realise my aloneness.

Gina's descriptions of her 'naming of God' are helpful and she tries to be completely honest about her emotions and her conscious decisions to relate to God in different ways. For her, the quest to be in a personal relationship with God is as important to her as is the academic exercise, which both of us are involved in. This is a particularly long excerpt but one that stands on its own as it addresses this one topic.

Gina also raises the issue of women's isolation in worship when we are expected to sing hymns, participate in liturgies or read Bible passages that exclude women. Rakoczy (2004:214) poses the question: "Why do women stay?" in her discussion on "An Inclusive Ecclesiology" of the Church. She recognises that "many women leave the church and in western countries they have been leaving in appreciable numbers in the last generation. But African women generally stay within the church" (Rakoczy 2004:214). This phenomenon ties in with the hope Oduyoye (2001:83) expresses when she says:

Women's solidarity, therefore, is with the Church as they see it through the eyes of Jesus. Women's solidarity is with the Church that they envision Christ represents. They know the real Church, and its shortcomings as well as its strengths. They remain in the Church because they are called by the Christ to do so.

African women believe in the Church and they hope for a future, in which the Church will be fully inclusive. Gina's story continues:

Excerpt 8

One of the interesting/amusing things in scripture is that the church always talks about 'brotherly love'. However, I have been unable to find a single story in the Bible in which brothers have shown a real love and concern for one another. I know the language of the Bible is the result of male translators in patriarchal societies, but the 'damage' has been done and it will take a long time to undo it.

Gina's perception of the stories in the Bible does lead to question this notion of brotherly love. There is more talk about 'war' in the Hebrew Scriptures than there is of 'brotherly love' and Gina's challenge is a valid one.

This might indeed be why the close relationship that existed between David and Jonathan¹³¹ was so extraordinary. The story continues:

Excerpt 9

Being married to a minister my role and experience as a woman in the church may be different to most; also because I have studied and been very involved. I was the first ever lay person to take on ‘District Mission Co-ordinator’; was part of the District Executive; have held a number of roles in Society and Circuit, am a local preacher, have been to a number of Synods and one Conference. [This is stated simply to show my (former) level of involvement and commitment.] I have – since I can recall – rejected the model of ‘women in the kitchen’ and refused, on principle, to try to make any input via ‘women’s channels’. [This does not mean that I do not serve or do dishes – but then I get the guys involved as well.] While the 40/20/40 suggestion of representation is a good start it is not applied. It is also not always that helpful – often because women need to be empowered, not just represented.

Gina’s position, as a minister’s wife, has not taken on the traditional model. She is a strong individual and has made her mark in the Church. Gina has served in many leadership positions and she has embarked on some innovative experiments. Her sentiments about women’s representation in the Church are echoed by feminist theologians, in that representation is not enough – empowerment and responsibility form part of the package. In support of the notion that women should not merely be represented, Rakoczy (2004:216) asserts in the section of her book entitled ‘Discipleship of Equals’ that it “is clear from the Gospels that Jesus called both women and men to be disciples.” A disciple learns from the teacher and participates fully. Next Gina shares about her own growth.

Excerpt 10

My growth has come through moving into different contexts. My personal faith journey includes experience of traditional, evangelical, academic, social awareness, charismatic, feminist and contemplative traditions as well as inter-faith dialogue. Some of this has been found in the MCSA, most of it through studies and some through involvement in NGOs, etc.

Gina’s wide experience in the Church and society has stood her in good stead. Her studies have enabled her to identify with some of the aspects of theology and her commitment to ecumenical unity and inter-faith harmony is commendable. Like many other feminist theologians, Gina also discovered that activists and feminists often walk alone. Rakoczy (2004:220) raises the point that women “have been socialised as servants and are praised

¹³¹ See the Bible: 1 Samuel 18:1 “When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

for the depth of their self-sacrifice” but Jesus made the choice to become a “self-emptying gift” to humanity. Gina’s quest to learn and become fully involved in the Christian faith and in her community, speaks of her hope for an inclusive Church. She alludes to her lonely journey as she begins to move towards her conclusion in this next part of her story:

Excerpt 11

I cannot recall an event in which I have celebrated womanhood in the MCSA; but then neither can I recall a time when men were offered the same opportunity. However, I do recognise that the church, and society itself, is generally in favour of men. I am still a Methodist because my husband is in the ministry and because – as a church – it is at least open (in theory) to the empowerment of women. I long to be part of that process, although at times the mountain seems so set in its ways that I don’t know that anyone could have enough faith/endurance to shift it at all. Had I been physically able (health wise) to facilitate the empowerment group at the Mission Congress, and lead the Bible Study, it would have been super. However, even at this Congress, the workshop was entitled ‘Equality (Including women)’. It seems we are so often an after-thought, an ‘add on’, the ‘last chapter’, and not part of the real agenda or the healing power of The Divine as practised in the formal church. No ‘keynote’ speakers were women and only two women were seen on the stage among the ‘leadership’ of the MCSA. The organisers and speaker at the congress did not show any respect for women as can be seen in the accommodation, the state of the ablutions (including graffiti of a pornographic nature), and the lack of attention and/or correction with regard to inclusive language and the exclusion of women in many statements. Responses from the floor of congress also revealed the need for the empowerment of women: about 70% of the responses being from men. At no time were men called on to respect women and to do something about the issues affecting women; especially rape (child rape and rape of the aged being more heinous than can be described)!

Gina and I worked together as co-facilitators of the ‘Inequality Group’ at the Mission Congress and because Gina had not been well during the preparation period, I had the opportunity of preparing for and leading one of the Bible Studies, along with Phumzile (her pseudonym) and a young dynamic woman minister. Gina raises several concerns in this part of her story. Violence against women is a concern that the MCSA is finally speaking out on. The women’s organisations in the Church are addressing this issue and the Women’s *Manyano* theme this past year (2011) has revolved around abuse and violence against women. The Sixteen Days of Activism Campaign is being promoted and local Methodist Societies are being encouraged by their Bishops to participate in events that raise awareness about this scourge in our society. Gina’s experience resonates with Mary Tororeiy (2005:158-159) when she suggests that women are ‘Present but Unwanted’ and that “the Church has not only been the site, but also the seedbed for the oppression that

women have for so long suffered”. Like Oduyoye, Gina too believes that she is ‘the Church’ but her experience of belonging to the MCSA does not inspire her, as she shares:

Excerpt 12

Lastly, it is with sadness that I write this. I am aware that I am ‘the Church’; but I experience this ‘belonging’ as being disempowering. Many people know my standpoint and will discuss it with me, but I see little changing – even in the lives of many women who do not want to change and/or accept the responsibility that would come with empowerment and the embracing of life as ‘whole people’, fully created in *imago Dei*...

Gina’s experience is depressing as is the poem by Agumba, which Oduyoye (2001:80) quotes in *Introducing African Women’s Theology*:

Women and the Church

I am not giving up! To church I must go
First worship day I walk in with great hope
But from the pulpit I hear from the preacher
‘Thus says the Bible
“Wives submit to your husbands in all things”
No woman is allowed to speak in church
Their husbands have all the answers to their questions’

However, African women theologians, especially through the writings of members of The Circle, are encouraging us to persevere and to continue to be Church. Even though “the Church of women’s experience, has yet to be recognized”, Oduyoye (2001:85) stresses that sharing “fully in the life of the Church, its mission and ministry is the calling of all who are in the church”. Thus, we press on in hope as Gina concludes:

Excerpt 13

It is my prayer that God will work in this area [as with slavery, *apartheid* and many other instances in history], and that I may find an opportunity to play my part in bringing hope for women in the MCSA.

Gina’s story is full of life – she celebrates and laments – and she shares her experiences as honestly as possible.

Feminist principles of leadership are challenging for many people in the Church. Promoting choice (Rakoczy 2004:387), being inclusive (Oduyoye 2005:151), encouraging questioning (Watson 2002:7), and practising non-hierarchical leadership styles (Russell 1974:173) are not popular ways of doing church. People, both men and women, may need to have transforming experiences before they realise that God has not ordained the present *status quo* in the Church. Gina described how she, personally, had to unlearn concepts,

taught to her in the Church since childhood, and in her closing comments she laments the fact that so few people – women included – have yet made that transforming discovery. One woman, who has made this discovery, is the fifth participant, whom we shall call Linda.

5.3.5. Linda's Story

This woman's story is unique because Linda is the only woman minister with blindness in the MCSA. It is, therefore, also impossible to hide her identity, even though I have also given her a pseudonym. Over and above signing a consent form, Linda has given her full permission for me to use her story in this research. Linda is a single middle-aged White minister, who was raised in the Cape but who is now a part-time minister in Namibia. Her story tells of a double bind – she has blindness and she is female. Linda has a rare tenacity and she is someone who perseveres at something she believes in. Her years of training for the ordained ministry were difficult. She was the only probationer from Namibia, which means she had to travel alone and was cut off from other ministers in training in the Connexion. She overcame all the obstacles in her way even though she confessed that, at times, she questioned the wisdom of her choice to follow her calling. Not only was this probationer minister a woman but she was also a feminist theologian, working towards inclusive language in the MCSA. Linda's sighted female colleagues drew inspiration from her example. Many heated debates were entered into during her years of training, often between conservative male probationers and some of the more liberal female probationers. The women did not all agree because some of Linda's female co-students were determined to maintain the *status quo* and not to rock the boat, lest their ordination be jeopardised. Linda aspired to fulfil her calling as well as to work for gender justice in the Church. Her story makes for amusing reading as she has a keen sense of humour. Most often, she would be the one who makes the 'blind jokes' at social gatherings.

