

**SOUTH AFRICAN ANGLICAN CLERGYWOMEN
MERGING MINISTRY AND MOTHERHOOD:
EXPLORING PRESENCE, PRAXIS AND POWER**

by

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DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, in the Graduate Programme in Gender and Religion,
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I, Elizabeth Jane Getman, (Student Number 207512632) declare that

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Abstract

Until recently, feminist research in the area of women's leadership within churches has been predominantly based on the inclusion case for the ordination of women or for women in other spaces of authority. This thesis sought to shift this debate beyond the argument for the inclusion of women in positions of religious authority and asks what happens when women are in such leadership roles, and moreover when these women are "mothers of the church." To what extent are the vocations of motherhood and priesthood reciprocal? What are the activities and relationships that constitute the vocations of motherhood and priesthood? How are these activities and relationships embodied within the praxis of motherhood and priesthood? And finally how are new understandings of power being negotiated by the presence and praxis of clergy mothers?

These questions were explored through critical qualitative empirical research within the Anglican Church of South Africa (ACSA). The research was primarily grounded within a feminist theoretical framework. Through narrative interviews with seven clergywomen three major themes related to clergy mothers' experiences in leadership were explored. The first theme explored the "presence" of the clergy mothers in ministry and sought to understand, drawing on feminist theories of embodiment, how female bodies and perspectives might change church offices, pulpits, altars and beyond. The second theme focused on the "praxis" of clergy mothers in terms of formation and ministry, and a feminist theology of praxis was brought to bear on the women's experiences. Finally the "power" (and sometimes lack thereof) of clergy mothers was explored through the concept of "natality" as opposed to "mortality" – a focus on our embodied realities first, before the "life hereafter" as a key theme in Christian theology.

The thesis concludes that the presence, praxis and power of clergy mothers (with new experiences, insights and wisdom) are transforming the structures and manifestations of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa in multiple ways. Clergy mothers are teaching all priests and the laity about the values of

sacramental mothering; maternal leadership; and about the importance of making a “preferential option for the children.” These lessons if heeded can certainly be life-transforming for the church. Among the many theological contributions this thesis makes the most significant is the challenge to liberation theological discourse to extend the epistemological privilege of the poor to also including an epistemological privilege to the children. This new option provides the opportunity for liberation theologians to seek understanding through an embodied optic and for the church to practice genuine inclusivity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Is the church really in touch with women's deepest needs? Is it encouraging autonomy and a sense of dignity among women? Is it providing much-needed nurturance and affirmation? Women, with the variety of experiences that they are exposed to, may be either aggressive or passive, traditional or modern, confident or bewildered, and the church must provide a spiritual home for such a mix of persons. A deepening contemplative spirituality, in the quest for peace of mind and spirit and the quest for identity, is an important ministry that the church can provide to women in Southern Africa. The longing that women have for homecoming, to their Holy Mother the Church, to a place where there is love and acceptance and growth into full humanity, should not go unheeded. – Betty Govinden¹

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this study is to understand the reciprocal relationship between priesthood and motherhood so that new and more holistic insights into the praxis of priesthood can emerge for both women and men. Govinden rightly asserts that the church has a responsibility towards women as “their Holy Mother”. This thesis expands on her idea by suggesting that women can contribute a mothering praxis to the church in return. Understanding this potentially mutually empowering and conflicted relationship is what lies at the heart of my research. Ultimately, my central argument is that new conceptions of priesthood and motherhood can be found, and my hope is that clergywomen who are mothers can make more informed decisions about the praxis of their dual vocations.

The Anglican Church in Southern Africa (ACSA) has been ordaining women as priests for more than twenty years. While the first wave of clergywomen tended to be single and/or childless (or beyond the age of child rearing), a growing number of contemporary clergywomen are mothers of young

¹ Betty Govinden, “No Time for Silence: Women, Church and Liberation in Southern Africa,” in *Women Hold up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*, eds. Denise Ackermann, Jonathan A. Draper and Emma Mashinini (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991), 285.

children. ACSA ostensibly has impressive statistics when it comes to the number of women being discerned and ordained for ministry. For example, in commemoration of the twenty-year anniversary of women's ordination in Southern Africa, a list of seventy-five women clergy in the Diocese of Natal was prepared and distributed by the office of Bishop Rubin Phillip in December 2012. But the majority of the women on this list were self-supporting (which indicates voluntary as opposed to diocesan stipendiary) clergy. Only twelve of the seventy-five were stipendiary, and of those only eight were rectors.

The ACSA website indicates that there are just short of two thousand clergy currently ministering within its parishes.² Private correspondence with the secretary of ACSA's Publishing Committee placed the number at two thousand nine hundred and nineteen currently active clergy within the Province of Southern Africa.³ It was officially noted at ACSA's Provincial Synod in October 2013 that there were four hundred and seventy-three clergywomen in the twenty-eight dioceses.⁴ However, none of these statistics provide any indications about how many clergywomen are employed by the dioceses as opposed to the number of those who are self-supporting. The numbers can be deceptive. The real question is not numbers but whether clergywomen within ACSA experience access to authentic inclusion, respected authority and genuine support.

I chose to do my research within the context of the Anglican Church because this is where I am located in terms of faith community, tradition and practice.

² Anglican Church of Southern Africa, "We are Anglicans," <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?pg=about> (Accessed 5 August 2014).

³ This was in a private email received from Cynthia Botha on 11 August 2014.

⁴ These statistics were obtained by Cynthia Botha in her capacity as secretary of ACSA's Publishing Committee through communication with the dioceses in anticipation of the question being posed at Provincial Synod. The subtext to the impressive statistics is that two dioceses have yet to ordain any women and that most clergywomen within ACSA have been ordained to a self-supporting ministry and are not in positions of actual decision-making authority. The number includes all clergywomen (even some of whom may have retired, resigned or been suspended), including those ordained to the permanent diaconate. There are still very few women rectors (or archdeacons or canons). What is more, very few South African Anglican clergywomen have received significant formal theological (academic or practical) training for ministry or preaching. There are no statistics related to the number of clergywomen who are mothers.

While this might appear narrow in scope, Denise Ackermann offers an explanation of how broad and complex the definition of Anglican actually is:

In South Africa, Anglicans belong to every class and race and are described alternately as “high church” and “low church”. Some like the smells and bells. Others prefer simple services with as little ritual as possible. [...] Being an Anglican can mean almost anything: you can be conservative or liberal in your approach to scripture, you can subscribe to church authority and pomp or to simple egalitarianism, you can read the Bible to condemn homosexual practice and women’s ordination (yes, even today) or to affirm both. [...] Being Anglican means belonging literally to every race in creation. Despite our differences there is something cardinal that holds Anglicanism together. Harvey Gutherie describes this something as “simply participating in what the Church does as Church.” [...] Its strength lies in the fact that it is not narrowly sectarian, and at best, it is inclusive and truly catholic.⁵

This research project was conceived in order to record and learn from the experiences of South African Anglican clergywomen mothers in positions of decision-making authority. The co-constructed narrative results of the seven interviews conducted as part of the research tell part of the story about the work (professional and domestic) being done by clergywomen. Originally I intended to converse exclusively with biological mothers, but as I read more widely I was reminded that mothering is not restricted to biology. Sara Ruddick’s book *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* moves the conversation beyond birth by explaining that mothering is a broad activity and indicates a long-term relationship. Maternal work is not primarily about giving birth to and caring for babies:

Although birthing labor is an undeniably female activity, it is possible to minimize its importance to mothering as a whole. Adoptive or stepmothers are no less qualified maternal workers because they have not given birth. Nor is giving birth sufficient grounds for undertaking maternal work or doing it effectively. Pregnancy, birth, and lactation are different in kind from other maternal work and, measured by the life of one child, are brief episodes in years of mothering.⁶

Hence, while most of the clergywomen who participated in the project are biological mothers, I did include adoptive mothers and women without

⁵ Denise M. Ackermann, *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith*. Glosderry: David Philip Publishers, (2003), 141-142.

⁶ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*. London: The Women’s Press, (1990), 48.

progeny by choice or circumstance. One participant has both biological and adopted children. The participants who are not mothers provided a valuable theoretical and experiential counterpoint. The interviews document the joys and frustrations of ministry (and motherhood) and the hopes that we harbour for a more equitable future for our church and for our children.

As already stated, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the reciprocal relationship between the dual vocations of motherhood and ministry. It also aims to demonstrate that much of the work that priests (both women and men) do is analogous with mothering. This research sought to access and makes available some of the shared wisdom of the experiences and perspectives of South African clergywomen. It has been a personal pilgrimage of discovery in order to determine the limits and possibilities of practising a vocation to the priesthood alongside practising the vocation of motherhood. Doing this research provided an opportunity to learn from my peers and from their experiences. In addition to contributing to the existing body of literature on this topic, an extended possible outcome is that my personal interest as a practising priest and mother might result in a study that can be used as a resource for other Anglican clergy who are considering their options in terms of their multiple vocations and their roles within the wider institution.

This work also explores how clergy mothers (who are managing the primary domestic responsibility for young children), deconstruct and reconstruct notions of ministry and power within ACSA. It aims to uncover to what extent childbearing and child-rearing priests are a witness and a challenge for the institutional Anglican Church and for the congregations in which these clergy mothers minister. The lived experiences of clergy mothers are used as a means to explore theoretically and pragmatically how mothering can be a resource for theological reflection and ministerial practice.

Analysing the implications of being a mother (and in some cases a wife) in terms of ministerial praxis is a critical aspect of this research. But these roles and relationships are not the only factors that define our otherness from male clergy. Beginning with our bodies and then reflecting on our training and

formation and ultimately looking specifically at the life and work of women priests, I will demonstrate that our symbolic significance as female impacts on the way that we are perceived (by the institution and the congregation) and the way that we experience and practice our ministries. This gendered and biological difference, while often perceived as a liability, can provide an opportunity to challenge and change the church. Hence, questions of difference (and sameness), in terms of identity, but also in terms of praxis - how clergywomen perform and function in the role of the priest within the congregation and the institution – and simultaneously in the role of the mother within their own family are also explored.

The ambitious central question that this thesis seeks to explore is:

To what extent is the relationship between motherhood and priesthood reciprocal?

In no way can a definitive answer be achieved to such a complex and subjective question. But the research herein is an attempt to promote and further the conversation around this topic. The sub-questions are:

1. What are the activities and relationships that constitute the vocations of motherhood and priesthood?
2. How are these activities and relationships embodied within the praxis of motherhood and priesthood?
3. How are new understandings of power being negotiated by the presence and praxis of clergy mothers?

These broad questions raise further specific questions that I explored in the interview conversations. Are clergywomen aping clergymen (who are in turn aping mothers)? What is the iconography of women's priesthood? What are clergywomen doing (differently) at the altar? What does our physical presence in this (previously exclusively male) sacred space indicate? How is our experience of ministry different from that of our male counterparts (particularly where it comes to juggling family responsibilities)? Concurrently, what are the

implications of our absence from our homes while we are ministering? These questions are first and foremost personal. Hence, I provide below an overview of my personal journey as an integral part of this process.

Reflexive Praxis

My exploration of the dual vocations of motherhood and priesthood is constituted by extensive and personal “embodied” fieldwork. In the past fifteen years I have been pregnant six times (including two miscarriages). I have given birth to four sons. One was an active birth resulting in a natural vaginal delivery. Two were emergency caesarean sections (one after an attempted homebirth) and the final one was a planned caesarean section (despite my best efforts to have a second VBA2C – Vaginal Birth After Two Caesareans). Ironically, the final experience of surgery was the most theologically interesting and I was able to interpret it through new eyes as I unpacked the power dynamics of birth (involving knowledge, choice, fear, confidence and economics) at play in the doctor/patient relationship. Sheila Kitzinger, natural active childbirth activist strongly advocates women taking more responsibility for our bodies, for our birthings, and in so doing, for the society that we create:

To turn the process of bringing new life into the world into one in which a woman becomes simply the body on the delivery table rather than an active birth-giver is a degradation of the mother's role in childbirth [...]. The way we give birth is important to all of us because it has a great deal to do with the kind of society we want to live in, the significance of the coming to birth of a new person and a new family.

When we hand over responsibility for choosing between alternatives on the basis of what we believe to be right, we hand over responsibility for the quality of the society we, and our children, must live in.⁷

Mothering has become a primary focus of my life and therefore a nexus of power and responsibility for the way in which I engage with the wider world. I have been consumed and delighted (and frustrated) by the overwhelming

⁷ Sheila Kitzinger, “Foreword” in *New Active Birth: A Concise Guide to Natural Childbirth*, Janet Balaskas, Thorsons 1989 London, xi.

vocation of motherhood. I have breastfed and cared for four growing boys, while attempting not to lose sight of my own vocation as a priest. As Allison Moore suggests, being asked to prioritise motherhood or ministry creates a false dichotomy:

Both can be vital for the well-being of the ordained mother, her children, the church, and the world. It's a question that only makes sense in a world where people are categorized by the work that they do in the public realm, or in a profession where practitioners have been celibate, or male with other people to care for their children. The church, its clergy, and its clergy families would be healthier if we acknowledged that humans can be parents and priests (not to mention adult children caring for aging parents, another part of many clergy lives) and that it's not only possible, but good to let priesthood and family life enrich each other.⁸

My two vocations have certainly enriched each other. In tandem with my journey into motherhood, I was exploring a sense of calling to the priesthood within the Episcopal/Anglican Church. The journey has included study, prayer, liturgy, self-reflection and conversation with laity, ordinands, priests and even a few bishops on three continents (North America, Europe and Africa).

It was a longer journey than I had anticipated due to the joyful interruption of children in my life. Our first child was born in Cape Town in 1999. Our second joined us in Edinburgh in 2003. Our third son was born in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal in 2005. Shortly afterward, I finally entered the formal discernment process (during which church leadership decides whether an individual has a “verifiable” calling and whether to issue an invitation to ordain the person to the priesthood). Our baby was still breastfeeding at that time, therefore he was present along with my husband and a babysitter for the weekend of meetings and worship and interviews. Our family passed the test. I was ordained as a self-supporting (as opposed to diocesan) deacon in the Diocese of Natal at the end of 2007.

I had the good fortune to enter a process of intensive but gentle formation within my local parish with a rector who was also the mother of young

⁸ Allison Moore, *Clergy Moms, A Survival Guide to Balancing Family and Congregation*. New York: Seabury Books, (2008), 57.

children. She made the juggle of the two vocations look possible. I loved parish work and began to consider the longer-term possibility of engaging fulltime as a diocesan priest.

Just before my ordination as a self-supporting priest a professional opportunity was presented to me and I accepted the position as chaplain at a Christian girls' school in Durban. This seemed an ideal way to practice my vocation alternatively, in a timeframe that was more adapted to family life and my own children's school calendar than parish work ever could be. The income that indicated that the institution valued my ministry was also very welcome. So I wore my collar and practiced being a priest during the school day through, among other things, leading assemblies and services, teaching religious education, and doing non-stop pastoral care and counselling. It was an enormously gratifying ministry. But everyday I would race (late again) to fetch my own children from school and switch gears to be in mother mode. It was a complex and frustrating and rewarding chapter. Everything changed when our fourth son was conceived. I loved being a pregnant priest. It was a valuable opportunity to challenge stereotypes and change iconographies. But it also made clear that I needed to reassess my priorities and commitments.

The caesarean birth of our fourth son was a theologically charged experience. Participation as a priest in the sacramental rituals of Eucharist and baptism and ordination had changed my understanding of my own authority and vulnerability. Power and surrender had been redefined through experiences of symbolic mothering at the altar and in the pulpit and at the font. I had also experienced several more years of practical mothering of three growing boys at home. As I lay on the operating table in theatre with my arms outstretched hooked up to tubes and monitors, physically recalling the crucified Christ, it was clear that embracing vulnerability and surrendering control provided the only way through to new life. It recalled for me those memorable and transformative words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper and reiterated at

every Eucharistic consecration: “This is my body, broken for you.” The delivery was a negotiated and completely respectful and even joyful process.⁹

Motherhood and ministry are my dual vocations. But neither are simple tasks, and with four children in the mix, it was increasingly obvious that I needed to resign from the chaplaincy in order to be more present to my family. There was also pressure to finish this academic project! The experiences of other mother priests have inspired and convinced me that more fulltime engagement with ministry in the future is possible. I have learned so much about how other women manage this merging of vocations, but also to what extent these two vocations are mirrors of each other - and to what extent they are in opposition to each other. Being a priest is an ontologically life altering experience. With ordination comes an identity shift. It affects one’s body, mind and spirit. Many find it gratifying, but there is no arguing with the fact that it is challenging. Likewise, being a mother is a life altering experience. It affects one’s body, mind and spirit. Many find it gratifying, but there is no arguing with the fact that it is challenging.

Part of the challenge lies in the fact that priesthood in ACSA is still largely designed for men. However, women are redefining priesthood by our presence, participation and alternative practice. Our praxis redefines our understanding and experience of power and there is a growing body of literature to confirm this.

Locating the Research

The research in this area falls primarily within three categories. The first is the case for inclusion of women within ordained ministry. The second is re-theologising priesthood. And the third focuses on the praxis of ministry. And here my interest lies in the reciprocal relationship between priesthood and motherhood.

⁹ My gynaecologist was seven months pregnant at the time and declared me medically safe to officiate at a wedding three days later.

Women as Priests

Globally, this is documented in books such as Karen Jo Torjesen's *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* which reconfirms that women's ministry is not something modern or unusual. It is completely acceptable and necessary for both halves of humanity to be priests. Torjesen reminds us:

Women's leadership in Christianity is a dramatic and complex story [...] When Jesus gathered disciples around him to carry his message to the world, women were prominent in the group. Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and Mary his mother area women whose names survived the retelling of the Christian story in the language and literary conventions of Roman patriarchal society. Paul's letters reflect an early Christian world in which women were well-known evangelists, apostles, leaders of congregations, and bearers of prophetic authority.¹⁰

Locally, in South Africa the story of women in ecclesiological leadership within ACSA began with the movement for inclusion. There was a long and painful journey undertaken by faithful Anglican women who challenged the church to recognise the legitimacy of ministry by female bodies. This is well documented in the classic collection of essays arguing for the ordination of women called *Women Hold up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*.¹¹ An individual journey is also recorded in Nancy Charton's memoir, *The Calling: The Story of a Pioneering Woman Priest*.¹² Sarojini Nadar wrote about another pioneer, May Laban, in *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* in a chapter called "Journeying in Faith: The Stories of Two Ordained Indian Women in the Anglican and Full Gospel Churches in South Africa".¹³ Wilma Jakobsen gives another personal

¹⁰ Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, (1993), 4-5.

¹¹ Denise Ackermann, Jonathan A. Draper, Emma Mashanini (eds), *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, (1991).

¹² Nancy Charton, *The Calling: The Story of a Pioneering Woman Priest*. W H Meyer, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, (2009).

¹³ Sarojini Nadar, "Journeying in Faith: The Stories of Two Ordained Indian Women in the Anglican and Full Gospel Churches in South Africa," in *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of*

perspective in *Claiming Our Footprints* in her chapter called “Struggling to Come Home”. Despite the change in legislation that led to the ordination of women in 1992, Jakobsen articulates the crux of the inclusion problem within ACSA:

[T]here was almost an unspoken assumption that womenpriests would come into the structures, into the system, and that they would really be like male priests.

Yet my own experience has been that women don’t just fit neatly into male spaces. I have been in countless situations where I have heard myself saying inside my head that I would do this so differently. I have sometimes felt squeezed into a mould which is not one where I can be myself as a woman.¹⁴

Jakobsen’s reflections point us towards the necessity to re-theologise priesthood and the church in the light of women’s experiences.

Re-theologising Priesthood

The former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, declares:

The most substantial argument for the ordination of women, I have always believed, is the simple one that connects with baptism. If women cannot be ordained, then baptised women relate differently to Jesus from baptised men – not a doctrine easily reconcilable with the New Testament. But if so, then we ought to be rediscovering in the light of women’s ordination some new depths in our understanding of baptism, especially of what it is to be baptised into the ‘priestliness’ of Jesus. [...] We ought to be recovering a sense of what the Church’s distinctive voice is – Jesus’ voice, speaking to God in intimacy, speaking to the world in challenge and hope.¹⁵

Williams makes clear that the presence and praxis of clergywomen will help to redefine priesthood. Part of the research for the inclusion of women in ministry was the documentation of the stories of the first women priests in Great

Women of Faith in Africa, eds. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Devakarsham Betty Govinden, and Sarojini Nadar (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002), 127-144.

¹⁴ Wilma Jakobsen, “Struggling to Come Home,” in *Claiming Our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity and Spirituality*, eds. Denise Ackermann, Eliza Getman, Hantie Kotzé and Judy Tobler (Matieland: The EFSA Institute for Theological and Interdisciplinary Research, 2000), 135.

¹⁵ Rowan Williams, “Epilogue,” in *Voices of this Calling: Experiences of the First Generation of Women Priests*, ed. Christina Rees, ed. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002):213-214.

Britain and the United States. Joy Carroll Wallis has written about her journey through ordination and into ministry and ultimately into motherhood in her book *The Woman Behind the Collar: The Pioneering Journey of an Episcopal Priest*. She closes by saying:¹⁶

I have discovered a wonderful integration of priesthood and motherhood that is immensely satisfying. There is a richness about my life right now that makes me thankful that I can have so much, if not all at once, that priesthood and motherhood have to offer.

Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling edited by Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis and Patricia Mei Yin Chang unpacks the complex realities faced by protestant women in ministry in the United States through a massive study using surveys and interviews. As a result they found the following:

Women clergy are creating a new situation in many ways. The analysis of our surveys and interviews provides important new insights into the future of Protestant churches and their leadership. Whether clergy use the word or not, many clergy women and clergy men are *feminists*.¹⁷

This idea of transformed leadership opened up possibilities for research concerned with theorising women's role in this process. In *A Theology of Women's Priesthood* Ali Green writes as a woman priest about the maternal divine and the broken body of Christ and the church, and the ways in which women's bodies are excluded. She longs for a theology of flourishing to breathe new life into the necrophilic traditional Christian symbolism. She writes:

The womb, the primal place in which we become body, is the human crucible of new life. It offers an eloquent image of God who nurtures life and brings to birth.¹⁸

She is fully aware that this is dangerous and radical imagery that threatens the status quo. The bodies of women represent the bodies of mothers since Eve (*Isha*) means "mother of all living".¹⁹ Green says:

¹⁶ Joy Carroll Wallis, *The Woman Behind the Collar*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, (2004), 261.

¹⁷ Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, (1998), 22.

¹⁸ Ali Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*. London: SPCK, (2009), 52.

¹⁹ The NRSV *Bible*, Genesis 3:20.

The body of the mother induces both longing and desire, anxiety and fear, leading to strategies of control and oppression.²⁰

Natalie K. Watson, in her book *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, asks the following important question:

Do existing ecclesiological discourses take account of women, their lives and their bodies and do they write women's lives and women's bodies into the body of Christ?²¹

Watson is determined to show that the symbolism of women priests is an important aspect of church as a reflection of justice for all because (while not the only form of ministry):

[O]rdained ministry is a form of participation in the life of the church which is meaningful for those women who feel called to it and can be a means of empowerment for new and transformed structures within the church".²²

She reminds us that women can help to restructure and reorientate church in alternative and exciting ways:

Being church takes place in thinking who we are in relation to others and to the whole of creation and in thinking how we can create structures of God's justice and right relation not only in the next world but already in this one. This cannot be done in isolation but only as part of a community of shared responsibility, creativity and celebration. [...] In the context of doing feminist ecclesiology this is realised: being church is women's claim to the authority of being the actualization of God's being as communion in this world and with this world.²³

Watson believes that women can help to rebalance the church and the world.

There are African women theologians who are also attempting to do this, but the focus is not as theoretical. The essays in the edited collection *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions* explores the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians who in their research "focused on

²⁰ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 150.

²¹ Natalie K. Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*. London: Sheffield Academic Press, (2002), 11.

²² Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, 13.

²³ Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, 115.

women as the church in Africa while recognising the ways in which the institutionalized churches have marginalized their experiences, their theological voices and their gifts.”²⁴ Similarly, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in *The Power We Celebrate: Women’s Stories of Faith and Power* explains:

Women’s reading of Scripture and theological reflections struggle for a place in the community of interpretation of the church. Hence the contemporary efforts to get women to write, to publish, to communicate, and to seek alternative communication avenues. Women’s words are more often than not delivered as bold prints of real life – not just theories. Women speak of human beings as they struggle to keep their humanity under slum conditions, in the face of the brutalities of war and the anonymity imposed on women by the nonrecognition of their presence and contribution.²⁵

While Ali Green and Natalie Watson have the opportunity to theorise more radically, African women theologians still have to struggle with basic obstacles to their humanity. Therefore in this context theory serves a different purpose. Theory is intimately linked to practice and is derived from it.

The Praxis of Clergy Mothers

A practical book about contemporary clergywomen that has informed my research is called *Clergy Moms: A Survival Guide to Balancing Family and Congregation*. Written by Allison Moore, it documents and compares the lived experiences of clergy and their family members in the United States. One of the explicit aims of her research was to “find healthier models of how to be faithful [in ministry], and challenge some of the expectations that make both clergy and the church crazy.”²⁶

²⁴ Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, *On Being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, (2005). The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians was started in 1989 by Mercy Amba Oduyoye as an organisation that brings together African women theologians to address the dearth of African women’s voices in the production of theology within the African context. Since its inception the Circle has published over a hundred books and continues in its mission of research and publication.

²⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Foreword: The Beauty of Women’s Revolt” in *The Power We Celebrate: Women’s Stories of Faith and Power*, eds. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Wendy S. Robins, (Geneva: WCC, 1992), vii-ix.

²⁶ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 61.

Emma Percy's books *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry* and *What Clergy Do: Especially When it Looks Like Nothing* clearly articulate the ways in which the activity and relationships of mothering can be compared to the work that priests, both men and women, also do. She is convinced "that we need to use more imaginative language and find metaphors for ministry that can provide clergy with models of working that relate better to their day-to-day experience."²⁷ She recognises that both mothering and priesting are engaged in relationships and activity. Both motherhood and priesthood are about being and doing. Both require creativity and imagination for job satisfaction and external recognition:

Like mothering, the role of the parish priest does not fit into many of the modern ideas about work and professionalism. It is a commitment that does not lend itself to targets and easily measurable outcomes. Neither role can be done by formula; there is not a definitive right way to do it but lots of shared wisdom, which can help.²⁸

Moore and Percy's work was conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively. In South Africa, however, there is limited research in the area of clergywomen mothers. Instead the research has focused on the praxis of women's ministry more generally. For example, Mary Bernadette Ryan's thesis, *Behind Caring: The Contribution of Feminist Pedagogy in Preparing Women for Christian Ministry in South Africa* focuses specifically on training women. Isabel Sparrow's work "An exploratory study of women's experiences and place in the church: A case study of a parish in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA), Diocese of Cape Town", looked at lay leadership.

This gap in the research in South Africa on the subject of mother priests is where my own project makes a contribution. My project also extends the global discourse. For example, while Percy's work is theoretical, my own project is more empirical. It explores specific clergywomen's experiences as mothers and as priests. The interviews provide a small sampling, but the

²⁷ Emma Percy, *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, (2014), 1.

²⁸ Emma Percy, *What Clergy Do: Especially When it Looks Like Nothing*. London: SPCK, (2014), 3.

experiences that the seven participants shared offered in-depth insight into the complexities of the dual vocations. This thesis constitutes an initial attempt to explore this terrain academically in South Africa.

Theories and Methods

This thesis is grounded within a framework of feminist theological praxis. Embodiment is the fundamentally important aspect of such praxis.

In her book *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Sallie McFague uses the metaphor of God as mother and considers the female body to be a most appropriate image for God's own creativity. She recognises the centrality of the body within Christianity, and mourns the way women's bodies are treated:

What does Christian faith, and especially the story of Jesus have to offer in terms of a distinctive perspective on embodiment? Christianity is *par excellence* the religion of the Incarnation, and, is about nothing but embodiment, as is evident in its major doctrines. In another sense Christianity has denied, subjected, and at times despised the body, especially female human bodies and bodies in the natural world.²⁹

Denise Ackermann's theological scholarship deals directly with questions of embodiment. In *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith* she declares:

Human beings do not live disembodied lives. The fact that we can see, hear, touch, smell and feel is the source of what we know. All reality and all knowledge are mediated through our bodies. Making love, giving birth, dancing, eating, wrestling with depression or arthritic joints – these are not only bodily realities. They shape our experience of ourselves, what we know and what we yearn for.³⁰

Ackermann goes on to explain:

To a feminist theologian the splitting of our bodies from our spirits, minds, or emotions simply does not make sense. I do not know where

²⁹ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. London: SCM Press, (1993), 165.

³⁰ Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 65-66.

the spirit resides other than in my body. What happens in my belly is not unconnected to my brain.³¹

Adrienne Rich makes the link between bodies and thinking most profoundly in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*:

Physical motherhood is merely one dimension of our being. [...] We are neither “inner” nor “outer” constructed; our skin is alive with signals; our lives and our deaths are inseparable from the release or blockages of our thinking bodies.³²

So my epistemological point of departure for my research is a feminist theology of embodiment that values women’s bodily experiences as a valid and credible source of theology and praxis. This is directly linked, therefore, with my choice of research methods.

Methods

While I will explore the methods and methodology in greater detail in a later chapter, here I explain the importance of feminist narrative research— our bodies are telling stories.

As human beings, we are grounded in our bodies and in the context of our particular identities. Our theology also must be so rooted. Our stories matter. Our bodies matter. Therefore I have chosen to engage in a form of practical theology through an interview process to explore aspects of spirituality and praxis with seven clergywomen participants.

Narrative research is often favoured by feminist researchers who understand that “the personal is political.” This research is unapologetically feminist in that it attempts not only to make sense of the lives and experiences of women – but it also has a political commitment to recognising that women experience oppression because of our gender. Furthermore:

In a postmodern feminist approach, in contrast to the Enlightenment

³¹ Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 66.

³² Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W. Norton and Company, (1986), 284.

view, the moral and political have priority over scientific and epistemological theory. For feminist researchers, gender is a basic organizing principle that profoundly shapes the concrete conditions of our lives.³³

This research is feminist because it goes beyond one detached academic observing and objectifying other women's experiences. I am engaged with my subject and with my participants and with the institutional church. Located within a critical feminist research paradigm, this research consciously attempts to critique the power dynamics of gender and the gender imbalance within ACSA. My aim was not simply to listen to these women's stories:

Instead the hearing is for a higher purpose - in order to derive better understanding, and identify ways to bring about change to alter the subordinated and oppressed position of women. Thus, while feminist research commences with a first essential 'experiential' (or 'phenomenological') step, it moves secondly to ask: 'Given that this is how we currently experience things - how can we explain these experiences? what are desirable experiences? how could things be improved?'³⁴

Letty Russell explains the commonality inherent in all methodologies used for developing feminist theologies:

The methodologies used in feminist theologies vary with the training, the task, and the religious and cultural traditions of the participants. Yet, in one way or another, these methods have to take into account the struggle to move beyond the competitive and hierarchical forms of patriarchal methods, which seek a truth that is made secure through the vanquishing of all other truths.³⁵

The idea of co-producing the data through the interview conversations demonstrates the ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty that defines the complexity of lived experience – that a singular truth is neither possible nor desirable.

³³ Steinar Kvale, *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage Publications, (1996), 73.

³⁴ Yoland Wadsworth, "What is Feminist Research?" from Bridging the Gap: Feminisms and Participatory Action Research Conference, Conference Papers June 22-24, 2001 at Boston College <http://ggsc.wnmu.edu/gap/wadsworth.htm> (Accessed 18 May, 2013).

³⁵ Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, (1993), 30.

In his book *God of the Oppressed*, James Cone explains the usefulness of a praxis orientated methodological approach: “Theological concepts have meaning only as they are translated into theological praxis, that is, the Church living in the world on the basis of what it proclaims.”³⁶ Douglas McGaughey similarly asserts in his book *Strangers and Pilgrims*:

Doing theology deliberately, rather than merely pre-reflectively, is by definition a matter of dialogue and application. A theological understanding and position is born out of listening and speaking – in that order. However, the very texts we hear and the very words that we speak are themselves selective and suppressive of what was and is not said – and at its deepest level, of what cannot be said.³⁷

He goes on to say:

The task of theology as speaking is precisely that of critical reflective application, praxis, and action. [...] Speaking is to be taken in the sense that it includes both the head and the heart, of the understanding and the will, which inform one’s actions.³⁸

In this respect, the central tenets of feminist research with which this thesis aligns itself are:

1. Claiming conscious partiality
2. Taking a view from below
3. Engaging in activism, movements and struggles
4. Changing the status quo
5. Practising conscientisation
6. Studying women’s individual and social histories
7. Collectivising women’s own experiences

There are criticisms that can be raised concerning practical and ethical issues of doing feminist research. It may be assumed that all women experience oppression equally and that women want to help each other. In reality, some women are more oppressed than others and many women are highly competitive with each other. In light of this, I must clarify my own positionality.

³⁶ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press, (1975), 36.

³⁷ Douglas R. McGaughey, *Strangers and Pilgrims: On the Role of Aporia in Theology*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, (1997), 113.

³⁸ McGaughey, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 122-123.

As an able-bodied, highly educated, economically advantaged, white, heterosexual, married, American, Anglican priest, feminist Christian, I enjoy far more privileges than most women in the world. This raises issues about my insider/outsider status. But the advantages of being an Anglican clergywoman interviewing other Anglican clergywomen outweigh the disadvantages for the process. I am also an outsider to their lives in many respects beyond gender, clerical status and maternity. Two are not mothers. Several are not married. Because I was born and raised in the United States, I am an outsider in terms of culture and heritage and sense of deep rootedness in South Africa. Although I have lived here since 1996, I will never truly be able to comprehend the oppression and marginalisation (at multiple levels) faced by (for example) a physically challenged, uneducated, rural, poor, black, lesbian, single South African. But I hope to provide a study that will benefit more than just a privileged elite. Bearing this in mind, all of our stories are legitimate and worthy of attention and reflection.

Outline of chapters

The thesis is divided in two major sections. The first section comprises three chapters introducing the study as well as the major theoretical and methodological considerations.

In the first chapter I have introduced the central research question and explored the background and purpose of the study. I also briefly introduced my feminist theoretical and methodological approach. In line with my feminist research paradigm, I strongly located myself within the context of my research.

The second chapter provides a more in-depth literature review in order to identify where my study fits into the wider body of research and where possible extends and challenges it.

The third chapter explores the methods and theories that have enabled my research focusing strongly on the importance of the co-production of knowledge.

The second section comprises three chapters that focus on the major themes that emerged from the interviews about mothering and priesting with the seven participants. The categories for analysis of the themes drawn from the co-constructed data from the interviews are:

- the “presence” of the clergy mothers (chapter four)
- the “praxis” of clergy mothers in terms of formation and ministry (chapter five)
- and the “power” of clergy mothers (chapter six)

The chapter on “presence” considers the ways in which female bodies and perspectives might change church offices, pulpits, altars and beyond. This gendered and biological difference, while often perceived as a liability (particularly where children are concerned), can provide an opportunity to challenge and change the church. This chapter discusses the “clergy image” that these particular South African clergywomen foster and project. It pertains to bodies and perceptions. It also considers the uniform: the clericals and vestments that they wear on their female bodies. And finally it explores the personas and iconographies that clergywomen may be imitating and creating. The presence of clergy mothers also requires the recognition of the presence of the children whom clergy mothers bring into the equation. Children are not theoretical. They are a vibrant and disruptive presence and reality.

The chapter on “praxis” is certainly about reflecting on the experiences and practices of these clergywomen concerning their vocations as priests and mothers. It begins with a focus on “formation” which explores the discernment process, the training that these particular clergywomen received and the role models that they had. It raises questions about whether they experienced any

gender sensitivity that may or may not have prepared them for ministry and for involvement with the wider institution.

“Praxis” also considers the merging of the two vocations – motherhood and ministry. As clergywomen, our bodies have been marked by the hands of Anglican (still predominantly male) bishops and supposedly “set apart” for the work of being a priest. But mothers cannot remove ourselves from the messy reality of domestic responsibilities and particularly from children’s needs. So while praxis concerns formation and ministry (and the functional performance aspect of the work of a priest), it also concerns the intentional relationships built both within the church community and within clergy families. It must be acknowledged that mothers are still expected to act as the primary care-givers/takers of children. My research shows that this responsibility is not generally taken into account by church structures.

The “power” chapter explores the leadership and authority of Anglican clergywomen within their congregations and the institution at large – particularly in light of discussions around the issue of the consecration of women bishops within the Anglican Church in Southern Africa and further afield. It also grapples with constructions, understandings and manifestations of power in terms of motherhood and priesthood. How might mothers and priests (and priests who are mothers) use power for the flourishing and empowerment of others?

The concluding chapter makes a theological case for expanding liberation theological discourse to making a preferential option for the children. Here the significance of Christ being born of woman and coming into the world as a vulnerable baby (who needed to be mothered and in turn learned to mother others) is explored as a heuristic tool to imagine more just and equitable leadership and community within the Anglican Church.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the scope of my research into the subjects of motherhood and ministry so that their interface can be examined and affirmed. It is important to acknowledge that questions around motherhood and ministry are relatively new; hence an obvious and specific body of literature focused on this subject is still very limited. Therefore, throughout the thesis I will engage with a wide and varied body of literature that has contributed to my field of inquiry. In this chapter, I present a broad overview from a wide range of sources that include (but are not limited to) theology, ecclesiology and feminism. This literature review is divided into three sections. In the first section I explore research concerning women as priests and how they are transforming leadership. In the second section I explore research about motherhood drawn both from the social sciences and theology. In the third section I represent the scope of research that is being done on the reciprocal relationship between priesthood and motherhood.

Women Priests Transforming Leadership

As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, there is a growing body of literature that documents clergywomen's experiences both globally and locally. *Voices of this Calling: Experiences of the First Generation of Women Priests* (edited by Christina Rees) offers first hand views from inside the changing church from a British perspective. The introduction describes the book:

This book is a collection of the reflections of 45 women priests and nine male priests and bishops in the Church of England. [...] The women have woven their stories with intensely personal disclosure, theological reflection and sharp political observation and insight.³⁹

³⁹ Christina Rees, ed, *Voices of this Calling: Experiences of the First Generation of Women Priests*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, (2002), 5.

Likewise, Penny Jamieson, the first woman diocesan bishop in the universal Anglican Church, in her book *Living on the Edge* grapples courageously and critically with issues concerning power and women in ministry.⁴⁰ Barbara Harris was the very first woman Anglican suffragan bishop in the United States. Her biography called *The Miter Fits Just Fine! A Story about the Rt. Rev. Barbara Clementine Harris The First Woman Bishop in the Anglican Communion*, was written by Mark Francisco Bozzuti-Jones. While it is a charming story, it ignores some of the most critical aspects of her theology and leadership.⁴¹ Likewise, Katharine Jefferts Schori, the first Episcopal Primate in the United States, in her book *A Wing and a Prayer: A Message of Faith and Hope*, misses an opportunity to explore the ways in which women are changing church leadership.⁴² Clearly, neither of these two books was intended to be academic. Storytelling (and sermons effectively are storytelling) is a valuable place to start, and both obviously support the ordination and even consecration of women leaders. Judith Lang, in her book *Ministers of Grace: Women in the Early Church*, takes an opposing viewpoint:

This book does not advocate the ordination of women priests. It describes the ministry of women in the formative years of the Church, when separate but complementary roles of men and women were clearly defined. These roles are again in danger of being obscured by present demands for equality.⁴³

Lang falls squarely within the complementarian position regarding women's contribution to church leadership that insists that men and women have very different roles to play – generally with men leading authoritatively while women offer nurturing support. While Jamieson offers clear critical reflection on women's leadership within the church, this is largely absent from the stories and sermons of Harris and Schori. Nevertheless, their presence in the authoritative leadership roles is a clear political statement that speaks

⁴⁰ Penny Jamieson, *Living at the Edge: Sacrament and Solidarity in Leadership*. London: Mowbray, (1997).

⁴¹ Mark Francisco Bozzuti-Jones, *The Miter Fits Just Fine! A Story about the Rt. Rev. Barbara Clementine Harris The First Woman Bishop in the Anglican Communion*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, (2003).

⁴² Katharine Jefferts Schori, *A Wing and a Prayer: A Message of Faith and Hope*. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, (2007).

⁴³ Judith Lang, *Ministers of Grace: Women in the Early Church*. Middlegreen: St Paul Publications, (1989), 17.

volumes. My own research seeks to fill the gap of what has too often been left unspoken by asking direct questions of clergywomen in positions of authority and leadership so that further critical reflection can be articulated.

Likewise, Susan Rakoczy explores the notion of women in ministry at length in her book *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology* and makes the following claim: “women’s desires to minister are not centred on coercive power but on partnership and mutual empowerment.”⁴⁴ This book provides an important overview of the theological contribution of women generally, but particularly in the African context. The chapter on “Church and Ministry: Women Included and Excluded” is especially pertinent for my research.⁴⁵ Rakoczy makes many claims about the current state of the church including the following:

The church wants women to do the work men will not do, the behind-the-scenes work of cooking, cleaning, arranging flowers etc and to disappear when decisions are to be made.⁴⁶

Rakoczy offers critical insight regarding women and leadership. She speaks from her position within the Catholic Church and she advocates the acceptance of women priests with solid biblical argument. Obviously, this is no longer an issue in the Anglican Church since it has opened the doors to women’s ordination and consecration, but Rakoczy makes clear that universal acceptance is still a work in process. A looming question is whether women’s gifts might be contributed on our own terms or whether we must contend with the unrealistic expectations that are part and parcel of the traditional monastic (celibate male) model. I join Rakoczy in longing for the end of clericalism. This would be made manifest through genuine mutual support between and among clergy and laity.

The presence of women priests provides the possibility of reconceptualising and re-theologising notions and practices of priesthood within ACSA. Jakobsen notes the shift towards broader inclusion and explains:

⁴⁴ Susan Rakoczy, *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, (2004), 224.

⁴⁵ Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 198-254.

⁴⁶ Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 221.

[The journey] leads to a church of greater openness and diversity, a church of empowered women and men living together in a faith community, naming who they are, being who they are, offering the gifts of themselves to the church, which in turn receives those gifts. This is a beacon of hope towards which we can work together, a beacon which holds the promise of true mutuality and acceptance of diversity, which attracts others and empowers all to aspire to authentic and integrated living.⁴⁷

Healing Priesthood: Women's Voices Worldwide, edited by Angela Perkins and Verena Wright, also offered a similar insight into the need for priesthood to be more inclusive.⁴⁸ This brings us to Letty Russell's critical question: "What would it mean to see real live models of partnership among those women and men who share Christ's ministry?"⁴⁹

Rosemary Radford Ruether's seminal work, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, raises another question with which I have wrestled about whether feminism and Christianity are mutually exclusive. She engages directly with the inherently sexist history and practice of the church in order to raise consciousness and call for transformation and radically critiques patriarchal systematic theology:

Powers and principalities exist as the precondition of evil choices. But these powers and principalities are precisely the heritage of systemic social evil, which conditions our personal choices before we choose and prevents us from fully understanding our own choices and actions. Sexism is one of those powers and principalities of historical, systemic, social evil that conditions our choices as males and females from before our birth. [...] We can unmask sexism as sin. We can disaffiliate with it. We can begin to shape at least our personal identity and then our more immediate relationships with others in a new way.⁵⁰

Although the radical feminist rejection of patriarchal church might be tempting, schism with half of the world is brutal and unrealistic – especially when one

⁴⁷ Wilma Jakobsen, "Weaving our Common Struggle" in *Aliens in the Household of God: Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa*, eds. Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1997), 76.

⁴⁸ Perkins, Angela and Verena Wright (eds), *Healing Priesthood: Women's Voices Worldwide*. London: Dalton, Longman and Todd Ltd, (2003).

⁴⁹ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 47.

⁵⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, (1983), 182.

has a father, brothers, a husband and sons whom one loves. Like Ruether, I long for healing and fresh practice within and beyond the church. Russell's work, especially *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* and her chapter "Women's Voices and Visions of the Church" found in a World Council of Churches publication of the same name also have been conceptually helpful towards that end. Russell articulates our task as Christian feminist theologians who choose to stay within the institutional church to contribute "our sense of embodiment and of transcendence with many other rich faith traditions from past and present".⁵¹

Unfortunately, it is precisely this embodiment that has, in part, actually prevented women's access to leadership within the church. Perhaps this has something to do with the perception that women's bodies are disruptive. Birth is certainly disruptive to women's bodies (and psyches and lives). The children produced by birth are disruptive to their families and homes and worship spaces and communities in a long-term capacity. But this can be viewed as a gift rather than a liability. It is to this subject of women as mothers that we now turn our attention.

Women as Mothers

The power to reproduce life, even more than sensuality or sexuality, can explain why female bodies too often are perceived as threatening: we are the gateway to noisy disorder. But this messy, noisy, disruptive liveliness of children is the promise of new and on-going life in the church and in the world. Another aspect of the irony of this rejection is that the anatomy of women's bodies often is mirrored in religious architecture. Gloria Steinheim explains in the foreword to Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*:

[T]he traditional design of most patriarchal buildings of worship imitates the female body. Thus, there is an outer and inner entrance, labia majora and labia minora; a central vaginal aisle toward the altar; two

⁵¹ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 201.

curved ovarian structures on either side; and then in the sacred center, the altar or womb, where the miracle takes—where males give birth.⁵²

Architecture is far from the only way in which the body reflects and defines Christianity. Embodiment is central to who we are as a faith community, from the breaking of the bread, to our worship space, to our understanding of leadership and community. How we feel about our bodies and what we do with them is relevant to what we believe. Mothers' bodies, as part of the Body of Christ, are particularly relevant to my thesis.

However, I am aware of the limitations of using motherhood in a biologically essentialist way. In this respect, the book *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants and Natural Selection* is helpful. The author, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy is an anthropologist who problematises the idea of "maternal instinct". She addresses the "underlying agendas" inherent in received and too often unquestioned understandings of this concept:

Our views of "motherhood" (including such scientific-sounding phrases as "*the* maternal instinct") derive from these old ideas and even older tensions between males and females. The fact that most of us equate maternity with charity and self-sacrifice, rather than with the innumerable things a mother does to make sure some of her offspring grow up alive and well, tells us a great deal about how conflicting interests between fathers and mothers were played out in our recent history. Sad to say, these old conceptions about maternity infiltrated modern evolutionary thinking.⁵³

Her book draws on her own experience of being a mother and a scientist, but rings true for mothers in other professions as well:

I so desperately wanted to succeed in my chosen profession; yet I didn't want to deprive my daughter of the emotional security I had become convinced she needed. Personal ambition seemed to be on a collision course with my baby's needs. At that time I had no idea how interrelated maternal and professional aspirations actually are.⁵⁴

⁵² Gloria Steinem, "Foreword," in Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (New York: Villard, 2008): xxxv.

⁵³ Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection*. New York: Pantheon Books, (1999), 12.

⁵⁴ Hrdy, *Mother Nature*, xiv.

Adrienne Rich's watershed book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (first published in 1976) was an important precursor to Hrdy's thesis regarding the co-option of the notion of motherhood. Rich identifies the root of the problem:

The idea of maternal power has been domesticated. In transfiguring and enslaving woman, the womb—the ultimate source of this power—has historically been turned against us and itself made into a source of powerlessness.⁵⁵

Rich goes on to suggest:

[W]e all carry in our earliest imprintings the memory of, or the longing for, an individual past relationship to a female body, larger and stronger than our own, and to female warmth, nurture and tenderness, [and] there is a new concern for the *possibilities* inherent in beneficent female power, as a mode which is absent from the society at large, and which, even in the private sphere, women have exercised under terrible constraints.⁵⁶

She offers an important distinction between the experience and the institution of motherhood. Rich names the first as “the *potential relationship* of any women to her powers of reproduction and to children,” and the second as “the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control.”⁵⁷ She continues:

This institution has been a keystone of the most diverse social and political systems. It has withheld over one-half of the human species from the decisions affecting their lives; it exonerated men from fatherhood in any authentic sense; it creates the dangerous schism between “private” and “public” life; it calcifies human choices and potentialities. In the most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions, it has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them.⁵⁸

One of my premises is that clergywomen who are mothers may be doubly incarcerated (within their bodies and homes through motherhood - and within their institutional church through sub-ordination). My aim in this thesis is to facilitate a conversation whereby all parents (mothers and fathers) and priests

⁵⁵ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 68.

⁵⁶ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 73.

⁵⁷ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 13.

⁵⁸ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 13.

(mothers and fathers) might begin to experience a larger freedom through authentic discourses (in contrast to the assumed and often false expectations) about people's particular situations, and thereby begin to facilitate wider mutual support and to grow in genuine authority.

But vindication of the role of the mother is no simple task. Sara Ruddick speaks of the rampant sentimentalising and idealising of motherhood – both of which reinforce the undervaluing of the actual practice of mothering. She says:

It is hard to speak precisely about mothering. Overwhelmed with greeting card sentiment, we have no realistic language in which to capture the ordinary/extraordinary pleasures and pains of maternal work. [...] In many societies, the ideology of *motherhood* is oppressive to women. It defines maternal work as a consuming identity requiring sacrifices of health, pleasure, and ambitions unnecessary for the well-being of children.⁵⁹

Neither women nor children ought to be sacrificed at the altars of motherhood or ministry. Instead, a reciprocal relationship between motherhood and priesthood can be envisaged. There is a body of literature on this subject and it is to this that we now turn our attention.

Reciprocal Relationship between Priesthood and Motherhood

My formal research on the topic of ministry and motherhood began while I was holding my third baby in my friend Sarah's garden in Edinburgh. This feminist Christian mother of five handed me a little book called *Motherhood and God* by Margaret Hebblethwaite who says:

As mothers, we must listen to God in the experience of our own motherhood; then perhaps we will be able to share something with the community that no one else can bring.⁶⁰

Mothers can identify with God (and Christ) in particular ways that can broaden our understanding of God and of mothers, motherhood and mothering. The

⁵⁹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 29.

⁶⁰ Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Motherhood and God*. London: Geoffrey Chapman/Cassell Publishers Ltd, (1984), 119.

literature indicates that many aspects of Christian theology and ministry are closely related to mothering. As discussed previously, Allison Moore's book *Clergy Moms* and Emma's Percy's two books *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry* and *What Clergy Do: Especially When It Looks Like Nothing* are the most explicit about making the link between motherhood and priesthood. Moore helps to define what particular lessons can be learned from pioneering clergywomen who are attempting to live the dual vocations:

Clergy mothers have valuable gifts to offer their parishes, the wider church, and their families. They have been creative and resourceful at making a way through an institution designed for male clergy without daily child-care responsibilities, worshipping a God depicted primarily as male, in a world that finds church increasingly irrelevant and still isn't sure where women really belong. Attending to their lives reveals changes in church practice and social structures that could make it more possible for clergy, family members of clergy, and the church as a whole to live more sanely.⁶¹

Joy Carroll Wallis has made the decision to leave professional ministry while her children are still at home. But she indicates that her involvement in ministry continues nevertheless. She has written about her experience of motherhood as the "village priest" in "Let's Say Grace":

As for the mom in this family, I am privileged to be able to focus my energy in the communities in which our boys grow and thrive. [...] I was reminded that we are what God calls us to be wherever that happens to be. I have discovered that priesthood is unconfined and spills over into all areas of my life – including raising a family. Whether or not the priest has a church, the vocation lives and finds expression. The priestly part of my being goes with me into Jack's elementary school, it goes with me onto the Little League baseball diamond, and it goes with me as we build a community of moms and dads who playfully call ourselves "the village" in our efforts to support one another as we raise our kids. I listen, I support, I pray, I encourage, I explain, I take initiatives. I am there in the middle of life in Washington, D.C. as a person, as a mom, and as a Christian; and from time to time God uses all this.⁶²

This is a good illustration of a ministry of presence. Praxis and even power do

⁶¹ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 129.

⁶² Joy Carroll Wallis, "Let's Say Grace," in *Faith Forward: A Dialogue on Children, Youth and a New Kind of Christianity*, eds. David M Csinos and Melvin Bray, (Kelowna: CooperHouse, 2013), 232.

not lie exclusively in the formal ritualistic presentation of worship or other services. Both are realised in being in relationships wherever we find ourselves. Carroll Wallis claims to feel fulfilled and free of resentment. She has made a conscious choice to redirect her ministry into mothering and being part of a community instead of working within the institutional church.

A book that I had hoped would talk about merging the two vocations, was Nadia Bolz-Weber's memoir called *Pastrix: the Cranky Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint*.⁶³ Disappointingly, it was compiled predominantly of reworked sermons and barely mentioned the juggle of mothering her two children. This made it appear as if motherhood was simply a footnote to her practice of an alternative yet traditional ministry.

Verena Wright's book, *Maid in God's Image: In Search of the Unruly Woman*, though intended as a feminist challenge to the broader Christian church, has been useful for my purposes of exploring motherhood and ministry. She echoes Ruddick when she says:

Mothering means moving to a new realm of anxiety, delight and learning. It prioritises a child's needs through generous self-giving, without losing sight of our own well-being. It is about nurturing a child into social being by modelling human-ness, where love's power expresses respect for self and others.⁶⁴

She goes on to say:

As embodied human beings, we think, feel, act and create, affecting our environments whether or not we are aware of it. A mother-focused perspective helps us to appreciate the potential for new life and energy to spread throughout the human community. The greater involvement of men in modern childcare is a positive sign of society beginning to value the mothering model.⁶⁵

What the literature thus far is indicating is that instead of perpetuating misunderstandings about conception and pregnancy and birth being sinful

⁶³ Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*. New York: Jericho Books, (2013).

⁶⁴ Verena Wright, *Maid in God's Image: In Search of the Unruly Woman*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, (2008), 84.

⁶⁵ Wright, *Maid in God's Image*, 85.

and shameful, or sentimentalising motherhood, contemporary Christian theology and ecclesiological praxis can consciously and explicitly affirm women's bodies and women's gestative and nurturing power. Increasing acceptance of clergywomen (and even women bishops) indicates that the Anglican Church no longer emphasises shaming and blaming women and our bodies. Women's experiences of birth and childrearing provide an important context for identifying with the creative and nurturing power of the creator God. Exploring metaphors and experiences of mothering (including but not limited to birth and childrearing) as sites for theological reflection is an important contribution that my thesis seeks to make.

John Shelby Spong, along with many others, suggests that a good place to start the conversation about women in the church is by critically deconstructing the meaning of the Virgin Mary. Spong's controversial book *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Virgin Birth and the Treatment of Women by a Male Dominated Church* makes the connection between the "viginification" of Mary and the ways in which the church continues to subordinate women. He suggests that if we begin with Jesus' birth narratives, not as historical fact, but rather as metaphor, we can begin to understand them metaphorically in the context of our own human births and human lives. Spong says:

To force these narratives into the straightjacket of literal historicity is to violate their intention, their method, and their truth. To see them as expressions of the genre called midrash with a Christian twist is to enter Scripture in a new and perhaps a life-giving way.⁶⁶

While agreeing wholeheartedly with the importance of metaphor, in her book *A Big Enough God* Sara Maitland argues hard for the virginity of Mary as she feels there is something "deeply sexist" and disempowering about stripping the mother of God of that aspect of her identity:

[S]ince from the point of view of women, Jesus did indeed get born in entirely the usual way – down a woman's vagina and out between a woman's legs just like everyone else. The only difference being that

⁶⁶ John Shelby Spong, *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Virgin Birth and the Treatment of Women by a Male-Dominated Church*. New York: Harper One, (1992), 19-20.

maleness was made redundant in this myth. Was it this that they found intolerable?⁶⁷

She goes on to discuss women's incorporation in Christ and the mythopoeic structure that uses difference, not to alienate but rather to point to universality.

She explains:

[T]he virginity of Mary is not about biology, but about meaning, about symbol and metaphor; which is necessarily embedded in narrative, in story. Feminists are frequently accused of this, of trying to remake the stories so that they more closely 'match' with our experience. We do do it, more often than we should, although I would argue that having been excluded for 2,000 years from 'being like Jesus' we have some excuse.⁶⁸

Whether or not Mary was a virgin does not change the fact that she gave birth. The actual moment of birth in the narratives in Matthew (1:18-25) and Luke (2:6-7) are surprisingly short and leave much to the imagination. Jesus' conception, and gestation (as related through the story of the Visitation of two impossibly pregnant cousins) receive a bit more attention in Luke 1:26-56.

The liberation theologian Leonardo Boff offers an important perspective to the conversation about Mary the mother of God. He attempts to do this in the light of feminism. His book *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expression* dedicates a chapter to "Mary's Human and Divine Motherhood."⁶⁹ But there is still a theoretical detachment and romanticising of her motherhood that celebrates sacrifice and surrendered piety instead of providing authoritative leadership. While Boff's intention is to demonstrate that "the meaning of Mary extends beyond Mary, beyond woman, to the mystery of the human being, male or female, as such, and to the whole religious mystery of creation," there is a certain objectification of women and mothers and our bodies.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Sara Maitland, *A Big Enough God*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, (1995), 188.

⁶⁸ Maitland, *A Big Enough God*, 188.

⁶⁹ Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expression*. London: Collins, (1989), 153-167.

⁷⁰ Boff, *The Maternal Face of God*, 254.

Lyn Holness has written about the mother of God in a humanising way in her book *Journeying with Mary*. She deals with the feminist critiques of Mary's submissiveness and the "presupposition that total fulfilment for women comes only through marriage and motherhood."⁷¹ Holness focuses on identifying the alternative imagery of power associated with Jesus' human birth:

The fact that Christ emerged from the body of a woman accords dignity both to the maternal state and to the simple reality of being human, and simultaneously provides us with a wealth of imagery through which we can explore, from another perspective, the contents of our faith as Christians.⁷²

Holness shows that Mary represents the "Theotokos" or God-bearer and thus is the reminder "that the Christian faith is all about *embodiment*, and that through the Incarnation God affirmed, in the most dramatic way possible, the value of physical reality."⁷³ This is an indication of mature religious engagement and understanding. It is rooted in our human experience of birth.

The Wild Goose Worship Group has put together *Cloth for the Cradle: Worship Resources and Readings for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany* to help "guard against the season becoming a baby festival of maudlin sentimentality." John Bell explains further:

Those who witnessed and were involved in or around the Incarnation were all adults. Only Christ was small. Christmas therefore requires the adult world not to gaze on children re-enacting the Nativity, but rather to re-discover the stories of Christ's birth as speaking from and to adult experience.⁷⁴

Interestingly, there is a parallel telling of the Immaculate Conception and a more fleshed out story of Jesus' birth found in the Qur'an (found in Suryat Maryam 19 A. 16-34) in which Mary suffers alone in a remote place:

⁷¹ Lyn Holness, *Journeying with Mary*. Wellington: Lux Verbi.BM, (2008), 91.

⁷² Holness, *Journeying with Mary*, 94-95.

⁷³ Holness, *Journeying with Mary*, 111.

⁷⁴ John L Bell, "Introduction," in *Cloth for the Cradle: Worship Resources and Readings for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*, Wild Goose Resource Group (Glasgow: Wild Goose Resource Group, 1997),10.

And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: She cried (in her anguish): “Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten.”⁷⁵

And then Mary made a vow not to speak and she was delivered of a miraculous speaking baby Jesus who says: “I am indeed a servant of Allah [...] He hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or unblessed.”⁷⁶ The miracle of birth is here rendered even more astounding with a talking newborn who is respectful of his mother.

Of course, some might say that it is blasphemous to relate the human messiness of the birth of God. In fact, Jose Saramago’s novel *The Gospel According to Jesus* has one of the most realistic birth scenes and this has rendered his novel very controversial in conservative Catholic circles. His imagining of the sex life of Mary and Joseph and the divine pregnancy and birth is considered by some to be heretical. But Saramago does this consciously, critiquing ancient purity laws and gender inequality:

[W]e must not forget that this whole process is unclean from the moment of impregnation to the moment of birth, that horrific female organ, vortex and abyss, the seat of all the world’s evils, an inner labyrinth, blood, sweat, discharges, gushing waters, revolting afterbirth, dear God, how can You permit Your beloved children to be born from such impurity.⁷⁷

Rethinking and retelling the stories of Jesus’ birth from the perspective of mothers who have experienced birth (and men who have assisted) helps reinsert the subjective voice into abstract theologising. This thesis explores this further by examining how clergy mothers’ experiences might lead to new practices within the church. It explores how women’s bodies are perceived and handled and whether we are recognised and respected as equal partners.

⁷⁵ *The Holy Qur-an*. King Fahd Holy Qur-an Printing Complex. Al-Madinah Al Munawarah. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1996. A.23.

⁷⁶ *The Holy Qur-an*, Suryat Maryam 19(A. 30-32).

⁷⁷ Jose Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*. London: Vintage Books, (2008), 51.

Iconically, all clergywomen (whether or not we are biological mothers) are mothers of the church who in our priestly role represent Jesus, the Christian high priest and head servant. This is not a modern idea. Early Christian religious mystics had no qualms about speaking about God in alternatively gendered terms, which recognise and celebrate the gestative, nurturing and empowering aspects of the divine. In the fourteenth century Dame Julian of Norwich consistently referred to Christ as her Mother. In *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, Grace Jantzen explains that understanding God as mother was the crux of Julian's theology:

[S]he managed to combine the themes of Jesus' sacrificial motherhood with other aspects of maternal care in a way that makes the whole [theological approach] less stereotyped and more in touch with what women actually experience.⁷⁸

Jantzen goes on to say that when this imagery and metaphor (as opposed to literal understandings of God's gender) was suppressed in favour of exclusive Father God language, women were also devalued because "if God can be thought of as Mother and in female terms, then mothering and femaleness, can be thought of as God-like."⁷⁹ This is liberatory thinking and theologising.

In *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* by Matthew Fox, he offers additional confirmation that God can be expressed with female imagery. Fox affirms this theology in a chapter called "God as Mother, God as Child: Ourselves as Mothers of God and Birthers of God's Son".⁸⁰ He quotes scripture, mystics and others who have inspired him, including Julian of Norwich who declared, "God is the true Father and Mother of Nature... God almighty is our loving Father, and God all wisdom is our loving Mother."⁸¹ Fox explains the human need for maternal imagery of God thus:

The patriarchal tradition has pretty much ignored the implications of God's motherly side and of our responsibility to develop the mother in ourselves, whether we are women or men, married or celibate,

⁷⁸ Jantzen, Grace M., *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1995), 301.

⁷⁹ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 303.

⁸⁰ Matthew Fox. *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*. Sante Fe: Bear & Company, (1983), 220-228

⁸¹ Fox, *Original Blessing*, 221.

heterosexual or homosexual. If Eckhart is correct when he declares that “We are all meant to be mothers of God,” then it follows that we are all meant to be mothers.⁸²

This thesis is concerned with exploring and embracing a theology of mothering in a way that is affirming for clergy and laity alike. Men, women and children have been mothered and can mother others in turn.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to highlight some of the fundamentally defining literature within a field of study that is still an underwritten area of theology. This accounts for the fact that a straightforward literature review would be strictly impossible. I have explored how women as priests are transforming church leadership. In the second section attention was paid to the research about motherhood and indicated that discussion is not confined to biological essentialism. I have shown that there is vast and extensive literature concerning motherhood, the priesthood and the divine. What I am interested in through this thesis is to explore these relationships more fully through the contextual and embodied experiences of Anglican clergywomen in South Africa. In the next chapter, I will introduce the ways in which this study is framed theoretically and methodologically.

⁸² Fox, *Original Blessing*, 222.

Chapter 3: Theories

This thesis is firmly rooted in a feminist theology of praxis. As already stated in the introduction, a key component of this theology of praxis is notions of embodiment and narrative — what I have come to understand as “bodies telling stories”. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce, expand and explicate this theoretical framing. I will begin with a general discussion of feminist and narrative theology. Then I will introduce the theories of “natality” and “motherism” as lenses through which to make sense of the clergywomen’s experiences.

Theology, Feminist Theology and Narrative Theology

A classical definition of theology articulated by Anselm of Canterbury, the eleventh century Christian theologian and philosopher, is *fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding”. Daniel Migliore explains:

It is faith venturing to inquire, daring to raise questions. If Christian faith is basically trust in and obedience to the freely gracious God made known in Jesus Christ, theology is faith asking questions and struggling to find at least provisional answers to these questions. Christian faith is no sedative for world-weary souls, no satchelful of ready answers to the deepest questions of life. Instead, Christian faith invariably prompts questions, sets an inquiry in motion, fights the inclination to accept things as they are, continually calls into question unexamined assumptions about God, ourselves, and our world.⁸³

Feminist theology begins with experience and inevitably asks complex questions. This expands Anselm’s traditional understanding of theology from “faith seeking understanding” to “faith seeking understanding in the light of women’s lived experiences with a view to transformation”. In his essay “The Need for the Christian to Journey Beyond Scripture, Creed and Church” John Shelby Spong similarly expands upon Anselm’s understanding thus:

⁸³ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, 2.

Theology is a rational, deeply human attempt to explain our experience with God. Theology is, therefore, never primary; it is always secondary to experience. Theological explanations can thus never be eternal. All explanations not only will change, but must change when knowledge grows and by so doing will always invalidate previous conclusions. Theology can never be infallible, unchanging or ultimately real.⁸⁴

There is a broad spectrum of theological understanding within the Anglican Church today, and while, as Spong asserts, theology is not infallible, it can be used for good or ill. Karen Armstrong, a former Catholic nun who now champions the Charter for Compassion and works tirelessly for interfaith dialogue explains the difference between good and bad theology:

The one and only test of a valid religious idea, doctrinal statement, spiritual experience, or devotional practice was that it must lead directly to practical compassion. If your understanding of the divine made you kinder, more empathetic, and impelled you to express sympathy in concrete acts of loving-kindness, this was good theology. But if your notion of God made you unkind, belligerent, cruel, or self-righteous, or if it led you to kill in God's name, it was bad theology.⁸⁵

Whether one judges it to be good or bad, theology continues to be an important factor in the decisions that people make and the ways in which they choose to live their lives. It is obvious that clergy have made clear and public decisions about the direction in which our faith and our vocational identity have led us. But clergy hardly have the monopoly on theology. Anyone who attempts to define or even point to God is a theologian. Each individual experiences God through the lens of his or her own life. Listening to people tell their stories and reflect upon and interpret how God is at work in their lives – and identifying with them – is one way of doing theology. This is a form of practical theology – and where feminist thought finds a home most perceptibly. Who we are shapes our understanding of who God is. Our spirituality is grounded in our physical bodies and our daily lives. So our theology and our spirituality cannot be divorced from our bodies and our thinking, speaking and acting.

⁸⁴ <http://johnshelbyspong.com/2013/08/22/the-need-for-the-christian-to-journey-beyond-scripture-creed-and-church/> (accessed 1 November 2013).

⁸⁵ Karen Armstrong, *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness*, New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2004, 293.

Ackermann articulates the importance of being grounded in order for the church and its theologians to be authentic. This is why a feminist theology of praxis is so important. Drawing on Sandra Schneiders' words Ackermann reasserts:

Spirituality cannot be divorced from theology. [...] Only a theology that is rooted in the spiritual commitment of the theologian and oriented towards praxis will be meaningful in the Church of the future.”⁸⁶

Likewise, Ali Green says, “Theology is about making connections between what we hear and do in worship and how we understand ourselves and act in our everyday lives”.⁸⁷ This is a good definition of the consciously practical theology being done daily by the Anglican clergywomen who participated in this project. Feminist theologies, and the research I have done for this thesis, are grounded in contextual theology. Storytelling is the starting point.

Steve de Gruchy and Paul Germond affirm the links between contextual and narrative theology:

At its heart, contextual theology is about listening and taking seriously the stories, the narratives, of ordinary people in a given context. Contextual theology takes the experience of people, principally the experience of the suffering, as a primary point of departure. It does theology from the perspective of a particular group of people.⁸⁸

The contextual theological perspective sought by this research is that of South African Anglican clergywomen. Their experiences are understood through their recounting of their own stories. This contextual theology is at once feminist, narrative, contextual, embodied and liberatory. It *is* theology. Sara Maitland in her book *A Big Enough God: A Feminist's Search for a Joyful Theology* declares:

Feminism has allowed and encouraged those women who have engaged with it to transgress across the traditional boundaries of intellectual disciplines – it has authorized amateurs to speak. If I am a

⁸⁶ Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 136.

⁸⁷ Green, *A Theology of a Women's Priesthood*, 18.

⁸⁸ Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy, eds, *Aliens in the Household of God: Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1997, 6.

theologian at all I am a 'feminist theologian'. In one sense I believe this to be a false category – since any theology that is not related to justice and truth is not theological, and any truth claim that leaves out 52 per cent of the people in the world is really most unlikely to be very competent.⁸⁹

Furthermore Maitland, who refuses to call herself a theologian as she has not been formally trained in the subject defines theology as “(1) the art of telling stories about the divine and (2) the art of listening to those stories.”⁹⁰ My own research was precisely about listening to clergywomen's stories, their experiences of the divine as expressed through their ministry and mothering. The benefit of using stories as a theoretical tool is further creatively explained by Sarojini Nadar in her article “Stories are Data with Soul: Lessons from Black Feminist Epistemology” where she describes story as providing:

- Suspicion of master narratives of knowledge;
- Tools of knowledge gathering and dissemination;
- Objection to objectivity;
- Reflexivity of the positioning of researchers; and
- Yearning for and working for transformation and change.⁹¹

Engaging with the clergywomen's stories in this thesis as a means of theologising challenges the master narratives that are largely based on abstract notions in traditional mainstream theology. The stories (including my own reflexive experience) found herein have also provided the primary data as a foundation from which to create new theologies. And finally as Nadar asserts, transformation might be realised through the retelling and re-presenting of these stories of priesthood and motherhood, thereby changing understandings of the ecclesial and the divine.

These stories are emplotted. Paul Ricoeur speaks of “emplotment” as critical to the formation of unified self-understanding.⁹² In *Circles of Dignity*:

⁸⁹ Maitland, *A Big-Enough God*, 91.

⁹⁰ Maitland, *A Big Enough God*, 7.

⁹¹ Sarojini Nadar, “Stories are Data with Soul: Lessons from Black Feminist Epistemology,” *Agenda* 18, 99/28.1, (2014): 18-28.

Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection, James Cochrane explains the importance of embodiment both in the embodiment of the mythos of Christian tradition and in individual embodied lives:

What plots our perceptions and perspectives at any one time depends upon our location in the grand narratives into which we are born and by which we are brought up, as well as our embodiment in a narrative of the self for which we are in part responsible. [...] The practical field of our life is thus always shaped by what Ricoeur calls the double-determination in the exchange between the whole and the part. The part is analogous to the particularities of context, where actions and practices shape the story of one's life and contribute to one's understanding of life. The whole may be found in the ideals and projects that endure in one's life and by which particularities are integrated into a larger narrative. The interplay between the two shapes the narrative configuration of life, a unity without which we cannot function.⁹³

This sense of unity means that we are required to grapple with the messiness of life, not just sterile detached ideas of God and humanity. As Cochrane notes above, we are born into grand narratives that shape us. I content that birth also shapes the narratives.

Embodiment as Feminist Theological Praxis

Motherhood is an ideal context for the discussion concerning the messiness of theology. As stated previously, perhaps part of the reason why women's gestative bodies (and the children issued from them) traditionally have not been welcome in the sanctuary is because they are disruptively messy. But more than being alienated from the sanctuary, Ali Green has observed that:

Women's experiences of giving birth have historically been under-explored as a resource for theology, but this essentially female function, now bodily represented by the woman priest, clearly symbolises aspects of the divine.⁹⁴

⁹² Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. K. Blamey, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (1992), 286.

⁹³ James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999, 161.

⁹⁴ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 51.

The stories of the women priests re-presented in this study provide the very resources for theology to which Green draws our attention. James Nelson also notes, “The way we think and feel about ourselves as bodies will always find expression in the way that we think and feel about the world and about God”.⁹⁵ Therefore it is ironic that women’s bodies have been (and continue to be) so mistreated, misinterpreted and alienated from Christian notions of God.

This alienation and omission of women’s bodies is also largely a result of dualistic thinking where the rational mind is associated with men and an Almighty God while the feeling body is associated with women and the surrendered earth. The thinking bodies of the clergywomen in this study (and the stories that they tell) provide, I would argue, a theoretical and even an iconic way of reconceptualising God. Ruth Mantin has rightly asserted:

One of the many great contributions that feminist theology has made to the study and practice of religion is the effective challenge it presents to a dominant discourse which places a transcendent, metaphysical God over against the profane realities of a messy, dirty, material world. In dismantling such a dualistic paradigm, feminist theology has affirmed the sacrality of embodiment.⁹⁶

As human beings we are grounded in our bodies and in the context of our particular identities, our theology also must be so rooted. Our stories and our bodies provide our context. If the Body of Christ through the church is to serve the world then it must examine both its spirituality and its praxis. Therefore I have chosen to engage in a form of practical theology through this interview process to explore with the clergywomen participants aspects of their own spirituality and praxis. All of our human experience is subjective. Living in a body is a different experience for each individual – but every human being shares the experience of being born.

Taking female embodiment seriously involves paying attention to, among other things, nutrition, sexuality, reproductive choice, pregnancy, childbirth

⁹⁵ James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1978, 20.