As mentioned in chapter one, a highlight in Linda's childhood was her utmost delight when she received her first Braille Hymn-Book and Bible. She remembers with fondness her joy at being able to read the Gospel according to John by herself.

She highlighted that, in her experience, single people find it difficult to have a place in the Church as it is usually designed for the 'nuclear family' (mother, father and two children – preferably first a boy and then a girl).

Linda has studied the subject of same-sex sexuality extensively and believes that the MCSA needs to accept people of all sexual orientations – this in itself marginalises her for her outspokenness on the topic. She is a qualified advocate, who is now also an ordained part-time and non-stipendiary minister in a congregation that cannot afford to pay her a stipend. I am reminded of Rakoczy (2004:221) saying that the “church wants women to do the work men will not do” when I think of Linda’s sacrificial ministry in Windhoek. Although she has had many positive experiences in the Church, her pain arose during the period of her training for the ministry. We now hear Linda’s story in her own words:

Excerpt 1

I was taken to church by my mother. My father was not anti-church, but rarely attended. I never figured out the reason for this, except that I do know that while he was a soldier in World War II, he was once chased out of a Dutch Reformed Church, which he had attended, wearing a uniform. My mother read me Bible Stories. I also went to Sunday School and at ordinary school we were taught about the Bible and about God. I cannot specifically remember my images of God as a child, but I did say my prayers every night and prayed for my parents. I asked God to look after them and me, especially since I went to boarding school at a very young age. I cannot remember that I was scared of God, but I was aware that God seemed to be respected.

One of the key themes that run through all the stories we have heard, is the role mothers and grandmothers play in children’s faith development and religious education. At the same time, we also discovered that not all the men in the participants’ lives were actively involved in the Church. Although none of the fathers seemed ‘anti-church’ they nevertheless did not make any significant imprint on their daughter’s memory regarding God, Church or spirituality. It is helpful, in this research, to recognise that women played the major roles in the spiritual upbringing of those who share their stories with us.

I also discovered, when talking with Linda about her images of God, that for a person with blindness images are very different to what they are for sighted people. An image is more related to feelings, experiences, nuances and sounds, rather than to what it looks like. In the correspondence between two friends (one blind and the other sighted) recorded in *On Blindness – Letters between Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan*, Magee (1995:21) responds to Milligan as follows:

You end your letter by asking if I agree with you that blind people can understand the meaning of visual terms to a major extent even if not wholly; and, if I do, what I would say about that part of the meaning of such terms that blind people cannot share.

I have to say that I do not believe that blind people can understand visual terms to a *major* extent, though you demonstrate impressively that they can do so to *some* extent. What is central here is the distinction between ‘knowing’ and ‘knowing about’ or ‘knowing that’.

Linda is a remarkable woman, who loves to engage with others about blindness. As a sighted person, I found it difficult to understand her love for travel and adventure, until I travelled with her and saw the world through her ‘unseeing eyes’. Sighted people rely more on sight and less on their other four senses – Linda constantly reminds me of them. Linda has gone skiing, she has been a crewmember on a tall ship, she has climbed Table Mountain and she has been on several ocean cruises. She often travels on her own, which is a challenge, even for a sighted person.

Linda’s close relationship with God, which was fostered from childhood, provides her with the strength she needs. Having a sense of humour has always been a priority in Linda’s life and I believe her teachers contributed to this aspect of her personality, as we hear in the next part of her story:

Excerpt 2

I enjoyed Sunday School. I remember asking many questions and found my teachers very helpful. One teacher who stands out, was someone called Maggie Reid. She was a teacher at the school for the deaf in Worcester and also a local preacher. I remember her as having a sense of humour. I also remember Vic Honey, who was principal of the art school. He was lively and full of fun, but also taught me a great deal.

Two teachers stand out in Linda’s memory of her early school days. It was also during this time of her life that she learnt to play the piano and unlike sighted piano players who read the music as they play it, she had to commit the score to memory before she could play the piece.

Excerpt 3

I do not remember specific things about being a teenage girl in church. Nothing really stands out, other than that I was quite active, participating in Sunday School anniversaries with great enthusiasm, singing solos sometimes and on occasion playing the piano in the Sunday School. I did not attend youth groups and youth camps; there were no such opportunities. I do remember singing in the church choir as a teenager and that was great fun. Our congregation was small and everyone knew everyone else. My biggest thrill as a youngster was when I acquired my first Braille hymnbook and Bible. I could read the latter to my hearts’ content.

Literacy meant so much more to Linda than it does to a sighted person. Being able to read opened up the whole world to her. The Bible and the Methodist Hymnbook have a special place in Linda's heart. As she matured, she also became aware of the gender injustice of the Bible and the exclusive language of many of the hymns but those challenges made the Scriptures even more important to her – it strengthened her commitment to delve into what really is there. Her story continues:

Excerpt 4

I learnt Bible stories at school and Sunday School. My first encounter with a Braille Bible was in standard two when I was a boarder. The hostel had some of the Gospels. They were in Afrikaans, but I remember that the first book I read (without being read to), was John's Gospel. I did not understand it all, but found it fascinating. Individual books of the Bible were available in Afrikaans from the Printing Press at Worcester and I acquired a few of those. I enjoy reading the Bible still today, especially since I studied theology (I have a BTh from UNISA and an MA in Evangelism Studies from Sheffield University), because I now have access to commentaries and find it a challenge to apply the teachings of the Bible in my own life and that of the people who listen to my sermons.

Linda's studies have stimulated her thinking and her sharp mind provides her with the skills to preach and teach regularly, over and above her duties as an advocate in a legal NGO. Her humility is astounding in the face of everything she has accomplished in her life. Yet, even though she is reluctant to talk about it, she is constantly passed over when it comes to promotions or leadership in her secular job. It is difficult to know whether it is because she is a woman or merely because she is a woman with blindness. Linda makes use of the most up-to-date electronic equipment to assist her in her work. She has her own Braille printer, a Braille book-reader, a phone that talks to her and software on her computer, which converts documents into Braille. These documents, including e-mails, can then either be spoken to her by an electronic voice, or converted into Braille, which she can then print. Such equipment, as used by Linda, makes me aware of another kind of marginalisation, that of people with disabilities. Few people with blindness can afford to pay thirty-thousand Rand for electronic equipment and the cell phone, which is compatible with her computer software, costs more than twice the price of an ordinary cell phone in the same range. One of the feminist principles that stands out for me in Linda's determination, is that of choice. Linda chooses life, she works towards her dreams and pursues her call from God with an incredible passion. Linda's spirituality is closely connected to her daily life, as she shares:

Excerpt 5

My image of God is one of holiness, power, gentleness, love and caring. God for me is gracious and generous. The names for God, with which I am most familiar at present are: Father, Mother, The Holy One, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Lord. I relate to God quite comfortably, feeling that I can bring the smallest need, e.g. finding transport, etc. to God. I find God very personal, even though I regard God with awe. I find that I meet God in the Church and outside. I must qualify this by saying that I do not always feel God's presence in church. I feel God's presence during my personal devotions and often when I am in a Bible study of fellowship group. I also sometimes feel God's presence in other places, e.g. beside the sea, or in the garden.

Like many other feminist theologians, Linda too, experiences times when God seems absent in the Church. Linda finds interaction with people in small groups meaningful and it is there that she often senses God's presence. Nature also plays an important part in her experience of God. Prayer is part of life for Linda and she openly includes others in her prayers. She is dependent on others for transport and for assisting her with colour coding her wardrobe and this is something she manages quite naturally. Although Linda lives on her own in her own house, with a garden, she regularly needs people to give her rides to work and to church. She has a circle of friends on whom she can call and she does so without feeling guilty. Linda is a fiercely independent person in many respects, so much so that it is comforting to know that she does concede to being dependent in some areas. Next she shares about her feminist awakening:

Excerpt 6

I did not become aware of language until a few years ago. I often found and still find some language old-fashioned and find that I no longer relate well to it. I find hymns and songs meaningful, but must admit that some of the contemporary songs, while they may have good rhythm and tunes, are somewhat superficial. I have recently made more use of liturgy in church and in my quiet time. I find the liturgies in the new Methodist Worship Book from the UK helpful, especially the fact the language is understandable, e.g. the new Covenant Service. I also find the liturgy in the Anglican Prayer Book (Church of the Province 1989) useful in private devotions. I do not always use these liturgies, but I find that it gives some structure and helps me to have a broader focus. I have not been exposed to many other liturgies.