⁹⁶ Ruth Mantin, “Theological Reflections on Embodiment,” *Feminist Theology* 12 (2004): 212-227.

and parenting. The women's' health manual called *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves* (produced by the Boston Women's Health Collective)⁹⁷ offers insight towards understanding the biologically creative power of women - and the activist power of the community of women. A subsequent expanded edition was published in 2005 that included an important chapter on "Mutuality".⁹⁸ This book has helped countless women to define and articulate our feminist consciousness. The power and purpose of this unapologetically feminist project are explained in its preface:

Learning about our bodies in this way is an exciting kind of learning, where information and feelings are allowed to interact. It makes the difference between rote memorization and relevant learning, between fragmented pieces of a puzzle and the integrated picture, between abstractions and real knowledge.⁹⁹

This same way of interactive learning provided the foundation for how I understood the participants' experiences and subsequently how I re-present them in this thesis. In what follows, I explore the concepts of "natality" and "motherism" as tools for understanding the experiences and contributions of clergywomen.

Natality

The question that I seek to answer in this thesis concerns the significance and contribution of mothering to the hitherto male-defined role of priest. Moreover, how can the theological and philosophical reasoning provided by a feminist theology of embodiment contribute to transformative ideas of God? Grace Jantzen's theory of natality provides the lens through which we can understand the varied clergywomen's experiences as expressed through their shared stories.

⁹⁷ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women*. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster Inc., (1984).

⁹⁸ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era*. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster Inc., (2005).

⁹⁹ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, xix.

Grace Jantzen calls for a shift in Christian theological focus from mortality to natality. In other words, she seeks to shift our traditional theological conceptions of ourselves as mortals, and instead encourages us to understand ourselves as “natals” – male and female – who have survived birth, been mothered into maturity and have an opportunity to experience flourishing in the world. Jantzen has begun an ambitious project of developing a feminist philosophy of religion in her book *Becoming Divine*:

[A] feminist philosophy of religion based in the aim of becoming divine does a great deal more than challenge traditional aims and methods of the philosophy of religion, although it certainly does that too, especially in its diagnosis of the necrophilia of western philosophical and religious thought. It actually moves us onward from the project of modernity itself, creating a new horizon for human becoming [...] in which natality can be explored as the opening of new possibilities.¹⁰⁰

She also emphasises the importance for women to develop a female subjectivity and in order for this to occur:

[I]t would be necessary to disrupt the symbolic, displacing the masculinist structures by a new imaginary not based on the Name of the Father but on new ways of conceiving and being which enable women to be subjects *as women*. And since religious discourse serves as the linchpin of the western symbolic, it is religious discourse above all which requires to be disrupted.¹⁰¹

Drawing on Jantzen, Green calls on clergywomen to assist in developing a theology of flourishing:

The issue of the woman priest and sacrifice appears to present a cultural and psychological impasse. I suggest, however, that a solution lies in developing the concept of natality proposed by Grace Jantzen. [...] Her idea of natality, rooted in the maternal, the bodily and the material, seeks to uncover new possibilities based on the acknowledgement of birth and hence of the embodiment and gendered, the physical and material.¹⁰²

I take up Green’s call to develop the concept of natality in order to understand more fully the experience and contribution of women priests. Instead of

¹⁰⁰ Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, (1999), 8.

¹⁰¹ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 12.

¹⁰² Green, *A Theology of Women’s Priesthood*, 150.

denying our femaleness and our physicality, or alternatively seeing ourselves as superior to men because of our capacity to give birth, we can all recognise the incarnate divinity of the one who is born. Jesus' human incarnation is the ultimate acceptance of our human form and reconnects God with creation. This common natality provides a new way for women and men to understand God and ourselves.

Being in our bodies is a different experience for each individual – but every human being shares the experience of being born. We all were formed bodily within the body of a particular woman. Jantzen clarifies that “a symbolic of natality is not reducible to a symbolic of maternity. [...] We are all natalists whether or not we are mothers.”¹⁰³ The death of Christ on the Cross, the Crucifixion is seen as the central Christian event – but the birth of Christ in the stable, the Incarnation, is actually the moment when God made complete the acceptance of and connection to our humanity.

And as I have noted in an article called “Natality and Motherism: Embodiment within Praxis of Spiritual Leadership”, “the power that resides in the female body is given its fullest expression in the most basic and practical experience of birthing and mothering.”¹⁰⁴ In this regard, motherism is another theoretical tool of significance for my thesis.¹⁰⁵

Motherism

Just as Rich has made the distinction between motherhood as experience and institution, motherhood also needs to be understood ontologically (in terms of how it redefines the identity and self-conceptualisation of women who become mothers) and motherhood needs to be understood through the day to

¹⁰³ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 243.

¹⁰⁴ Eliza Getman and Sarojini Nadar, “Natality and Motherism: Embodiment within Praxis of Spiritual Leadership,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 26, no. 2, Special issue: Continuities and Departures: Women's Religious and Spiritual Leadership, (2013): 59-73.

¹⁰⁵ The next section is largely based on the previously published article noted above.

day lived experience of particular women. However, the gulf between the ontological ideas and the lived realities creates difficulty:

Our culture[s] idealize[s] some mothers, demonizes others, and takes the *work* [emphasis added] of mothering largely for granted. Many mothers are caught off guard by the huge gulf between fantasies about motherhood and the daily reality of providing children with love, care, and a nurturing home.¹⁰⁶

Many of the complex tasks relegated to the work of mothers are reflected in the work of priests. Through my own acting as priest has come the profound recognition that priesting is about “mothering”: handholding, feeding, mediating conflict, being present and containing during transitional moments, and offering forgiveness and absolution. This work is complex and can be described by the term “motherism.” The term motherism is used differently here from the dualistic and unhelpful distinctions made between motherism and feminism found elsewhere. In the African context, one must recognise that using the term in biologically essential ways can be unhelpful. Desiree Lewis explains how some scholars essentialise the discourse in ways that perpetuate oppressive gender stereotypes:

In confronting these questions, some theorists' concern with evaluating African women's 'difference' lead them to equate social roles and ascribed identities with alternative feminisms. For example, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, in her book *Motherism; The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* writes that 'Africa's alternative to feminism is MOTHERISM and Motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture'. Celebrating purely symbolic roles for women, or affirming gendered roles of service and nurturing, Acholonu ultimately reinforces standard gender stereotypes. Gwendolyn Mikell echoes Acholonu's argument when she endorses the 'survivalist', 'heterosexual' and 'pro-natal' foundations of what she terms African feminism.¹⁰⁷

Even though Lewis' critique of motherism is legitimate, I contend that motherism can be useful as a prism for understanding the praxis of some clergywomen's ministry. In order to do this, motherism must be understood to describe mothering as experience instead of motherhood as a patriarchal institution. In a review of Obiama Nnaemeka's (1997) book *The Politics of*

¹⁰⁶ The Boston Women's Heath Book Collective, *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 311.

¹⁰⁷ Desiree Lewis, "Introduction: African Feminisms," *Agenda* 50, no. 4 (2001): 4-10.

(M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature, Nicki Hitchcott makes the observation, “Whilst maternity has been rejected by some feminists as a site for the oppression of women, this volume emphasizes the distinction between mothering as experience, and motherhood as patriarchal institution”.¹⁰⁸ This is precisely what Adrienne Rich, as noted in an early chapter, has described in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Also, Judith Fester and others have conceptualised motherism in the context of activism and resistance as opposed to biological essentialism. If we understand mothering to be related to experience and motherism to be related to activism both can become catalysts for transforming ministry.

Mothering as Experience

This experience of mothering, as expressed through a nurturing presence and praxis at the altar, is a re-vindication of the necessity and the value of domestic labour. This labour happens both at the altar and in the home. The powerful witness of clergy mothers can transform the traditional institutional practices that have idealised the work of the clergy while undervaluing the same domestic work done by innumerable women (and some liberated men) on the home front. The altars of our homes include our kitchen tables, cluttered with the mess of children and the management of family life, can be reclaimed as sacred spaces for breaking bread and enacting celebration. This work of “mothering” includes feeding, serving, mediating conflict and forgiving the “natals”. Our hope as mothers who do this work conscientiously is that all concerned will deepen their experience and understanding of embodiment in order to give birth to new horizons of possibility and equity.

Barbara Brown Taylor knows that altars can be found everywhere, including in the kitchen. In her book *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*, she says:

¹⁰⁸ Nicki Hitchcott, “Review of *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* by Obioma Nnaemeka,” *The Modern Language Review* 93, no. 1 (1998): 234-235.

To make bread or love, to dig in the earth, to feed an animal or cook for a stranger—these activities require no extensive commentary, no lucid theology. All they require is someone willing to bend, reach, chop, stir. Most of these tasks are so full of pleasure that there is no need to complicate things by calling them holy. And yet these are the same activities that change lives, sometimes all at once and sometimes more slowly, the way dripping water changes stone. In a world where faith is often construed as a way of thinking, bodily practices remind the willing that faith is a way of life.¹⁰⁹

Thus the “experience of mothering” can become a catalyst for transformation that can change both theology and ministry. This discussion continues below.

Motherism as Catalyst for Transformed Ministry

The role of women in the South African liberation struggle has been well documented. In many instances, the role of motherhood has been understood as a driving and uniting force of resistance. As Nadar has noted:

While motherhood in much feminist discourse has been seen to limit the role of women in the public, banishing them to the home and to domestic matters, in Africa it is conversely linked to women finding solidarity to participate in the public sphere.¹¹⁰

Is it possible to harness this solidarity found within the experience of mothering – motherism - towards the project of a transformed ministry? It seems obvious that mothers can reclaim the power of giving birth. This can be used as a foundational source of theological anthropology and ministry. Christianity has inherited and propagate an ancient Hebrew creation story that disempowers women as the birthers of new life. A male God uses dust and breath to create an adult male “earth creature” who delivers (in his sleep via caesarean section) an adult female “mother of all living”. Fortunately, Azila Reisenberger explains that the “*zela*” (conveniently mistranslated as “rib”) of

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the world: A Geography of Faith*. New York: Harper One, (2009), xviii

¹¹⁰ Sarojini Nadar, “*Wathint’abafazi Wathint’imbokodo!* — The Son of Woman in the *Son of Man* as an Embodiment of the Struggle for Justice,” in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film*, ed. R. Walsh, J. Staley, and A. Reinhartz, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 61-68.

Adam, actually refers to a whole side.¹¹¹ The misinterpretation has been profoundly disempowering for women. Vindicating the original concept of partnership is critically important.

Through the celebrating of the Eucharist we recall Jesus' (and our own) natality. Human life here on earth (not only as it is in heaven) is an expression of divine and beloved natality. Jesus began in utero and required gestation and birth in order to enter human reality. As the receptive co-creator, Mary's pregnancy and her giving birth to Jesus serve as a reminder Christ was embodied. Thus all of our human bodies are good, beautiful, divinely created, blessed and holy. Our bodies are a reflection of Jesus' embodied holiness and the ritual of consecration and communion at the Eucharistic feast is another link between Christ's body and our own.

Motherism can also be used towards transforming ministry by repeatedly reinforcing the understanding that at its origin, the Eucharistic feast was a real meal with real bread and wine. When Jesus instructs his disciples to make the preparations (which indicated those menial chores routinely assigned to women: shopping, cooking and setting the table), he overturns gendered roles and expectations. He uses the ironic image of the secret signal of "a man carrying a jar of water" (Mark 14:13b) because this would have been a rare occurrence in his context. Jesus calls into question the burden of expectation regarding gendered work and sexual division of labour. What is most striking is that Jesus does precisely what mothers do for their families: he offers nourishment of food and drink and calls it his own body. This is exactly what is happening in pregnancy and breastfeeding. Mothers offer our bodies to feed and form and grow our children.

[Jesus] took bread and gave you thanks. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: 'Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you.' When the supper was ended, he took the cup. Again he gave you thanks and praise, gave the cup to his disciples, and said: 'Take this all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my

¹¹¹ Azila Talit Reisenberger, "The Creation of Adam as Hermaphrodite — and its Implications for Feminist Theology," *Judaism* 42, (1993): 447-452.

blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.¹¹²

Can we not understand that this body and blood of Christ that we bless and invite the congregation to share represents our bodies too? If we reconceptualise the Eucharist in this way, the possibilities for embodied transformation are endless.

Finally, the gendered and biological difference that women (and mothers) bring to ministry might provide a dangerous opportunity to challenge and change the institutional church. While there are obvious differences between clergymen and clergywomen in terms of identity, our praxis may also differ according to our different gendered and biological experiences and perspectives. This impacts on how we perform and function in the role of the priest within the congregation and the institution. Simultaneously, acting as the priest within particular congregations will influence clergy mothers' understandings of ourselves within our families. We need to listen to each other's stories and to learn from each other's experiences in order to move beyond assumptions and expectations. This is precisely what the experiencing of doing interviews with other clergywomen afforded me in this thesis.

Conclusion

The frightening, frustrating and empowering experiences of birthing and mothering have radically influenced my understanding of theology and ministry. Theologian and potter Marjory Zoet Bankson in a book called *This is My Body: Creativity, Clay and Change* explains that working with clay awakened her to "the embodiment of Christ [and] the difference between men and women in the Church."¹¹³

¹¹² Church of the Province of Southern Africa, *An Anglican Prayer Book* (1989). Jeppestown: HarperCollins Religious, (2002), 123.

¹¹³ Marjory Zoet Bankson, *This is My Body: Creativity, Clay, and Change*. San Diego: LuraMedia, (1993), 12.

Throughout the gospels Jesus' words and actions (and even what the church has come to call the sacraments) seem to reflect the powerful female capacity to grow, give birth to and feed and nurture new life. Mothers know in an embodied way through the experiences of gestation and birth and raising children that we all are connected and we need to learn from each other and liberate each other. Nolan makes the connection between the political and the personal, the theoretical and the embodied experiential:

In apartheid South Africa we used to say: "No one is free until we are all free." This reference was to social and political liberation, but it applies equally well to personal liberation or rather to a holistic ideal that includes social and personal freedom. We cannot become free all alone in splendid isolation. We need one another. [...] We learn from little children and from those who are childlike. Our freedom is much more than personal achievement. We free one another, just as we heal one another.¹¹⁴

This is a powerful metaphor for birth: mother and child free and heal one another in the process. Likewise, women being born into new leadership within the church will free and heal both women and men.

Jantzen is clear that neither of the terms "experience" or "women" "can be taken as a straightforward empirically discernible category".¹¹⁵ Therefore, feminist theologians have much work to do in terms of negotiating subjectivity. But while a complex task and endless task (like mothering), it is a worthwhile project. As Jantzen says:

I wish to suggest that much would be gained for the strong claims for women's experience made by feminist theologians if, instead of thinking in terms of the trajectory of beliefs, we were to consider women's experience as a resource and grounding for desire and imagination in the development of a feminist religious symbolic. In this way, rather than serving as an empirical foundation of religious truths, women's experience offers transformative suggestions for the religious imaginary and the development of the woman subject.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books, (2006), 185-186.

¹¹⁵ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 101.

¹¹⁶ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 101-102.

All of our human experience is subjective. Mothers (and wombs that bring new life) challenge the idealisation of death and the hereafter. Clergywomen and mothers can use our experience as a resource instead of as a stumbling block.

In this chapter I discussed the theoretical foundations of this thesis. Based largely within a feminist theology of praxis, the importance of narrative theology to this work was explored. Two specific theoretical concepts, namely natality and motherism, were explored in the context of embodiment as significant lenses through which to understand the clergywomen's experiences re-presented in this thesis. Having laid this foundation, in the next chapter, I will discuss the feminist methodology I used in the research.

Chapter 4: Feminist Methodology

Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end.

— Jeanette Winterson¹¹⁷

Jeanette Winterson, a British feminist writer, refers to the complexities of seeking to understand people's lived experiences through the stories that they tell. Notwithstanding the complexities of the task at hand, listening to stories is the method I chose for my research. I concur with Winterson about the impossibility of proving anything. In this study there was no attempt to align myself with positivist notions of doing research, what Mary Daly calls "methodolatry":

The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illuminated by ideas that do not fit into pre-established boxes and forms. The worshippers of Method have an effective way of handling data that does not fit into the Respectable Categories of Questions and Answers. They simply classify it as nondata, thereby rendering it invisible.

It should be noted that the god Method is in fact a subordinate deity, serving Higher Powers. These are social and cultural institutions whose survival depends on the classification of disruptive and disturbing information as nondata. Under patriarchy, Method has wiped out women's questions so totally that women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experiences. Women have not been able even to experience our own experiences.¹¹⁸

This study is concerned with the articulation of Anglican clergywomen's lived experiences as mothers and as priests. The formulation of the questions, the co-constructed conversations of the interviews, and the mutual affirmation of

¹¹⁷ Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. London: Vintage, (2001), 91.

¹¹⁸ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, (1973), 11.

identification with each other's lived experiences overcomes "methodolatry". The data is disruptive and disturbing. It is also enlightening and hopeful.

In the previous chapter I outlined the theoretical framing of this study. The purpose of this chapter on methodology is to sketch and discuss the research design, the methods of data production (and co-production), the sampling, reflexivity, the methods of data analysis, reliability and validity, and the ethical considerations concerning this study – all the while being aware that positivist science might classify what I have found as "non-data". My more circular and more narrative way of exploring multiple truths is sometimes challenging for a traditionally linear academic discipline that longs for the illusion of one absolute truth. But listening to experiential story telling through the interview process has been the best way to engage clergywomen in reflection about ministry and mothering for the purpose of this project.

Research Design

The research that I have undertaken has been qualitative and narrative and I have incorporated reflexivity into the design. My empirical research is firmly located within a critical feminist research paradigm. I have chosen this paradigm because of feminist scholarship's explicit emphasis on a non-hierarchical, reflexive, and interactive approach.

This method of doing research is modelled on a postmodernist approach suggested by Steinar Kvale. In his book *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* he contrasts the "miner metaphor" with that of the "traveller metaphor" as representing alternative understandings of how people access and formulate knowledge. Kvale explains that an interviewer who explores like a respectful traveller might be able to go on a journey through unfamiliar lands experiencing new vistas and conversations, sometimes wandering and sometimes with maps, but always with a view to telling a coherent story to family and friends back at home. Kvale reminds us the Greek word *method* means "a route that leads to the goal" and that the

original Latin word *conversation* means “wandering together with.”¹¹⁹ He explains what happens during the interview journey:

What the traveling reporter hears and sees is described qualitatively and is reconstructed as stories to be told to the people of the interviewer’s own country, and possibly also to those with whom the interviewer wandered. The potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler’s interpretations; the tales are remolded into new narratives, which are convincing in their aesthetic form and are validated through their impact upon the listeners.¹²⁰

Stated succinctly, this idea of doing research as a traveller “refers to a postmodern constructive understanding that involves a conversational approach to social research.”¹²¹ All that is learned and experienced is translated into new stories to be recounted and the interpretations can change in each telling and in each hearing. This storyteller certainly has been challenged and changed through my own new understandings.

Methods of Data Production

In line with the qualitative research design, this study used listening to and recording women’s stories in order to examine the theological and practical implications of the vocational ministerial work and the vocational family life experiences of the participants. The method for data production was a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix A) comprised of sixteen questions about life and work as a mother and a priest. Although the same questions were used in each of the seven interviews, the questions were open to interpretation and led to diverse tangential narratives. I encouraged each participant to redirect the conversation as she saw fit. This more in-depth and personal approach suited this study better than a quantitative survey as the aim was to gain experiential insights from some of the pioneering clergywomen in ACSA. The relatively small quantity of interviews conducted

¹¹⁹ Steinar Kvale, *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage Publications: 1996, 4.

¹²⁰ Kvale, *InterViews*, 4.

¹²¹ Kvale, *InterViews*, 5.

was more than compensated for by the depth and quality of the insights that were shared by the participants. All interviews were conducted in English, and were electronically recorded and then transcribed. Each interview lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes.

My research is inherently narrative as the interviews provided an opportunity for these particular clergywomen to reflect on their own experiences and to tell their interpretation of their faith and life journeys. Their stories are about (among other things) identity, work, family, church and power. Narrative theology is increasingly acceptable within the academy. This is a reflection of the increased acceptance of the understanding that the personal is academic as well as political. The personal is also deeply theological.

As a woman priest who is also a mother, I identify strongly with the participants. This could never have been an objective detached scientific process. As the interviewer, I have attempted to bring to this project both my compassion and my academic background of critical reflection. These both impact on the way that I listened during the interviews and on the subsequent interpretation and analysis of the co-constructed data. Effective reflexivity requires intensive self-reflection and long-term commitment. This has been my personal preoccupation, but I required input from other Anglican clergywomen with whom I identify in order to understand more broadly the issues that we are facing as mothering priests. And so in 2007 I began to engage in a long and drawn out (over nearly seven years to accommodate work and children – my own and those of the participants) process of interviewing seven South African clergywomen (most of whom are mothers) to gain insight from their varied experiences. The seventh and final interview took place in early 2013.

The recording and documentation of these clergywomen's lives is oral history. Oral history uses a narrative approach. Paul Thompson explains just how creative and co-operative oral history can be in his book, *The Voice of the Past*. He speaks of its key advantage of "locating new evidence exactly where it is wanted". He goes on to say:

[F]ield-work to be successful demands human and social skills in working with informants, as well as professional knowledge. This means that oral history projects of any kind start with unusual advantages. They demand a range of skills which will not be monopolized by those who are older, expert, or best at writing, so they allow co-operation on a much more equal basis. They can bring not only intellectual stimulation, but sometimes, through entering into the lives of others, a deep and moving human experience. And they can be carried out anywhere—for any community of people carries within it a many-sided history of work, family life, and social relationships waiting to be drawn out.¹²²

This sums up many of the reasons why I chose to do live, individual interviews with clergywomen. I enjoy doing this kind of fieldwork as it is engaging, inspiring and enlightening. It is not about being an academic expert, but rather about being an interested equal who wants to listen and participate in a conversation. Thompson explains what an interviewer must bring to such a conversation:

There are some essential qualities which the successful interviewer must possess: an interest and respect for people as individuals, and flexibility in response to them; an ability to show understanding and sympathy for their point of view; and above all, a willingness to sit quietly and listen.¹²³

I hope that I was able to bring these qualities to the interview conversation. The depth and candour of the participants would certainly indicate that they felt comfortable speaking with me.

Alessandro Portelli, in his chapter “What makes Oral History Different?” (In *The Oral History Reader*) explains rather obviously:

Oral sources are *oral* sources. Scholars are willing to admit that the actual document is the recorded tape; but almost all go on to work on the transcripts, and it is only the transcripts that are published. Occasionally, tapes are actually destroyed: a symbolic case of the destruction of the spoken word. The transcript turns aural objects into visual ones, which inevitably implies change and interpretation.¹²⁴

¹²² Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Third edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2000), 190.

¹²³ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 222.

¹²⁴ Alessandro Portelli, “What makes Oral History Different?” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998): 63-74.

This is an important reminder. Christians can identify with this idea of voice becoming embodied: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). It is also important to remember that these sources of oral history are narrative sources. There is less emphasis on fact and more emphasis on people’s own interpretation of their stories. The “facts” of the interviews are not open to being disputed – because it is a legitimate perspective – even if not historically fully accurate. Portelli states:

Oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no ‘false’ oral sources. [... T]he diversity of oral history consists in the fact that ‘wrong’ statements are still psychologically ‘true’ and that this truth may be equally important as factually reliable accounts.¹²⁵

Portelli again states the obvious when he reminds us that:

Oral sources are not *objective*. This of course applies to every source, though the holiness of writing often leads us to forget it. But the inherent nonobjectivity of oral sources lies in specific intrinsic characteristics, the most important being that they are *artificial, variable, and partial*.¹²⁶

There are several issues at play as a researcher and research participant co-create the oral data that is generated in an interview. The first issue to be considered is the power dynamics between the people involved. The researcher has formulated the interview questions and selected the participants and invested in the relationships. But the participants choose to be part of the conversation and choose what they reveal and what they do not wish to have on record. There is also the reality that sometimes participants say what they think the researcher wishes to hear and this depends upon assumptions that they might make about the researcher. It is critical for the researcher to suspend any judgment in order for the participant to feel the freedom to tell their truth. However, the conversation is never neutral. And as Portelli indicates:

¹²⁵ Portelli, “What makes Oral History Different?” 68.

¹²⁶ Portelli, “What makes Oral History Different?” 70.

Communication always works both ways. The interviewees are always, though perhaps unobtrusively, studying the interviewers who 'study' them. Historians might as well recognize this fact and make the best of its advantages, rather than try to eliminate it for the sake of an impossible (and perhaps undesirable) neutrality. The final result of the interview is the product of both the narrator and the researcher.¹²⁷

No two interviews could ever be the same. Furthermore, oral history is always unfinished and incomplete – and the interviews in which I was a participant along with the clergywomen who shared their stories with me, there was always so much more that could have been said. The wider conversation that began long before the digital recording took place will continue for many years to come.

Sampling

There were seven separate interviews conducted with seven Anglican clergywomen. My sampling was purposive in that I deliberately selected the participants who fitted the criteria. I wanted to listen to experienced Anglican clergywomen in positions of authority within their dioceses (by this I mean diocesan clergy – not self-supporting or community priests or part-time priests) who were also mothers. During the interviewing phase of this project, a friend suggested that perhaps I ought to interview unmarried and childless clergymen who might have a completely alternative viewpoint. He thought (correctly) that I was simply looking for reflections of my own story. Following his advice would have taken the project in a very different direction, and although it could have been fascinating, it was also outside of the field of my particular interest. However, his comment led me to consider the importance of speaking to some clergywomen who are not mothers, women who have made choices very different from my own. Their voices offered a control of sorts to compare and contrast the experiences of the clergy mothers.

While this was not a quantitative study, the sample was nevertheless

¹²⁷ Portelli, "What makes Oral History Different?" 70-71.

representative in terms of age, race, class, sexual orientation and even ways of practising motherhood. The participants were all between the ages of thirty-five and sixty. These women represent a spectrum of the South African racial rainbow: indian, coloured, black and white.¹²⁸ All are from relatively urban backgrounds and are currently working in urban settings. The interviews took place in four cities in three different provinces across the country. The participants in this study come from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. More than half of the participants come from “previously disadvantaged”¹²⁹ communities. All have received higher education and most have theological degrees. Two are divorced. Three have never been married. One is now (after many years of living in the closet) in a same sex marriage. Two have adopted children. Two are grandmothers.

It was also critically important to the selection of my participants that they have some experiential understanding of marginalisation. All of them have experienced being a woman in what has traditionally been a “man’s job” in a “man’s world” and have described feeling patronised, marginalised, alienated or excluded to varying degrees. In some cases issues around gender and parenting have been compounded by other factors such as singleness or homosexuality.

The original criteria for the participants were that they would be mothers who (at the time of the interview) worked in fulltime diocesan ministry (at the level of rector or the equivalent) within ACSA. As explained earlier, the criteria changed to accommodate two “mothers of the church” who do not have biological or adoptive children – for one of them this was a conscious choice and for the other this is due to current circumstances. The counterpoint of their views has been extremely helpful and enlightening.

¹²⁸ These terms of racial classification were used during apartheid and continue to be used to reflect the diversity of human experience. Therefore I have used these previously fraught terms to acknowledge that people’s stories must be filtered through particular experiences of race. This is an inescapable reality within the South African context.

¹²⁹ This is a South African term intended to describe the economically challenged – but is really a euphemism for people who can be described as black, coloured and indian.

The seven interviews were co-constructed (through one-on-one face to face electronically recorded) conversations with South African Anglican women priests from three different provinces. All of them (bar one who is employed as a chaplain at a prestigious Anglican private girls' school) were diocesan (stipendiary) rectors of congregations. Several of them are canons.

Although racial demographics did not feature as criteria for the selection of any of the seven clergywomen in the study, race certainly had bearing on the lived experiences that each of them recounted. As "Eve" (one of the participants) so aptly stated, "I find I can never separate the race and the gender from me". The economic demographics that may (or may not) have been diverse in terms of their backgrounds and upbringings have been more or less equalised by the vocation (and limited stipend) of priesthood within ACSA. The identities of the participants have been veiled with the names of biblical mothers.

Some of the interview conversations were more in-depth and open than others. This depended largely on two factors: the personalities of the participants, and the relationships and trust levels that I, as the researcher/interviewer had established with each woman. Some of them I knew quite well, while others I met for the first time at the interview. Certain participants were invited to be part of the project quite organically as we had already engaged in similar informal conversations. My supervisor directed me to some of the participants. In one case, my diocesan bishop suggested that I include a particular person in my research. These women were candidly vulnerable about their personal lives and struggles and therefore require anonymity. I have renamed them after biblical mothers in the presentation of all excerpts from the interview transcripts as follows: "Rebekah", "Ruth", "Hannah", "Rachel", "Sarah", "Mary" and "Eve". Sometimes their comments reveal their race. But, while not erasing it from the text, I have chosen not to draw additional attention to that demographic marker in order to further obscure their identities. My own baptismal name, Elizabeth, is occasionally inserted with comments and questions which effectively adds an eighth voice to the conversation. This is in line with my reflexive approach. I will introduce

each of the participants by describing some basic information about their lives in order to profile their identities at the end of this chapter.

Reflexivity

I have travelled great distances with these clergywomen. The geographical and psychological journey continues to change my life and my way of understanding myself, my practice of ministry and motherhood in general. This is an example of reflexivity in scholarship. Reflexivity indicates an understanding by the researcher that knowledge is not neutral and that there are power dynamics at play in the production and coproduction of knowledge. In their article “Gender and Families: Feminist Perspectives and Family Research”, Greer Fox and Velma Murray explain this concept:

One of the hallmarks of reflexivity is recognition by the scholar that he or she is an actor intimately involved in the generation of knowledge, rather than simply a recorder and reporter of what is seen outside oneself. Such a self-aware stance on the part of a researcher fosters a critical approach to epistemology. For example, reflexivity calls into question the notion that objectivity is the only orientation a scholar may legitimately take to his or her study. Thus, it opens the door to the recognition that subjectivity not only is a valid and valuable orientation to research but may also be a necessary stance for good research.¹³⁰

Reflexivity is an important concept for feminist researchers who take seriously their relationship to the participants in their research. Reflexivity insists that the researcher cannot stand objectively apart from the process.

Instead of conceptualizing research as something done to (or for) research subjects by an objective observer outside the research setting, feminists acknowledge that their orientations, actions, interpretations, biases, and interests will become integral to the research process and its outcomes, and they seek to understand how it happens as it is happening during the process of their research.¹³¹

Of course, feminist scholarship does not have the monopoly on self-critical sensitivity. In fact, black feminist scholars have critiqued the scholarship of

¹³⁰ Greer Litton Fox and Velma McBride Murry, “Gender and Families: Feminist Perspectives and Family Research,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no. 4 (2000): 1160-1172, 1161.

¹³¹ Fox and Murry, “Gender and Families”, 1161.

white middle class feminists labelling it "academic colonialism".

Academic colonialism is a reference to the potential for the academic research enterprise to exploit rather than to empower those who are the subject of study. In response to such critiques, feminist scholars have attempted to be more deliberately conscious of how scholarly practices affect those whose lives are studied and to attend to patterns of inclusion and exclusion.¹³²

I was profoundly aware as a white middle class American feminist of the potential to exploit other women's stories for my own academic benefit. Here the value of solidarity helped to keep me accountable and intellectually honest. The power of our common story and the centrality of our praxis (the combination of our theory and our practice) as clergywomen promoted such solidarity.

Methods of Data Analysis

This solidarity found expression in my desire to do something useful with the perspectives and stories that these clergywomen had risked sharing with me. While I find oral history fascinating and important, the interviews and the transcription were only the beginning of this project. The next step was comparison and analysis. As already asserted, my own life experience and biases coloured my interpretation. My approach to social analysis stems in part from an involvement with the work and publications of the interfaith Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Many of the books that they have written and published offer examples of ways of "doing theology" differently.¹³³

The mentoring that I received as a graduate student from the Cape Town branch of the Circle (led by Denise Ackermann) from 1997-2000 provided a template for engaging with the interview material in an alternative framework that sought to be theologically and academically sound. Mercy Amba Oduyoye states:

¹³² Fox and Murry, "Gender and Families", 1161.

¹³³ Nyambura J. Njoroge, "The Missing Voice: African Women Doing Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997): 77-83.

The Circle itself represents an attempt to listen for women's voices as they contributed and continue to contribute to theological reflection and draw attention to issues, which faith communities have ignored. [...] The stories are told in a way that includes analysis, reflection and a call to action.¹³⁴

This model of analysis, reflection and a call to action is the template I use for my data analysis. Furthermore, the Circle was concerned with building empowering relationships between women. It was also determined to encourage women to write theology from their individual perspectives. Musa Dube explains the significance and purpose of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*:

[I]t describes African women theologians in various contexts, methods and concerns, who work together for the empowerment of women and the recognition of human dignity. [...] A circle of women pursuing theology together in different African contexts is an approach that insists that African women are also part of the life force in creation. It is an approach that pays attention to all that denies the fulfilment of women's lives and the assertion that African women are part of the circle of life.¹³⁵

The philosophy of the Circle emphasises the importance of women telling (and writing and publishing) our stories. While the articulation of the *raison d'être* is sometimes overly romanticised and idealistic, I agree wholeheartedly with the process and the desired outcome:

[W]e believe that telling our stories shifts women from being observers and victims into participants and actors in history. The growing community of writers expands into a community of readers. When our sisters read our stories they, in turn, are gathered into the winnowing process. They are inspired to look at their own lives and evaluate their own experiences and, hopefully, tell their stories.¹³⁶

Through telling these stories basic social analysis emerges. Social analysis proceeds from engagement with the participants to an emerging (or erupting

¹³⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface: Naming Our Mothers," in *Her-stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, ed. Isabel A. Phiri, Devakarsham K. Govinden and Sarojini Nadar (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002), xi.

¹³⁵ Nyambura J. Njoroge and Musa W. Dube, eds, *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, (2001), 11.

¹³⁶ Isabel Apawo Phiri, Devakarsham Betty Govinden and Sarojini Nadar, eds, *Her-stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, (2002), 7.

or even disruptive) analysis. This can in turn lead to theological reflection and the construction of a call and model for action. As already stated, this is exactly how my analysis of the data produced in this research proceeds. Social analysis is critical for us to understand what is happening currently within the Anglican Church and how the women it ordains are experiencing their vocations.

As already stated, it would have been impossible to be dispassionate and objective in the analysis of the coproduced data. As a clergywoman and a mother, I identify very strongly with these women and I care deeply about their experiences and their futures within the church. As Adrienne Rich declared about the process of writing her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as an Experience and Institution*, “I wanted to examine motherhood—my own included—in a social context, as embedded in a political institution: in feminist terms.”¹³⁷ This is what I have sought to do within the context of the institution of ACSA. Rich says that there was both praise and criticism for her approach of “personal testimony mingled with research, and theory which derived from both.”¹³⁸ Like Rich, I find that this subjective approach is not odd and I agree with her assessment that, “What is odd is the absentee author, the writer who lays down speculations, theories, facts, and fantasies without any personal grounding.”¹³⁹

It would be irresponsible (and intellectually dishonest) not to insert my voice in the context of these co-constructed “conversations.” My own perspective certainly shapes the way the responses are grouped and separated. But I have tried to be as loyal to the participants’ views and responses as possible. I have also tried to suspend judgment and keep an open mind when I did not understand or disagreed with certain positions.

The analysis of the transcripts (like the interview process) was informed by methods proposed by Steinar Kvale in his book *InterViews: An Introduction to*

¹³⁷ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, ix.

¹³⁸ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, x.

¹³⁹ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, x.

Qualitative Research Interviewing. Kvale speaks of the qualitative research interview as a “construction site of knowledge” and provides a valuable theoretical framework and some practical suggestions for how to build on such a site.¹⁴⁰ The usefulness of this process is explained in the following way:

With the breakdown of the universal meta-narratives of legitimization, there is an emphasis on the local context, on the social and linguistic construction of a perspectival reality where knowledge is validated through practice. There is an openness to qualitative diversity, to the multiplicity of meanings in local context; knowledge is perspectival, dependant on the viewpoint and values of the investigator. Human reality is understood as conversation and action, where knowledge becomes the ability to perform effective actions. Today, the legitimization question of whether a study is scientific tends to be replaced by the pragmatic question of whether it provides useful knowledge.¹⁴¹

In my analysis of the co-produced data, my main intention was to provide “useful knowledge”. Interactive interviewing provided the means and opportunity to do this. The framework of the interviews was based on a fixed set of questions derived from the literature review and extensive research, and, most importantly, from my own experience of clerical involvement in ACSA as an ordained mother. What happened in the course of the conversations between the participants and myself was not fixed. There was a certain element of fluidity and even surprise, but I had to “re-present” and contain it so that it could be transmitted as “useful knowledge”.

Re-presentation of findings

The presentation of the co-produced data from the transcripts was structured to highlight the meaning through narratives. Different clear themes emerged from the conversations that were then reconstructed with the voices of the seven participants and my own voice as the engaged researcher. Instead of presenting the interview responses separately, I have created artificial conversations that include all of the voices responding the various themes.

¹⁴⁰ Kvale, *InterViews*, 42.

¹⁴¹ Kvale, *InterViews*, 42.

The counterpointing, comparing and contrasting of the different responses makes for more digestible reading. It is important to remember that the word “analyse” means to separate something into different parts. As Kvale explains the usefulness of breaking apart and breaking open the separate interviews into narrated conversations:

An interview analysis can be treated as a form of narration, as a continuation of the story told by the interviewee. A narrative analysis of what was said leads to a new story to be told, a story developing the themes of the original interview. The analysis may also be a condensation or a reconstruction of the many tales told by the different subjects into a richer, more condensed and coherent story than the scattered stories of the separate interviews.¹⁴²

The larger conversation of the analysis could in no way integrate all the separate elements of the stories that these women confided in me. I chose themes that were of particular interest to me and therefore I have used some of the information gathered leaving many other fascinating topics aside. The analysis in this study is not the final word on the matter. It is a doorway into further and wider conversations.

As I began to analyse the data that had been co-created in the interview process and then interpreted through the transcription process, four clear themes emerged. These became the basis for the regrouping of quotes from the interviews into several broader “conversations”. These four themes are:

1. Clergy Image: body image and iconography
2. Vocation/discernment, training/formation and role models
3. The life and work of a (mother) priest
4. Sub-ordination? Power and authority

The four themes are grouped into three chapters entitled Presence, Praxis and Power. The self-reflective process required by the participants and by the interviewer myself meant that the insights are deeply subjective. The participants speak for themselves in the chapters on Presence, Praxis and

¹⁴² Kvale, *InterViews*, 199.

Power. This is done in the form of thematic reconstructed conversations that are the result of the recorded and transcribed interviews. The juxtaposition of their comments recasts their particular positions in a new light and provides insight into their common or individual experiences.

Reliability and Validity

One might raise the issue of credibility in terms of what is recounted to the audience of the researcher (and others who might read the results of the research). How can anyone tell any story without agendas and blind spots? This raises questions about “truth” and the telling of “the truth”. In this context, the historical truth was not what really mattered.

The construction of reality that each of us attempts to explain when we “tell our truth” and the re-presentation that I have attempted to present through my interpretation inevitably mean that some things will be misunderstood – others will be lost in translation. There are always agendas involved in what we want our audiences to know (and not know) and what we want to believe (and to have believed by others) about ourselves. We can never see the whole picture. But historical truth was never the objective in this study. A different kind of insight and instruction is possible with the new perspectives gained by oral history:

For each of us, our way of life, our personality, our consciousness, our knowledge are directly built out of our past life experience. Our lives are cumulations of our own pasts, continuous and indivisible.¹⁴³

Addressing the question of what defines subjectivity, we must consider the multiplicity of our identities. The participants (and the researcher) are clergy and women and students and teachers and natals and mortals, and in some cases wives and mothers too. We need strategies to understand ourselves and each other. Power plays a part in this dynamic. Language and discourse also play important roles in the production of subjectivity. Through listening to

¹⁴³ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 171-172.

these particular clergywomen's voices and experiences, I was reminded again that each of us speaks our own language – and language is always gendered.

In the foreword to Leslie Rebecca Bloom's book *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation*, Deborah Britzman explains that the author aims "[t]o unravel and then retie, again, the knot of intersubjectivity in the afterthought of research."¹⁴⁴ For Bloom the sign of hope under which she writes and lives is a new horizon of possibility. But as Britzman explains, feminist research is not without its own particular complexities:

[T]he values of representing stories of research begin with the hope of friendship, good conversation, and, perhaps with a wish for an unencumbered space where the method might comfortably reside. But this call for conversation [...] has conflicting addresses. This is because neither the researcher nor those who participate are as stable as the method promises. More often than not, the stories exchanged fray the fragile tie of subjectivity. Even as feminist research methods urge the researcher to move beyond such values as the rational, the logical, and the regulative, there is still the question of how the researcher herself can prepare for encountering, or crafting, this "beyond." For Bloom, the surprise of constructing this "beyond" comes under the sign of hope.¹⁴⁵

Human beings are inherently unstable as we are always moving, always changing (our bodies and our minds). What we say today might not adequately reflect how we might feel tomorrow. What is more, we may speak the truth that we think that our audience wishes to hear. What we choose not to reveal (or even consider – perhaps because we think it unthinkable) is in itself revealing. How can we possibly commit ourselves to an unknowable future when we cannot even know who we will be when we get there? What is more, too often we are misunderstood and misinterpreted because each of us speaks a language that is unique. There are so many questions that are raised by doing research that is critical, feminist, narrative and interpretive. My

¹⁴⁴ Deborah P. Britzman, "Foreword," in *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation*, Leslie Rebecca Bloom, (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), ix.

¹⁴⁵ Britzman, "Foreword," ix.

hope is that my own research, like Bloom's, is able to confront some of these questions directly:

What is it, then, to accept the conflicts, ambivalences, and slipperiness of the stories told? What is it to bother research with its own unfulfilled promise? If one of the divisions in the world, as feminists suggest, is the division of gender, how does research explain the division of that gender? If there are differences between methodologies, how does one live with the differences within one methodology? And, if there are conflicts between the biography told and the one that is lived, how can one think that the conflict is biography? These are questions that orient the strange geography we call research.¹⁴⁶

Feminists continue to seek a space within the academy to do research on our own terms – research that is narrative, personal and transformative. I am aware that these modes of research are still sometimes undervalued, undermined and at worst dismissed outright in the predominantly western male academy. The church also continues to struggle to admit women and women's ways of knowing and being. As Indian activist and writer Arundhati Roy says, "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."¹⁴⁷ While alternative approaches and our experiences may be called into question by the establishment (ecclesiological and academic), feminist epistemology reminds us that there is more than one way of knowing and being. Alternative voices raise alternative questions – clergywomen and clergy mothers know what we know through our own valid individual and collective experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The research that I have undertaken raises several important ethical considerations. First and foremost is the issue of consent. All of the women interviewed signed a consent form that assured them that the co-constructed material from the conversations would be used for the purpose of this study,

¹⁴⁶ Britzman, "Foreword," ix.

¹⁴⁷ Arundhati Roy, "Peace & The New Corporate Liberation Theology," <http://www.smh.com.au/news/Opinion/Roys-full-speech/2004/11/04/1099362264349.html> (Accessed 21 January 2014).

but that they would be made anonymous to protect them personally and professionally from any possible repercussions.

Some participants were happy to reveal their names, but in order to protect those who did not wish to be named, all have been protected with anonymity. This begs the question as to why these clergywomen agreed to be in conversation with me. I am an insider with all of the participants as an Anglican clergywoman. I am an insider with most of them because I am a mother. My maternity makes me an outsider with two of them. We are all within a similar economic bracket. Perhaps some of them were simply doing me a favour by agreeing to be interviewed. But most of them seemed grateful for an opportunity to reflect on these issues and questions and to speak about their own experiences and concerns. What was my role vis-à-vis the participants? Was I a casual “conversation partner”, or “friend”, or “confessor”, or “witness”, or something else entirely?

Some contact and informal discussion prior to the interviews with each of the women confirmed their interest and suitability and all gave their verbal consent to be interviewed. Written informed consent forms (see example in Appendix B) were signed by each participant prior to the interviews permitting the recording and use of the material for the express purpose of doing the research for this study. Ethical clearance was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and granted accordingly (see Appendix C).

Initially I employed another individual to assist with the transcription process, but when I discovered glaring gaps and inversions of words and meanings, I went back and redid the three that had already been converted to text format and also did the remaining four transcriptions personally. I then emailed the electronic copies of the transcripts in word document format to the participants so that they could verify that these were accurate renderings of our conversations. All seven clergywomen accepted my re-presentation of their oral submissions. After reviewing the transcripts, some of the participants expressed anxiety about being identified. The reassurance of complete anonymity put their minds at rest. None of them were pressured to remain in

the study, but all freely accepted to do so. They were in no way required to share my views - theologically or politically - and the interview questions deliberately did not directly explore these aspects of their identities. I was overt with them about being a feminist researcher as this impacted strongly on my own active participation in the process.

A central question during this entire process was “what is this research for?” or “who benefits?” Obviously, I have benefited personally from the experience. But as a feminist scholar, I have made a conscious choice to place value on the lives and experiences of these particular women (and in so doing make the statement that all women’s perspectives are critically important). I hope that by focusing on something as “mundane” as mothering and ministry (which can be experienced as relentlessly boring even for those who are participating in the work and relationships), that the power dynamics and the issues of inequality might be highlighted and addressed.

My greatest ethical concern in undertaking this research was that I might do these women (who trusted me with their own stories and concerns) a disservice – that I might not adequately or appropriately re-present their views. I am profoundly aware of the political nature of this research and I take seriously my responsibility to be an advocate for change. The interviews were designed in such a way as to empower the clergywomen to whom I listened because it was an active listening process. It was never detached or judgmental. I myself was engaged in the conversation and the relationships. And I myself felt empowered through the process. I cannot say to what extent the participants experienced empowerment. Only the participants themselves could answer that question – but most indicated that they found the process interesting, helpful, and even cathartic. I also cannot answer the question as to whether I was an appropriate witness or advocate, but my aim has been to undertake this for their sake, for my own, and for other people engaged in clerical ministry within ACSA.

Conclusion

The interviews with seven South African Anglican clergywomen focused on ministry and family life were most compelling. My own vocational, academic and personal journey (and the pilgrimage on which I embarked with other clergywomen by listening to their stories) has reshaped many of my preconceived notions about ministry and mothering. It has also influenced personal and professional decisions that I have taken subsequently. This research has enabled me to acquire a new methodology for grappling with the received wisdom.

In her book *That They May Be Many: Voices of Women Echoes of God*, Ann Kirkus Wetherilt asks the following important questions:

How might we develop a methodology through which the multiple voices of diverse cultures—and diverse people *within* cultures—could engage in theo-ethical dialogue with one another in the service of new possibilities for living together in the increasingly fragile world which we share? And how would such a methodology challenge the metaphors that have been central to historical Christianity?¹⁴⁸

In this chapter I have attempted to engage with many of these questions by highlighting the need to tell our own and listen to each other's stories. Wetherilt and I have both experienced the process of being "heard into speech" described by Nelle Morton:

This woman was saying, and I had experienced, a depth hearing that takes place before speaking—a hearing that is more than acute listening. A hearing engaged in by the whole body that evokes speech—a new speech—a new creation. The woman had been heard to her own speech.¹⁴⁹

Through this dialectical process, I have become able to express what was previously inexpressible, and perhaps even previously unthinkable. This was

¹⁴⁸ Ann Kirkus Wetherilt, *That They May Be Many: Voices of Women Echoes of God*. New York: Continuum, (1994), 7-8.

¹⁴⁹ Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home*. Boston: Beacon Press, (1985), 127-28.

a powerfully liberatory process that involved compassionate and engaged listening to peoples' stories. It involved critical reflection. It involves continuing to challenge the status quo. And hopefully it leads to change – both internal and external. As Kvale so aptly states:

The journey may not only lead to new knowledge; the traveler might change as well. The journey might instigate a process of reflection that leads the interviewer to new ways of self-understanding, as well as uncovering previously taken-for-granted values and customs in the traveler's home country. The transformative effects of traveling are expressed in the German term *Bildungsreise*—a scholarly, formative journey. Through conversations, the traveler can also lead others to new understanding and insight as they, through their own story telling, may come to reflect on previously natural-seeming matters of course in their culture.”¹⁵⁰

In the following chapters, we begin the recounting of this journey of conversations. As already stated, the recorded interviews were transcribed and thereafter thematically analysed according to three major themes: Presence (which discusses the lived experiences of being a priest in a female body); Praxis (which discusses the activities and relationships with which these female bodies engage); and Power (which discusses the dynamics of gendered power within the church).

I will now briefly introduce the seven clergywomen participants. This can also be found in Appendix D for easy referencing purposes. At the time of the interviews, all of the participants (apart from one chaplain) were rectors of congregations in three different provinces. The clergywomen interviewed can be briefly described as follows:

- “Rebekah” is married to another Anglican priest and they have two young children. Her own mother died when she was a teenager. She no longer lives in South Africa.
- “Ruth” was previously married to a man, with whom she had two biological children and adopted four others. She divorced and was a

¹⁵⁰ Kvale, *InterViews*, 4.

single mother for many years. But shortly after the interview she married another woman and left the country.

- “Hannah” is married with two young children and works fulltime as a school chaplain at an Anglican girls’ school.
- “Rachel” is divorced and has made a conscious choice not to be a biological or adoptive mother.
- “Sarah” has never been married, but raised her late sister’s child as her own and now shares in the parenting of her grandson.
- “Mary” is single and childless, but this is due more to circumstance rather than choice, and she conscientiously practices mothering the children of those close to her.
- “Eve” is a single mother of two grown children and a grandmother. One of her daughters was still in school during “Eve’s” years of seminary training.

These clergywomen are women of spirit and servants of truth labouring to give birth to a new creation in the church. We now turn to the heart of this thesis that is based on their stories of ministry and motherhood.

Chapter 5: Presence

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how clergywomen are present both in the sacred spaces of the sanctuary and in their broader lives. It explores their journeys towards more equitable arrangements and new understandings of who can be a priest. The journey explores 1) Bodies and Perceptions; 2) A New Iconography of Priesthood; and 3) Persona. On each of these paths we explore the changing perceptions and expectations about how priests look, and how we practice our ministry. We reflect on what clergywomen have to offer in terms of rebalancing the iconography and symbolism and meaning of church, and through my own experience (and the experiences of other the clergywomen whom I have interviewed) I explore the ways in which our female bodies broadening the understanding of who God is and how we are made in God's image and how these changing perceptions might lead to new horizons of possibility for clergywomen within ACSA.

Bodies and Perceptions

Clergywomen, by nature of our female bodies, automatically and inherently break ancient purity rules and disrupt many people's expectations of the clergy image. Our ritually communicative bodies, our voices and our perspectives do not fit the traditional stereotype of the priest. Even though the Anglican Church has moved beyond the Catholic celibate male model, for many people (both clergy and lay) the female body continues to represent sexuality and sensuality and mothering. Moore explains:

Ordained women make the affirmation of sexuality explicit because of the gendered ways women's bodies are seen. One of the arguments against women's ordination was that female bodies were a source of temptation to lust for men. Women's bodies were by nature dirty, impure, and dangerous, said strands of Christian tradition from the church fathers to the present. Women's bodies are also sexualized in the media and culture, and used as sex objects to sell almost anything. So imagining or seeing women as clergy highlights a disconcerting contrast between a sex object and a person of respect. [...] Just by

being women, women challenge some notions of what it is to be holy.¹⁵¹

The participants confirmed Moore's above assertions. For example, "Ruth" spoke specifically about some of the ways in which her own body has been alternately hyper-sexualised and desexualised within the church context.

"Ruth": You will be sitting in a clergy meeting, and they will be discussing let's go somewhere, and the question will be like: Oh, so you going to bring your bikini? You know? That would never be asked of another [male] colleague! Every time you get addressed the attention is always around your gender, your body, your sexuality, always. It is almost like there is an incapability to relate to you as just another colleague. It is not possible. It doesn't seem to be possible. It is always your gender that they are relating to. So I have very seldom been in a context where I have just felt like another priest, you know. And that is from the top all the way down.

"Ruth" had painful and chronic experiences of sexism in the church. Inappropriate speech and behaviour were a regular occurrence. She still hoped that the priesthood of women might lead ultimately to a complete renegotiation of peoples' views on women. She explained that the church hierarchy and the congregations tend to prefer their women priests desexualised:

"Ruth": I got asked questions like: Promise you won't fall pregnant now, once you are ordained. I think the idea of a pregnant priest just for them was too much (then you must have been be fucking somebody, you know!) They don't want those images.

Despite "Ruth's" critique of the church's inability to confront women as sexual beings, she nevertheless holds out hope that the iconography of the priest can change. She continues:

But I think people can get used to [those images]. I mean at the end of the day we are sexual. Ultimately, it is not just this disembodied woman that they have to cope with, who is now a priest. It is actually a woman who is a sexual being, and sexually active and that is what they struggle to cope with, I think. Particularly the male clergy, particularly the male clergy. It is hard for them to see a woman that is not a sex object.

¹⁵¹ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 64-65.

“Ruth’s” experience is not unique. It has been noted elsewhere that one of the biggest hurdles for many congregations (and for some senior clergy) is the idea (and reality) of a pregnant priest. Rosemary Radford Ruether states, “The most extreme repugnance against the idea of women in ministry typically is expressed in the question “Can you imagine a pregnant woman at the altar?””¹⁵² Moore explains why this might be the case:

Nothing surfaces issues of gender in ministry more than pregnancy. Many women are still serving in parishes as “the first woman,” and all the fears of whether women can lead are now magnified by the question of “can pregnant women lead.” Implicit bargains about accepting a woman because they can indeed perform as well as men are betrayed by physical proof that women are different, even if not in matters of leadership style. What about hormones, fatigue, physical symptoms?¹⁵³

An example of moving beyond the discomfort for more profound and honest mutual understanding follows. “Rebekah” told the story of being a pregnant rector (and then a mother) and how it was uncomfortable for her and for some people in the congregation to process the reality and logistics of that situation. This is part of how clergywomen and our children can be transformative for the church:

“Rebekah”: I think it makes people realise that their priests are human, in a way that a male priest, even with a family, doesn’t. Because you can’t avoid having a child run up to you and grab you around the knees at different moments even within the liturgy. It brings a humanity, a deeper sense of humanity, which is very very good. I laugh though because sometimes you don’t want that. For example: when I was first pregnant [...] and I was standing at the lectern, trying to remember what the notices were for that Sunday, and I was making a complete hash of it, because I was forgetting this, that and the next thing... and [my assistant minister husband] stood up and he said, I just need to tell the congregation something. And he said, This week when we were at the gynaecologist, he told me to expect that “Rebekah” would have a mushy brain, because that’s how the hormones work. And some people were quite horrified that he said the word “gynecologist” from up front in church. I was horrified that he said it, because I don’t want that image in people’s minds! I don’t want my congregation to have an image of me with my legs up in stirrups!

¹⁵² Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 195.

¹⁵³ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 83.

The word gynaecologist is explicit and revealing. It makes tangible the reality of a pregnant priest. It makes people think of vaginas and procreation. These are not topics that people necessarily want to think about in church. A pregnant female body in clerical garb and performing the functions of a priest might challenge people to reconsider bodies in general – and perhaps to acknowledge that bodies (male and female) are not profane because all of creation is holy.

Gyn/Ecology is also the name of Mary Daly's radical feminist separatist book in which she utterly rejects the masculine (both in terms of human men and divine imagery), "reversing its reversals", and declaring that only female imagery can be life-affirming for women.¹⁵⁴ Those of us who choose to remain in more integrated community cannot be so completely rejecting of all that is masculine. Nevertheless, we must examine our relationships with our mothers and their relationships with their bodies as this influences heavily on how we engage as women in our own relationships and in our positions of authority and influence.

Women priests are inherently subversive. Where do we come from? Of course, our bishops confirmed us as members of the Anglican Church and later ordained us as priests. Prior to that our priests baptised us into the Christian faith and community. But I am drawn to the biological birth of priests. We were natal first. Our mothers co-create us by growing us in their wombs and feeding us at their breasts and caring for us with their hands. On some level we mirror those who mother us in our ministry. Our mothers' bodies are our point of entry into the world. Yet "vagina" is still a taboo word in polite company in our society. It still conjures up images of Tertullian's metaphor for women being 'the devil's gateway'.¹⁵⁵

Artist Judy Chicago has tapped into transformative anger and used the image of the vagina to shout back to a sexist world. Her feminist installation

¹⁵⁴ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press, (1978).

¹⁵⁵ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 46-47.

masterpiece “The Dinner Party” (1979) is three massive altars joined together in the form of a triangle that fills an entire museum hall:

Presented in the form of a triple Eucharist, which singled out 39 famous women who altered the course of human history – but also found space to mention numerous others – the work made a point of using skills that have been thought of as specifically female, such as stitchery and china painting, as an integral part of the presentation. [...] Many male viewers, and some feminists also, took offence at the nature of her imagery, which seemed to place the emphasis on physical differences between men and women – the plates at her *Dinner Party* were inspired by the form of the vulva – rather than on the inequalities imposed by the social context. Chicago has always said that her primary aim was not to stress difference but to celebrate women’s achievements in the face of all odds.¹⁵⁶

A more recent art installation called “The Great Wall of Vagina” by Jamie McCartney has the express purpose of “changing female body imagery through art”.¹⁵⁷ Eve Ensler’s book (and the worldwide performances of it) *The Vagina Monologues* has made a massive contribution towards normalising conversation about certain taboo subjects relating to female sexuality and female bodies.¹⁵⁸ Vaginas are beginning to get more visibility and their public image is slowly improving.

But in a culture heavily influenced by hypersexualised portrayals of female bodies in the media, women are constantly monitored (informally) by socialisation and (formally) by reproductive health practices and laws – including access to birth control and abortion. Women are still in the process of reclaiming our bodies. Reproductive health and self-image are only the beginning of the journey towards liberation as long as systematic attempts to control and repress female bodies/sexuality according to the male gaze/expectation continues.

¹⁵⁶ Judy Chicago and Edward Lucie-Smith, *Women and Art: Contested Territory*. Royston: Eagle Editions, (2004), 43-44.

¹⁵⁷ Jamie McCartney, *The Great Wall of Vagina*, <http://www.greatwallofvagina.co.uk/home> (accessed 14 May 2014).

¹⁵⁸ Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, New York: Villard, (2008).

Women's bodies provide the human entry point into the world. This reality and a theology of birth are central to this research. Birth is one of many battlefields for the control of women's bodies. Issues of education and economics are at play in attempts to control and domesticate women's wild bodies. While there are extensive areas related to the body politics that I will not cover, birth and mothering are central to this reflection on the theology of birth and the theology of motherhood. Birth is a physical sacrifice. The body of the woman who carries the baby is sacrificed during the pregnancy as she is depleted of fluids and vitamins and minerals and energy. The body of the women is sacrificed again during the physiological process of giving birth. There is loss of blood and in many cases there is also loss of control. This is an important way in which our female bodies provide a different iconography in the sanctuary.

A New Iconography of Priesthood

With all of this background in mind, we move now to consider the ways in which the female body is circumscribed in the role of the priest. It is clear that when a woman becomes a priest, she does so from a different standpoint (in terms of her own gendered experiences) from that of her brothers in the church. What clergywomen carry within our bodies and our psyches is hidden under the veil of holiness. Lifting the veil or "defrocking" the female body is an important step in the process of understanding who we are and how we minister. Joy Carroll Wallis knew this when she originally called her memoir *Beneath the Cassock*¹⁵⁹. Interestingly, it was rebranded in the United States as *Behind the Collar*, once again highlighting the discomfort that society has with confronting the female priestly body.

The perception of our bodies was not addressed in the interviews. It might have been potentially embarrassing or awkward to discuss this explicitly with these clergywomen. Therefore we discussed the way that we cover our

¹⁵⁹ Joy Carroll Wallis, *Beneath the Cassock: The Real Life Vicar of Dibley*. London: HarperCollins Entertainment, 2002.

bodies. Just as our bodies are different, our uniforms as clergywomen differ from the clericals and vestments that our male colleagues wear. There are many ways in which women priests adorn our bodies. While we are not necessarily mothers, we are certainly not fathers. As “Ruth” says:

“Ruth”: If somebody calls me a “father”, I’m immediately like, Ho... I’ve got boobs darling! Can you not see? It’s like, hallo?!. No... I like my hair long. I like my nose ring. I like jewellery. I like clothes.

There are many forms of body adornment that are generally more applicable to women than men. In Western culture, beautification is overwhelmingly placed in the woman’s domain. Hairstyles tend to be more self-consciously a part of a women’s image. This begs the question as to why the majority of clergywomen seem to have shorter haircuts. “Ruth” spoke of the irrational discomfort and even double standard about women’s long hair:

“Ruth”: I have had critiques, you know, for instance when I first became ordained in the cathedral, [there was a] huge uproar (because my hair was long) about my hair being down. They insisted that I tie it up when I celebrated mass. But the men don’t tie their hair up. [There was a clergyman who] had longer hair than me, and no one asked him to tie his hair up... So why was I, as a woman, being asked to tie my hair up? And the reason given was that it falls in the chalice. And I said, well, better long hair falls in the chalice than a tiny piece of short hair. If you are going to swallow my hair at least you will notice! It is irrational.

Long female hair has a sensual and even sexual connotation. This is evident in the iconography of Mary Magdalen who to this day carries the denotation of being the penitent prostitute. Cynthia Bourgeault offers a broader perspective in her book, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity*.¹⁶⁰ But the hypersexualised imagery of this particular disciple (‘the apostle to the apostles’) has not aided the cause of women in church leadership being taken seriously. Several of the women interviewed expressed the need to consciously downplay their sexuality. Two of the clergywomen mentioned nail varnish and neither of them were comfortable wearing it (particularly not in the sanctuary while distributing communion). “Rebekah” said, *“It is too sexual, too flirtatious. Too sensual but everything*

¹⁶⁰ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity*. Boston: Shambala, (2010).

about the Eucharist is sensual, so it's a bit silly." "Rachel" spoke with humour and admiration about a colleague who routinely wore nail varnish:

"Rachel": We always used to have this argument when I was at College [of the Transfiguration] because we were told that everybody wears closed black shoes in the sanctuary. I always wear closed black shoes in the sanctuary. [My clergywoman friend], on the other hand, thinks that women should wear high-heeled pink shoes with nail varnish in the sanctuary.

The clergywomen interviewed were aware that the way we present ourselves influences the way people respond to us and in turn influences the ways in which people conceptualise the idea of the woman priest. This is a heavy burden of responsibility.

There are many factors that influence the clergy image we project. These include the shape that we are in (both in terms of fitness and size) and the clothes that we wear to cover or reveal our bodies. Clergy clothing is quite specialised and can convey a loud message, symbolically and otherwise. The clergy wardrobe begins with the collar. This odd little piece of white plastic that is the symbol of our office makes us recognisable in places of worship and in the public and private arena. Wearing the collar sends a message that we work for the church (and for God). At my pre-ordination retreat, the bishops warned us that while the collar would bring a certain measure of respect and prestige, we must stay humble and grounded. The need to be noticed and admired can be dangerous and may inflate the ego. People's trust in clergy can be abused far too easily. A case in point is the photograph of Jacob Zuma wearing a collar at a Pentecostal church service prior to his election that was published in the local Durban newspaper, *The Mercury*.¹⁶¹ The collar itself cannot be trusted. Some of the clergywomen I interviewed wear their collars with discomfort – others with pride. In any case, wearing it is a heavy responsibility because of the expectations that come with it.

¹⁶¹ South African Press Association, *Zuma now a 'pastor'*, <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/Zuma-now-a-pastor-20070506>. Originally printed May 2007 (Accessed 14 July 2010).

It is important to demystify the collar. It serves a clear function as part of a uniform. Working as a chaplain in a girls' school, my students would often remark on it and ask why I wore it (and whether I wore it all the time). I would take it off and let them handle it (and even try it on) and explain its function and symbolism. I explained that it was my professional uniform (just as they wore a school uniform). It distinguished me at the school as a bit different from the other teachers in that it indicated that my job was to represent God's love to them and never to grade them or judge them or to encourage competition between them. And then everyday when I got home, if I had neglected to do so before collecting them from school, one of my boys would pull it off. At home I'm not the priest, I am my boys' mum. Another clergy mother with young children echoed my experience. "Hannah" said:

"Hannah": There are days when I wear my collar and days I don't and when I don't [the students] ask why. Usually on the days when I do, it is because I am ministering in chapel. But most days I don't. [...] Sometimes I go into Pick and Pay and forget I am wearing my collar, and people will stare and then I'll quickly just slip it off. I try not to wear it in front of my son, he doesn't like it. He says, Mom why do you have to wear that? So I don't often wear it.

"Rebekah" made a point of taking off the collar as soon as she walked in the door (she and her clergy husband kept them in the front hallway for joint use). This might be a statement of leaving work and uniform and perhaps persona at the door in order to be authentic and relaxed in the safe haven of one's own home. "Rebekah" also talked about the masculine clerical shirts that she was expected to wear when she was first ordained:

"Rebekah": Oh they are horrible. I couldn't do them. They are so disgusting! I never wore one. I tried one on it just looked so hideous. So I had to try find a tailor who could make a clerical collar.

"Eve" shared this viewpoint about women wearing men's clerical shirts. She explained that she will only wear clericals that express who she is:

"Eve": One of the things I was clear about is that I was coming in as a woman and black shirts don't do it for me. And also as a black woman

so I will wear i-shweshwe when I want to wear i-shweshwe.¹⁶² And I think we need to be true to who we are.

“Rachel” has also had her shirts custom made, but enjoys them far less. She said, *“I do wear a collar with a heavy heart. Because I just find them uncomfortable. I don’t like them.”* The responses to the question of how we wear our clericals covered the entire spectrum of possibilities. And as much as some clergywomen are uncomfortable with the collar itself, many of us find ways to make the clerical shirts work for us. “Sarah” said, *“I really enjoy my clerical shirt. I really do”.*

Despite the negative experiences that are recounted below, one clergywoman has persisted with the Mariannhill tailors at the Catholic monastery near Durban. Maybe she sees her relationship with them as a way of encouraging these more conservative Catholic clergy to change their attitudes. “Mary” said:

“Mary”: [For] my clerical shirts, I go to Mariannhill, which is a challenge for them. Because I say to them, this is how I want it, do it like that. And because I have built a relationship with them, they are getting to grips with that.

All of the clergywomen whom I interviewed wear vestments when we are involved with church services. The aesthetics and the liturgical colours of the stoles and the neat presentation of the priest and the sanctuary are all important for the experience of the theatre and the drama of the liturgy. The same “Rachel” who hates to wear a clerical collar said:

“Rachel”: I do wear vestments because I think that that’s part of being Anglican – part of the glory of the liturgy is to have pretty vestments [...] hardly a Sunday goes by that somebody doesn’t comment on my vestments. [...] And I do try to (for example) make sure that the stole’s always of equal length that it looks neat – that it’s part of the – yes of the drama of the liturgy. So I do wear vestments – and with pleasure.

The fact that these women choose to wear the vestments is a statement about the changing iconography of the priest. This is affirmed by “Sarah’s”

¹⁶² “I-shweshwe” is a traditional South Africa printed cotton fabric from the Xhosa tradition. It is currently produced by De Gama Textiles. The name is meant to imitate the sound made by the stiff starched fabric rustling as one walks. The designs include intricate geometric patterns and dot motifs and the colours are often bold and primary or earthy tones.

resounding and emphatic response to the question concerning whether she wears clericals and vestments differently from her clergymen colleagues:

“Sarah”: Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes. We don’t have to be them. And I think as I said earlier – we brought in the colour, the style and we showed them: eh! You know what? Clerical shirts are made of vestments – are vestments – and it’s so funny that some of the men who were anti-women-priests have lace – like [a certain named clergyman] and all those people. Eh! They have those lace and everything else. And even as you look at the processions at the Vatican and you see all that lace, and you say, ‘Hey, brother, where are you coming from?’ Yeah, but saying that, we added that dimension – and a beautiful dimension.

Our uniforms can be beautiful when they are measured and cut to fit our bodies and made well. Most of the clergywomen interviewed spoke of having theirs tailor-made for them. The experience of these clergywomen indicates that the Catholic monk tailors at Mariannahill Monastery are far less comfortable with women’s bodies and seem hostile to the idea of women priests. Despite this barrier of perceived animosity, some of these clergywomen did contract the monks to make their vestments (even though they don’t do breasts). “Rebekah” explained:

“Rebekah”: I was the first woman they made a cassock for and they got it all wrong at Mariannahill because they had never made a cassock for a woman. [...] But now they’ve got one of those torsos so they can now, but they didn’t have one then. And it was also very difficult to measure me because he didn’t want to come near me, and they needed measurements.

“Rachel” also had the frustrating experience of buying badly cut vestments at Mariannahill at the beginning of her ministry:

“Rachel”: They made my cassock for me when I was ordained. And they wouldn’t (of course) measure me. But they had a good guess – but the darts come to here! [She indicated that they completely misjudged where her breasts might be.] What! Have you ever considered female anatomy?!

That is precisely the question. Female anatomy has only recently been considered in the church in terms of priesthood. It has not been widely acceptable as a resource for theology. But it can provide a wealth of new understandings.

Female anatomy enjoys a generous breadth of diversity – even for one woman there is a shifting in shape and size. Our bodies and our image change as we mature into motherhood and priesthood. Pregnancy, breastfeeding and childrearing change us. But other factors can impact on our bodies as well. “Mary” was very honest about her struggle with her body image and her clergy image. She made clear how much the two are tied up with each other. Our own ideas of what we think we are supposed to look like do not always match reality:

“Mary”: I remember that before I was even ordained I had this picture in my mind of the kind of priest I wanted to look like. And for me it has had this corporate professional look in it – but to be able to carry my body and be excited about my body. And during my PhD work I gained a lot of weight because I didn’t have time to cook – there was work and if I’m sitting there thinking of cooking I’m thinking of a chapter to write – but after I got it, I got back to the gym, I said, I’m going to lose weight. I’m going to change my wardrobe. Because I want to look and feel good about myself.

“Mary” also spoke about the expectations that people have for clergywomen all to fit one model and how that will never be comfortable for her. Our bodies and our styles are so individual:

“Mary”: I won’t do pink clerical shirts. Because people expect women to – somebody said, I’ve never seen you with a pink clerical shirt! I said, It’s because I’m struggling with pink. It’s just too bright for me. So they said, oh I saw so and so wearing it. And I said, they love it. And I’m glad they love it. But I don’t want it to be made as a woman-thing that women will have all this badly cut shirts that are done for men and the neck is somewhere here next to your breasts. Take care of yourself. And so for me, the female body has to be [cared for] - it’s such a beautiful thing, a female body, and for women just not to care for it...

This was an important reminder that our bodies are expressive in so many ways and we need to take care of them as a means of taking care of ourselves. Many clergywomen and mothers forget to look after our own needs, as we are so preoccupied with taking care of other people.

Perhaps choosing and taking care of our vestments is also a way of taking care of ourselves and fostering a positive self-image. “Hannah” had a very positive experience of getting her clerical shirts and vestments made, and she

has very positive responses from the people who see her wearing them. She seems to enjoy encouraging the transformation of peoples' expectations concerning clergy image:

“Hannah”: The woman who makes the clergy shirts’ whole idea of making the clerical shirt to fit a woman’s body is fantastic. You go to African Praise and you can choose all these cool shirts that are red and green and pink. So when I first arrived [as chaplain at this school] the girls were quite charmed that it wasn’t only black [clothes] and, the fact that I sometimes wear skirts, sometimes I wear pants. I think it is strange for some people when I take off my robes and I am wearing slops, [... they must think], Oh, okay, so that’s how women clergy dress. And I think that is something new and it’s something that we must accept. When you go and have clothes made, it is not just one size fits all like it is for the men, and the fact that we are mothers, and we do have breasts, and we need to use them, we breastfeed, and that is something the church and those who profess to be church-goers must adapt to.

Breastfeeding

Except perhaps at Christmas time, the church tends to forgets (or chooses not to think about the fact) that Jesus was a real baby and that Mary was a real mother who breastfed him. However, there is a whole tradition in medieval religious iconography of the breastfeeding Mary. This image is known as the Nursing Madonna or Mary Lactans.

The image of Jesus the Mother breastfeeding the faithful may be shocking to some. Yet bodies and embodied theology are deeply implicit in Christian identity and ritual. The Eucharist service is all about the body and blood of Jesus. In her book, *A Theology of Women’s Priesthood*, Green recalls the resurgence in medieval art and writing of the image of Jesus as a nurturing and nourishing mother figure. She uses the example and the image of the 15th century painting called *The Saviour* by Quirizio da Murano in which Jesus shows his nipple to a nun as he offers her the Eucharistic wafer.¹⁶³ She makes the point that both in scripture and in early Christian tradition breast milk was a positive image:

¹⁶³ Green, *A Theology of Women’s Priesthood*, 55-56.

New Christians are nourished by the Spirit of God as they grow in their new-found faith. The comparison between spiritual food for neophytes and breastmilk for babies is a continuing theme in the history of the Church. Several epistles liken this spiritual nourishment to human milk. Peter writes: 'Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation' (1Pet. 2.2). Benediction of neophytes in Egypt, North Africa and Rome included a chalice with milk and honey, a ritual expression perhaps, of the image of God as mother. Several patristic writers, including Augustine and Origen, describe Christ as mother. Clement of Alexandria portrays Christ as the milk of the Father, the nursing mother, and as the mother who gives birth to his people on the cross.¹⁶⁴

So we return to the expanded and enlarged understanding of the mother priest: if Jesus can symbolically "breastfeed" his flock in the sanctuary, what is so shocking about a mother priest giving her real breast to feed her baby? There are obvious links between this ritual in which Jesus (through the mediation of the priest) feeds his family and the daily practice of mothers feeding our families. But this sensual connection between food and breasts is not necessarily one that many church people are comfortable making. The embodiedness of clergywomen can be threatening to clergy and laity alike. It is an indication of how far we have to journey as a community towards accepting not just the physical Incarnation of Jesus, but our own enfleshment as well.