During our training for the ministry – our training overlapped for two years – we wrestled with the exclusive language used by lecturers and colleagues. We created opportunities to talk about feminist theological perspectives but we were not popular. Like Linda, I too enjoy working with the new 'Methodist Worship Book from the UK' but the new liturgies

are not yet accepted by all the people in local congregations. Linda also struggles with singing inane 'love songs' to Jesus. Worship needs to be more than that. Social justice and a deepened spirituality are important aspects of worship. Her story continues:

Excerpt 7

The fact that the Bible is patriarchal never really occurred to me until I heard a talk by an American professor who visited Central Methodist Church in Cape Town in the early 1990s. He gave me a new perspective and I have since become more aware to this. I do not understand everything that I read in the Bible and consult commentaries if I do not. One of the stories in the Bible to which I relate is that of Esther, the power of one person to change the course of history. I also find the story of the woman who touched Jesus' cloak particularly meaningful. This may sound strange, but having suffered for many years with menstrual problems and haemorrhage, I can relate to what she must have been going through and how desperate she must have been. The main purpose of the Bible is for God to reveal Godself to human beings.

Linda's feminist awakening was a breakthrough for her. She immediately started studying and working towards a change in her own approach to God and ministry. This journey continues as Linda is beginning to explore the possibilities of studying for her PhD. When Linda identifies with this particular biblical character I sense a much deeper connection there than merely her physical challenges, related to her own menstrual cycle. Linda's blindness has kept her 'outside' the 'ordinary community' and Jesus also says to her 'be healed of your 'isolation''. Linda's views, on the role the Church plays in family life, is explored in this next part of her story:

Excerpt 8

The Church's roles in family life is to promote good family values but not in the sense of wives submitting to husbands, etc. Moreover, the Church needs to broaden its understanding of family life by recognising different kinds of families: single parent, same-sex relationships, etc. I cannot think of any particular joys and sorrows of my family in the Church, except that I sometimes felt "out" because of being single. I receive good pastoral care in the Church before I became a minister. I have not felt specific expectations of me as a woman in the Church. I have not been involved in "women's work" as such and have fortunately not been expected to work in the kitchen or look after children.

Linda particularly raises the 'family values' concern. She is deeply aware of the pain lesbian and gay people experience in the MCSA and she promotes the conversation that the Church has committed itself to being a part of. Although a good cook, Linda has not been expected to fulfil the tasks, usually assigned to women, which indirectly excluded her from their group. Being a woman with blindness has caused Linda much marginalisation and

isolation and, even though she does not mention it in the next excerpt of her story, she has in fact been overlooked for leadership positions.

Excerpt 9

I have been fortunate in not having experienced rejection as a woman in leadership. The only pain I have suffered in the church has been as a probationer minister; I guess being a woman has not helped. I have felt not listened to or taken seriously. This has been at the hands of clergy colleagues and not the laity.

Linda acknowledges her struggles during the years of training for the ministry. Being placed in a group with conservative evangelicals as well as feminist liberals was bound to cause problems for everyone. I recall an occasion when our groups visited a Buddhist Retreat Centre as an interfaith exposure. Linda and I were excited and delighted at what we learnt and experienced there. On reflection afterwards some of our co-student ministers were angry at being taken to ‘an evil’ place. Other difficulties Linda experienced were the handouts we received during lectures. The sighted student ministers could read and prepare for tests and exams easily. Linda, however, could not bring her scanning equipment with her so seminars and retreats – she had to wait until she got home and only then could the laborious process of scanning her notes, books, lectures and handouts begin so that she could convert them all to Braille. She needed more than twice as much time to prepare for exams than any of her sighted colleagues did. In spite of all these challenges, Linda excelled at tests, examinations and assignments. However, she concludes her story by relating her introduction into MCSA leadership in 1988:

Excerpt 10

My first encounter with leadership in the Church was in 1988 when our minister asked me to be a Society Steward (in Cape Town). I continued in this position until I relocated to Namibia in 1994. I then became a Circuit Steward and a lay representative to the Connexional Executive, as well as a local preacher. Bishop Ivan Abrahams has provided and still provides encouragement. I am still a Methodist because I believe in its basic tenets and doctrines. I dream of a day when church leaders will stop being high and mighty and decide to climb off their pedestals. I dream of a day when all will be regarded as equals: men, women, gays, etc. It is obviously necessary to have leaders but I find the abuse of power in some quarters in our church unacceptable. Moreover, we need the Laws and Discipline as our guide, but then we need to follow the spirit and not the letter of the law. Ultimately, our main guide is God and the Bible. Furthermore, I hope that we would stop creating talkshops and structures and get down to more action. The structures ought to be much more a means to an end and not an end in itself.

This quote does not refer to the exclusion that Linda has to bear on a day-to-day basis. The only time, that I recall, that a liturgy was e-mailed to her ahead of time so that she could print out a copy for herself in Braille, was for her own ordination service. Most often, Linda is excluded because liturgies or programmes at Circuit, Synod, Conference or other Church events are not printed in Braille. She is accustomed to being excluded in this sense and would not mention this as it would draw attention to her personal need. Although the purpose of this thesis is to examine the gap between gender policy and practice, I believe Linda's story adds the dimension of all marginalised people to the justice debate in the MCSA. Being a woman, who is also blind, has prevented her from being elected to positions that she could ably fill. In her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins (2000:273) discusses the theory of intersectionality and asserts that

Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance.

Linda has experienced this kind of interconnectedness of oppression. However, she has mostly accepted this marginalisation because 'resistance' would impact negatively on her relationships with people. Hill Collins (2000:273) suggests that offering "subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications".

This participant with blindness from Namibia, who shared that her experiences in the MCSA have been mainly positive, except for the six years of her training for the ministry, is an example of the level of acceptance women have been conditioned to in the Church. Linda is a talented woman with many gifts but she is not encouraged to utilise her skills to the full in the Church. It is in a secular NGO that she is more fully encouraged to exercise her gifts rather than in the MCSA. Her presence at Circuit Quarterly Meetings, District Synods or Connexional events should make the leadership of the MCSA more aware of the need to provide for people with disabilities – this is one more social issue that needs to be researched in the future. Braille facilities are not high on any congregation's agenda.

It is helpful to note that Linda was invited to give a personal reflection at the recent World Methodist Conference, held in Durban in August 2011. Her reflection was entitled ‘Blind Spots’ and she challenged the Conference on the many blind spots we have in the Church. Her reflection was very well received and her challenge was most appropriate.

5.4. Thematic Analysis

The women have told their stories and the voices of African theologians have been heard in the commentary. I now offer a review of these five women’s stories under the following collective themes:

5.4.1. Mother’s Table Setting

All five participants reminisce about their mothers in their stories. Letty Russell (1988:14) affirms how “the image of our mothers and grandmothers is often empowering for our lives as we seek to ground faith and action in our own herstory”. Phumzile recalls attending church with her mother and she calls to mind how her mother was one of the women who helped with all the work in their home church. The opening lines of Busisiwe’s story tell how her mother and grandmother were the ones who talked to her about God and she too attended church with her mother. Dawn tells how her mother spoke to her about God and encouraged her to attend Sunday School. Gina’s reference to her mother emphasises her strong Methodist roots and she remembers that her grandmother was a Sunday School teacher. Linda’s mother played a significant role in her life and she too was the one who took Linda to church. The mothers of these women played an important role in shaping their children’s spirituality. Even though none of the women indicated that their fathers were anti-church, none of them mentioned their fathers as the key figure in their childhood spiritual formation.

5.4.2. Children at the Table

The Methodist women were asked to reflect on their childhood experiences of God and the MCSA when they wrote their stories. More than one woman experienced fear and guilt as a child in the Church even though Jesus welcomed children into the circle. Gina was made to feel responsible for Jesus’ Crucifixion and Dawn was made to feel guilty about everyone coming to Jesus’ birthday on Christmas Day and not giving him a gift. Kenneth Mtata (2011) has recently in his article ‘African Theological Anthropology: the

Place of Children', challenged the discipline of African Women's Theologies, whose scholarship he says, despite campaigning vociferously for inclusivity in their theologising, is nevertheless lacking because they have not included children in their theological discourses. He argues that "had their scope of marginalisation been enlarged to encompass children, this would have given African womanist theological reflection a positive nuance it currently misses" (Mtata 2011:55).¹³² Only when children are included, then will the quest for a more inclusive African theological anthropology be complete. Holness (2009:67) also reminds us of the importance of the prophet's words and challenges the Church to "bring children in from the margins of faith, taking note of the real significance of those six short words in Isaiah's prophecy: "a little child shall lead them" (Is. 11:6)".