Pregnant or Breastfeeding or Grandmother Priests

"Eve" spoke about two of the new iconic clergywomen: the pregnant or breastfeeding mother of young children and the grandmother. In her experience, people are still not comfortable with these different kinds of clergywomen who so obviously do not fit the mould. Mothers and grandmothers in positions of this kind of spiritual and public authority wreak havoc with the fixed stereotypes:

"Eve": [P]eople complain about Father Gogo¹⁶⁵ – but that is who she is: she is Father Gogo and she will wear her hats and she will carry her stick, but this is who we are. It goes back to a demand of an

¹⁶⁴ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 54-55.

¹⁶⁵ "Gogo" is the isiZulu word that means "grandmother".

acceptance of who we are as we are. Fortunately our robes accommodate pregnant stomachs – and also even the question has undertones of the female body being other. It still has an undertone of the male body being THE priestly body. I think we will know we are transformed when we no longer have these questions of: ‘So what do we call you?’ ‘Are you the priest?’ It must be difficult when you arrive with [your husband because] people think [he] is the priest. A priest with a baby? And nobody expects a priest to be asking for water to make a baby’s bottle. But we are here and having come in we need to keep moving.

The image of a priest with a baby might be disconcerting for some. It follows on from the image of the pregnant priest and is followed by the image of the breastfeeding priest. Not only is the imagery of priests changing with women in the role, but the needs of the priests are changing as well. “Eve’s” comment about baby bottles and peoples’ expectations of priests echoes “Hannah” who said, *“we do have breasts and we need to use them”*. I personally have had to feed my baby between the sermon and the Eucharist when I was preaching and presiding. Discretion helps so as not to offend anyone, but this basic physical necessity in some clergy mothers’ portfolio of responsibilities is part of the new iconography of priesthood. And yet even “Ruth” who is very progressive in her outlook and theology was disconcerted the first time she encountered a breastfeeding vested priest:

“Ruth”: I remember once for myself, I saw a woman in the sanctuary, and she started breastfeeding a baby, she wasn’t a South African priest, but she had come with a baby, and I remember she unzipped, it was one of those button-up, double-breasted cassocks, and she unpeeled in the sanctuary and she pulled out her breast, and started breastfeeding the baby, in the sanctuary. And I was like, Oooh! I mean, we have women in the parish breastfeeding all the time, but I had never seen a priest unzip the clerical collar and start breastfeeding. I was like, wow! And that threw me. So I mean, if it throws me, I am sure it throws other people hugely as well. We are not used to those images, you know. And I think it is a process of people becoming used to those images. But what’s wrong with a priest breastfeeding a baby in the sanctuary you know? But they are not images of the sacred that we are used to. That’s what it boils down to.

Clearly, clergywomen are changing the styles of dress and the expectations of what a priest looks like. But the conversation does not end with clericals and vestments. The wardrobe is only the superficial manifestation of radically

different iconography that clergywomen present to church and to the world. Expectations and assumptions about who is allowed to be the priest and how priests dress and present ourselves in the public domain are changing. But “Eve” made it clear that underneath the cassocks many other issues are lurking and we still have a long road ahead of us in terms of respect and consideration for the reality and the real needs of clergywomen:

“Eve”: As you know in our vestries there will be a whole lot of male lay ministers and you – the female clergy. There is no consideration that you might want a mirror and want to be in a separate room from these people. You’re still expected to wear your cassock. I mean we had this thing with [a senior clergy colleague] and his parish priest because he wanted me to wear a cassock under my chalb for a service. And I said, J., I’m already wearing a petticoat and a dress – you expect me to wear two more dresses on top? He said, It’s your choice to wear these two. So you see, even our vestments – which is another ballgame – are still designed for [men] and we are expected to fit in – and we have to a large extent – fitted in. And we still sweat with our chasubles and cassocks and our hot flashes.

There is not a lot of consideration currently for our potential modesty, or vanity, or comfort, or for biological realities like menopause.

What the stories so far reveal is that there is a new and changing iconography around priesthood since women, and now mothers, are assuming the role. When I was first ordained a local clergywoman told me that I was a “beautiful icon” – simply by nature of my joint role as mother and as priest. The introduction to the book *The Art of the Icon* offers the following definition: “The basic meaning of the word icon is an image or likeness, but it has come to signify a religious painting.”¹⁶⁶ It goes on to explain what they depict:

For their subject matter, icons traditionally concentrate on a limited number of subjects. The earliest icons show only Christ, the Virgin Mary and the leading apostles. The canon was then broadened to include the twelve great feasts of the Christian calendar. [...] The lives of the saints also appear in icons.¹⁶⁷

In his book *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* the former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams explains that traditional Eastern

¹⁶⁶ Nigel Cawthorne, *The Art of the Icon*, San Diego: Laurel Glen Publishing, (2000), 8.

¹⁶⁷ Cawthorne, *The Art of the Icon*, 10.

Christian icons have never attempted realistic reproduction of historical persons or biblical narratives:

What is shown is their significance against the background of a source of illumination independent of them. [...] The point of the icon is to give us a window into an alien frame of reference that is at the same time the structure that will make definitive sense of the world we inhabit.”¹⁶⁸

Williams explains that icons “are not an attempt to show you what God or the things of heaven look like”, but rather their usefulness is that “[t]he image gives directions, it essays a way of bringing you into a new place and a new perception”.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the clergywomen at the altar, whether single or lesbian or pregnant or breastfeeding or even in menopause or beyond that stage of life all help to “make definitive sense of the world we inhabit.”

God Our Mother and the Mother of God

Catholic nun and activist, Joan Chittister narrates a book of Robert Lentz’ icons called *A Passion for Life: Fragments of the Face of God*. Lentz and Chittister have helped to redefine for modern times what iconography is all about and who can be represented. One of the historic figures represented through paint and words in their book is Julian of Norwich whom they have called the “Icon of the Motherhood of God”. Lentz depicts her in a nun’s habit, calmly and thoughtfully stroking a cat. Chittister says:

Julian makes her most original contribution to mystical literature. She not only uses feminine imagery to refer to God, and Jesus, but she explains it theologically. Julian teaches a patriarchal church and a machismo world in the *Showings*:

As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother, and God revealed that in everything, and especially in these sweet words where God says: I am he; that is to say: I am he, the power and goodness of fatherhood; I am he, the wisdom and lovingness of motherhood; I am he, the light and the grace which is all blessed love; I am he, the Trinity; I am he the unity...
I understand three ways of contemplating motherhood in God. The first is the foundation of our nature’s

¹⁶⁸ Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement*. London: Continuum, (2003), 2-3.

¹⁶⁹ Williams, *Lost Icons*, 225.

creation; the second is his taking of our nature, where the motherhood of grace begins; and the third is the motherhood at work.

...The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life.¹⁷⁰

I do not intend to claim that all clergywomen are positively transformative icons. But mother priests can be similarly iconic to Julian. They can recall the motherhood of God. They also can recall Mary the mother of God.

Leonardo Boff attempts to incorporate feminist theology in his book *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and Its Religious Expression*. He speaks of the “divine motherhood” of Mary in the following terms:

Mary’s divine motherhood is founded on her human motherhood. She engendered a human being who is also God. Accordingly, Christian faith has always proclaimed Mary to be the Mother of God. The person whose flesh was *de facto* conceived *in* the womb of the Virgin Mary, as well as *from* her womb, is directly and properly, really and truly, and not figuratively or metaphorically, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus is and always has been true human being and true God. At no moment was Jesus ever merely a human being. Mary did not engender a human being who thereupon was united with the Second Person of the Trinity. She engendered someone who, from the first moment of his conception, was God in person. Mary is the Mother of God incarnate.¹⁷¹

While his perspective is intended to be affirming, it seems too concrete and essentialist. What is more, his position seems to indicate that motherhood is the pinnacle of female expression. It may even be objectifying and idealising of women and motherhood. Motherhood can never be the aspect of female identity that defines women. Some women choose not to be mothers. Others are unable (for whatever reasons) to be mothers. Some women find the expectation to be maternal (and the reality of motherhood) complicated, difficult, unfulfilling and/or frustrating.

¹⁷⁰ Joan Chittister and Robert Lentz, *A Passion for Life: Fragments of the face of God*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, (1996).

¹⁷¹ Boff, *The Maternal Face of God*, 158.

Susan Rakoczy also speaks from a Catholic perspective when she considers the importance of rediscovering Mary's steadfast faith outweighing the teachings about her embodied purity. She says:

Theological deconstruction of Mary as "female face of God" and the re-appropriation of these aspects allow the symbol of God to be further enriched. [...] Mary's loving compassion, care and love for us are also ways to describe God. [...] As a real woman of faith, living an ordinary life, Mary thus becomes more approachable and her life of compassionate commitment gives new meaning to holiness. This holiness is simple and very profound: total love of God and of neighbour in every circumstance of life.¹⁷²

Lyn Holness explores the symbolic significance of both Mary and Julian in her book *Journeying with Mary*. She understands Mary's mothering of her divine child to be iconic for all of us, clergy and laity, men and women. She also discusses Julian of Norwich's contribution to theology in terms of her interpretation of Christ's maternal engagement:

Julian recalled her visions of Christ as Mother by describing a whole cycle of divine maternal activity involving the womb, birth, infancy, care, education, washing, and healing."¹⁷³

Holness draws attention to Julian's understanding of the physical and historic conception of Jesus in the womb of his mother Mary:

Julian calls it 'God in a point': God in an infinitely small point in space and time.
In the Incarnation, God had deliberately been reduced to such a point, as the embryo in Mary's womb.¹⁷⁴

Holness makes the point that Mary is both Mother of God and mother of Jesus:

In Mary – in what God did through her – we are reminded that the Christian faith is all about *embodiment*, and that through the Incarnation God affirmed, the most dramatic way possible, the value of physical reality.
[...]

¹⁷² Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 370.

¹⁷³ Holness, *Journeying with Mary*, 74-75.

¹⁷⁴ Holness, *Journeying with Mary*, 75.

Mary's 'yes' to God involved all of her. It was not only her body that mediated Christ's humanity, as if she were merely a vessel as some have imagined. She was engaged in mediating the Incarnation physically, emotionally, and with her will – that is, as a whole person.¹⁷⁵

Transformative iconography continues to adapt and expand according to our re-imagining of God and ourselves through the clergywomen's stories represented here and through their actual presence at the altar and elsewhere in the church. Thus far in this chapter we have focused on their bodies and their image. In the final section of this chapter we move to a discussion about the ways in which their public performance in the role of priest transforms their identity and persona.

Clergy Persona

There is an ontological identity shift when we are ordained priests. We are blessed by the bishops and vested for service. This tradition is symbolised by the laying on of hands. This conveys a new authority that is both spiritual and practical. We are called to be and confirmed as leaders by the bishops. We think of ourselves differently in terms of our role and our ministry, and other people perceive us differently and have new expectations. Perhaps this may continue to happen (to a lesser extent) for some clergy each time we put on our robes and kiss our stoles in the vestry before a service. This raises questions about the implicit and explicit contractual agreements to obedience priests make when we take our ordination vows. Ruether takes issue with the sexist ways in which ministry is constructed and calls for reflection and renegotiation of the terms of engagement:

We begin to see that the securing of women's ordination through liberal assumptions contains the seeds of its own contradiction. Women are included in ministry through a concept of justice as equal opportunity. But this perspective neglects any critique of the public order beyond a demand for equal opportunity of all persons in it regardless of gender. The shaping of the form and symbols of ministry by patriarchal culture, to the exclusion of women, is not seen as making the historic form of

¹⁷⁵ Holness, *Journeying with Mary*, 111.

ministry itself problematic. Women win inclusion in this same ministry, without asking whether ministry itself needs to be redefined.¹⁷⁶

The interviews indicated that these clergywomen have been changed (not necessarily unconsciously so) by the office and role to which they have been admitted. “Rebekah” spoke most clearly about the phenomenon of adopting a clergy persona:

“Rebekah”: [T]here is a lot of façade and a lot of play-acting when you can put on different clothes and be holy in front of people. [... The robes] allow you to take on another persona, if you want.

She agreed that the robes can “cover a multitude of sins” and mentioned the “masculinisation of persona.” “Mary” said that she has found that since becoming a priest she has become “harder and sharper” – and these are not traits that she appreciates adopting as a woman and as a clergyperson. She is consciously trying to be softer in her approach to other people and towards herself:

“Mary”: Yes. I’m surprised at some of my prayers lately where I pray, God make those rough edges soft. Make those blunt things sharper. Why do I need to sharpen things, you know? Because for me it scares me that I have to pray for that. And I think it is because where we find ourselves, that if there is nothing about you that is sharp and piercing and hurting that you are not doing your work. [...] Ya because for women, when something is sharp it gets to your skin it’s going to hurt you. Why do I need to be sharpened? I’m not asking for wisdom nor courage nor – why? It troubles me.

She seemed to be asking for a metaphorical phallus. The language of penetration is very masculine. This is another indication that the clergy persona continues to be predominantly masculine. The unfairness of not being accepted in our difference can make some clergywomen hurt and angry. Injustice can make thinking women angry at the church that still does not celebrate the gifts that we bring to the altar and the pulpit and the sickbed. The church still seems to ask us to conform to the masculine way of being a

¹⁷⁶ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 200.

priest. “Mary” was trying to understand how and when this had happened to her:

“Mary”: I’m scared that I have to bring this up in prayer. And I’m trying to trace it now. When did I suddenly need this? What has happened? And I’m wondering if other women do listen to themselves when they pray and analyse their prayers – because it just tells you where you are – without even you knowing where you are – your prayers have delivered you into that space.

It is a lonely and confusing and sometimes frightening place to be. We often cannot identify with our male colleagues (nor they with us), and we are sometimes an enigma to ourselves. “Rachel” had this to say about how women are inherently different from our male colleagues in terms of bodies and voices and leadership and preaching style:

“Rachel”: I think there is definitely a difference. Most women are smaller – and I think that makes a huge difference to have a smaller body in the space. I think that it comes with complications because we are meant to look glamorous and some of us are not – that’s manifestly the case. But I think also, it’s a double-edged sword because when A BIG MAN speaks it sounds authoritative – mostly because they want it to. And I think because we have been socialised thus – we speak more tentatively. So we don’t speak with such power and authority. I happen to think that is a good thing because we have to find ways of persuading in the way we speak – not in a kind of ‘please like me!’ way – but in a way of leaving open an opportunity for response. And so particularly in preaching, I think it’s a different style of preaching – although I have to say I’ve heard some [clergywomen] preachers [who] hammer them!

“Rebekah” had major criticisms of the hierarchical power games and the more elaborate and expensive vestments that came with increased status in the church. She talked about the ways in which clergy would show off during “the time to shine” when they would gather for services at the cathedral and if one was a senior clergyperson one could “wear [the] cope and process to the front”. She made the point that the layout of that space and the seating arrangement added to the intimidating power dynamic:

“Rebekah”: [T]his cathedral is terrible with that little semi-circle with the chapter staring down at you... I hate it! (Don’t tell my bishop I said that!)

Somebody I was ordained with [who became a canon and got to sit at the front where] there are those little tub chair things [...] said, Hey this feels just like [those fighter pods in] Star Wars!

On a more serious note “Rebekah” continued this thought process about vestments and the power that they convey. She said those higher up in the diocesan clerical hierarchy were: *“more holy, more fancy, more powerful, with better outfits.”* But she in no way suggested that this was a gendered issue. In fact, she said, *“I think women are probably just as vulnerable to careerism as men, but maybe more so if they don’t have anything else in life.”* She talked about her own identity and persona changing dramatically after her ordination largely because one wants to wear the uniform and fit in with a professional guild that is predominantly masculine:

“Rebekah”: So I think when you come to be ordained you feel that you have got to take on a particular persona, you even change the way you dress because you don’t want to offend anyone [...] and it is very dangerous because you lose your identity when you do that and so I think [...] there is a whole aspect about priesthood that is about drama and costume and presenting to people a story, a narrative, that you play a part in. It is about persona. Even voices, I listen to myself and think, How did I get to this funny accent? Lots of clergy feel that they have to take on like a British accent [...] and affectation. I think there is a lot of that going on. So I don’t know how much of the cutting of hair and the changing of dress styles has to do with a sort of de-feminisation.

Some of the issues that “Rebekah” raised will be discussed further in the chapter on power. Ruether understands and explains how women are trapped by the male rules about what priests (and ministry) are supposed to look like:

Women play the ministerial role by endlessly proving that they can think, feel, and act like “one of the boys.”[...] Women in ministry, like all women trying to function in public roles under male rules, find themselves in a double bind. They are allowed success only by being better than men at the games of masculinity, while at the same time they are rebuked for having lost their femininity. In such a system it is not possible for women to be equal, but only to survive in a token and marginal way at tremendous physical and psychological cost.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 200-201.

“Eve” made it very clear that our way of presenting ourselves is not just about our clergy image. There are so many conversations that still need to be had between clergywomen, with our male colleagues and within our congregations. These critical conversations can effect change. It is up to the clergywomen to present ourselves as alternative role models:

“Eve”: We haven’t had role models and unless we are conscious of and talk about these things it will carry on – I mean some years ago the joke was on us trying to wear black suits and black clerical shirts – the men’s shirts – but it’s deeper than that. It is deeper than what we wear. It’s a lot more. [It’s about] our understandings of power.

“Eve” has borne tremendous personal cost in her determination to be what she called a “full-priest” and to publically and doggedly critique sexism within the church and the clergy. Her struggle has not been in vain as there are glimmers of hope that the church can choose to behave in new ways. Power can be redistributed and vulnerability can be valued and protected. This will be explored further in the chapter on power.

Conclusion

This chapter on Presence that engaged with issues of body image, a new iconography of priesthood and how women are challenged by the clergy persona has demonstrated that women priests are different from our male clergy counterparts and we are different from each other. We cannot be painted with the same brush. The big question is how can we assert ourselves, our bodies, our voices, our experiences without competing or forcing the point? Clarissa Pinkola Estés explains the root of the problem in *Women Who Run with the Wolves* about the “Joyous Body: The Wild Flesh” when she says, “The cultural power of the body is its beauty, but power in the body is rare, for most have chased it away with their torture of or embarrassment by the flesh.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, London, Rider, 1993, 210.

Joy and delight in our bodies is the beginning of a different path. If we begin with the beauty of God creating human beings in God's own image, and move to the incarnation of God within us and in our midst and continue with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into our own bodies, then bodies have a miraculous connotation instead of a shameful denotation. If we can recognise ourselves and all of humanity in the broken body of Christ, then we have an opportunity to mother ourselves and each other out of shame and into mature self-acceptance. Pinkola Estés waxes lyrical about the inherent power of the female body:

The body is like an earth. It is a land unto itself. It is as vulnerable to overbuilding, being carved into parcels, cut off, over mined, and shorn of its power as any landscape. The wilder woman will not be easily swayed by redevelopment schemes. For her, the questions are not how to form but how to feel. The breast in all its shapes has the function of feeling and feeding. Does it feed? Does it feel? It is a good breast.

The hips, they are wide for a reason, inside them is a satiny ivory cradle for new life. A woman's hips are outriggers for the body above and below; they are portals, they are a lush cushion, the handholds for love, a place for children to hide behind. The legs, they are meant to take us, sometimes to propel us; they are the pulleys that help us lift, they are the anillo, the ring for encircling a lover. They cannot be too this or too that. They are what they are.

There is no "supposed to be" in bodies. The question is not size or shape or years of age, or even having two of everything, for some do not. But the wild issue is, does this body feel, does it have right connection to pleasure, to heart to soul, to the wild? Does it have happiness, joy? Can it in its own way move, dance, jiggle, sway, thrust?

Nothing else matters.¹⁷⁹

This is exactly what Grace Jantzen's idea of flourishing is all about. It is about joy in the flesh. Life, in all its "natality" is rich with new horizons of possibility. This embodiment is also what Julian of Norwich embraced in her theology of a mothering God. Ackermann in turn appreciates Julian's playfulness and

¹⁷⁹ Estés, *Women who Run with the Wolves*, 210-211.

delight and declares that Julian is the kind of integrated theologian she longs to be:

Julian's views on the motherhood of God are quite in keeping with the bible, which also describes God's "mothering" – a fact that is overlooked all too often today. Julian's understanding is carefully developed. God is the creator giving birth to us, like a mother. Christ is our mother because he gives birth to us as we are reborn in him. As a mother bears the pain of birth, Christ takes upon himself the pain of death to bring us to spiritual birth. In the Eucharist we are fed with Christ's blood that pours from his side like milk from a mother's breast. Like a true mother he seeks to take away our sin and our pain. These metaphors are simple but extraordinary and quite daring for her time. I don't think that Julian's theology is arrived at through playing mind games. Her visions of God's love and of Christ's passion, her bodily experience of these visions and decades of reflection on them, shape her theological insights.¹⁸⁰

We can all strive to become more integrated theologians as we live our faith through our embodied experiences. Jantzen insists that the more we are able to integrate our bodies with our theology, the closer we journey towards becoming divine. Part of my determination to have one more pregnancy and birth following my ordination had to do with a conscious and deliberate longing to shatter the stereotypes of priesthood and motherhood. I wanted to be a pregnant priest presiding at the altar. I wanted to be a breastfeeding priest. I wanted to escort my baby down the central aisle during the formal procession. I even tried to take my baby in a front-carrier into the pulpit. This kind of imagery and reality changes peoples' minds about what is normal and good and possible.

The stories of the clergywomen re-presented in this chapter demonstrate a new way of being priest that is not hardened by a masculinised perception of clergy image. Green, drawing on Jantzen, makes a case for clergywomen teaching the church how to celebrate our human natality and to help each other flourish:

¹⁸⁰ Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 168-169.

I have argued that the woman priest is particularly well placed to embody the notion of natality. All of us are born, but women especially carry the range of symbolic significance associated with birthing and nurturing. In embodying natality as a human condition that is just as powerful as mortality, she gives expression to the call for all humans to flourish in their aspiration towards the divine. Birthing, nurturing and flourishing necessarily require compassionate action.¹⁸¹

Clergywomen can incorporate our sexuality and our sensuality and our capacity to mother with our capacity to minister, as the stories in this chapter have revealed. We do not have to cut off our femininity (or our hair, although we may choose to) or our female strength and power to be in this role. And throughout it all we can retain our vulnerability. There is iconic power in the priestly presence of young pregnant and breastfeeding women with their full bellies and their full breasts and their life-giving laps, and also in the grandmother priests with their soft breasts and their safe laps. This chapter has clearly indicated that the iconography and the projections and the expectations of what priests look like is changing and with new role models clergywomen, in all of our diversity, can begin to find a place that is authentic within ourselves and within the institution. In the next chapter we will begin to discuss the praxis of clergywomen within ACSA.

¹⁸¹ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 101.

Chapter 6: Praxis

Women have always had a unique contribution to the area of ministry. Perhaps you could call it “mothering”, I don’t know. I believe that women have a certain touch, a certain feeling, which some men may have also, perhaps, but women have always had in a special way. I would describe it also as “seeding things to grow”. Women can sometimes feel and understand what is at the deepest level of a person and plant seeds to help people develop their full potential.

– Emma Mashinini¹⁸²

Emma Mashinini makes the important assertion that women priest differently and she aligns this alternative ministry with “mothering.” In the interview conversations we discussed to what extent the participants both experienced and provided this in the context of their particular ministries. We spoke about ways in which their “divine occupation” might be different from secular employment; we discussed aspects of mothering; we also explored boundaries; and institutional challenges.

In the previous chapter, the presence of clergywomen within ecclesiastical spaces was explored in terms of the ways in which they are transforming those spaces and are being transformed by them. The embodied presence of these mothers of the church in their various stages of life, across the spectrum from single to grandmother, was considered.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how these clergywomen practice their vocation. It explores their journeys from discernment, through formation and training and into their actual vocational leadership within ACSA. We also consider the support systems and role models of the participants involved with this project. This section explores the role of clergywomen who are mothering children and priesting people, often simultaneously. It examines how they

¹⁸² Emma Mashinini, “Women between Church and Society,” in *Women Hold up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*, eds. Denise M. Ackermann, Jonathan A. Draper, and Emma Mashinini (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991), 349.

manage the complex responsibilities of the relationships and activities of their vocations.

The ministerial praxis (practice informed by experience and reflection), beginning with a focus on formation, from the perspective of the ordained Anglican clergywomen interviewed. Denise Ackermann defines praxis in the following way:

[P]raxis [is] a word I use because it is the only one that says exactly what I mean. It is not to be confused with mere action. Praxis describes the inseparable relationship between reflecting and acting, between what I think and believe and what I do to achieve the goals of my belief. Praxis is not the opposite of theory. It is opposed to separating theory and practice.¹⁸³

Theoretical and experiential reflection inevitably changes action. Praxis is about more than merely going through the motions. While worship services can be described as “performance” led by the presiding priest, the rituals and the relationships with people are more about practice in the sense of repetition and intentionality, as one might practice a musical instrument with the aim to learn and improve the playing. Reflecting and acting in tandem are at the heart of priesting.

This same way of thinking, acting and being can be said about mothering. It is about relentlessly repetitive ritual actions of care (feeding, bathing, dressing, etc.) and about intentional relationships with those one has made a choice to love. Children keep mothers anchored in the messiness and repetition of domestic responsibilities. Praying the offices of children’s needs includes doing laundry, packing lunch boxes, cooking dinner, bathing small bodies, reading bedtime stories and ensuring that teeth are brushed.

Verena Wright, in her book *Maid in God’s Image: In Search of the Unruly Woman* writes about the ways in which women claim authority while experiencing marginality and find ways of coping:

¹⁸³ Ackermann, *After the Locusts*, 35.

Wherever women are, they are always operating on two 'levels' – the personal (body awareness) and the social; for me, one enhances the other, but within the public sphere, that is often not recognised. So women have had to develop strategies of masking, 'getting on with it', incorporating body rhythms seamlessly into external work patterns and demands – and additionally for mothers, interweaving attention to their children's needs. [...] Ironically, thanks to new business-speak, a consequence of this mental and emotional gymnastics has been recognised and is now valued as cross-gendered *multi-tasking*. It seems to me that this has always, across cultures, been common to female experience.¹⁸⁴

No conscious and sustainable praxis can occur without the tools of formation that are handed on to us from our foremothers and forefathers. This is the important work of mothering that Grace Paley talks about in her short story "Midrash on Happiness" through her heroine named "Faith":

By work to do she included the important work of raising children righteously up. By righteously she meant that along with being useful and speaking truth to the community, they must do no harm. By harm she meant not only personal injury to the friend the lover the co-worker the parent (the city the nation) but also the stranger; she meant particularly the stranger in all her or his difference, who, because we were strangers in Egypt, deserves special goodness for life or at least until the end of strangeness.¹⁸⁵

Character formation and training children how to be responsible members (and potential leaders) of any given community begins early. Our mothers have generally helped to set our feet on the path towards ministry. Formation begins in the womb and continues within the family. Long before we reach the official stage of formation, the vocational journey is travelled with our companions (those with whom we share our bread). Then there is a process of discernment that tests our vocations. So it is to this process that we now turn our attention.

¹⁸⁴ Wright, *Maid in God's Image*, 70.

¹⁸⁵ Grace Paley, "Midrash on Happiness" in *America and I: Short Stories by American Jewish Women Writers*, Joyce Antler, ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991, 290-292, 291.

Vocation and Discernment

Vocation begins with a sense of someone or something outside of oneself, yet no stranger, offering an invitation to love more. – Allison M. Moore¹⁸⁶

Discernment requires not only a good process, but also needs to take account of circumstances. For all the move towards greater participation by women in the formal structures of the church, there is still a considerable variation in the position and circumstances of women within our society which means that they bring different skills and make it inappropriate always to look for the same response. – Penny Jamieson¹⁸⁷

There has been much emphasis placed on the significance of the ritual of ordination – the moment that “makes” one a priest. But priests are not born priests. They are made to be priests in an engaged process over time and with significant reflection. Becoming a priest cannot occur in isolation. The people who are ordained have already been involved in ministry. In fact, candidates for ordination in the Anglican Church in Southern Africa must produce proof of their baptism and confirmation and they must be licenced as lay ministers within their congregations.

In this section I will explore the ambivalence of the discernment process, the power dynamics at play and ultimately the pain that some clergywomen have experienced as part of the journey towards ordination.

The discernment process ostensibly tests the vocation of potential clergy through senior people in church leadership interviewing and vetting the candidates. One of the participants in this study made it clear that potential problems with the existing structures of authority and decision making arise long before the training process even starts. She found the arbitrary and political nature of the discernment process inherently problematic:

“Eve”: For some reason, I’m drawn to the entry process where – we call it all sorts of things – we stopped calling it selection

¹⁸⁶ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 7.

¹⁸⁷ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 49.

Elizabeth: Discernment – you mean that entry process.

“Eve”: I think that has a great impact for what follows. You are made to feel you are competing to go through this narrow door so you will do anything.

Elizabeth: When in fact the church is so desperate for people to come in they are taking all sorts of people who shouldn't be in the door.

“Eve”: When I was going through my discernment a male friend (now colleague) said to me, You are going through so much that if half our clergy went through half of what you are going through to go through this narrow door we wouldn't have the problems we have! [...] And it is also alienating in the sense that you feel you've succeeded and you are so grateful that you have been allowed through that you've got to be grateful to your masters. And always deliver. And I think that we are more conscientious about work than men are most of the time. And we are so grateful that we have made it through this part that we...

Elizabeth: - that we don't try and negotiate.

There is a problematic sense of heightened anxiety and obligation that is linked to a desire for acceptance for ordination or particular placements by the hierarchy. This need for clergywomen to compete and to prove ourselves to be as competent as our male counterparts is self-destructive and unhealthy. There is also pervasive (gender neutral) paranoia that stems from the political manoeuvrings. What is more, ironically for people called to serve, there is a clergy tendency towards self-centredness. But clergy are deeply enmeshed in an institution with historical issues of inequity and patterns of behaviour that are difficult to change.

“Eve” further captures the ambivalence of the process when she explained that attention to her gender was already being drawn during her discernment. While this was problematic for her, she also felt that being a woman gave her a certain advantage in the practice of ministry:

“Eve”: I think it just comes naturally. I remember when I went for discernment and somebody said to me, What do you bring as a woman? And I said I'm not coming as a woman – I'm coming as a priest. But you can't help yourself. You see things men don't see. You listen with an ear that men don't have. That comes from you being a woman. And even in rural settings, people – actually women, because

there's more women in church – appreciate you more because they are more able to talk to you. They are freer to share some of their secrets. So you certainly bring a lot of your motherhood and your own experience. Our experience make us who we are. So you cannot not be a women. I mean, even in experiences of bereavement, we handle things differently and have sensitivity to peoples' needs – and where people are at – we are more in tune with people than with getting things done.

Even as clergywomen try to transform the institution by our presence and our alternative perspective and approach, we risk internalising and mirroring ego driven masculine public personas, as discussed in the previous chapter. There was an echo of “Eve’s” anger and anxiety, and the fear of the lurking possibility of betrayal and rejection when “Hannah” spoke about investing years of theological study, only to discover that the (male) church leadership was non-committal about whether they would invite her to be ordained:

“Hannah”: You know you are never going to be accepted by everyone – that's something we must just accept about human beings – but when the one place that you feel called to serve treat you like that. I mean, I have had people from every other part of the Anglican Communion say to me, I would never put up with the amount of crap that you've had to deal with! To be told after completing your theology degree, We are actually nowhere near ready to accept you for ordination, go and do something else for a while, and then we will see... That was unbelievable. I couldn't believe it. You know I was pretty much offering myself to the church.

Many participants expressed a sense that church leadership wants clergywomen to be put firmly in our place. There are too many reminders that we must not try to ask for more than (what leadership might determine is) our due. What is tragically clear is that many women perceive that by subjecting ourselves to a discernment process that is intimately exposing, we run the risk of more rejection, shame and humiliation. The extensive interviews conducted by bishops and senior clergy at the discernment weekend (to determine whether people are suitable candidates for ordination) are personally probing in the extreme. A positive metaphor might be the beginning of a love affair, not knowing how one will measure up and whether one will be accepted. A negative metaphor would be the experience of testifying in court after surviving abuse.

Many clergy experience the discernment process as wounding and controlling from the outset. Whether or not a potential ordinand is accepted seems largely dependant upon political quotas and arbitrary and subjective opinions. This is not necessarily a divinely inspired decision making process. After all, the church is a very human and embodied institution. Too often people's emotionally charged visions and voices are given the veneer of spiritual authority. Sometimes our complex choices are hard to unravel in a cold rational light. But the dualistic split between rational and emotional, male and female, good and evil, spiritual and material is part of what the reality of women priests starts to call into question and unravel beginning with the discernment process. Our complex choices cannot (indeed ought not) be coldly rational.

The question is why, despite the ambivalence, women would seek leadership in the Anglican Church today. The pay (even for diocesan clergy) is not commensurate with the work. Maybe in a strange way, this destabilisation feeds certain theological underpinnings and understandings of church and self. Do the power dynamics and the ambivalence of the discernment process have anything to do with gender? And does this relate to a reticence to embrace the more "female" style of a Mother God who loves and nurtures natals into flourishing? Unquestioning dependence on outside male authority figures might be directly related to the concept of Father God who commands and judges and punishes. "Sarah" spoke of someone else's vision being the trigger for her own path towards ordination. She was hesitant but there were a number of clergymen nudging her towards something previously unseen in her province:

"Sarah": I was very fortunate in that I had lots of priests – [my church] was that kind of parish where you would get a rector every two or three years. And so every priest that came, and they kind of said to me, "Sarah", I think there is a calling for you. And I would say, Uh uh! Remember I was in my [early twenties] and I said, No, I think what I am doing is enough. Until [a certain priest] came across and he called me one day and he said he had a vision that he was praying over a woman priest in a church and that church was remarkable because it had a

stained glass window at the back. And so he came into [the church], he looked all over for the stained glass window. He couldn't find it. Until one day he was at the altar and he suddenly looked up and there right towards the ceiling was a little stained glass window. And he said, "Sarah", I'm not saying it could be you as a woman priest – but I'm saying think about it. And then [another priest] came over and he was in charge of St Stephen's Guild which was for women. And he was my rector and I joined that guild and that is how things started moving.

But these men were not commanding. She seemed to imply that they used a more maternal approach. Perhaps these men were mothering "Sarah". This kind of gentle nudging and encouraging is often expressed, in religious terminology, as the work of the Holy Spirit. Clearly women do not experience the vocation and discernment process uniformly. Zikmund et al. discuss the issue of how different individuals and denominations discern God's call at length:

Many clergy do not feel that they "choose" the ordained ministry; rather, it chooses them. The call to become an ordained minister is beyond their control. God chooses, and the process takes many forms.

A man or woman may have a one-time dramatic experience or vision or may simply slowly grow into the idea. Everyone agrees, however, that ordained ministry is not merely a human choice. It is a gift from God. Even as they embrace the gift, however, those who respond hope that a ministerial career will be personally rewarding. Most of those who enter the "occupation of divinity" believe that ordained ministry is not just interesting employment in a fairly high-status job but a divine treasure. Unfortunately, clergy are repeatedly disappointed when the churches are not able to accept their talents *and* provide employment with enough material resources to support them as they seek to serve church and society.¹⁸⁸

Another issue is that since women are still primarily responsible for childcare, being discerned for fulltime ministry is disruptive to mothers and their children in particularly complex ways. Penny Jamieson explains:

We are still a society that is highly structured on gender lines and a consequence of this is that women find mobility more difficult. They tend therefore to gravitate more readily to the non-stipendiary ministry,

¹⁸⁸ Zikmund et al, *Clergy Women*, 95.

which has enabled many women to enter the ordained ministry without undue family disruption.¹⁸⁹

This certainly influenced my decision not to engage in diocesan ministry – but it effectively removes women from positions of decision-making authority.

After responding to the call, and the process of discernment those who are accepted into ministry undergo another process of formation that includes the ritual of ordination. Ordination in this context indicates the liturgical rite used in this Province that confers the office of deacon or priest found in An Anglican Prayer Book (1989). The hierarchy established and perpetuated by ordination is a construction based on power and control. Sue Rakoczy reminds us that:

Jesus never ordained anyone and that this concept only gradually evolved in Christian practice in the early centuries of the church. One of the arguments against women's ordination, the intention of Jesus to ordain only men, thus has no historical credibility and foundation.¹⁹⁰

There is heavy symbolism and solemnity in the lengthy Anglican ordination service. While it might provide a certain mystique and a perception of authority, ordination does not provide any mysterious or instant gift of the capacity to do the work of a deacon or priest. The importance of theoretical reflection on this practice changes the praxis. There are valid arguments on both sides about whether or not formal theological education is a prerequisite for ordination and this will be considered in the following section on training.