5.4.3. Minding our Manners at the Table

Even now, when women are supposed to feel welcome at 'the Table' through ordination in the MCSA, a sense of limitation still mars women's participation in the Church. Tradition plays a prevailing role here, particularly when it comes to how women ought to dress and whether they may fill key positions of leadership in the Church. Phumzile and Dawn have indicated their unwillingness to be told what to wear or how to behave, yet others have accepted the demands tradition makes on them. Busisiwe, however, is one of the women who perpetuate these notions, especially about women's work in the Church and women covering their heads at Holy Communion. Njoroge (2005:68) reminds us of the desperate need for the "prophetic voice in a continent that is languishing in a litany of woes that devalue and diminish women's fruitfulness and creativity".

5.4.4. Bible Reading Around the Table

One thing emerges repeatedly in all the women's stories – this is the importance of the Bible in their lives. The women are at different places with regard to the Bible¹³³ but it has nevertheless occupied a revered place in their spiritual journeys. Carolyn Osiek's (1985:97ff) five-part typology of the Bible is a helpful tool with which to categorise where each woman situates herself with regard to the Bible. I do not think these terms cover

¹³² The question, however, needs to be raised as to whether male African theologians include children.

¹³³ People often embody more than one position at any given time.

every perspective one can have on the Bible and although I use Osiek's terms, the description of them is my own interpretation.

"Rejectionist"

This view declares that the Bible does not have ultimate authority and that the Christian Church is completely sexist and irredeemable. This view holds out no hope, as it sees the Church as misogynist and an institution that continues to abuse and marginalise women. Although Gina has expressed rejectionist tendencies, she in fact still holds onto the hope that the MCSA will change.

"Revisionist"

Within a revisionist understanding is the view that the text is patriarchal, but that this is due to the era in which it was authored and recorded. This view supports the notion that there is sacred truth in the Bible and that the language could be made inclusive. I would place Gina, Phumzile, Dawn and Linda in this category and to an extent I even believe Busisiwe has a few revisionist tendencies.

"Sublimationist"

This view perseveres at exploring feminine symbols and images of God in the Bible, and proposes that these ought to be discovered and developed. Linda, Dawn, Gina and Phumzile have each indicated in their stories that they are committed to discovering new images for God but none of them now wants to limit God to feminine images.

"Liberationist"

This view claims that the Bible's primary aim is to facilitate liberation. All aspects related to images for God and language of the Bible are secondary. This view rejects any perspective on the Bible that does not overtly support liberation. Gina has expressed liberationist tendencies in her story but even she would not situate herself wholly in this category. Phumzile, Dawn and Linda would agree that the Bible has liberatory qualities but like Gina, they would not agree that liberation is its only objective. Here we also acknowledge that there are different perspectives on liberation. Liberation theologians have worked with political activists to change oppressive regimes but spiritual liberation is also an aspect, which cannot be ignored. A postcolonial reading of the Bible is essential in Africa as this adds an additional liberatory quality to the Bible, as does a gender reading.

"Loyalist"

This view ascribes to the Bible absolute authority. It is the Word of God and therefore cannot be oppressive. It needs to be acknowledged that all five women's introduction to the Bible began with this view. Only Busisiwe, however, has remained a loyalist. For the other four women, various experiences, studies and extensive reading have drawn them into acquiring a new perspective on the Bible. For most of them, their view of the Bible is now a mixed perspective, related very much to the context they find themselves in.

5.4.5. Exclusion From the Table

All the women in these stories have shared the pain of being excluded, at some time or another. Feminist theology emerged out of "pain" – the deep pain of the exclusion and marginalisation of women in the Church. Each of these women's stories of exclusion was different. For Phumzile it was a conscious exclusion by her co-Bishops even though she too had been elected to the same high office in the MCSA, whereas for Busisiwe it was an unconscious exclusion, which she did not acknowledge, but was nevertheless real. For Gina it was the exclusive language of the hymns and liturgies in the Church and the way the Bible seems such an unfriendly book to women. For Linda it was being overlooked for leadership positions because she is a woman with blindness and, although she does not mention it, not having a liturgy printed in Braille at a major function in the MCSA. For Dawn it was being told, via her husband, not to wear brightly coloured stockings and, on another occasion, being relegated as a minister to serve in the Sunday School for three years. Feminist theologians have lamented the exclusion of women in the Church and will continue to do so until the Church changes.

5.4.6. Changing the Shape of the Table

While all the women talk of exclusion and pain, they also demonstrate incredible courage and hope, through various efforts. Linda's perseverance at ministry, often in difficult circumstances, is encouraging. Her commitment to campaigning for gay rights in the MCSA is an example of a sure hope that change will come. Dawn's dream to establish a church that will be different from any other church because its minister is a woman is another sign of hope. Gina's willingness to serve on committees to examine policies in the MCSA means women are represented where changes need to take place. Phumzile's

commitment to the AIDS Hospice where she serves continues to bring hope to the people living with HIV in her community. The values that are important to Busisiwe keep her committed to her family and loyal to the MCSA. African woman theologians are recognising that “God’s call to them is not passive. It is compelling and compulsory. It is a call to wholeness that challenges the will and the intellect” (Kanyoro and Oduyoye 2006:1). It is in accepting this call and in responding to this challenge that the shape of ‘the Table’ is being changed.

Inasmuch as theology is the study of God and of God’s relationship with humanity and the universe, ecclesiology is the study of the Church in all its forms. In the following section, I examine feminist ecclesiological perspectives, in relation to the women’s stories and my own experiences.

5.5. Feminist Ecclesiological Perspectives

I include this critique from a feminist spiritual and theological perspective because I need to acknowledge my own position as a woman, who is a convert to feminist theology. I recognise my biased gender lens, through which I view the MCSA and life in general. I make no apology for this. However, I do state my position and my commitment to examine the various perspectives as objectively as possible.

In my experience, the term *feminism* does not enjoy a positive acceptance by the majority of people in the MCSA. It is often used to ridicule or make fun of someone who believes women should share in leadership or who challenges any male-dominance in the church. In many academic circles it is understood, according to Ann Loades, who draws on Gerda Lerner’s (1986:236-237) definition, that

[a]t its most minimal, then, feminism is a movement that seeks change for the better for women, for justice for them; thus feminism can mean a doctrine of social and political rights, an organization for working for those rights, the assertion of the claims of women as a group and the body of theory they have created, and the recognition of the necessity of long-term social change (Loades (ed) 1990:1).

Although this is a good place to start, it is also necessary to state that the Christian perspective on feminism or feminist theology is more than that. Ackermann (2006:225-226) believes that

[g]enerally speaking, however, feminist theologies take a special interest in the lives of women, their stories, their hopes, their beliefs, and their experiences of oppression and liberation. Christian feminist theologies want to bring women's lives into the "drama of the Christian message and explores how Christian faith grounds and shapes women's experiences of hope, justice, and grace as well as instigat[ing] and enforce[ing] women's experiences of oppression, sin, and evil".

The feminist reaction to the story and practice of patriarchy is multi-faceted. Firstly, we believe that if women's role in society is to change, then women's and men's perceptions and attitudes toward women also have to change. Exploitation of women, in all institutions and organisations, must be exposed. Feminists also seek to counteract the stereotyping of women and to object to being kept in inferior positions or barred from leadership just because they are women. Feminist analyses have pointed out that Christianity has had a major influence in the shaping of Western culture and its sexist ideology.

Patriarchy silences women. Patriarchy as language, as biblical heritage, as secular and legal systems – all of patriarchy is unhelpful when it comes to women searching for healing and transformation. Laws and constitutions may have been amended to be more woman-friendly but until patriarchy is exposed and transformed women will continue to live as second-class citizens in a male-dominated and misogynist world. This is as relevant in the MCSA as it is in the secular realm because male-dominance as a state of mind crosses the secular sacred divide.

Joan Chittister (1998:1) shares a completely different stance on the conflict, which is related to "the Other" between men and women:

A world on the brink of marital breakdown, urban violence, international conflict, and global deterioration demonstrates without a doubt that spirituality-as-per-usual has not worked. And no wonder. When traditional spirituality requires the invisibility of half the human race, the spiritual resources of the world go bankrupt.

She is therefore recommending a spirituality of the spiritual life itself. A spirituality that is independent of traditional religion. Morny Joy (1995) in her article in *Religion & Gender* explores the numerous options for the re-conception of God. All, to some extent, "seek to reverse the autocratic and austere atmosphere that has pervaded male-oriented God models" (Joy 1995:121-122). I believe that both men and women need to examine these models and find a balanced approach which rings true for all people. Feminist theologians have

grappled and will continue to grapple with the many issues, which surround this all-pervading system of patriarchal domination. For some the most important aspect has been political liberation, for others the focus has been inclusive language and yet for still others the most important part of the struggle has been to rediscover the Feminine Divine.

5.6. Concluding Summary

In conclusion I wish to celebrate the work and witness of women in the MCSA. The stories of the five significant Methodist women, related here, are examples of the ways in which women in the MCSA are continually excluded. Their stories also serve to illustrate that although the MCSA is steeped in patriarchal ecclesiological practices, many women still find fulfilment in the Church.

Another way that I have demonstrated the ways in which the MCSA remains patriarchal in its ecclesiological practices, is through the writings of African woman feminist theologians.

When the work and witness of women in the MCSA are discussed, it becomes apparent that for most part, especially thirty and more years ago, the women's organisations were some of the only avenues of service and leadership open to women. Before 1950 it was very unusual for women to become local preachers in Southern Africa and in the MCSA the doors only opened to women to enter the ordained ministry in 1975, when the first woman was accepted on trial for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, to which she was duly ordained in the following year (Oosthuizen 1990:75).

Before embarking on this chapter, I posed two questions and it is essential to review whether they have been answered or, at least, to consider to what extent answers or responses have been possible. When analysing the women's stories it became clear that women's needs are seldom considered in the Church. When we hear the lament of African feminist theologians, we are reminded that women's recommendations are rarely debated, firstly because they are seldom given an opportunity to raise issues in the institutional Church and secondly, because women have ways of dealing with their issues outside of the institutional Church. However, what remains crucial is that these questions, and others like them, continue to be asked.

Having considered ways of expanding ‘the Table’, prepared the way for expressing the hope for a ‘round Table’, which is the title of the concluding chapter of this thesis. The MCSA has stated its intent to be a Church of healing and transformation. The way forward, especially when considering alternative models of being church, might facilitate this dream of the MCSA to become a reality.

Chapter Six

‘Hope for a Round Table’ – Modelling a Transformed Future for the MCSA

The critical principle of feminist ecclesiology is a table principle. It looks for ways that God reaches out to include all those whom society and religion have declared outsiders and invites them to gather round God’s table of hospitality (Russell 1993:25).

6.0. Introducing the Conclusion

I begin this final chapter with the above quote from Letty Russell in her book *Church in the Round – Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, as I believe in God’s vision for an alternative community – an alternative table – a round table that will enable the doing and being of church differently. Here I shall provide a summary of the research project as a whole. Thereafter, I shall propose some transformative models of being church, in response to the exclusive and patriarchal ecclesiological practices of the MCSA. These models would enhance the healing and transformation that the MCSA has declared to be its mission. Thereafter, as part of the ‘way forward’, this final chapter will also deal with the hope for gender healing in the MCSA. This conclusion will also evaluate the research, placing it on ‘the Table’ along with other African feminist theologians’ work.

Although this thesis addresses the importance of gender healing and transformation in the MCSA, it cannot offer one perfect model in which this ought to take place. However, some concrete suggestions to assist in closing this gap include:

- a) Gender education for clergy and laity – both general and theological.
- b) A critical review of present liturgies – by DEWCOM and the local church.
- c) Creating structures for monitoring and evaluating the progress towards inclusion and gender justice in the MCSA – at every level of being church..
- d) Linking gender injustice to racial injustice – learning from the methodology used to implement geographic Circuits and replicating that system.
- e) Research the methods used by the South African Government to close the gap, at local and national level, between the gender policy enshrined in the South African Constitution and practice on the ground, which still exists. Learn from this and adapt any of their methodologies, which might be useful in the MCSA.

During a discussion at a staff meeting in November 2007, I ascertained that in the Durban Metropolitan Circuit women are in the majority at worship on Sundays. It would be interesting to determine what exactly the ratio of male and female membership is in the MCSA.¹³⁴ At the Natal Coastal District Synod in May 2007, the Bishop mentioned in her opening address that in many societies throughout this District the membership of a congregation is comprised mainly of women. This should entitle women to a greater proportion of the leadership quota than the suggested 40%. Women usually seem to do the lion's share of the work in the Church and such a statement is not an exaggeration but an accurate reflection of the situation in many congregations throughout Southern Africa. At each Synod and Conference financial reports are tabled, indicating that large sums of money were raised by the women's organisations – for mission and for their own local Societies and Circuits.

The statistics for the census taken in 2001¹³⁵ indicate that the total number of Methodists in South Africa (which excludes the membership in Namibia, Botswana, Moçambique, Swaziland and Lesotho, which also form part of this Connexion) were as follows:

	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
Male	1,288,106	77,575	1,426	161,706	1,528,813
Female	1,507,414	85,634	1,655	181,908	1,776,611
Totals:	2,795,520	163,209	3,081	343,614	3,305,424
Female Majority:	219,308	8,059	229	20,202	247,798

According to the Methodist Connexional Office the statistics on this church's schedules¹³⁶ are lower than what the government census indicates as some people specify their 'religion' as Methodist during a census even though they are not recorded on any congregation's membership list. However, these statistics do indicate that in 2001 there were 247,798

¹³⁴ Statistics are not automatically recorded according to gender or age. A resolution was passed at the Conference of 2011 to ensure that registers for all official meetings in the MCSA now do record gender and age but it would remain difficult to gather these kind of statistics for Sunday worship.

¹³⁵ <<http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/default.asp>> [Accessed 11 August 2011].

¹³⁶ Circuits submit their membership statistics to their annual District Synods and these figures are compiled for the Methodist Connexional Office's records.

more women Methodists in South Africa than there were men. (A new census was conducted in South Africa in 2011 but these statistics are not yet available.)

Given the statistics above it is clear why the gender policy, promoted by the MCSA, which recommends '40% Female, 40% Male and 20% Youth representation' (Yearbook 1999/2000:174) is needed. My research endeavoured to examine the gap that exists between this gender policy and the practice within the MCSA. The theoretical framework was developed, the broader questions were briefly posed and space was created for dealing with an extensive literature review. The relevance of this research was clarified through providing references to the MCSA's source documents and substantiating my arguments with some stories of Methodist women.

Gender healing for all members of the MCSA is a hope expressed in chapter one of this thesis. We have examined the arguments and we have journeyed with the women, who tell their stories, and we have listened to the wisdom of African feminist theologians, among others. Does this thesis merely add additional knowledge to the field of gender and religion or may it express a deeper hope for real transformation? Fulata Moyo (2006:243) writes about this theology of hope:

Three attributes of God enhance this theology of hope. The first is God's unconditional love, coupled with God's justice, whereby through Her/His infinite wisdom, God brings interventions into our lives that seek out the best in a situation. These nullify possible misconceptions implied by simplistic Christian explanations of particular crises, such as "Sister, accept this as God's will." These rejoinders are sometimes insensitive and almost always escapist, resembling Marx' statement that faith (religion) is the opiate of the people.

I believe that gender healing is facilitated through similar means. When God's love, justice and wisdom are understood as being intricately intertwined, a deep sense of hope could be awakened in the Church, a way to pursue gender healing.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which explores Sacred Scripture, Church Tradition, Human Reason and Personal Experience, remains an important approach to research for Methodists. I have endeavoured to allow all four of these aspects to inform and enlighten my arguments – sometimes overtly but mostly covertly.

It has emerged, according to the preceding discussions in this thesis that patriarchy, as a system, continues to govern the MCSA's ecclesiological practices. However, the voices of African feminist theologians are being heard as we say '**women are church**'.

Maya Angelou, the acclaimed African American author and poet, says: “A bird doesn’t sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.”¹³⁷ I too, along with many women in the Church, ‘sing because we have a song’. The stories in this thesis have contributed to ‘the song of the MCSA’.

Theories are interesting and they can create much discussion and debate. How these theories are transformed into the practical implementation of, in this case, the MCSA’s gender policy, remains the vital test as to whether theories encourage and build up or whether they end up as mere ‘castles in the air’.

The theories of feminist cultural hermeneutics (Kanyoro 2002) are encouraging because they show clearly how religious activity in most cultures has been designed to uplift the marginalised and to bring hope to the poor and the oppressed in society. The Christian faith is no different and while many Western women are walking away from the institutional Church, the majority of African women have decided to stay, to tell their stories and to work towards gender justice in the Church. How this gender justice will be worked out depends on whether the Church is truly willing to change the shape of ‘the Table’ and move toward a round table of partnership. It is also interesting to note that even in the South African Government, which has an inclusive constitution, a gender policy and quotas for woman in positions of leadership; gender justice is not yet implemented with integrity. The media regularly highlights incidents where incompetent women were appointed because they toe the party line. Appointing women indiscriminately is as much an injustice to women as is not doing so at all. Neither the South African Government nor the Church has a perfect model to emulate. However, even though it is recognised that the process will be challenging, below I discuss some transformative models that might be helpful to the MCSA in order to close the gap that exists between gender policy and practice.

6.1. Moving towards Transformative Models of Being Church

The process of moving from the present hierarchical system to a more inclusive and relational leadership style in the MCSA will not be easy nor happen quickly. The process is

¹³⁷ Maya Angelou – Quotes. <<http://quotationsbook.com/quote/426/>> [Accessed 13 November 2011].

already espoused strongly in the declarations of the MCSA hoping for a more just system of inclusion.