Formation and Training

How clergywomen are trained and who provides that training impacts hugely on how we practice our ministry. Living in the world and garnering a theological and vocational education in a female body provides a very different standpoint from that of the traditional male ordinand or curate. While it is encouraging that more women are being ordained in ACSA, it is deeply

¹⁸⁹ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 49.

¹⁹⁰ Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 230.

problematic when people are ordained without training (and insufficient in-service training follows). The general consensus amongst the clergywomen interviewed was that the church needs women priests and all priests need formal theological training. Without a solid intellectual and spiritual and practical formation many women priests struggle all the more to make a space for themselves in this very patriarchal institution. A lack of training can easily (and understandably) undermine external and internal perceptions of legitimacy, credibility and authority. When criticisms abound, self-doubt is an almost inevitable result.

There have been calls for the academic theological training for Anglican ordinands in South Africa to transform in ways that might be increasingly gender sensitive. Mary Ryan has undertaken research locally in the feminist ethics of care for a doctorate of theology entitled *Behind Caring: The Contribution of Feminist Pedagogy in Preparing Women for Christian Ministry in South Africa*. If this kind of conscientious and intentional caring could put into practice, there would be positive consequences for clergywomen, for theological education in general and for the wider church. Ryan says:

Firstly, it has implications for the women and how they assert themselves as moral agents of critical caring in their ministry. It suggests that in addition to the traditional caring work that women do, women also care when they seek justice by challenging the *status quo* understandings and practices of caring. In addition, women care when they look after themselves: when they seek healing, when they scrutinise their roles and responsibilities and in some cases, make decisions not to care.¹⁹¹

This dimension of caring for others is traditionally assigned to mother. Ryan seems to be calling for this to be mainstreamed into the curriculum of theological education. The bodily presence and praxis of mother priests enables this shift from theoretical training to ministerial practice – for all clergy. The hope is that the presence of women in the priestly role might

¹⁹¹ Mary Bernadette Ryan, "Behind Caring: The Contribution of Feminist Pedagogy in Preparing Women for Christian Ministry in South Africa", Doctor of Theology diss., UNISA, (2006), iii.

encourage men and women to practice a feminist ethic of care in general. Ryan confirms this understanding when she says:

*Secondly, a critical ethic of care has implications for theological education at the epistemological, the pedagogical and the practical levels. The findings [...] have helped to identify the kinds of changes that are necessary. These include revisioning the theological content that is taught, as well as the teaching methodologies. Changes to the institutional culture and the relationships within it are necessary so that the institutions become more welcoming and hospitable to women. [E]ducators have an ethical responsibility to prepare women with the necessary knowledge and skills for the difficult and often uncaring, terrain of their local churches.*¹⁹²

But at the time when most of the clergywomen whom I interviewed were training, there was no consideration for the different realities that women might face in their life and work as priests. They were expected to be grateful to have been chosen. And they were expected to fit in with the other students – the majority of whom were single men.

Three of the participants in this study attended the College of the Transfiguration (CoTT) in Grahamstown where most diocesan Anglican priests in Southern Africa are trained. It was a complex experience for each of them. In one case, being a single mother brought a very different perspective. Children, who in African culture are seen symbolically as a blessing from God, are often seen as a liability for potential clergywomen. The presence and reality of children changes the experience of training and ministry for mothers. “Eve” spoken openly about how she felt she had sacrificed her child in the process of becoming a priest:

“Eve”: I remember having the conversation with my mother that if I was going [my daughter] would definitely go with me. I wasn’t going to burden my elderly mother with a nine-year-old child [...]. I mean it was confirmed I was going to College, [the] rector at College was instructed to find us a school on the other side. I didn’t know the school. She didn’t know the school and suddenly we had house removals moving all our stuff and we were on a bus to Grahamstown – a place we’d never been to. I don’t know if she had a chance to tell her friends. I

¹⁹² Ryan, “Behind Caring,” iii-iv.

mean they'd closed school at the end of the year. And the next year early in January we were off a Grahamstown we didn't know. We didn't know anybody. She didn't know [anybody]. I had a purpose there and I was going to be with forty-nice other people like me. But for her there was absolutely nothing to look forward to. And as if that wasn't bad enough, I mean suddenly we had no car and we were walking everywhere, which was new to her. And suddenly she was coming home to an empty flat – she had to have her own key because I would be at College. And because I think I was obsessed – which I still am – with being proper – full clergy, I wasn't going to ask for any special favours. So she got sacrificed in the process. She virtually lived on two-minute noodles. Which she had to make. I look back now and I think who let's a nine-year-old come home in a strange place and make herself two-minute noodles? I mean I was so busy being a priest that we hadn't – I hadn't - bothered with the TV set. But then after some days I thought, poor child! What does she do? And then I went and got this TV set – but then did TV have to babysit her? Suddenly, I mean, she had to make friends with all the other children around. And then the pressures began. I remember [...] a student from Zululand was complaining that when we are at evening prayer our children make a noise on the road – the noise our children make on the road disturbs them. And I said to him, So what do you expect? What do you want us to do? So I said to him, They have been at school the whole day. Their parents have to be in chapel. Give them a break. Let them play. He said, Ya. You spoil these children. They should be coming to chapel. And I said, Noooo. They are not ordinands. At least mine is not an ordinand. She does not have to come to church. And that day I went back home and I said to [my daughter], You don't have to attend any extra services. The only thing you have to do is attend A church service on a Sunday. Other than that, if you want to be a server you are welcome. If you want to be in the youth group, if you want to do anything in the church you are welcome to but you don't have to do them and I think it's the best thing I've done for her. Which hasn't always been accepted.

As “Eve’s story so clearly illustrates, training for the ministry is complicated if you are the primary caregiver in a family. “Eve” continued

“Eve”: I hadn't thought about it that way but as we are talking, theological training is the sum total of the academic and the formation. And the formation, being in a residential theological setting such as a seminary setting began to highlight my otherness – I mean we would be in class and you would be lucky if there was another woman in the same class as you. So you were already different. You were different in that you were a woman. You were different in that you had a child or children (which was seen as burdensome). It had an effect on – it had an impact on how you organised your life your classes and everything. And so whatever peoples' responses were began to prepare me. I'm

sure it wasn't their intention –but it began to say to me, ya there is an ordinands' boarding meeting and the homework. Ya there will be a parish council meeting set for seven in the evening when I should be putting my child to sleep. So inadvertently it did. It wasn't meant to but it did.

“Eve” indicated clearly that while her training was not gender sensitive in the least, the experience of being at College gave her insight into what some of the complications of ministry as a mother might be. It is important to recognise that these issues are not unique to women in “occupations of divinity.” Women in secular leadership also wrestle with the work/life balance and sexism (among other issues). This has been well documented.

There was massive response, both positive and negative, when Anne-Marie Slaughter published an article called “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All” in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 2012. She was well aware that this was not the politically correct message that people expected her to deliver as a powerful role model for younger women coming up through the ranks, and yet she confessed, “I was increasingly aware that the feminist beliefs on which I had built my entire career were shifting under my feet.”¹⁹³ Theory and practice are very different animals. She says that her decision to leave an influential post in the Obama administration and go back to teaching at Princeton University, in part to be more present with her family, helped her to realise this:

All my life, I’d been on the other side of this exchange. I’d been the woman smiling the faintly superior smile while another woman told me she had decided to take some time out or pursue a less competitive career track so that she could spend more time with her family. I’d been the woman congratulating herself on her unswerving commitment to the feminist cause, chatting smugly with her dwindling number of college or law-school friends who had reached and maintained their place on the highest rungs of their profession. I’d been the one telling young women at my lectures that you can have it all and do it all, regardless of what field you are in. Which means I’d been part, albeit unwittingly, of making millions of women feel that they are to blame if

¹⁹³ Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” in *Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2012). <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/> (Accessed 12 November, 2013).

they cannot manage to rise up the ladder as fast as men and also have a family and an active home life (and be thin and beautiful to boot).¹⁹⁴

Slaughter is not advocating the non-self-actualisation of women in favour of being a fulltime stay at home mother (although, her point was not to judge any other woman's decision about how they manage competing demands). She states clearly:

I still strongly believe that women can "have it all" (and that men can too). I believe that we can "have it all at the same time." But not today, not with the way America's economy and society are currently structured.¹⁹⁵

She speaks from her own experience in the United States, but her critique is equally valid in the South African context. Although perhaps here, it can be even more difficult for women to get the logistical and political support they need to do the work that they feel compelled to do because the sexism and the economic injustice is even more deeply entrenched in our (post-apartheid but not actually democratic) society. This is despite the fact that much lip service is paid to meeting quotas for women in government and in the corporate world. On the other hand, perhaps there are economic factors that make it easier for wealthier women to afford the domestic assistance with household chores and childcare (it is interesting that managing this is still widely considered to be the mother's responsibility). It is up to women to change the rules of engagement. Slaughter expresses it clearly:

If women are ever to achieve real equality as leaders, then we have to stop accepting male behavior and male choices as the default and the ideal. We must insist on changing social policies and bending career tracks to accommodate our choices, too. We have the power to do it if we decide to, and we have many men standing beside us.¹⁹⁶

We cannot do this alone. We need to be authentic about the issues that we are facing as women and as mothers. As long as we pretend that we can just fit in with the Fathers, and be pretty and compliant without making our voices

¹⁹⁴ Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All".

¹⁹⁵ Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All".

¹⁹⁶ Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All".

properly heard, then we will never change the rules of engagement. We need solidarity with other women. And we need solidarity with our male partners and colleagues. We will never achieve that solidarity without speaking our alternative (and sometimes difficult) truths. We need to tell our stories to each other (other clergywomen) and to our male colleagues and especially to our bishops as they are the ones who make critical decisions on our behalf.

The exploration in this thesis contributes to this conversation about mothers in positions of ecclesial authority and how they are negotiating these challenges. As Ryan has suggested above, these challenges can only be effectively addressed when we reconsider the content of theological training. “Eve” went on to discuss precisely this issue:

“Eve”: We were at College at an interesting time where people were resisting feminist theology, gender studies. The gender dynamics were more made fun of than taken seriously. But even then I soon noticed, much as the guys we were with made fun of [our female lecturer] and her gender studies and her feminism, but when somebody from outside came and used sexist language, people began to realise. But it was right in the beginning stages, and so you were made – we were lucky we had people like [this lecturer] – we were made aware and conscious.

Several years later, “Mary” also attended CoTT. She was unmarried and childless, so there was less logistical otherness. And yet she also experienced sexism so she was ambivalent about whether her training could be considered gender sensitive:

“Mary”: I went to College excited about being a priest and College taught me about life. I rediscovered myself in ways that I never thought I would at the age of twenty-two when I [started] and I thought I was a grown up. I realised, I think I skipped a stage somewhere. But the service of Bernard Mizeki that we once had - it was a really long monthly service that they would have of Bernard Mizeki.¹⁹⁷ And I think as women at College we just wanted to be militant about that. We knew that they were patriarchal – we knew that they were not sensitive to women needs and women ministries. So we supported because it’s at

¹⁹⁷ Bernard Mizeki was a Southern African missionary and martyr in the late nineteenth century. There is a men’s guild named for him that is popular among more conservative African members of ACSA. See <http://www.bernardmizeki.co.za>.

College and this is our College - even if you invite other people. But I remember this one service [during which] this one man was so hell-bent on being disrespectful to women with the language that they used. And having everyone from everywhere and not everyone who has Xhosa as their first language and having a man and deciding to talk or preach or whatever he was doing in Xhosa. Which was absolutely another way of alienating people in that place. And I remember a number of us women, we left that service. And we had sympathetic men – and it was interesting that those men who were sympathetic – they were coloured, white and they were internationals [...]. They didn't understand because they felt discriminated [against] and excluded from this. And I remember that [action] brought out so many issues [...]. It was a kind of preparation for parish life and for ministry outside of seminary.

The above story of solidarity between men and women and their common experience of discrimination highlights that women's presence and praxis within ministry holds the potential for positive change for all people theologically, socially and politically. Mary explained:

“Mary”: We felt that was the only way we could protest. Rather than sit there and [accept] what was happening.

Elizabeth: Did you wait for the peace?

“Mary”: I don't remember if there was a peace. We were just so pissed off.

Elizabeth: No peace – just pissed off.

“Mary”: And even the sacraments - which for me I really value. Having to leave without receiving the sacraments was again somebody dictating what I will get and not get in the church.

Mary Daly writes about the 1971 Harvard Memorial Church Exodus in her book *Beyond God the Father*. She speaks of “the women's revolution, just by being ourselves” and quotes a woman who participated in the historic and symbolic walk-out:

What made the Memorial Church Exodus different [from skulking out the side door and feeling guilty for leaving], what made it possible, was the realization that the Church that does belong to me and to my experience as the exodus community of women and men who are

*prepared to get on with the business of living – living up to our potential, living in relationships, living creatively.*¹⁹⁸

“Rachel’s” experience at CoTT was similar to “Mary’s” – but she was a more mature student and arrived with more life experience. Therefore she was less overwhelmed and disillusioned by the sexism. She was clear that the training was not gender sensitive, but the power dynamics and prejudices that she encountered at CoTT were the same in most sectors of the professional world.

“Rachel”: Of course [the training] wasn’t [gender sensitive]. But it did prepare me - in a kind of inverse way. We were four women at the College at the time. I was the only one living in the res with the men. And we experienced the whole gamut – from men in chapel praying that women’s ordination vote would not go through – to the physical bumping around in the dining room and that kind of thing – to the just awful prejudices. In the classroom... So in a sense I was prepared.

Elizabeth: Because it is real world.

“Rachel”: Ya, that’s real world and I’d been through that – I went to law school. And there were about three or four women in our law class out of seventy odd – so I already knew that.

Elizabeth: You’d been there before.

“Rachel”: Ya. So yes, we were prepared I think – but not in the way that I would have hoped to have been.

Elizabeth: Not explicitly with courses that recognised the power dynamics and the prejudices.

“Rachel”: No. Not remotely.

“Hannah” had a completely different experience because for logistical and other reasons she did her training outside of seminary:

“Hannah”: I did not go to the College in Grahamstown - so in many ways I think that was a godsend for me because I was at the University of the Western Cape for my theological training and had Denise Ackermann teaching me hermeneutics and guiding me. At that stage, in the early to the late nineties, I was one of very few women in the

¹⁹⁸ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 144.

Theological Faculty surrounded by all of these would be bishops, and it was hard.

When asked about whether her training was gender sensitive, “Hannah” responded:

Well, with Denise, yes - and probably only with Denise. The rest of it was very of course male dominated and we touched on issues of inclusive language and so on, but nothing overwhelming, especially for the men. They weren't very often challenged, and found it impossible to say “Our Parent who art in Heaven” as opposed to “Our Father”. But at least I was introduced to that, and again it was wonderful to have Denise there.

“Rebekah” had the unusual experience of going to St Joseph’s Theological Institute in Pietermaritzburg. This was where she met the German Catholic seminarian who would later become her Anglican priest husband and father of her children:

*“Rebekah”: My academic formation, and a lot of my practical formation, happened at St. Joseph’s Theological Institute together with a group of other men... I don’t think there were [any other women] in my year. [...] But at the same time I was based at the Anglican Church, so [...] my formator met with me on a six weekly basis and we discussed things and I also learnt from him. [...] Now it was very contextual, but it was specifically training people for the priesthood within the Roman Catholic Church. And obviously there are two aspects to that: number one, it’s men who are going to be doing the job. So, even thinking about how it might be different from the female perspective wasn’t part of the equation, and unfortunately, towards the end of my time there, Cardinal Ratzinger [...] forbade discussions about women’s ordination altogether. [...] That wasn’t held to very strictly, in those days. And then secondly, it was for a celibate priesthood, which [means] it is just you, and that is your vocation and that is what you do. However, in a way it did prepare me well (and I think this might be because it was also a seminary for religious). There was a lot of emphasis on making sure that your spiritual life was sound and that you had a healthy spirit and a healthy psyche, and a balanced life, despite the fact that it could be completely all consuming. And that came through very strongly in everything that we did. [...] I had a lot of informal discussions with the more liberal, open-minded people, including lecturers, because it was such a struggle for them about what it is that women **could** bring, because it was not an option, but that again was rather an informal thing. So no: it was not gender sensitive but it was certainly geared towards wholeness.*

“Ruth” did not attend a seminary as such. She did a Licentiate in Theology through the Evangelical Bible Seminary of South Africa (now called ESSA, “Evangelical Seminary of South Africa”) in Pietermaritzburg. She explained that it was politically more radical in the nineties but is now very conservative under its new leadership. She did (in service) vocational training in a local parish. When asked whether her theological training prepared her for the realities that she faces in her life and work as a woman priest, “Ruth” replied that in many respects it did the opposite:

“Ruth”: I think in some ways [our theological training] disempowers us. Because I mean, I can only speak for my own theological formation, I remember very strongly [being told] in counselling, You are the priest, and they are the parishioner. And you have these boundaries, and you never get emotionally involved, and you never - I mean when somebody (a mother) has just lost a son in a car accident, I cry my eyes out. And we will sit there and I cry; when I’m doing a funeral, and a husband has lost his wife, I’m going to cry. You know there is no ways I’m going to get through that service without crying. When I am doing a wedding, when these two people are happy: I’m like, God! You are making me cry now! But it is okay [...] it makes it real, it actually makes it real, they feel like, this person is actually authentic. But the theological formation was definitely not like that, definitely not. It was: you always keep the boundary, and you know you never really get close to what’s happening. And actually as women, I don’t think we are wired in that way. It actually feels very painful for us, that kind of model. Did it prepare me adequately? NO because theological formation is just really about training men to be priests. In reality they don’t take into account... I think because in the past there haven’t been women priests, and even those who are shaping course contents, are doing it very often as men who have been in parishes, so it is about events, it is about project management, it is about parish management. And I think as women, you know we are used to running households, we are used to running lots of things, but we do it in a very different manner, it is very much more about need. A woman, she runs a home, [...] but it is about the needs of the children and or the husband, the whatever, are always the foremost and management happens around: how do we facilitate the best development of that? Whereas with men it isn’t about that often. So, ya no I don’t think the formation really [...] just doesn’t take in, I think, the reality of a woman being a priest. Because we haven’t had that in the past, so it hasn’t been factored into theological formation.

What “Ruth” is talking about could be construed in biologically essentialist terms. Namely that because women live in female bodies that mother and take care of other people (and express emotions more freely), women therefore have something unique to contribute to ministry. However, her comments are not simply restricted to the nature argument, but can also be aligned with the idea that nurture plays a part. This seems to confirm that theological training still largely plays into masculinist construction of leadership and control.

Carol Lee Flinders in her book *Rebalancing the World: Why Women Belong and Men Compete and How to Restore the Ancient Equilibrium* speaks of the painfully damaging effect of making “male” ways of thinking and being and doing normative:

The profound consequence of the domination of the Enterprise value system over that of Belonging was that women lost power and voice, and for decades we’ve interpreted women’s role in history from the perspective of that dual loss. But what we’ve failed to realize is that it wasn’t just women who incurred massive losses. The lost “half” of who we are, collectively, is that constellation of values; and that loss has impacted men as injuriously as women, though in different ways.¹⁹⁹

The expectation that men will decide what is best for both men and women without engaging in genuine consultation is far too common. Socially constructed gender roles certainly played a part in “Sarah’s” training. The church did not see a space for her in ecclesiological leadership. She was trained for a much more traditional role that fit with the complementarity paradigm. Here, women’s roles must be defined by their traditionally defined domestic roles in support of male leadership. This recalls Judith Lang, who in her book *Ministers of Grace: Women in the Early Church* affirms this position and only supports women as deacons. She advocates clearly defined “separate but complementary roles of men and women”.²⁰⁰ This has not served Sarah well as she was the only participant who did her theological studies by correspondence. This was not the result of her own choice.

¹⁹⁹ Carol Lee Flinders, *Rebalancing the World: Why Women Belong and Men Compete and How to Restore the Ancient Equilibrium*. New York: Harper Collins, (2002), xxiii.

²⁰⁰ Lang, *Ministers of Grace*, 17.

“Sarah”: After I finished University and I was teaching, I did a part time course with TEE. At that time they didn’t have women priests. So I obtained my theological diploma before I was ordained. And so they said it was pointless sending me for training – and plus I did all the practical work [...]. So [...] I was a Sunday School teacher and the youth leader and the organist. And I did the flowers and I visited. And so that was the practical part – and where Bishop [X] said it was just senseless. So I didn’t go.

Her bishop said that it was “senseless” because the church did not yet ordain women, and in fact, he personally did not support the ordination of women at that stage. But others were supportive of her ministry and there were good gentle clergymen who mentored “Sarah”. She did not have clergywomen mentors because there were none to be found. She was pioneering in that eventually she was to be the first Anglican clergywoman ordained from her own ethnic community. “Sarah” described that shattering of the stained glass ceiling in this way: “It was amazing but also frightening because people were looking at you.” The expectations, both positive and negative were enormous. Clearly, even when ordination was available for women, receiving adequate training continued to be a challenge. Perhaps adequate training could have afforded “Sarah” more confidence at the outset.

In contrast, “Rebekah” indicated that her strong vocational and theological training was very important – in no small part precisely because it gave her confidence. She said,

“Rebekah”: I was quite confident, so I didn’t see every criticism as a criticism of me and my ability to be priest or to lead. And that’s why I think people do a great disservice to women when they don’t train them well.

“Eve” was quite categorical about this oversight of ordaining women without training. She said so much of the discernment process had to do with politics and fulfilling quotas:

“Eve”: The lack of training also doesn’t help us – because like I said earlier on – training involved also the formation in that melting pot of

about fifty people where you were very aware of all the “isms”. I mean just if you had to draw up a list of ten people – it wasn’t just a question of putting names down – it was: Why have I got this person here? Do I have enough coloureds? Do I have enough blacks? Do I have enough women? Do I have enough South Africans? And do we then get into the church and forget all those – and become [priest?]. What is “priest”? We bring all those [identities] with ourselves.

Just from the brief overview of the seven interviewees it was clear that there is a whole spectrum of ways to train priests – even on a formal level there is not one model. There are many different options for receiving solid theological and practical foundations. But those foundations must not be overlooked. “Rebekah” told the following story as an example of how poor or insufficient training can disempower clergywomen by reinforcing negative stereotypes:

“Rebekah”: One of my lecturers was a sort of a liturgist, obviously one of the Catholic priests, and he attended a funeral and it was his first experience of a woman priest [...] and this person had been trained, not in a very Catholic institution, but in a very evangelical institution, so she didn’t have a great appreciation for liturgy. So she conducted this funeral with papers all over the place, and moving backwards and forwards, and wafting around, and for him it was such a poor example. It was shocking you know! [He seemed to say], If you are going to make women priests, teach them how to do things properly. So I think if women are not properly equipped, and not properly trained and therefore more easily criticised than men, they are at risk of being considered lesser. So I suppose, women talk about this in business, how in order to gain credibility in their institution you actually have to be WAY better than everybody else... and ballsier than the guys. So I think women can be complicit in it by not demanding what should be given and offered to them, as would be offered to a man. [...] When it comes to the self-supporting ministry and the stipendiary ministry you shouldn’t be less equipped because you weren’t “sent away”. You should be well equipped, and for the most part women are self-supporting so you’ve got two things against you - second-class priest on two levels, ja. And I don’t think it has to be that way, and I don’t think it should be that way... but I think very often it becomes that. I can think of women in the diocese that have been ordained that should never have been ordained and have been very poorly trained and very poorly equipped and it’s embarrassing to experience their ministry and be involved with them and to know that that is the first experience some people might have of a women in the ministry, and identified with them.

“Rebekah’s” embarrassment speaks to many clergywomen’s experience of feeling accountable for the mistakes of our entire gender. It also points to the desire not to be identified with such “failings”. There will always be negative feedback from those who are opposed to the idea of women in ministry. Problems and criticisms will inevitably arise if clergywomen are disorganised, ill-prepared or lacking in confidence. Often this is linked to a lack of the basic understanding of leadership or liturgy or preaching or pastoral care that could be rectified by appropriate training. Sadly, the lack of training may be interpreted as a personal failing of the clergywomen in question, or of women priests in general. This does not aid the cause of solidarity between women. “Mary’s” frustration, as recounted below, was legitimate, but harsh:

“Mary”: My pet hate is the squeaky voice that we put on. [I trust] it will change with time – when I think we find our confidence that we don’t need to have somebody else’s voice. But just own our own voices.

Elizabeth: And often it’s an indication of nervousness isn’t it?

“Mary”: Yes, but when you’ve done it for five years now, really it has to go.

“Mary” also expressed her position on the importance of education, not only for clergywomen, but for anyone who wants to change their situation in life:

“Mary”: And for me to get the taste of that formal education – because my high school was disrupted. I came in there and I said I want more of this – and I want people to have more of this. And realising that again part of the privilege come that it is not cheap to study – how do we make it accessible for people to have this opportunity, formally or informally, to study? You know – pick up a book and read and be motivated to get another one.

“Mary” recognised that training is on going – far beyond the seminary experience. She longs for other people to be inspired to learn. She spoke about the experience of organising a clergy-training workshop led by a young South African academic:

You know so that’s why in my own small way when I heard that [Professor X] was coming [to visit] it was like: Here’s an opportunity!

Here's an opportunity to inspire some other people – to see young women [academics] doing this - that we don't get to have a professor whose about to retire and who's a man. That is an expectation. Shake that up. Rock their boats. Change the stereotype.

Elizabeth: Change the expectations. And it makes people change their expectations of themselves.

“Mary”: Yes. People are still waiting for me to be arrogant because I have a PhD. I don't have time [for that]. It's work to be arrogant. I don't have time to plan my entrance and my exit and what I'm going to say. For me [having the degree simply] enables me to do other things and it opens doors.

This relates to the changing iconography discussed in the previous chapter, which is not clearly not just restricted to women at the altar, but also relates to women in theological training. In other words, it is not simply about what is being taught, but changing the expectation of who can do this work and how they do it.

It is important to clarify that this research does not intend to pass judgment on clergywomen. It does intend to express frustration with the institution that ordains us without adequate preparation and then expects us to perform well in the face of criticism – especially from those who are looking for flaws. “Rachel” bemoaned the depressing statistics of clergywomen in her diocese - and the lack of training and the chronic disempowerment that result in fewer strong women leaders:

“Rachel”: At the moment there are twelve stipendiary clergy – of whom three are retiring in the next year. [...] And the non-stipendiary are unqualified - not ill-qualified – unqualified. And so in effect there are ten of us in leadership positions. And leadership is not big-time leadership – you know. We are talking about a parish here.

My own experience has been one of limited formal training. There were only two ordinands (out of twelve) at my preordination retreat who had attended seminary and were much better qualified than me. They were both men on the way to becoming rectors. As a young perspective ordinand, I dreamed of attending seminary and later becoming a fulltime curate. But as with so many women, circumstances and life overtake the direction of our lives. Too often

for women, marriage orientates us towards our partner's career. Motherhood utterly changes our identity and focus. Male ordinands and newly ordained clergymen do not experience the same gender-biased expectations to be supportive and nurturing and self-effacing. Clergymen do not often follow their wives professional opportunities. This brings us to the question of whether clergywomen have experienced support for their vocations from their families and wider circles of care.

Vocational Support

Within my own family, there was support for my sense of calling. My husband knew before we married that I was determined to work to transform the Anglican Church from within. The participants in this research received varying degrees of emotional (and other) support from their families and wider circles of care.

“Mary”: I don’t know where I was and thinking this thing by age thirty-two I want my PhD. And my parents were like, Oh you are such a big dreamer. Because you are not even going to go university – we can’t even afford that. So when I said, “and priesthood” – they couldn’t even grasp this priesthood thing. My grandmother had to check in our family lineage – did we have a priest somewhere that we don’t know of? And they were like, Ok, you are the craziest of them all – do it. We don’t know what you want to do – just go and do it.

“Mary” also spoke of the fact that her father chose not to attend her ordination, and her mother chose to leave the Anglican Church to become a Methodist to give her daughter space to make her own way. They continue to support her from beyond the walls of the church. Other parents were even more baffled by their daughters’ decisions:

“Rachel”: When I told my parents that I was leaving the law profession and going to go and be ordained, they were horrified. [...] They were Anglicans, so that was not the issue. But my mother’s first question was: But what about the pension? Given that they both lived extremely simple lives – I mean, they never had money – but that was her first question: But what about the pension? But once they’d got used to the

idea and once they actually saw me doing it, they actually quite liked it – and they traded on it, I think. [...] My sister and my nieces and nephew – I think they just think it's completely weird. I mean they don't go to church or anything like that. Although I have to say my sister asks me every Saturday for me to email her my sermon – and she always reads it and she always comments [...]. So it's not that they are unsupportive. They just think it is quite mysterious. [...] My parents were both scientists. And they were completely mystified by my choosing to study law in the first place. Once they got used to that idea, then I mystified them again. [...] I think they just didn't always get it. And my sister is also a scientist. And she is married to a scientist. So none of them really get it.

Our perceptions of our parents' reactions to our chosen profession span from delight to horror. Disappointment was yet another reaction. Ultimately, there seemed to be a general sense of pride in the achievement of ordination, but the reactions were not always straightforward:

“Hannah”: I am the youngest of three girls and so it was very clear, my father supported whatever we wanted to do. My eldest sister is a lawyer and my middle sister works in the finance world, and so when I came along and said I wanted to be a priest, that was a very disappointing for my family... to hear this firstly, coming from the background that we come from, where we having had this very privileged education, and I now want to go out to study theology? But, thank God, that has changed. When I, in 2007, was named by the World Economic Forum as one of the Young Global Leaders, I think that probably was a turning point, or even the day of my ordination, I saw my parents look at me in a different way. And so the expectations on me - sometimes the expectations on me are hard, because I should always be nice, I should always be kind.

“Rebekah” spoke of her partner's reaction instead of her parents'. Her profession was nothing unusual since her husband was also on the vocational track:

“Rebekah”: Well, with my partner, with [my husband], my vocation was always a part of me, from the moment we met. He never even knew what the Anglican Church was, and he met me shortly after I had been ordained deacon. And he said, Oh, so do you also study at St. Josephs? Why is that? And I said, Well, I am an Anglican and I am a deacon. [...] The stress of being a first time rector and learning to deal with, particularly, alpha males, businessmen who need you to interact in a particular way, caused me initially to feel quite insecure about my own abilities, not my abilities, my own skills set. But then [my husband]

would see that in me, sense my vulnerability, and feel that he needed to be more encouraging.

“Rebekah” explained that the life of a clergywoman is not necessarily conducive to family life because it does not adhere to regular office hours and time off and that she has been fortunate to find a partner who understands that way of life:

I mean the weekends are just not weekends! It depends also again on personality and styles of work. I am not the kind of person who can complete my Sunday sermon by like Friday lunchtime! I am just not that kind of person, never have been, so (laughs) I am in my Sunday sermon on a Saturday afternoon, Saturday night, and I dream it until Sunday morning so that's not really conducive to an ordinary pattern of life for most people. But again he knew that and was in it with me. [...] I mean, with [my husband], as my partner, he was in that rhythm with me, so it was fine.

Emma Percy understands this restructured pattern and rhythm as inherent to both vocations of priesthood and motherhood:

Those who move into these practices learn to move to a different beat, to know that the interruptions are as central to the meaning as the organized and planned elements. They need to develop an attentiveness which enables them to respond quickly to a change in pace, the urgency of a cry for help or the slowing down to delight in the wonder of ordinary miracles.²⁰¹

When I asked “Ruth” about the support structures that make the practice of her vocation possible, she had some very bitter responses where the institution and even the congregation were concerned. But she had sought out some alternative support systems that served her well:

“Ruth”: None really within the church, if I am honest [...]. I don't think we trust one another as clergy you know, so one would never feel free to open your mouth to another clergy person, because it going to come back to bite you. And it has, you know! So I have learnt that it is not a source of support. Your bishop, certainly, is not a source of support, that's for damn sure! Because whatever you tell is also going to come back and bite you. Your parishioners... no, umm no, not as a woman

²⁰¹ Percy, *What Clergy Do*, 163.

priest, not as a woman priest. So for me, my supports... and I have tried to use my children at times, but that can backfire badly as well, it is not their role to support you. But I think my kids have been a great support at different times, because there hasn't been anybody else. But I think my friends, and funnily enough, it would be the gay community friends... That's where my support has come from, mostly my gay friends, and one or two straight friends, who have been there through thick and thin, [...]. So I think those have been the biggest support. But then with moving (as a priest, as well, you move) - so most of my friends were in [the town where I worked]. When I moved to [a new town], I had very few friends. So with relocation, you are no longer in close proximity often to your support circle, so that makes it difficult as well. I can't keep going to [my old town], and if I need someone to pick up the kids... I need somebody to pick up the kids here, and most of gay friends do not have kids, and they are just not wired into fetching a child from school. They haven't even negotiated that in their job... so ja, there's difficulties.

“Ruth’s” experience confirms Moore’s important (previously quoted) observation that:

Clergy mothers have valuable gifts to offer their parishes, the wider church, and their families. They have been creative and resourceful at making a way through an institution designed for male clergy without daily child-care responsibilities, worshipping a God depicted primarily as male, in a world that finds church increasingly irrelevant and still isn't sure where women really belong. Attending to their lives reveals changes in church practice and social structures that could make it more possible for clergy, family members of clergy, and the church as a whole to live more sanely.²⁰²

“Ruth” did not profess to have answers for others and she clearly expressed the pain of her own experience:

“Ruth”: I think it depends on how strong your calling is. I mean, for some, it is a calling to priesthood, but they actually can be happy doing something else. For others it is like this is blood. Like for me, this feels like it's the air I breathe. I cannot conceive of doing anything else. So for me I really am prepared to bear the cost, you know what I am saying? I am prepared to bleed more in the process. Am I prepared to be martyred and killed? Probably not. At that point I will probably say, Fuck you! You know what I am saying? But I will go pretty close to that point, you know. And also I am strong and I can cope with that, and I know what I can cope with. And for me there is also still that fighting spirit. So it is like: I want it to transform and it is also that I feel

²⁰² Allison M. Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 129.

that the church belongs to me as much as it belongs to them. So for me it is like: I will not hand over my faith and my community, for you to shape in a way that excludes me! So no. I'm going to hang in there, and that is the only reason. Ja. And if my fingertips bleed, that's okay, I can cope with that you know! So ja, is it worth it? I think it just depends to the extent of how much of yourself you are prepared to (it comes with a cost) how much you are prepared to carry, and that, I think, every woman has to answer for herself you know.

But if Moore's assertion that clergy mothers can help to renegotiate what it means to be a priest is correct, "Ruth's" negative experience has much to teach the church. Likewise, "Eve's" experience is very informative. She did not speak about any family support she's received although she did speak extensively about her concern that her daughter had been neglected. "Eve" felt that her own commitment to her ministry had not been fair on her daughter:

"Eve": I've used the word sacrifice a lot because I think to a very large extent, my poor child has been sacrificed. Her needs have had to stand aside and I have prioritised work. She's had to adapt, I mean I have no way of telling how her personality would have turned out if we had not been – if I had not been in this vocation. I think of – especially when you work in a black parish – you do everything in the rectory and there is this open door syndrome so that people can come in any time. So you could be about to have supper and there is a knock on the door and she knows that she's got to disappear. She's had to make herself invisible and has had to smile when people have expected her to do that and with all the moves that have come – that we have had to go through, she's very quiet and reserved person. And like I said I have no way of knowing if she'd have been that way if we were in a different setting. She hasn't been able to – I mean I can complain now – that she doesn't have a social life – did I allow her to have one? I mean she was in [a] primary [school] for eighteen months and then I had to move in July. And then she was in [another] primary for eighteen months – so she is the one who comes to a school in the middle of the year when people have made their friends. Even when she became a boarder there was still for me she was still being sacrificed in the sense that we thought ok she will be a weekly boarder – but that didn't quite help because weekends is when you are dealing with funerals and all the parish things. And Sunday of course is not your day so she'd come home and still be alone. So I think she's been sacrificed – and it could be worse – there could be a husband and other children sacrificed – she was just the sole sacrificial lamb.

"Eve's" constant reference to the sacrifice of her daughter echoes Moore who states:

[T]he church as an institution preaches the well-being of the family, and on the one hand expects its clergy to model healthy family life, and on the other makes demands that threaten the well-being of marriages, committed relationship, and parenting.²⁰³

“Eve’s” struggle to model and even experience “healthy” family life points us to the importance of finding good support structures, but equally so for finding good role models and good caregivers. As we will see in the following section, we do not always find this according to gendered expectation.

Role Models and Caregivers

For clergy mothers there are not many professional role models. When most of the participants were being trained in South Africa, there were very few, if any, clergywomen (or women academic theologians). As indicated from the stories above, it can be a harrowing and lonely profession characterised by self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of children. Hence the importance of finding people who minister to us, perhaps who even mother us in some capacity. This shapes who we become and influences how we minister. Letty Russell’s critical question resonates with this need: “What would it mean to see real live models of partnership among those women and men who share Christ’s ministry?”²⁰⁴

This is answered in a story told by “Eve”. During her training her bishop paid attention to real needs that might otherwise have been overlooked. He made sure that appropriate practical care was taken and financial and other interventions were made to support her family.

“Eve”: And in the midst of all this murkiness, there have been interesting people who have remedied the situation. It was in April of our first year at College that Bishop [X] – the Diocesan bishop then – visited college. And bless his soul, he noticed at the end of the first day

²⁰³ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 60.

²⁰⁴ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 47.

that I had been on campus the whole day and when we went to the communion service – the Eucharist – he said where has [your daughter] been the whole day? I said, She came back from school and let herself into the flat. And he said, Is that the way it goes? I said, I'm a fulltime student. He wasn't happy with that. And two things happened then. He saw her during the peace, and greeted her. And after the service he said to me, Her teeth are not straight. [...] Find an orthodontist. Don't tell the diocesan secretary. Tell ME and I will pay. And that was very helpful [...]. But this is help from a quarter you didn't expect – this was help from a man – and he asked me if there was a boarding facility in the school she was in – and I said, Yes. And he said, Find out if they have space in the boarding establishment and [...] before I leave let me know how much it costs for her to go into boarding. And I did that and he said, I'll pay. Tell them she is becoming a boarder at the beginning of next term [...] so she can be taken care of properly. And that's how she became a boarder. And that was ok. [...] And he stuck to his word in the sense that when a new pharaoh was coming in, he said to me: A new pharaoh has come in but I want to honour my promise to you for your entire stay here. [...] And so we tend to look at the institution for what it is but there are good individuals in it.

This was an exceptional situation with an exceptionally sensitive and caring bishop. It should be normal for the church to look after clergy and their families to ensure their health and wellbeing are attended to. In contrast to this story of support, “Eve” spoke of a rector who exploited her during her practical training. “Eve” was expected to be chauffeur, shopper, and all around skivvy for a clergywoman who wanted to make “Eve” a clone of herself with no consideration for “Eve’s” needs, nor those of her daughter. This came to a head during a Sunday service:

“Eve”: She was very unhappy when she wasn't running my life. Well she saw it more as me being ungrateful to her for her mentoring of me. But I had to be me and we differed in many ways.[...] One Sunday morning. I hadn't been ordained – I was lay minister. We had even prayed in the vestry. Processing into the church [...] she said, By the way, you are preaching. And I turned around and said no I'm not. Well she told me that she was the rector. I said, Nope, I'm not preaching. And walked on. And then after the Gospel [...] I went out. I went to the loo. And when the creed came to an end somebody had to go to the pulpit but it wasn't me. She was very very unhappy and I said – at least you could have told me yesterday, not while we were processing in. She says, No that's part of training. I said, No I don't want that training.

There are many things that the Anglican Church is still learning to accommodate in terms of its transforming more gender balanced clergy compliment. The institution was run for centuries as an “old boys club”. The process of privileged men learning to share power with those previously disadvantaged in terms of economics, race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status (to name but a few differences) is long and complex, but it is happening. This is apparent from the examples cited by the participants of men who were good role models and caregivers who challenged the status quo and equipped women as well as men to be conscientious clergy in this changing church.

“Rachel”: I mean the person who taught us systematic theology, a dear dear man from England. He taught, bless his heart, African theology, feminist theology, black theology. He was this white Englishman teaching us all of those things. [...] So he at least introduced us to all of those things although it was weird coming from him. Although he was a very enlightened human being. But that was just because of his own particular sensitivities – he had grown up in Kenya – even though he was an Englishman. So he was aware of those differences. And so he exposed us to difference – but never around issues of power. It was almost by the way but as part of our systematic theology training. But I mean there was no such thing, for example, as women studies or particular issues around the way men and women learn differently, boy children and girl children learn differently – no no no – there was none of that.

“Sarah” also spoke of good clergymen mentors and did not mention any women who helped to shape her.

“Sarah”: [They were] very very good. [...]. These kinds of men who came to confirm and say you had [a calling].

“Rebekah” spoke of many good men who walked the academic and practical theological journey with her. But she had the positive experience of being taught by three women theologians as well.

“Rebekah”: Our lecturers were predominantly male. I remember being lectured by three women.

“Rebekah” who was receiving a Catholic academic theological training that *“was not gender sensitive but it was certainly geared towards wholeness”* received Anglican formation from a local Anglican priest:

“Rebekah”: [My formator] was also very conscious of the need to maintain a balance in life, when I used to meet with him he used to draw his four circles interlocking, and say, How is your balance of life? And it would be study, prayer or spirituality, family and friends and ministry, church work, and that there had to be a balance, because once it is skewed again you lose that sense of wholeness, and I think you also lose perspective. And then he was a married man [...] with a very deep spiritual life and an appreciation for monasticism, I suppose. But at the same time the father of sons that took a long time to arrive - and a man who had been through his own personal journey of trying to become less rigid and systematic etc. He was trying to kind of learn to be “in process” versus be “in control”. [...] Very good lessons. Was it gender sensitive? [...] When I was discerned, I was discerned together with a woman. When I was at St. Josephs I obviously wasn’t, but the person who was the assistant at the time when I was in [a particular] parish was [Mother X], who was one of the first women to be ordained, so indirectly I learned from her. However, she wasn’t married, she was looking after both her elderly parents, but did her own kind of mothering of lots of stray dogs and things like that. No - I think there wasn’t much specific awareness of the need to consider how things might be different given that I was a woman.

“Eve” said that her theological education conscientised her and her fellow ordinands about sexism and sexist language: *“[W]e were lucky we had people like [a certain feminist lecturer] – we were made aware and conscious”*. This was a positive example of good role modelling on a personal level but also on a broader theological level. “Mary” echoed this earlier when she spoke of her desire to have more younger female role models who change the iconography of theological formation. “Mary” also has a special connection with the first Episcopalian African American woman bishop (emeritus) Barbara Harris. “Mary” said, *“Oh that woman! Ya, na – I hope she lives long enough for me to spend time with her!”* But “Hannah” was the only participant in this study who spoke extensively and passionately about a particular woman who had an enormous impact on her theological training and her understanding of ministry. She continues to rely on the support of this remarkable South African woman theologian.

“Hannah”: Denise [Ackermann] had a way of cutting [the would be bishops] down to size and being very clear with the women about what it is going to be like, and the challenges that we will face when doing ministry. So thank God for Denise, and I thank God that Denise is in this diocese still, and that she is just a phone call or an email away. So I don’t think I was adequately prepared, but definitely, I knew from the very beginning that it was going to be a challenge.

The explicit nature of the challenge for women in ministry only becomes clear when one is actually immersed in parish ministry and diocesan politics. It is a baptism of fire, so to speak. The perceptions and the projections and the relationships can only be untangled from within the structures of the church. The transformed interpersonal role-plays and possible new ways of thinking and acting and ministering can only occur if we apply the gospel of liberation that we study to our own lives. “Eve” articulates that the issues run far deeper than clergy image, or uniforms or even role modelling:

“Eve”: We haven’t had role models and unless we are conscious of and talk about these things it will carry on – I mean some years ago the joke was on us trying to wear black suits and black clerical shirts – the men’s shirts – but it’s deeper than that. It is deeper than what we wear. It’s a lot more. And [it’s about] our understandings of power.

In the chapter on power we will examine those understandings. But as “Eve” so clearly says, it is critical that the conversations about positive (and negative) role modelling take place so that transformation can begin to occur. Russell articulates the task of feminist theologians who choose to stay within the institutional church:

Christian feminist spirituality is being constantly challenged, not only to talk back to tradition but also to be part of the transformation of that tradition so that it speaks of the love of God as an open circle of welcome to all persons. Often the spirituality practiced by feminists puts together our sense of embodiment and of transcendence with many other rich faith traditions from past and present.²⁰⁵

This possibility of transforming tradition begins with the solid foundations of good training. But it is embodied in a ministry of praxis. So now the focus

²⁰⁵ Russell, *Church in the Round*, 201.

shifts beyond the formation and training to the articulation of these particular clergywomen's praxis of ministry.

Divine Occupation

There are specific challenges for women in ministry that have been researched within the South African context. In their article "Parishioners' Attitudes towards Clergywomen: A South African Case Study", Petronella Jonck, Anda le Roux and Lyzette Hoffman found that while the attitudes towards clergywomen seem to be improving, discrimination continues to be a problem. They make the following statement that resonates with my own findings: "Churches in South Africa have a history of gender injustice that is not taking into account the needs of women."²⁰⁶ They explained some of the ways in which discrimination was experienced by clergywomen:

There are many consequences of a Christian male theology, which is characterised by a patriarchal paradigm that elevates male experiences, thoughts and values to the detriment of women. In religious organizations, clergywomen experience vertical discrimination which manifests in being clustered at the bottom end of the religious organizational hierarchies, resulting in extended durations before they acquire parish positions, longer wait to be promoted out of entry-level positions and dubious chances of ever becoming head pastor. Similarly, clergy women experience horizontal discrimination as they are more likely to serve as leaders of children's ministries, to be appointed to rural congregations or to be employed in non-parish positions. In conjunction with this, clergywomen are also exposed to contractual discrimination in that they are more likely to be hired on a part-time basis, on short-term contracts or for interim positions. In some cases, contracts of clergy women do not include remuneration and if they are remunerated it does not weigh up against the salaries of their male counterparts.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Petronella Jonck, Anda le Roux & Lyzette Hoffman, "Parishioners' Attitudes towards Clergywomen: A South African Case Study," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 144, (November 2012): 92-108.

²⁰⁷ Jonck et al. "Parishioners' Attitudes towards Clergywomen," 93.

The irony is that while clergywomen experience such discrimination, what they bring to the church is invaluable. As already stated, experience is essential to theological reflection and feminist theology begins and ultimately ends with experience. It is interesting to note that in a study called “An exploratory study of women’s experiences and place in the church: A case study of a parish in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA), Diocese of Cape Town”, Isabel Sparrow found that the lay participants perceived that they brought what they considered to be “feminine” gifts to their ministry. She said:

Whilst the women have a range of leadership skills, what they imagine they bring to ministry is their ability to nurture, heal and care. It seems that ordination and licensing provide recognition for women’s and men’s work in the church and that this recognised work is to do with reproducing the church liturgy, preaching, teaching and church management. In addition to the cleaning, beautification of the church and tea-making functions, it is mostly non-ordained, unlicensed women and some men who do the bulk of the caring, nurturing and supporting work. Yet, this is the work that is most urgent – work related to the issue of women’s poverty, and work concerning health, housing, education, availability of food and water – that tends to go unacknowledged by the church.²⁰⁸

Although Sparrow’s study was specifically focused on laywomen leaders, many of the findings are relevant to the burden of expectation that ordained women also carry, including the undervaluing of their ministry. Sparrow concludes that:

[W]omen who move into leadership positions in the church do so because of their desire to serve God by utilizing so called ‘feminine’ skills of nurturing and caring. And yet, in the very act of taking up leadership positions they represent a challenge to the deeply embedded constructions of gender in which caring and nurturing is understood as women’s work. Most of the participants in leadership roles are reluctant to take part in decision-making according to the manner in which men traditionally function. Some of the participants appear to experience considerable discomfort around taking up decision-making and leadership roles. It appears to be of special concern that women should retain their feminine image. In this regard they all favour what they

²⁰⁸ Isabel Sparrow, “An exploratory study of women’s experiences and place in the church: A case study of a parish in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA), Diocese of Cape Town”, MPhil diss., University of the Western Cape, (2006), 99-100.

understand as a 'feminine' style of leadership in which consensus is sought rather than authority wielded. What is obvious is that each of the participants holds a particular perspective of women's experiences of gender and patriarchy in the church and many of these experiences are contradictory in nature.²⁰⁹

In contrast to Sparrows findings, most of the participants in my study embraced leadership despite the fact that they experienced varying degrees of resistance to their claiming of authority. Power and authority can be expressed and asserted in many ways. The nurturing aspects of both mothering and ministering provide powerful expressions of leadership. In her book *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry*, Emma Percy explains how in practice ministry and mothering are very similar. She says, "The practice of mothering shapes the relationship of care in which a child or children grow to maturity."²¹⁰ She goes on to state:

In both the home and the church, the mother or priest is the facilitator. It is the children and people who themselves do the growing and maturing. Yet there is an important role for the ones who shape and sustain the relationships, spaces and communities in which the growing up happens.²¹¹

This is in contrast to the widely held misconception that clergy have a very gentle job that is focused mainly on the Sunday worship service. In fact, the regular liturgical services are simply the window dressing for intensive engagement with other aspects of ministry all week long. Emma Percy has articulated an important revaluing of the caring work of ministry in her book, *What Clergy Do: Especially When It Looks Like Nothing*. She concludes:

Parish ministry, like mothering, is a way of life. Its rhythms do not conform to traditional boundaries between work and home, on and off duty, public and private space. That does not mean that there is no time off, no private spaces and no proper home life, just that boundaries are blurred and the times of work and rest are not so easily predicted.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Sparrow, "An exploratory study of women's experiences and place in the church," 100-101.

²¹⁰ Percy, *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry*, 86.

²¹¹ Percy, *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry*, 103.

²¹² Percy, *What Clergy Do*, 163.

Percy's findings were confirmed by the experiences recounted by the clergywomen I interviewed. Some of the participants experienced ministry as completely different from previous professional involvements. This was largely related to the work hours and the emotional investment required. Others felt that there was quite a lot that was similar. But that was largely career or sector dependent. Also, the work and life of a priest cannot be separated. All of this can be said about the life and work of a mother as well. Priesthood, like motherhood, is both an identity and a way of life. All of the participants spoke of how consuming ministry can be. For example "Rebekah" notes:

"Rebekah": I worked professionally before this in a pathology laboratory and the work I did then it was shift work, [...] but there the work that I did was work that had to be done on site. So, your job was your job. You went to it and you came away from it. [...] So there was a very clear separation between your private life and what you do at home and how you socialise, versus how you are amongst your colleagues and then the work you do. And now, as a priest your whole life is subject to other people's opinions and perceptions. So there isn't a lot about you that is private, unless you specifically make it that way. Your working hours are not specifically set as rigidly [...]. I mean there are some things that you can predict, and that you know will run in that particular way, and there are other things you just can't predict.

"Ruth" identified with the perpetual availability and the sense that priests do not have a private life and that this impacts hugely on family and family life:

"Ruth": [It is] completely [different]. Because, for instance, I was a nurse and – you have set hours, as a priest you don't have set hours. That is the first biggest difference: [...] as a priest, it is really understood by the community that you are on call twenty-four hours a day. [...] I think the other massive difference is that when you work in a secular field, your personal life and family life have actually got nothing to do with it. It's nobody's business. When you work in a parish, oh my God, your whole personal life is everybody's business and that can be very difficult as mother, very difficult as a mother. And also your family is actually right there in your workplace, all the time so you are actually having to relate pastorally to your own kids, [...] they are part of the congregation, they are part of the worship group, they are part of the whatever, so your family are literally there in your workspace, one way or the other. [...] Ja, I just think it is very, very different.

Hannah also spoke about experiencing the heavy responsibility of ministry, and the fact that one cannot walk away from peoples' needs:

“Hannah”: I think it is just that you have to be available twenty-four hours and day, seven days a week, and when people - often staff will walk into my office, across the board, academic staff, teaching staff, support staff and say, Can we pray? And there are so many days when I want to say, I can't. And then I am reminded that it is just my duty, and it is my ministry. I think as a mother it is even harder, and as a daughter, because I have parents also, and have a responsibility towards them [...]. I realise just how much rests on me, but I just do it because that's how it works.

“Sarah” explained that it is impossible to not be “on call” and that one needs to always be available and how exhausting that can be. She said:

“Sarah”: I was a teacher before I joined the ministry. And when you came home in the afternoons, it was either just some marking and some prep for the next day – and over. You put your head on the pillow and you just went up to sleep. But as a priest you carry the people – you know the song that says: I've written their names on my heart. And so you are restless. You are thinking about this person who has cancer who's dying and you are waiting in anticipation for that telephone call. And also you stress and strain over certain tragedies that occur. And I think that is a difference. You know, whereas you just close the office door and you walk off. [... In my] community the first thing they look for is the priest. So you can get a call at two o'clock in the morning and they expect you to come out.

“Rachel” and “Eve” also spoke of the overwhelming time commitment of ministry and the way that impacted on their lives. But both of them had come from professional backgrounds that required a similar level of engagement. “Rachel” said:

“Rachel”: When I was a lawyer, I was a lawyer twenty-four hours a day. You know that is not different from being a priest now. I suppose it depends very much on what the profession is [...] In the two professions that I have been involved in – you know I take it home with me obviously and live it. And in both professions – both law and the priesthood – lots of people make lots of assumptions about my identity because of the work that I do. So they are not dissimilar in that way.

“Eve” expressed how difficult parish demands could be on family life, and said that she had expected the church to be more accommodating. But she also recognised that as long as men govern church, the corporate model will prevail. Her experience was even more complicated as she was a single mother:

“Eve”: I actually find it’s very similar at least for me from where I came from – I remember before going to College being part of a management team at Game.²¹³ And I was the only woman. I was the only one who lived in [a township] (I find I can never separate the race and the gender from me) and with a child who was in nursery school. There would be a meeting set for six in the evening. And I would drive [long distances] to take my child from nursery school drop her off at home and come back to the meeting. And these meetings went on for as long as the men wanted them to. [...]. And the one was already divorced, one was going through a divorce and then there [me] - I was never married. But their children were taken care of by somebody else and because I wanted to be fully part of this management team, I had to do those drives [...] to belong. And that is two people sacrificed: that child and me. [...] Church hasn’t been any different [from the corporate world]. I mean I still get to a parish and people tell you: We have always had our parish counsel meeting at half past seven. Why half past seven? [...] Some of us have children to see to and it means leaving my child alone in the house. And some people resent it because you are then imposing your particular peculiar needs on them. Which is no different from working with [a corporate] on the other side.

All the participants seem to describe the fulltime commitment of priesthood in a way that resonates with the fulltime commitment of motherhood. So while male priests may find the encroachment on their time equally frustrating, clergywomen who are primarily responsible for the children find it doubly binding. “Ruth” experienced rebuke from surprising quarters and articulated some of the outrageous expectations that parishioners sometimes have of clergywomen as follows:

“Ruth”: I think you do [create boundaries], and it always comes with a cost, you know. So for instance, I remember the parish complaining that I wasn’t pouring tea with the other women after the service and I was like, Uh? That’s because I’m shaking hands at the door. They were like, Yes, but we feel that you are not doing things with us, as a woman. And I was like, Well would you like me to bi-locate and maybe

²¹³ Game is a South African supermarket franchise corporation.

with one hand I could shake and the other I could pour tea? Maybe I could do something with my feet! You know! So I think women can sometimes be quite unrelenting in their expectations of you, and because they are used to carrying sixty thousand balls, and not coping themselves, there is this kind of, Well, we pretty much assume you [can do it all] and so the demands can just be quite unrealistic, from other women.

This is another case in point of the frequent lack of solidarity and understanding between women. Some of the most difficult issues to negotiate can come from the most unexpected places. Just as women might expect to find support from other women, clergy might also expect to encounter support from the institutional church. Even though “Mary” does not have children and therefore has not experienced the competing demands of motherhood and ministry, she has nevertheless found that she must protect herself and those whom she loves from the burden of ministry:

“Mary”: For me I’m trying to see ministry as a profession – as a career – because there is part of that. And that what I do at the office and at work shouldn’t be taken and be brought into the home. I don’t share with my family of choice and my biological family the struggles that I go through because I don’t want them to have that coloured shady view of the church because of what I go through. I protect these two worlds from each other. And I’m in the middle of it so I really choose where and how I’m going to involve the church.

Fulltime stipendiary ministry in the Anglican Church is a demanding vocation. It is not just a job. It is a way of life. Particularly if one lives in a rectory (or other church owned accommodation), one’s family is drawn even further into the church community and the experience and stress of ministry. As the next section will reveal, it is very difficult to merge the competing demands of ministry and motherhood.

Clergy Motherhood

In both ministry and motherhood, good time management is essential. Also, very good support structures (assistant clergy, administrators, child-minders, domestic workers, husbands, wives, grandparents, and other family and friends) are required to ensure that the children's needs are met. Neither the caring profession of ministry or the caring occupation of motherhood lend themselves to considering the needs of the caregiver herself. This recalls the research done by Ryan that found, unsurprisingly, "that a *critical ethic of care*, which incorporates biblical principals of compassion and justice, is central to the liberating praxis of women in ministry."²¹⁴ She has suggested that an important, but much neglected, part of care involves self-care and sometimes women must make decisions to self-protectively choose "not to care". This recalls part of the last stanza of the last verse of T.S. Eliot's poem, "Ash Wednesday":

Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit
of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.²¹⁵

But it is very difficult for mothers not to care – and almost impossible to sit still. The exception may be during worship services when someone else is caring for the children! It can be a relief for clergy mothers when we celebrate or preach in large part because this professional responsibility provides us with respite from the primary care-giving role if there is someone else looking after our children. Also, it is an opportunity to sit quietly during the more reflective and meditative moments of the liturgy.

²¹⁴ Ryan, "Behind Caring," iii.

²¹⁵ T.S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday" in *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991): 85. This was the first long poem Eliot wrote after his conversion to Anglicanism.

Clergywomen have so much to learn from each other. Not least of these lessons is how to care appropriately and effectively whilst still taking care of our families and ourselves. “Rachel” recused herself completely from this conversation by avoiding both the joys and the struggles of motherhood:

“Rachel”: I was married when I was a lawyer and we chose not to have children because we were both professional people. And then I was divorced before I was ordained. And I have been in other relationships since then but I have not wanted to get married and I have never felt a desire to have children. So I’m rescued from that.

She went on to explain that the children in her parish are baffled by her decision:

“Rachel”: The children are always mystified. When they ask me, where are your children? And I say, I don’t have children. I think they find it inconceivable that I don’t.

Elizabeth: Is that a Zulu thing? Or is it a child thing?

“Rachel”: I think it’s a child thing – and probably you know for most children they are the centre of their own worlds and they can’t imagine that somebody that they like and looks after them at their church wouldn’t want children of their own.

“Mary” has not made the same deliberate choice. But circumstances have conspired to prevent family life at this stage of her career. She spoke of practising mothering with other peoples’ children for the time being:

“Mary”: I have a beautiful nephew. And my godchild is my son – I told his parents that You have him when I work during the week but on weekend, he’s mine. And both [my nephew and godson] have taught me something about mothering. And nurturing and caring. And they see me as a provider. As a nurturer. A caregiver. That moves me. And when I have to pick them up – either one from school or from day care, now I realise the pressures of love – of having to cancel a meeting because it’s not important enough. I want to spend time with these children. In that when they have plays at school, I want to be there. I want to be part of that. And I think for me that has been the mothering part of that - when I said to both their parents, I’m not going to be babysitter. I’m going to be part of their lives. And they should know that they have another parent – if they don’t understand it now, that’s ok,

we will explain it when they get older. But knowing that I care for them in that motherly way and that I'm there for them. As much as I try to be. But I think I have those things when I say, ok I need my day off, be with your parents. I have me time so I can bail out easily on that. But their parents know that when they are with me, they don't even need to worry because their children are safe because they are loved. So that's how I'm practising my mothering skills.

“Rebekah” and “Hannah” had the most similar domestic arrangements of all of the participants, since at the time of the interviews, they were both still managing fulltime ministry and mothering young children. “Rebekah” confessed: “I was absolutely completely naive about [motherhood].” Her own mother died when she was still a teenager so she did not have the benefit of that support or role modelling. She spoke about how she had to learn to restructure her life to accommodate the competing demands of ministry and motherhood:

“Rebekah”: It is easy to have meetings at home when you do not have children in the home. You'd think it might be easier to just do it at home, because then you are at home, but actually it is not. Because of the interruption factor [...] and a sense of being neither here nor there, an inability to be completely focused either way. So a clear separation has been very important for me. Having an office away. Doing parish work when I am out of the home and trying not to do parish work when I am at home. It has been really, really really important. [...] When I was pregnant with [our first child], one of the ladies who we were very good friends with was looking at the roster and seeing how things were, and she said “Oh, well, you know, next month we are going to have to put in an extra column for the baby-sitter”. And I was quite thrown! I thought why would we have to do that? And then I realised I hadn't even considered who might babysit while I was doing church on a Sunday, when there is no childcare! I guess I just assumed that [my husband] would do it. It hadn't crossed my mind - which was mad!

She had to learn to be very organised and to create support systems in order to manage the merging of her vocations:

“Rebekah”: You have things that you have to do that are integral to who you are as the priest, that take place at times other than the normal working times for other working moms. And if you don't have an extended family that can form a support structure around you at those times, on an on-going and regular basis, then you need to put other structures in place. You just have to. So when we were pregnant with

our second child I said to [my husband] actually we can't do this unless we have a nanny who is here especially to work every Sunday when we are now both ministering and in the evenings when we have to be doing stuff. So that there is a constant presence for the children, because you know, people are fantastic about volunteering, but having your children with different people every Sunday is not really, in my mind, my opinion, good for the children.

[...]

I was completely naïve and thought it would become easier as she got older. Silly, hey? But there was no one to mentor me, actually, [another mother priest] was around...but...[...] it is a very isolated place to be priest in charge of a congregation of a particular parish, because you are assumed to have been prepared for everything, and you are left to your own devices.

Families and congregations are in the process of redefining roles and relationships as women come into positions of leadership and authority. Priests cannot practice leadership or ministry in isolation. Likewise, family members need each other in order to have communal life together. Community and family have a responsibility to provide support for the leaders and caregivers as well. Sometimes, the support structures are not as strong as they could be. This is perhaps especially the case when traditionally women are still expected to be the supporters instead of the supported.

Single Motherhood

“Ruth”, “Eve” and “Sarah” all had raised children as single mothers. “Ruth” had a large family, while the other mothers ostensibly raised one daughter at a time. “Ruth” experienced being a (closeted) gay woman as an additionally complicating factor. This aspect of her identity was not permissible in her diocese and therefore her congregation could neither fully know nor truly support her:

“Ruth”: You know for me, the cost of being closeted has been hugely high, but I have carried that cost, because I haven't wanted to, either for myself or for, particularly, for my children, do the whole “coming out” process, because I just think that then the cost would be too great to

everybody, to the whole family unit. So then one carries the cost of that. I don't know. Will things change? I don't know.

Being single and not being heterosexual both raise huge questions about the definition of family within church context. These questions include issues of self-determination and autonomy. Allison Moore raises similar questions about the definition and presentation of family:

All denominations expect clergy and their families, when they have families, to live in accordance with Scripture and Christian tradition. Yet significant controversies exist over what Scripture and tradition say about the definition of family, the proper role of women in the home and public sphere, the holiness of egalitarian heterosexual relationships rather than families where ultimate decision-making power rests with the male head of house, and whether same-sex relationships can be holy and blessed by God.²¹⁶

“Eve’s” experience indicates that Moore’s assessment of American churches’ expectations of family are reflected within ACSA as well. “Eve’s” own family model as a single mother did not fit the stereotype of “clergy family”. What is more as a black South African she felt the burden of cultural expectation as well. She said:

“Eve”: On the whole I have become more and more conscious of the fact that the church isn't able to cope amongst other things, with singleness. They don't know how to do that. You were saying earlier on how they want to make sure that your family supports you. But what is family to them? Family is wife and obedient children. Family is moveable wife and moveable children. It get's awkward when family turns out to be a husband. Or family turns out to be children only. Or family turns out to be non-biological - then we are not prepared for that. We want you - the male priest with your obedient wife – if it's a Zulu congregation she will lead the mother's union – with or without her leadership qualities – if it's an “English speaking” (our euphemisms for race) she'll be music director and Sunday school superintendent. And the flower arrangers, of course, will be helped by her. And we push through. We don't do much to challenge it because we have pledged canonical obedience - which still needs to be interpreted.

²¹⁶ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 133.

“Eve” went on to clearly articulate some of the origins of the unrealistic expectations and some of the damage to clergy families that can result. She said:

“Eve”: The clergy family is supposed to be the ideal family – it’s the model family – ideally people look up to you and see how a family should be. Reality is something else again. Sacrificed families and tidying up when you don’t want to tidy up. But also coming from our Roman Catholic model – I mean priest Father was Father over there. And people had no relating to them as a father, as a husband. And now we have mothers and wives and partners. But I think family life makes for richer ministry at the expense of the family.

When asked whether ministry transforms family life, “Eve” was quite blunt about the negative impact:

“Eve”: It actually (I mean, transform is a nicer word), I think it actually kills it – destroys it. Because the reality – the expectations are unrealistic – and because we are bent on this ladder. We get too caught up climbing it – or trying to keep our place on it to see what’s happening under our noses. I think the JOY model we learned at Sunday School – Jesus, Others and then Yourself – hasn’t been helpful in that you then prioritise other people. You will go visit those people in hospital. You will go see that new family. And you’ll miss out on what is happening at home. Your own will not get as much attention - but then it’s work and they are only your children – but that’s work.

“Eve” most profoundly articulates the fundamental dialectal tension between the two vocations. When “Eve” was asked directly if she felt that her vocation prevented other potential intimate partnership from developing she responded in the affirmative:

“Eve”: It certainly did in that once you were a priest you had to be very careful. I mean for me as a single mother you are careful – especially with a girl child – you’re careful about who comes in and out of your life. But also you have to carry the mantle of woman clergy very cautiously for others after you. You don’t want to be doing things that are going to be used against other women after you. And the hours we work and the demands of the job don’t quite open you to other relationships. You actually eventually get confined to clergy people who understand how you operate.

She was not the only clergywoman to experience the ways in which ministry took over her life and made it complicated to consider trying to date or begin a long-term partnership:

“Sarah”: I mean there were times that you longed to have someone to come and to share something with and you can’t – I mean you can’t share with your child. You want your child to love the church. You don’t want the child to come to hate the church. And those are the moments that you miss somebody. But otherwise I have enjoyed being a single person, independent. And as I think back, I think, who would ever have wanted to live with me? You know the kind of ministry...

“Ruth” echoes this sense of family being good for ministry, but ministry not necessarily being good for family. She expressed deep resentment about the way her own needs were not recognised or taken care of by the community and she saw this as a gender related issue. Her stories exemplified some of the completely unrealistic expectations on women (clergy and mothers).

“Ruth”: In my context, being a single mother makes it much more difficult. When I have got to go out, there is no one to stay with the kids at home. It is very interesting, I have got friends who are divorced, single fathers, either with kids or without kids, and it is so interesting listening to them. From the time that they have been divorced, they have never cooked a meal! Parishioners, women parishioners, in the parish bring them meals every week, frozen meals, for them for the whole week. They have never had to cook a meal. Whenever they need anything done in the house, whenever they need somebody to fetch the children from schools, the women in the parish fetch the kids.

Elizabeth: So they’ve got a million wives!

“Ruth”: Yes! And they do this without blinking an eyelid. I have never once had anybody offer to make me a meal, never once, never once had anybody offer to pick my kids up, ever, I have never once had anybody offer to babysit my children. [...] Male clergy, they often get built in domestic workers, you know, into their budget. It certainly does not get built in for a woman priest! You know, you’d probably have to actually negotiate that with the parish. No! Ja, no, no, it is very difficult to be a single mother, there is just no allowances made for that whatever. And then for me, being a gay woman, it has been extremely difficult, because it just means that my whole life has been completely schizophrenically split, you know, and it just means that I can never share anything of my personal life with anyone in the parish. There is this whole closeting - it just means that, in effect, the parish can never care for me, because it is just not possible.

African women theologians have written extensively about the fact that while church might provide a place of solace for many women, it sadly, too often, is found to be a place that wounds, neglects and alienates women. Some of these stories are captured in two of the previously mentioned Circle publications, *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions* and *HerStories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*. Many of these stories also highlight the expectation that women will provide hospitality and care but cannot expect to be cared for in turn.

Thus far in the chapter there has been an emphasis on the difficulties of merging mothering and priesting. But “Sarah’s” story below offers a different and important perspective that experiences mothering as meditative. The arrival of her grandson has made “Sarah” conscientious about rearranging her time, attention and focus to include childcare as a central part of her life as a priest. She says:

“Sarah”: I mean that from birth I took care of him. And how precious that was because I would run from my room to feed him give him the last feed so that as I’m holding him I would imagine God holding me. And that was my time of my being with God in his presence as I held this child and fed this child. Or as he grew older and he was in the bath and I just sat and I watched him play and that was my quiet time with God. [...] This is my quiet time – and he’s having a bath and he’s watching TV and you are looking at him and those are the quiet times – although you are not watching his Winnie the Poo – you are in a different place but at the same time you are in the presence – I really really appreciated those times.

This is a good example of how children can provide a healthy reminder to renegotiate priorities. In a way, through rituals of mothering, children can minister to their mothers (and others) who are priests. The interview conversations indicated clearly that having a family could enrich ministry (although several also indicated that the inverse was not necessarily true). Allison Moore quotes a clergy mother who said, “Mothering and working forces you to take enough care of yourself to be a good human in both arenas.” Moore goes on to explain:

In her case, physical limits helped her to set appropriate boundaries at work and routines at home. This contrasts with another kind of pastor, often male, who overfunctions at work because home obligations are either non-existent or performed by someone else.²¹⁷

Perhaps it can prevent workaholism. Moore is indicating that priesting can be a very different experience for clergy fathers whose wives are primarily responsible for the care of their children. In the course of her research, Moore found:

Expectations of clergy and of mothers and fathers make the reality of male and female lives very different. Clergy mothers challenge both the norms of male clergy and the social messages about mothers. Their stories reveal important contradictions in social and economic structure shaping life in the United States, uncover implicit assumptions about holiness and vocation, and offer new models of vocation. Clergy women have often challenged structures and expectations intuitively, following their sense of God's call and their responsibilities to family and community.²¹⁸

Her findings are a clear reflection of the South African experience as well. It is a complex life. It is a rich and challenging life. It is critical that clergy mothers conscientiously renegotiate the boundaries and the expectations.

In conclusion, these stories explored the praxis of priesthood and demonstrated the complexities of merging the dual vocations of motherhood and priesthood. We began by exploring the gendered experience that these participants had of vocation and discernment. Then we examined the importance of adequate and appropriate training for ministry. We then moved on to considerations of how priesthood as "divine occupation" is both different from and similar to secular employment for clergywomen. Finally, the specific challenges related to clergy motherhood were discussed.

²¹⁷ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 12.

²¹⁸ Moore, *Clergy Moms*, 6.

In this chapter as well as the previous, issues of power and inequality and sexism were intimated. In the following chapter I will explore these complex issues more fully and at length.

Chapter 7: Power

O God our disturber,
whose speech is pregnant with power
and whose word will be fulfilled:
may we know ourselves unsatisfied
with all that distorts your truth,
and make our hearts attentive
to your liberating voice,
in Jesus Christ, Amen.

-- Janet Morley²¹⁹

In the previous chapter I focused on the praxis of women in ministry and how it is particularly complicated for mothers. The conversations with the participants revealed that such complications are fundamentally about power, how it is understood, who benefits from it (and who does not), and how it is used and divided and transmitted to others. This is what will be discussed in this current chapter.

Renegotiating Leadership within the Anglican Communion

Penny Jamieson's experience as the very first diocesan woman bishop in the Anglican Communion continues to be a source of empowerment for many Anglican clergywomen. The shattering the stained glass ceiling involved a journey into marginalisation. In her book, *Living at the Edge: Sacrament and Solidarity in Leadership* she explains that it was not easy or comfortable:

The personal and social impact upon me of becoming a bishop was such that every single one of my relationships shifted: my family, my friends, my working relationships. The extraordinary novelty of what was happening was personally highly disruptive.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Janet Morley, *All Desires Known, Third Edition*. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, (2006), 17.

²²⁰ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 165.

The leadership of the Anglican Church is still overwhelmingly male. Jamieson unpacks the power dynamics critically:

The Christian church is so imbued with the normativity of male experience that female experience is excluded; in fact, it is simply not noticed, and the participation of women makes little difference, is not a focus for analysis or comment. The invisibility of women is thus sadly confirmed, just as is the male sense of ownership of the church.