While the process may not be easy, the MCSA has a most helpful precedent – that of how it has dealt with racial integration. The MCSA is not unfamiliar with the process of transformation because in the 1970s and 1980s ‘Geographic Circuits’ were introduced in this church as part of its own commitment to transformation through non-racial structures on the ground. The MCSA had declared itself to be a ‘one and undivided’ church but in practice Circuits had operated along racial lines. Circuits were at first encouraged to re-group along geographic lines instead of clinging to the traditional boundaries along racial lines. When the transformation was slow, or where the suggestions were ignored, Conference directed Circuits to amalgamate.

This process was difficult and some members even left the MCSA because of its commitment to the principle of geographic Circuits. However, on reflection the MCSA knows that it was the right and racially just thing to do. Not only did it address racism in the Church it also began to address the economic disparity that exists between what was formerly known as Black and White churches. One of the aims of geographic Circuits was to encourage the people called Methodist to share their resources. This has been the most helpful process in moving towards a non-racial church but the journey is still long and difficult.

In a similar way, an innovative programme in pursuit of gender justice needs to be introduced in the MCSA, with similar vigorous follow up and monitoring to that of the programme which promoted geographic Circuits. If gender justice is energetically embraced and promoted by all the leaders of the MCSA, the results will be positive.

Next I suggest some alternative models of being church.

6.2. Transformative Models of Being Church – Hopes for a Round Table

The MCSA, along with many other denominations, has inherited the ancient hierarchical model of church governance. Some smaller church groups have broken away from the traditional mainline Churches in order to escape the bureaucracy and ecclesiastical hierarchy. Many of these groups have since developed their own hierarchies. It seems to

be difficult to merely ‘be church’ without all the traditional trappings of status, pomp and ceremony amongst the leaders.

A positive transformative model of being church would take into consideration aspects such as church structures, liturgies, worship songs and hymns. It would also advocate inclusive language translations and versions of Scripture, language used in the MCSA’s legal documents, as well as the ways in which sermons are preached from the pulpit and meetings are conducted by the leadership in the MCSA. It is necessary to state clearly that there is no one perfect model for being church. Life is complex and people are diverse. “If we have truly committed to follow our dream, we will find that a powerful force exists beyond ourselves and our conscious will, a force that helps us along the way, nurturing our quest and transformation” (Jaworski 1996:xi). I believe this ‘force’ is the same “live-giving power of Spirit-Sophia” that Schüssler Fiorenza (1983/1998:344-345) refers to. To bring about change in the Church will require commitment as well as determination.

The following four models are examples that might be explored in the MCSA.

6.2.1. Circle Leadership

A definition of ‘Circle Leadership’ might be helpful at the outset of considering this model. I perceive this model as a network, interlinking cross-functional teams led by whoever has the needed skill in any circle of function in an organisation.

Margaret Wheatley (2000) proposed at a ‘*Thinking Conference*’ in Canada that women think and work best in *networks* whereas men seem to operate best in *hierarchical* structures.¹³⁸ She is not the first person to make general observations and to differentiate between men and women in this way. I do not believe that Wheatley promotes gender essentialism or that her observation was biologically stereotypical, as she is an astute researcher and author of creative publications such as *Leadership and the New Science – Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (1999). She merely recognises some of the traditional ways in which the genders have been socialised. She does, however, suggest that the way forward into this ‘New Millennium’ will be through networking and her address encourages this kind of ‘thinking’ for both men and women.

¹³⁸ <<http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/silenceistheproblem.html>> [Accessed 7 August 2011]. (See this website for other material from Margaret Wheatly – I heard the address in question on an audio tape in 2001.)

Exploring circle-style leadership and greater lay involvement are two ways in which the MCSA could admit that its hierarchical structures are often unhelpful and seldom inclusive of women and youth. Adopting a curious and honest attitude, when attending a meeting, and being encouraged to ask for what you need and offer what you have to share, is different to going into a meeting with a clear-cut answer – no matter what the members of the meeting think – which is what often, and unfortunately, happens in the MCSA.

The MCSA has played a significant role in shaping the spirituality of many children and young people. The women, who told their stories for this study, bear witness to this as they were all influenced by their childhood faith. Feminist Christian women have an opportunity, through the Sunday School, to teach a new inclusive theology. Including young people in the MCSA's decision-making processes could, therefore, also provide a new model for ministry and service. Instead of young people becoming more critical of the Church, as has been the case in recent years, the MCSA has an opportunity to continue to shape the lives of young people by being intentional in recognising young people as part of the Church. Ignoring the needs of the youth or assuming that the leadership knows what they need does not endear the MCSA to the young people. Intentional consultations could be part of the structures – at every level of *kyriarchy*.¹³⁹

Wheatley (1999:77) asserts that “we have blinded ourselves to the processes that foster life” and she reminds her readers that “we have treated organizations like machines, acting as though they were dead when all this time they’ve been living, open systems capable of self-renewal”. Wheatley’s ideas might be revolutionary but they are not new! The Gospels record Jesus using organic analogies in his stories¹⁴⁰ and parables, and yet the Church has often ignored these relevant images, particularly regarding its structures.

¹³⁹ Greek term: “As contrasted to ‘patriarchy’: *Kyriarchy* – a neologism coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and derived from the Greek words for “lord” or “master” (*kyrios*) and “to rule or dominate” (*archein*) which seeks to redefine the analytic category of patriarchy in terms of multiplicative intersecting structures of domination...*Kyriarchy* is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression.”

<<http://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/2008/05/01/word-of-the-day-kyriarchy/>>

[Accessed 16 November 2011].

¹⁴⁰ See the Bible: John 12:24 – “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

Margaret Wheatley is a founder member of the Berkana Institute,¹⁴¹ which promotes circle-style leadership and believes in community involvement.

Circle-style leadership challenges a top-down structure of governance and it promotes a willingness to be vulnerable. In the circle there is no one person more important than another and every person, who is willing to help, is a leader.¹⁴² Circle-style leadership encourages its members to participate fully. An attitude of interdependence is fostered rather than dependence on a few leaders ‘at the top’ to direct the proceedings. In a circle, everyone would respect one another. Inclusive language would then be important as a sign that both women and men are valued and that young people and children are welcome.

Apart from belonging to The Circle, of whose scholarship this thesis has drawn on extensively, I have two personal examples of circle-style leadership. I belong to a feminist spirituality group and it operates on a circle-style leadership. No one person has needed to assume overall leadership of the group for the past twelve years. We all take turns and the meetings are run extremely well. The other example is Miriam’s Circle, to which I have belonged for the past ten years. We meet on full moon to explore alternative spiritualities for women and to celebrate the stories of exceptional women. We have a facilitator who encourages all the members to participate. These examples remind me that circle-style leadership is suitable for small groups but some of the principles could be useful, even for larger churches to explore.

6.2.2. Increased Lay Involvement

The ‘mainline’ Church, as we know it, has in the past mainly focused on its hierarchical clergy leadership and if the MCSA is serious about healing and transformation for its membership, I believe greater lay involvement is essential. We have witnessed some

¹⁴¹ See <www.berkana.org> – Promoting Community Leadership. “We work from an evolving, coherent theory of change. Since 1991, we have been learning from life (living systems) about how to create systems that are interdependent, adaptive and resilient. Everything we do is a conscious experiment to better understand two of life’s robust capacities: *self-organization* – life’s process for creating order (effectiveness) without control, and *emergence* – life’s means for creating system-wide change, taking things to scale. Read “Lifecycle of Emergence: Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale” by Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze.

¹⁴² This is precisely the thesis of the book edited by Musimbi Kanyoro (1997), *In Search of a Round Table: Gender, Theology and Church Leadership*. In her chapter in Kanoyoro’s book, Grum notes that the image of a church as a round table is one that has no sides and no preferred seating, and has room for all (Grum 1997:28-29).

changes in the past few years as the appointments of both a Connexional and a District lay leader have been inaugurated. Although these positions have opened up opportunities for women to serve in leadership, these offices tend to be support roles for the Presiding Bishop and the District Bishops. The opportunity exists for this office to be more fully owned by the lay leadership, for whom it is intended. The MCSA needs to admit that its present leadership structures continue to be hierarchical, that they are unhelpful in facilitating transformation and seldom inclusive of women and youth.

Including lay people more means consciously having to schedule events at times when lay people are available. It would also require the clergy to be more in touch with their congregation and become informed about the pressures of lay people in today's world. Lay people would also need to feel that their stories and experiences are important to the Church. Freedman and Combs (2002:83) suggest that "it is important to circulate the unique stories that people choose to live out as widely as possible. Only as stories that support alternative ways of being become more widely available will patriarchal stories cease to dominate us". If the MCSA wishes to be in full solidarity with lay people and youth, it would have to rethink its emphasis on clericalism.

Graeme Codrington¹⁴³ promotes the 'Mind-The-Gap Generation Theory' and he addresses the changes that need to come about in the Church and in society. Like in circle-style leadership, including lay people more would require risk and vulnerability. The big plus is that lay people bring many skills with them that could assist the Church to become more relevant in its mission. A mixture of circle-style and lay involvement makes for a good combination.

6.2.3. Power-Sharing

Being church is not about power but for many leaders it has become just that. The body¹⁴⁴ image is a powerful one. No one part of the body is more important than another part. The diversity of the body also makes it imperative that all the parts are present.

¹⁴³ Graeme Codrington is a keynote presenter, author, futurist, facilitator and strategy consultant working across multiple industries and sectors. His unique style blends cutting-edge research, thought leading insights with humour and multimedia-driven presentations and workshops.

He has a particular interest in trends affecting how people live, work, interact and connect with each other. He speaks on the TIDES of change – the five disruptive forces shaping the new world of work in the next decade: Technology, Institutional change, Demographics, the Environment and shifting Social values. <<http://www.graemecodrington.com>> [Accessed 12 November 2011].

¹⁴⁴ See the Bible: I Corinthians 12.

Kabamba Kiboko (2001) writes about women sharing power from an autobiographical perspective. She points to the question the women asked on the first Resurrection Sunday: “Who will roll the stone away?” in relation to “some women in the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC] who have gone further. They ask the next question: “How do we roll the stone away? (2001:207)”. Kiboko (2001:207-208) tells how a small group of four women, known as *Mama Kipendano*,¹⁴⁵ in the United Methodist Church started, in 1942, to study the Bible in their homes. She continues the story: “By 1950, the group was recognized at the Annual Conference, and, as of July 1992 they numbered 750,000”. These women began a programme through which they provided accommodation for needy woman university students. She writes that this “act was partially a response to a world in which men with wealth were exploiting female students sexually” (Kiboko 2001:208). Kiboko (2001:208) knows about this programme because she is a beneficiary, who says

... I was the first female student in the seminary from the Southern DRC Annual Conference, and they wanted to help make sure that I would remain emotionally, spiritually, and physically whole. They supported me financially and spiritually in more ways than I could possibly count. Today, even with all the turmoil that their country is experiencing, they continue to send love and support as I continue my PhD studies in the US. To these women I owe a debt beyond anything I can express.

From a small and almost insignificant beginning a group of women now run an influential programme that makes a huge difference in many women’s lives. The power of this group is inestimable. Sharing power with men in the Church might mean different things at different times and in different circumstances.

Kiboko (2001:219) asserts that although “[w]e want to transform power” ... “too often we are thinking only of transforming the way power is wielded by others, those whom we think of as more powerful than we are”. She reminds her readers that

... the dominant model of power in the world ... is impersonal, hierarchical, and basically a male concept. We call it patriarchy in English. The women in my village call it *aki belegi*, or colonialism, because we experienced it as practically synonymous with colonialism. Although it is said to be a male concept, women in power and authority also frequently conform to its tenets. We women who have reached certain levels of power and influence in a larger arena, a circumstance that was relatively rare in history until recently, have before us the

¹⁴⁵ Meaning “Loving Women”.

choice of whether and how to share our power with other women (Kiboko 2001:219).

She asks “how many sisters have we brought to the place where they too can “eat at our table”? We must remember always that without the inner power that can transform our own lives and communities, we cannot hope to transform the outer power that oppresses” (Kiboko 2001:219).

In keeping with the ‘body image’ with which I started this discussion, Kiboko (2001:221) concludes her article with quoting the following words, which were said in unison by a gathering of women in August 1996:

“Here we are. We will roll the stone away! We will accept the ‘heaviness’ – the responsibility that can only be carried by all of us working together in love and in the Spirit. We will surround with our fire and love those hearts that seem made of stone. We will be God’s instruments to open the tomb in which the full humanity of women has been kept for so long, just as we open our wombs to let life come forth! We will minister to each other, releasing the power of women into the world, that it may transform the way power is used on this planet.”

The male image of power is usually symbolised in the ‘head’ but women will share power through their ‘hearts’ and their ‘wombs’.

6.2.4. Non-hierarchical Partnerships

Although these four alternative models are presented as separate points, each under its own heading, a true transformative model would be a flexible system, with the people in the group being open to exploring options. A key and distinctive factor would be how willing the members are to listen and engage with everyone in the group. While this might sound loose and ungrounded, it would in fact be a far more disciplined leadership style. To be in partnership with others on a non-hierarchical basis means one would have to cultivate a deep respect for others – including women and children. This kind of partnership is based on relationship, is “found at the heart of feminist theologies, feminist ethics, and feminist theory”, says Ackermann (2006:233). “Our interrelatedness carries with it our responsibility for one another” Ackermann (2006:233) maintains.

Non-hierarchical relationships are based on mutual understanding and trust. Such understanding can only be developed over time and trust usually takes years to establish and maintain. Eugene Peterson (2000) has coined a phrase: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction – Discipleship in an Instant Society*, which is also the title of his book, and this

sums up what kind of commitment people in non-hierarchical partnerships are called to make.

Non-hierarchical partnerships also need to exist in the realm of theology. At present, the trained clergyperson is, as a rule, viewed as the expert in theology, whereas a layperson's views would usually be understood to be less important. This has been my experience when leading a small group Bible study. Lay people are often reluctant to share their opinions in the presence of a minister, in case they might be 'wrong'. It takes skill and time to develop a culture of **everyone** doing contextual theology in a congregation. Clericalism, which is supported by an accepted hierarchy in the Church, has fostered the hierarchical relationships that often exist in congregations where ministers are put on a pedestal.

6.3. Rounding off The Table

Concerning the why and how and what and who of ministry.
One image keeps surfacing: A table that is round.

It will take some sawing
To be roundtabled.
Some redefining
And redesigning,
Some redoing and rebirthing
Of narrow long Churching
Can painful be
For people and tables.
It would mean no daising
And throning,
For but one king is there
And he is a foot washer,
At table no less.

And what of narrow long ministers
When they confront
A round table people,
After years of working up the table
To finally sit at its head,
Only to discover
That the table has been turned round?

They must be loved into roundness,
For God has called a People
Not "them and us".
"them and us" are unable
to gather round; for at a round table

there are no sides
and ALL are invited
to wholeness and to food.

At one time
Our narrowing churches
Were built to resemble the Cross
But it does no good
For building to do so,
If lives do not.

Round tabling means
No preferred seating,
No first and last,
No better, and no corners
For the “least of these”.
Roundtableing means
Being with,
A part of,
Together and one.
It means room for the Spirit
And gifts
And disturbing profound peace for all.

We can no longer prepare for the past.
We will and must and are called
To be Church,
And if He calls for other than a round table
We are bound to follow.

Leaving the sawdust
And chips, designs and redesigns
Behind, in search of and in presence of
The Kingdom
That is His and not ours.

A poem by Charles Lathrop, 1977¹⁴⁶

Some redoing and rebirthing of narrow long Churching, can certainly painful be, as Lathrop declares in his poem above. However, a practical start in the MCSA has to be made some time. If it is not now then in another twenty years someone will be asking why it took forty years to try to close the gap I have raised here between the statements and the reality. It is likely that we will make some mistakes along the way but they will be new mistakes, and they will be our mistakes. What is more, we will learn new improved solutions from these mistakes that will better equip our church for a meaningful future.

¹⁴⁶ <<http://maggidawn.com/in-search-of-a-round-table/>> [Accessed 25 November 2011].

What we do not need is the answers provided from an archaic system, which disempowers too many of its members in favour of the privileged few. On the contrary, we will learn to include everyone through creating new, gender-friendly liturgies and we will learn new, inclusive hymns and songs. We will oppose hierarchical structures and we will give space for children and young people to contribute to the life of the Church.

Will this exploration shipwreck our church? Perhaps, but no sooner or more destructively than a top-heavy overweight, archaic, hierarchy will. Still, the hope is that if the new structure is organic it might have a life within it to adjust, and the machine-like image of 'shipwreck' will not apply. Organic living systems are wonderfully and creatively adaptive. I believe that given a chance, a living-system Church might find ways of honouring everyone – women and men, Greek and Roman, Black and White, adults and children, gay and straight, rich and poor – all growing in ways that encourage sharing of resources so everyone experiences life in all its fullness. This will never happen until women continue to raise up their voices and speak:



Church women don't have to be silent anymore.

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We have a right to dream of this reality for a church based on a round table principle of gender equality in both theory and practice. The objective of this thesis was to show what needs to be sawed, redesigned and redefined for the table to become round. We

continue to hope in this dream as expressed by the great African Methodist feminist theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye¹⁴⁷

DREAM GIRL DREAM

What's the future going to be?
Dream girl dream.
What we may become, that's what matters.
Dream woman dream.
Woman dream, Africa's dream.
Dream of the least of the world,
Permissible dreams.
Dream, for the other is you turned inside out.
Make the other strong and you will be strong,
We shall all be strong together.
Dream girl dream.
Be a woman, and Africa will be strong.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted from *Inheriting our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, edited by Letty Russell (1988:35).

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Appendix 1 Twelve Rules of the Helper by John Wesley

1. **Be diligent.** Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time, or spend more time at any place than is strictly necessary.
2. **Be serious.** Let your motto be ‘Holiness to the Lord’. Avoid all lightness, jesting and foolish talking.
3. **Be guarded in your conversation** and friendships lest you be led into temptation.
4. **Take no steps towards marriage** without solemn prayer to God, and consulting your colleagues.
5. **Believe evil of no one**, unless fully proved; take heed how you credit it. Put the best construction you can on everything. You know the judge is always supposed to be on the prisoner’s side.
6. **Speak evil of no one**, else your word, especially, would eat as doth a canker. Keep your thoughts within your own breast till you come to the person concerned.
7. **Tell everyone what you think wrong in them**, lovingly and plainly and as soon as may be else it will fester in your heart. Make all haste to cast the fire out of your bosom.
8. **Do not pretend to be of high station.** A Preacher of the Gospel is a servant of all.
9. **Be ashamed of nothing but sin**, no, not of cleaning your own shoes when necessary.
10. **Be punctual.** Do everything exactly at the time. And do not mend our Rules but keep them, and that for conscience’s sake.
11. **You have nothing to do but to save souls.** Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always not only to those who want you but to those who want you most.
12. **Act in all things not according to you own will** but as a child in the Gospel and in union with your colleagues.

As such it is your part to employ your time as our Rules direct, partly in preaching and visiting from house to house, partly in reading, meditation and prayer. Above all, if you labour with us in our Lord’s vineyard it is needful that you should do that part of the work which the Conference shall advise at those times and places which they shall judge most for God’s glory.

Observe : it is not your business to preach so many times and to take care merely of this or that Society, but to save as many souls as you can, to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see God.

And remember, a Methodist Preacher is to mind every point, great and small, in the Methodist Discipline. Therefore, you will need all the grace and all the sense you have and to have all your wits about you.

Appendix 2 The Story-Guideline

The following ten guiding questions are to enable participants to tell their stories in such a way that will facilitate analysis and evaluation. You are invited to write approximately three pages or between 1,000 – 1,500 words.

Please tell your story from the perspective of being a girl/woman under each heading with specific reference, wherever possible, to your relationship with the MCSA:-

11. Your family and your childhood memories of the Church.
 - Who spoke to you about God?
 - Who took you to Church?
 - What was your earliest image of God?
12. Sunday School / Wesley Guild / Youth Camps.
 - Which Sunday School teachers do you remember and why?
 - Who were your significant youth leaders and what stands out about them?
 - What was it like being a teenage girl in the Church?
13. Religious Knowledge Exams / Bible Studies.
 - How did you learn the stories of the Bible?
 - Do you enjoy reading the Bible today and why, or why not?
 - Have you done any formal biblical studies?
14. Understanding of God.
 - What is your image of God?
 - What are the names for God with which you are most familiar?
 - How do you relate to God?
 - Has God become real to you in the Church, or if not, where do you meet God?
15. Language used in Church.
 - What have your ministers been like and did they use helpful language?
 - Have the hymns and songs used in your Church been meaningful?
 - Do you find liturgies helpful and if so, which ones and why?
 - What stands out for you when you think of 'Church language'?
16. Language of the Bible.
 - Did you ever wonder why so much of the Bible only seems to talk to and about men?
 - Do you understand most of what you read in the Bible?
 - Have you found stories that you could relate to as a girl/woman?
 - How would you describe the purpose of the Bible?
17. Courtship, marriage and parenting.
 - What is your understanding of the Church's role in family life?
 - Share some joys and sorrows about your family and the Church.
 - What kind of pastoral care have you experienced in the Church?
 - Have there been certain expectations of you because you are a woman?
18. Tell of times you felt relegated to the 'kitchen' or to 'child-care', etc. (Women's Work)
19. Tell of times you felt overlooked for a leadership position in favour of a man.
 - Share incidents of pain and alienation and how have you coped with rejection?
 - How have you overcome disappointment, anger or frustration?
20. Tell also of the times when you were encouraged to celebrate being a woman.
 - Who was responsible for times of growth and why are you still a Methodist?

(Thank you for participating in this research project)

Appendix 3 Informed Consent

All prospective participants in this Research Project, for a PhD in Religion and Social Transformation, are requested to read the following information before committing themselves to being part of the project. Permission has been sought, and granted by the Executive Secretary of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa,¹⁴⁸ to engage in research with women's stories in the Church.

- The title of this project will be formulated around Christian Feminist Theology and Narrative Theory, with regard to the stories of Methodist women in the MCSA.
- The aim of this research is to collect the stories of Methodist women and through listening to them, hope to influence the rate at which transformation is happening.
- Professor Jannie Smit¹⁴⁹ (PhD), director of Christian Studies at the School of Religion and Culture for the University of KZN (Westville Campus), is the supervisor for this project and, for more information on this research, he can be contacted on e-mail at smitj@ukzn.ac.za or by telephone on (031) 260-7343.
- During the compilation of the research done for a Masters Degree in Feminist Theology (conferred in May 2003) it became evident that much more research needed to be done. There seems to be a big difference between the social transformation happening in our secular society and the rate at which transformation is taking place in the MCSA. This research is hoping to draw attention to the discrepancy between the policy of the MCSA and women's experience and will endeavour to keep gender issues on the agenda of the MCSA.
- The potential benefits for participants are long-term and lie in the hope that the MCSA will be moved by the stories women tell.
- The only costs that participants will have to bear are the costs of their time and postage fees for sending their stories to me - those with access to e-mail are urged to send their stories electronically.
- The only way any research can be valid is to have willing participants to help the process along.

❖ The following would be expected of you:

- 1) Read the informed consent form and ask any additional questions
- 2) Please consult with friends and family regarding your participation
- 3) *A decision not to participate, at any stage, will be respected and no-one will be disadvantaged because of such a decision*
- 4) Sign the consent form before commencing with the writing of your story
- 5) Complete the questionnaire as fully and honestly as possible
- 6) Use the ten guiding questions to help you write your story - this will mean you would have to set aside a big block of time to reflect and write
- 7) Agree to send your contribution to reach me by the 30th October 2004
- 8) Be willing to be interviewed, if necessary, on receipt of your story

¹⁴⁸ The Methodist Church of Southern Africa will be known as the MCSA throughout.

¹⁴⁹ Please note that at the time of the initial submission of this dissertation Professor JA Smit was the supervisor of this thesis. Professor S Nadar replaced him in the second submission.

9) Be willing to complete a final questionnaire towards the end of the research period - probably by mid 2005

❖ **You can expect the following from me:**

- i) Complete anonymity even if you are happy for your name to be used
- ii) Honest evaluations of the stories of Methodist women
- iii) Respect for each person's story and the utmost confidentiality on sensitive issues
- iv) Once the research is completed I would endeavour to make it available to ministers and leaders in the Church (My Masters thesis is already available to interested persons in the library used by the student ministers doing their Phase I programme in Cape Town)
- v) My sincere appreciation for your participation

I have read this form carefully. I have asked any questions I may have had and I have received satisfactory answers. I believe that telling my story may contribute to more positive changes coming about in the MCSA. I have discussed my participation in this project with my family and friends and I am now ready to give my consent. I do so by signing this form.

.....

Signature

Date

This form may be sent back to me separately if you wish to maintain complete anonymity or together with the completed questionnaire and your story.

Rev Jenny Sprong (Dip.Theol; MA)
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Appendix 4 - Circuit Questionnaire Assessment of Leadership 2005

The follow-up on the Synod workshop, which dealt with Justice and Equality, called all Circuit Superintendents to reflect on the diversity of the leadership in their Circuits.

This questionnaire has been designed to assist Circuits with this exercise.

General Numerical Assessment

Numerical size of Circuit: _____
 Numbers in the traditionally 'Black' sections: _____
 Numbers in the traditionally 'White' sections: _____
 Number of ministers¹⁵⁰: _____
 Number of Black ministers: _____
 Number of White ministers: _____
 Number of women ministers: _____
 Number of women in Circuit leadership: _____
 Number of youth in Circuit leadership: _____
 Number of men in Circuit leadership: _____
 Number of Black Circuit leaders: _____
 Number of White Circuit leaders: _____

Scale:

Ten Statements

1 Disagree - 5 Fully Agree

This Circuit's leadership fully represents its membership.	1	2	3	4	5
Women participate fully in the decision-making process in this Circuit.	1	2	3	4	5
Men continue to dominate the discussions and influence most of the decisions taken.	1	2	3	4	5
Young people are given a voice in this Circuit and their opinions are considered.	1	2	3	4	5
There is real co-operation in this Circuit between the rich and the poor.	1	2	3	4	5
People in this Circuit are exposed to other Societies and their needs.	1	2	3	4	5
This Circuit seeks to regularly elect the best persons for positions of leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
This Circuit facilitates friendship and caring amongst all the people of this Circuit.	1	2	3	4	5
Regular Circuit functions are held and both spiritual and social events are encouraged.	1	2	3	4	5
Organisations work well in this Circuit and they play a vital role in the life of the Circuit.	1	2	3	4	5

¹⁵⁰ Ministers, Deacons, Evangelists, Biblewomen, Youth and Lay Pastors