But issues of institutional power are inevitably thrown sharply into focus when women, historically and structurally the ones over whom power was held, assume power within areas customarily reserved for men.²²¹

The consecration to the episcopacy of woman has certainly brought the reinvigorated debate about women's leadership and authority. She explains: "for women who have wrestled with both the theoretical and liberational challenges of the feminist movement over the past thirty years or so, the issue of the power that has origins and impulse in the spiritual realm is particularly significant."²²² Jamieson is analytical about power and raises important questions:

Much of our fascination about power derives from interest in and analysis of the major shifts in power and the distribution of power that have occurred in recent years. No organization, no institution has remained unaffected by these. They have raised such questions as: what is the nature of power? where is it located? are there any alternatives? what are the implications of our understandings of power for people and communities who have hitherto seen themselves as powerless?²²³

Jamieson recognises that in a truly gospel orientated Christianity the oppressed can never become the oppressor. Adrienne Rich, in her revolutionary book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, describes the potentially destructive but also transformative aspects of oppression:

Oppression is not the mother of virtue; oppression can warp, undermine, turn us into haters of ourselves. But it can also turn us into

²²¹ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 5-6.

²²² Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 6.

²²³ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 8.

realists, who neither hate ourselves nor assume we are merely innocent and unaccountable victims.²²⁴

Breaking the yoke of oppression and thereby doing justice is at the heart of the Christian message. This must remain the case even for women who become bishops:

The focus is particularly sharp when a woman gains a position that is identified as one of power, and carries with her all the ideals about transforming the nature of power. It is all too tempting for her to abandon her memories of her own struggle and suffering and, rejoicing in her own achievement, adopt the ways and means of those who have always been powerful, and embark on the oppression of others. So Moses becomes Pharaoh and the Virgin Mary becomes the Mother Superior.²²⁵

Jamieson is honest about admitting that this is no easy task. She has written specifically about authority, women and leadership and about how awkward it can be for women to begin to negotiate the power dynamics in an overwhelmingly sexist world and in a sexist church:

Women often find questions of leadership particularly difficult to deal with, undoubtedly because they are so readily associated with power. Women tend to stress the servant role of leadership, feeling more at ease with a serving use of their authority than with one of power. I think that this is a form of denial of the power that they do have, but it is also, more insidiously, a way of making the power that they hold acceptable to men; for the Christian tradition, essentially paternalistic, has always honoured the serving role of women and this honour is now generally seen as an ill-disguised but effective way of keeping them in their place.²²⁶

The place of women is no longer circumscribed strictly by our sex and our gender, but women cannot escape the ways in which these affect our engagement in church structures. One might ask why the stained glass windows are finally shattering now. Grace Jantzen speaks of a “web of knowledge, power and gender” which she explains thus:

²²⁴ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, xxxv.

²²⁵ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 10.

²²⁶ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 141.

A connection can be traced between the domestication of women and the domestication of religion such that claims to religious experience become permissible for women in direct proportion to the decline of overt public importance of religion.²²⁷

So Jantzen contends that it is not accidental that women are gaining power in the arena of priesthood precisely because religion no longer holds so much significance in the Western world. Can Jantzen's theory help to explain why ACSA has finally opened the door to women bishops? I would argue that in South Africa this can be explained not so much because of the decline of religion (in fact, statistics indicate that South Africa is more religious than ever), I contend that ACSA has simply imitated the political freedoms that include professional gender equity in the public sector. Even if the church no longer holds the political clout that it once did, being in the role of a priest still provides access to a certain kind of power.

Likewise being in the role of a mother is a conduit to power. We can trace the source of power (if we are to understand power as the source of love) back to the symbolic Mother God and our attachment to her. Recalling that the Hebrew word for compassion or mercy is *rachamim*. The root word is *rechem*, which means womb, we can understand God's compassionate love for us as all encompassing, nurturing, and empowering.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye defines power simply as "the ability, skill and know-how, and the strength to do something or to make something happen."²²⁸

James R. Cochrane also has some interesting thoughts on power in his book *Circles of Dignity*:

Everything about incipient theologies, about the interaction between theologically trained people and untrained laypeople, about speech with the other, is fraught with questions of control, surveillance, authority, disguise. Everywhere we encounter the effects of power in the context of constrained and unequal relations between people.²²⁹

²²⁷ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, xv-xvi.

²²⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Transforming Power: Paradigms from the Novels of Buchi Emecheta," in *Talitha Cum!: Theologies of African Women*, (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 223.

²²⁹ Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity*, 71.

He explains:

Power is not a mysterious force, but the expression of social relations that never stand still are never fully under anyone's control. Power as a dynamic, unsubstantial matrix embraces everyone, and it is in some measure the effect of the agency of everyone.²³⁰

The emotional, physical, intellectual and psychological power over those in the care of both priest and mother cannot be underestimated. The status conferred by the roles is not always comfortable or appropriate. One of the participants, "Eve", stated clearly in our interview conversation:

"Eve": Being clergy is power. And how ready are we to kick the pedestal – because you come into a parish and they want to put you on a pedestal. Do we sit easily on that pedestal? Do we allow them to put us on that pedestal? (that they have put Father on...) I mean everybody knows exactly how Father wants his tea. And it is those little things – people know exactly how Father wants his bread buttered so they rush in and do that for him. Is it ok for me to go and make my own? Do I go on exploiting these women [parishioners]? I mean for me, there is this great danger of coming into a parish and being GOD. Unfortunately there is no – it's no easy settlement for us – we are aware of these and how do we not become like our brothers – without being against them?

"Eve" was well aware that the political gains for women in the country directly correlated with men feeling more threatened about the leadership of women in the church. She spoke of the sympathy that she felt for the men that were struggling with a new more gender equitable dispensation in post-apartheid affirmative action South Africa:

"Eve": I used to say at [my former Zulu parish] I feel sorry for you guys here. You already have mother hen at home. And some of you might have a female boss at work. And you come here and you still find another woman. This is all new to you. And so I think it's awkward, it's difficult that the power thing... The bottom line is the power – are you really the person in power?

²³⁰ Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity*, 79.

The question raised by “Eve”, Are you really the person in power is precisely the question we need to ask about women bishops in ACSA.

Women Bishops in Power?

The recent elections and consecrations of the first two women bishops in the African-wide Anglican Church have been widely accepted as steps on the church’s journey towards wholeness. But what kind of power do they really have, what kind of power were they given, and how will they use this power?

Ellinah Wamukoya joined ranks with the primates in Swaziland in 2012 and Margaret Vertue was elected in False Bay in the Western Cape that same year and consecrated in early 2013. Margaret Vertue is unmarried and has never had children. She was among the first women priest ordained in the Church of the Province in Southern Africa (as it was then called) by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Swazi bishop, Ellinah Wamukoya is married with children and grandchildren. At the time of her election she had been a priest for five years and previously worked as the mayor of Manzini and chaplain to Swaziland University. She is quoted in a BBC online article as saying: "I am going to try to represent the mother attribute of God." She explained, "A mother is a caring person but at the same time, a mother can be firm in doing whatever she is doing."²³¹ This echoes the powerful statement made by the bishop Jane Holmes Dixon in the USA at the transitional moment of her consecration: "I am a symbol of the inclusiveness of God,"²³²

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba (recalling Jesus’ cry from the cross) wrote a beautiful and clearly delighted report of the service that welcomed the first local woman bishop:

²³¹ BBC News Africa, “Ellinah Wamukoya becomes Africa’s first Anglican woman bishop,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20408199> (Accessed 5th November, 2014)

²³² The Archives of the Episcopal Church, “Consecration of Church’s Second Woman Bishop ‘Points to the Future,’” http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=92237 (Accessed 5th November, 2014).

And now our task has been completed! It is done! Welcome to Bishop Ellinah! We formed into three processions, and, like good Anglicans, we sung our beautiful hymns to a beautifully and prayerfully crafted liturgy. From the back of the procession, I could see nine mitres ahead of me, piercing the sky, as each procession went into the Mavuso Trade Centre, where between three and four thousand faithful gathered to witness Ellinah being 'done'.²³³

There is clearly overwhelming excitement in certain circles about this new development, but there is also some concern that it could just be 'window dressing.' The first consecrations have been 'done,' but the more crucial question is how what has been 'done' might transform power within the church. The leadership now reflects iconic motherhood (as recognised by Wamukoya) alongside the patriarchs. What these women bishops represent, whether or not it is in the name of feminism or simply in the name of the radical equality espoused and demonstrated in the original gospel texts, is the beginning of the journey towards rebalancing leadership and authority in the sanctuary, and influential decision-making at the bishops' conferences and synods and elective assemblies. As Sue Monk Kidd has observed:

Empowerment also comes into a woman's life as she finds her inner authority. The word *authority* has lots of meanings, both positive and negative, but I like the meaning that comes from the Greek: "to stand forth with power and dignity."²³⁴

In the previous chapters I explored how motherhood is seen more as a liability than an asset and the institution of motherhood has been devalued and women have been disempowered, however clergywomen (as bishops) now can empower others for service and authority through the rituals of ordination (and confirmation). As Green has observed:

The woman priest at the altar is visibly and audibly a representation of the feminine/female. By this I mean that she embodies both the biological characteristics and the traits of behavior and outlook

²³³ Anglican Church of Southern Africa, "Archbishop Thabo Writes on the Consecration of Bishop Ellinah, Swaziland," <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?ItemID=491&tname=tblComponent1&oname=News&pg=front> (Accessed on 14 April 2014).

²³⁴ Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine*. San Francisco: Harper, (2002), 210.

traditionally ascribed to her sex within a cultural context. [...] Hence the woman priest causes a shift in the symbolism associated with priesthood itself, because it is now a priesthood not of one sex but of both sexes. It is a shift that causes us to look again at how we understand and respond to God, how we interpret Scripture, how we worship and how we live as Christians in the world.²³⁵

Green draws our attention to the fact that power does not have to be conceived as domineering – it can also be nurturing, serving, cooperative, partnering and empowering. But these are not the only ways in which women can be powerful. The women's health manual *Our Bodies Ourselves* offers a useful definition of power:

Personal power means different things to different people; Self-esteem, sense of identity (group and/or individual), positive body image, self-confidence, enjoyment in what one does, a sense of contributing to the community, financial stability/earning power, self-reliance, ability to communicate... the list goes on. For many of us, finding personal power means finding inner strength—a sense of ourselves and who we are, what we need and what we want.²³⁶

As a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa, I was taught that we should always be working ourselves out of a job – passing on skills and confidence and relationships so that local community members might extend and improve the temporary projects of the volunteers. In ministry and in motherhood, empowering others ought also to be an important objective. This mothering ministry is focused on nurturing and serving others, often to the point of self-sacrifice. Can we conceptually revalue the servant work of parents (overwhelmingly done by mothers) and priests? This would require explicitly sharing out the nurturing parenting (ministering) responsibilities both in the home and in the church so that every one takes responsibility. More mature mothers and fathers (clergy and laity) would provide children with more fertile ground in which to flourish. Adrienne Rich defines feminism as “developing the nurturing qualities of women and men.”²³⁷ And Meister Eckhart declared,

²³⁵ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 5.

²³⁶ The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, 157.

²³⁷ Fox, *Original Blessing*, 223.

“We are all meant to be mothers of God because God is always needing to be born”.²³⁸

Hence engaging in motherhood is also a means of accessing power. Mothers obviously have massive influence over their children. But the power of the mother spills beyond the confines of the family relationships. Adrienne Rich explains:

The power of the mother has two aspects: the biological potential or capacity to bear and nourish human life, and the magical power invested in women by men, whether in the form of Goddess-worship or the fear of being controlled and overwhelmed by women.²³⁹

The mother attribute of God that Wamukoya seeks to embody for the church can be threatening for many. We have yet to learn how our mother bishops will lead us and whether they will empower other women to find their own distinct voices in the church. But Wamukoya’s bold statement that she embodies the mother attribute of God is a first step towards changing the iconography and praxis associated with priesthood and therefore a shift in the symbolism of power. Critiques levelled against women in such powerful positions often centre around tokenism and the notion of women playing the game according to the established rules. Nevertheless, Wamukoya and Vertue are pioneers. One would hope that they have found solidarity with each other as they break into the House of Bishops. But it has yet to be determined whether they will be agents of transformation or whether they will be co-opted by an overwhelmingly male dominated and masculinist institution.

The comparisons can be drawn between this pair of Southern African Anglican women bishops and the first two Episcopal women bishops in the United States, Barbara Harris and Jane Holmes Dixon. Obviously, as with their American counterparts, one is black and one white. One is a married mother and grandmother while the other is not (Barbara Harris is divorced and never had children). One was among the pioneering women priests in her

²³⁸ Fox, *Original Blessing*, 222.

²³⁹ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 13.

diocese (Margaret Vertue was ordained by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1992); the other was ordained later in life (Ellinah Wamukoya worked in city management first).

The global Anglican Church has much to learn from the beacon of witness provided by the late Jane Holmes Dixon and from the continuing faithful pilgrimage of Barbara Harris. They too are our mothers in the Anglican Church. Mark Bozzuti-Jones has written a charmingly accessible biography called *The Miter Fits Just Fine: A Story about the RT. Rev. Barbara Clementine Harris*. Unfortunately, it ends abruptly with her consecration. It did not examine in any depth the ways in which she has claimed and practiced her authority and power. But it did conclude on a note of positive determined activism in her own words:

The world today is looking for truth; it is looking for justice; it is looking for those who have compassion, yea even more for those who are willing to demonstrate their faith and their convictions by being examples of that which we profess. No one expects us to eliminate all of the evil of the world, nor to liberate all those who are oppressed, nor to feed all who are hungry or to house the millions who are homeless. But when the oppressed see one who fights for liberation, their burden is lightened because they know that somebody cares. When the victims of injustice see one who is fighting for justice, their suffering is a little less painful because they know that somebody cares. When the world sees one who takes a righteous stand and is willing to be persecuted for righteousness sake, it knows that somebody cares.²⁴⁰

There are countless stories and examples of the ways in which Harris and Dixon have touched lives and empowered others through their ministries and their commitment to social justice and inclusivity. In theory, these women have unlocked the door to accessing power and have ushered in the church's long overdue welcome of women into positions of ecclesiastical authority. However, the stories of the participants as expressed in the previous two chapters and as I will show below, reflect that this access to power is dogged by sexism and sub-ordination.

²⁴⁰ Bozzuti-Jones, *The Miter Fits Just Fine*, 86.

Mothers - not Fathers: Questions of Sexism and Sub-ordination

Clergywomen are not “Fathers” and no priest (of either gender) is more closely affiliated with God than any one else. The very last interview ended with a conversation with “Eve” about the manifest and the manipulative power of clergy. She was openly critical of the church and of all the clergy who use power to their own advantage and to exploit people. Power and status are part and parcel of being a priest, but how power is used speaks volumes about the people who assume the office. My idealistic assumption that the mere presence of women priests is a challenge to the church was in turn challenged by the lack of common cause for structural change within the institution. “Eve” disagreed that presence alone made a difference:

“Eve”: If you don’t come in as Esther, they call it being polystrategic – but still have the Vashti. And we have been talking largely about the fairness – or lack thereof of this to our families and all that we come with. There is also the reality of the burden on ourselves as individuals. And I think we have different energy levels for it – some people have just had it – they’ve had enough fighting. And other people still have the energy. But is the climate conducive?

Elizabeth: And is there solidarity? Is there real solidarity – not just token making nice solidarity for the happy picture but is there real, as you say “political will” – and common cause? You need women to see the common cause and really want to [work together for change].

“Eve”: We are such a diversity – I mean we have madam CEO pontificating before her episcopal husband. So it does begin when you go to seminary – it begins right at the beginning. In the family – in the home – but are we really in the home or busy fixing the church? And for me there is a strong need to choose our battles.

Elizabeth: Ya. No. You are absolutely right. But we are not going to get young women in and we are not going to get young women to stay if we don’t make it... conducive and accommodating are the words that come to mind but those are the wrong words...

“Eve”: [We need] a safe space.

Elizabeth: Yes! That is safe and that is realistic about what our needs are as women.

“Eve”: But I also take comfort in the fact that however hard we try to preserve and protect the institution as is – it has to change. The model of clergy has to change. The whole thing has to change and there will be resistance to the change because the status quo favours parts. It just has to [change]. We talk about: Are we going to be able to attract young women – we’re not even going to be able to attract young men at the rate at which we are going. [...] But that narrow door is dangerous. And bishop will look good because he will still ordain many women at the end of the year [...] but where are they? And people say you can’t waste time with this feminist nonsense – you [must just] love Jesus.

“Eve” highlights the need for critical feminist discourse within the church in order to dismantle these destructive power structures. She sees that individual piety is dangerous. She raises profoundly problematic questions of sexism and sub-ordination (and even of complicit co-option) being raised by the presence of women in positions of leadership and authority within ACSA. “Eve” is hopeful because she sees that change is inevitable. But the process of actively working for it has worn her down. The sacrifices have been huge. She refuses to see her ordination as lesser and has worked hard to be what she calls “full-clergy” and to be taken seriously as an equal member. Tragically, she explained that the priest who exploited her the most was another woman (as referred to in the chapter on praxis). She says that sexism in the church is rife:

“Eve”: It comes at varying levels and shades – from when a male priest comes in nobody asks them what they would like to be called. For me it begins with people saying, So what should we call you? When Father [X] arrives, nobody asks if they can call him [X]. But with you, they will ask you. [...] Depending on your age and experience and even your race, people will patronise you. People will want to also tease out your relationship with the institution you represent. And people will question your relationship with the one whose license you hold. And people then need to determine if you are the bishop’s blue-eyed boy/girl or are you here just doing what the bishop wants you to do? Are you truly capable of what needs to be done? Do you really want to do what you have been called to do? And with a woman clergy person, old church wardens will want to run your meetings for you and run the show for you – because they care for you – because you have to look after your children. Without you saying – they don’t allow you to draw the boundaries – but they know for you - they know women. This is what women would want. They KNOW you won’t worry about the house as

such but you worry about the colour. It vacillates between people totally ignoring your needs as a woman and people patronising you.

It seems that sexism is so ingrained that it has become normalised. “Rebekah” talked about experiencing “sub-conscious/unconscious sexism”. She explained:

“Rebekah”: I am often called ‘my girl’ which indicates that you are lesser and littler. I was given a compliment the other day, terms of endearment: ‘You are such a clever little girl’. Yes that’s rampant! You have got to have humour about it and say, Okay, yes, well, that’s where they are coming from, that’s okay. And again it has to do with whether you are very confident about where you are, and what you are able to do, and what you are called to do, or not. [...] But overt stuff? I have never been in a community that has said that women aren’t allowed to go into the sanctuary, women can’t teach, or be in a leadership role. I haven’t experienced that, thankfully. I haven’t had to fight those battles because they’ve been fought before me. Or, because church is just one aspect of a person’s life experience, and they’ve already had those barriers in them broken outside of church, at work or at school or at home.

She went on to say:

“Rebekah”: I think that if true equality is to be experienced, then the institution needs to be changed, ja. The only thing is, it only gets changed from the inside. Yes I do think it is a pipedream in a patriarchal institution. I think that’s what the contribution of ordained women can be and women bishops, etc. As women take on leadership roles and fatherly roles within the institution, so the institution will have to be constituted on a different ground. Not on the ground of fatherly authority, but on the ground of some other form of authority... I don’t know, or does it have to be authority, maybe it will be about belonging and not about authority, I am not sure. I think we are still in the process of that.

“Rebekah’s” discomfort with the concept of fatherly authority speaks of a longing for transformative views of authority and power. This is why an embodied theology (that has been referred to throughout this thesis) is important. And this is why clergywomen’s bodies can be a catalyst for reconceptualising power. As Rich asserts:

The repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by the workers. The female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be exploited and assembly-line turning out life. We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console and alter human existence—a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed.

This is where we have to begin.²⁴¹

But even as we begin to consider our bodies as catalysts for reconceptualising power, we are confronted with the overwhelming patriarchy that is deeply embedded in the body of Christ. “Ruth” explains this emphatically:

“Ruth”: It’s patriarchy! So there is no space for equality... No, I mean it’s incompatible. It is like saying, is there space for equality in apartheid? Dur! It is like no, obviously not! No, however you try to paint it otherwise, you know “separate but equal”... yeah, whatever! [...] I mean there is sexism from the bishop all the way down to every one of one’s colleagues. And I think what is difficult is that it’s perpetual sexism, it is not once off. [...] Sometimes you struggle with sexual harassment in the parish. That can definitely happen, but if you are the rector... I think it is different if you are an assistant priest. When I was an assistant priest I struggled a lot more with issues of sexuality, because you had a rector, and so people would always be appealing to the rector [saying], She doesn’t tie her hair up when she does Mass; she doesn’t wear stockings; she doesn’t wear a petticoat; her skirt is too high. You know? When you are a rector they are hardly going to write to the bishop about those issues! So I think it is different. If you are a rector you’ve got a lot more capacity to [make changes].

So the capacity to make changes, according to “Ruth” lies with the level of power granted to different clergywomen. She made clear that at a diocesan level gender issues did not seem to be a priority:

“Ruth”: I feel like we are regressing on gender issues, you know. I think that at one stage gender issues were being far more clearly articulated and named, there was stronger, there was stronger support of women,

²⁴¹ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 285-286.

we have lost a lot of that, we have lost a huge amount of that. Gender issues are off the radar now, they are not being articulated, named, at all, I don't feel. And I don't think that there is strong support amongst women anymore either. So that makes it a lot harder. So I don't know. I feel like we have regressed, you know, even though there are more women in numbers. Ja, I don't know.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, clergywomen sometimes are given lesser responsibilities that are aligned with a more domestic role. "Eve" qualified that this sub-ordination that may be experienced by some clergywomen is not necessarily intentional. She thought that even though twenty years have gone by since the first ordination of women priests, we have not insisted upon real structural change. She indicated that women might have to assume some responsibility for creating this situation:

"Eve": Again there is that distinction between intended and acted out/played out. There is a big schism between those two. I don't think it was meant to be a sub-ordination. But as with the ninety-four South Africa, I don't think enough preparatory work was done – [or] mind-set change was allowed for it. I don't think the church paused enough to anticipate what it meant to have women because we have almost sneaked in through the back door. And not caused any ripples. We haven't wanted to bother anybody. We wanted to fit in quietly. Rewind stop delay progress. And again, life is always about striking a balance. We – how far do we go? For me it's the question of are we ready – or how ready are we to seek conditions for our convenience without being seen to be wanting to be treated specially and differently? A breast-feeding woman should be allowed.

Elizabeth: There we go. See this is what I'm coming to – the breastfeeding, the pregnancies, the maternity leave – we are different. And we have children to take care of

"Eve": We are different – so how do we accommodate that – how do you have that accommodated without our climb being compromised?

Hannah answered the question about sub-ordination from the perspective of her experience working with the hierarchy and she saw the direct link with the issue of the possibility of women bishops. She also found that women could be their own worst enemies because of competition and complicity:

"Hannah": I have had a little bit more experience working with the house of bishops than most clergy. I think there are some bishops who

are very scared of the idea that we are open to having female bishops. I think that it is difficult for the church to be vocal about that because when your bishop says that he would like to have a woman bishop on the bench of bishops is he saying that because it is the politically correct thing to do or because that is really the need of the church? Some bishops that I have come across I don't think are at all ready to have a woman bishop sitting on the bench of bishops. So congregationally – I think the biggest critique for me is that women don't support women – and I think that when you come into parishes there will be some women who will make your life difficult. For whatever reason. You think the women will support you. In a patriarchal institution like the church – at this stage in our context – I think we are not there. Statistically – if you look at the province: nineteen women – one in three - in what we consider to be a progressive diocese. We have some dioceses in this province who don't ordain women. You know, for them the bishop makes the decision in that diocese to not ordain women. So no, we are a long way off. And yet it is the women who fill the church. It's the women who run the fundraisers. And in my opinion it is the women clergy who do the more difficult work. In this diocese, we have women who are prison chaplains, women who run the HIV projects, women who run the social development. I'm not saying that parish life is any less difficult. And then when you work in an extra-parochial ministry, the diocese [doesn't take you seriously]. You are not in a parish, so really, what is your problem? That seems to be the attitude. I often get that. What do you do, really? Ya, the biggest critique when I got this job [as chaplain] was: She's not even a rector, she's just a curate and now she's moving into this very cushy job. [...] I was totally amazed. Very often I want to show them my pay slip because, no, I don't get paid what they think I get paid. So just get off your soapbox. So, in many ways, I'm grateful that I'm here [in this chaplaincy] because I can just get on with it. But some of them are just too much for me. So I like going to synod just to see the reactions: Oh, she's here! Or just to hear what the latest drama is about. But I don't think they are anywhere near ready to call up [a woman bishop] - they are almost second-class citizens.

The hierarchy of the clergy ranks is undermining and demeaning as explained by “Hannah’s” story. It goes against all expectations that the church will be a place of equality and equity. The quest for justice is precisely what Letty Russell and Musimbi Kanyoro are calling for through their round table theology. They are suggesting a flattening of structures that is consultative and welcoming of difference. Russell speaks about the need for postcolonial practice in church circles in her chapter “Women’s Voices and Visions of the Church” found in a World Council of Churches publication of the same name. She says:

Feminist theologies of the church in post colonial perspective reflect on God's healing and liberating presence in our lives and world by analyzing and resisting the ongoing effects of colonialism on the colonized, the collaborators, and the colonizers, and joining God in recreating a world which is life giving for all women and children together with men and the whole creation.²⁴²

Russell's massive project can only be actualised by beginning to contemplate the small differences that can be made within families and church communities. Healing and liberation can occur in parish and home situations when mother priests attempt to carve out a feasible and gratifying and life giving ministry and family life.

There was a sense of disappointment and distrust expressed by most of the clergywomen through their stories. Most found that it was best to focus on ministry and not get too involved with the political aspect of the church. "Rachel" also found that there was more sexism in the institution and less in the parishes:

"Rachel": It's certainly rampant in the institution – I don't think that is even a question. I don't think that it's rampant in the congregations where I work. I think - there are three congregations where I work. [...] And [the sexism is] never directed against me – but certain assumptions about gender roles for example. Ya – I think that is where I encounter it the most.

"Rachel" sees that the patriarchal structures need to be challenged at an institutional level more than within the individual parishes. Although "Sarah" was aware of the problem of sexism in the hierarchy, it wasn't an important issue for her. She was more concerned about other divisions within the church:

²⁴² Letty M Russell, "Women's Voices and Visions of the Church: Reflections from North America" in *Women's Voices and Visions of the Church: Reflections from North America*, eds. Letty M Russell, Aruna Gnanadason and J Shannon Clarkson (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 20.

“Sarah”: It’s very obviously there. It’s going to take a long time, I think. It is moving at a very slow pace. I think the ANC government has beaten us to it.

She admired the gender equity that increasingly was reflected in government. She was hopeful that things were changing in the church as well. The interview with “Sarah” was the first one following the consecrations of the first two women bishops in the Province. She saw genuine equality as a real possibility:

“Sarah”: I think we can get there. Slowly – we have two women bishops and I think we will eventually get there. And I mean, it’s amazing that the men now are voting for the women. I think we have come a long way. We’ve come a long long way. [...] I mean – Margaret Vertue – I mean you think of Cape Town. When they make up their minds, they make up their minds! So there is [equality]: women have become rectors and archdeacons and canons and so on.

“Mary” also spoke about the way women were being accepted into the house of bishops, but with more criticism and less optimism:

“Mary”: The church is so sexist and it doesn’t even see it. They think that is how things are and you don’t need to apologise. You know you are a woman so you can’t make decisions or tell us what to do or you know, you can’t pick up that chair because you are a woman. Those stupid insinuations that get [made]: Oh because you are here can you make tea for us. And they think that is ok - and for me I don’t think that is ok. And we are so patriarchal – even with the women bishops that are coming in. I’m looking at them and I’m saying they have already bought into the structure. One, their behaviour. I have seen them amongst their brother bishops and I struggled to find one because I was looking for this woman – who I know she is there – but I couldn’t see her because she so looked like the men. And for me it was scary – what is it again that distinguishes us even if we wear the same robes? That says you are a woman here. And the patriarchal system will always be there because we don’t know how to do team ministry. Somebody has to be the boss. And I don’t know how we still do that in this day and age. When we talk of collective leadership or collective responsibility or collective something – I don’t know why the church still does this - those steps of whose at this level or that level. And laity who was so supportive and so amazing in the church are still at the bottom. They don’t get consulted unless we want money from them. But in terms of serious decision-making – they are not part of the process. And that worries me that the church is not moving to a place where we are all equals while others are set apart to do certain ministries.

On the question of whether the ordination of women is still a sub-ordination and whether women were complicit in our own sub-ordination, there were a variety of responses. But only one person said that it was not:

“Sarah”: No I don’t think it is a sub-ordination. It depends on your attitude – what you went in with as well. And if you thought that you were second. No, I think I’m just as equal to anyone else. In my thinking and my presenting of the Gospel. I really think so.

Others were more ambivalent about whether clergywomen received less acceptance, support and respect than their male counterparts. As discussed in the previous chapters, this had to do with training, self-confidence, a sense of one’s own authority, the lack of solidarity among women and the issues of sexism discussed above:

“Rebekah”: Is it a sub-ordination? No. You know we don’t have a different rite that we go through, we don’t have a different training system or a different code of practice - nothing like that. Complicity? Yes – that’s what I’m thinking about now... I would have a real problem if I was working with a woman priest who kept referring to her husband as the head of the household. I mean we haven’t even spoken about that dynamic. With [my husband] and me both being in the ministry I think sometimes there was an assumption that I bounced everything off him. Which I didn’t do. He bounced stuff off me because he was learning. But I think there will often be an assumption that a woman, even if she is a priest, will bounce things off her husband and take advice from him. So in that sense there is sexism still and I think women can be complicit if they allow their husband to interfere with their ministry, put it that way, because that will undermine their authority.

“Ruth” also spoke about some of the complications associated with ministry within a patriarchal institution:

“Ruth”: I don’t know if I would call it a sub-ordination, but I think it depends maybe on how you choose to exercise your vocation. I think it’s like the question of is allowing gay people to be married really just propping up the whole heterosexual, patriarchal system? Well, some could argue that, but I would say no. Marriage is a sacrament that is a gift to all people. Ordination is a calling that is available to all people, women included. I have the right to be ordained. Unfortunately we are

ordained into a patriarchal system, so it is not just the vocation. It is the institution in which you exercise your vocation that sometimes feels irredeemably patriarchal. And so even women who are within that system, to a certain extent of course, even yourself, you are working within those parameters. So like for instance, the way I have done it, I just basically don't get involved in hardly anything diocesan anymore. I just focus on being a parish priest. So, I wouldn't want to say: Ordaining women, no we shouldn't do that. I wouldn't want to say that, because I think we need people in the system to actually challenge the system from within.

“Ruth’s” position differs from that of feminists, like Mary Daly, who have chosen to leave the confines of the institutional church. Susan Rakoczy has explained why some women might choose to leave:

Revolutionary feminist theology is a post-Christian response to the patriarchy in the Christian tradition. These women walk out the door of the Christian community, convinced that since the dominant image of God is male, Christianity is irredeemably patriarchal and oppressive to women.²⁴³

Obviously, the clergywomen I interviewed have all made a conscious decision to remain within the confines of the church and work from change from within. “Ruth’s” position seemed to align with what Anne Clifford calls a reconstructionist Christian feminist theology which sees a place for women within the Christian tradition, “while also envisioning a deeper transformation, a true reconstruction, not only of their church structures, but also of civil society.”²⁴⁴ “Ruth” said:

“Ruth”: Yes, so I think it is critical, I think people need images of women priests, people need to hear women preaching. We do preach differently, we pastor differently and [this influences] people's experience of that. I mean in my parish, where people are choosing a new priest, most people were saying, Can't we get another woman priest? Without a doubt. I mean that was almost first on their agenda. And the bishop was there and he was so blunt and he said, You cannot get another priest like “Ruth”. Now that was not about me, personally, but it was what women represent. I think that threatens male clergy because as women we generally tend to be much better priests, much

²⁴³ Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 16.

²⁴⁴ Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, (2001), 33.

better priests. I don't even think that is a debatable statement. It is the truth.

“Ruth’s” assertion about changing the image of priesthood through clergywomen’s presence and praxis has already been explored in the previous chapters. She went as far as to say that women’s priesthood is a challenge to clergymen because women bring a different experience that makes them “better priests”. “Ruth” said: *“And I think that’s very threatening to men, very threatening to men.”*

However, the power of clergywomen is not only threatening to men. It also threatens other women, as “Ruth” continues to reflect below:

“Ruth”: So I think we need women and we need much more women. But I think the danger is how we women are priests with one another at a clerical level. Because there isn’t really much support between women. I still think we tend to, then, like women in the patriarchal situation, become quite competitive with one another. I think you get some women who sell out completely, like old IFP,²⁴⁵ and I think you get those women like that and they just sell us, and ja, I think it is difficult.

This issue of the lack of solidarity was echoed by “Hannah’s” experience her prioritising the power struggles that she chooses to take on:

“Hannah”: When there are so many other people who are really dependent on you. You know I have small children; I have my husband, parents. Do I take this on? And am I going to have support? Because when it comes – the day when they consecrate a woman bishop – she’s going to have a difficult job – because we are all going to critique her. We are either going to support her completely or we are going to be jealous - I would hate to be that woman. So I think yes – our sub-ordination makes us that way. Because if it’s a fight we are going to win, we have to rally. And I think the thing that we don’t do well as women clergy is that we don’t rally. [...] We haven’t organised ourselves well enough to get a motion through to provincial synod or five or six women to say these are the women who are probably going to best serve us as a bishop and support them. [If you are the first] you are going to get it from all sides. Is it going to be window dressing?

²⁴⁵ The Inkatha Freedom Party was a Zulu political party that was complicit with the apartheid government.

Rachel explained while the ordination of women has been accepted, the real problems have more to do with a lack of qualified women in positions of genuine authority:

“Rachel”: I’m just thinking about our own ordination services here – just as a starting point and all three of these bishops – and I think quite honestly – would say, no, they don’t have any difficulty ordaining women. That’s not the issue. But I just look at how they treat the men and the women differently. And how threatened they are by strong women. They like their women to be small and compliant. [...] And those kind of mocking comments about strong women. Always finding a way to just put them down a bit. [...] Our bishop] is terribly proud and he’s just put out this list of women clergy: seventy-five – or whatever it is.

“Mary” explained that numbers are not enough because they don’t recognise the differentiation in terms of positions of authority or whether the positions of these women bring a change of perspective and practice. Clergywomen continue to experience marginalisation despite their increased numbers. As “Mary” explained:

“Mary”: Twenty years later we are still trying to find our place in this church. And our voice. And yes there is a sub-ordination in other parts of our communion where women are there just to fill in the numbers and to bow to men in terms of that. [...] But] we need something that would propel us to the centre. And then we say – we are here to stay. I don’t know what event or what instance needs to happen for us to move to the centre. We are still at the periphery and that’s not healthy. So, yes in terms of numbers yes, we can tick the box. We have enough women who are ordained. Now we tick the box: yes, we have women who are bishops. But is that changing the ministry of women? I don’t think so.

“Mary’s” question about what might propel us to the centre is partially answered by the very first woman Anglican diocesan bishop, Penny Jamieson.²⁴⁶ Jamieson perceptively articulates the way in which the gospel that is central to faith and identity for Christians calls into question traditional manifestations of power:

²⁴⁶ Although she is English, Jamieson was consecrated in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1990.

There is a built-in feature of the gospel that contributes to the fracturing of power. The gospel of Jesus Christ preaches liberation from the social conditions and structures that oppress and bind (Luke 4.16-20). Jesus was particularly hard on institutional religion, and proclaimed that he was the alternative.²⁴⁷

So Jamieson is clear that gospel-based Christianity deliberately “contributes to the fracturing of power”²⁴⁸. Her theology is grounded in the concept of liberation from oppression and she recalls Jesus’ own critique of his contemporary institutional Judaism and proclamation of his alternative way:

We are a faith with our own built-in critique and protection against the unwarranted accumulation of power, so that there is a real sense in which Christianity will never rest authentically on unquestioned structures of power. The divisions of our history testify to the effectiveness of this critique.²⁴⁹

If the fracturing of power is an in-built feature of Christianity, then what are the ways in which clergy-mothers through their presence and praxis, are contributing to this transformation of power in the church?

Fracturing Power

My central argument is that clergywomen who are mothers are in a position to help the church learn how to re-examine its priorities and self-understanding. We can help to transform ministry, in part by using the metaphor of motherhood. Of course, motherhood is not always seen as a positive focus for women who want to claim authority. Jean Grimshaw summarises the argument that motherhood is the root cause of the subordination of women and is therefore almost antithetical to feminism:

Shulamith Firestone argued that while women continued to bear babies, they would inevitably be subordinate and oppressed, and that the solution lay in extra-uterine reproduction and new forms of communal living. More recently Jeffner Allen has argued that motherhood

²⁴⁷ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 9.

²⁴⁸ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 9.

²⁴⁹ Jamieson, *Living at the Edge*, 9.

annihilates women, and that it should, at least for a time, be totally rejected: 'A mother is she whose body is used as a resource to reproduce men and the world of men... Motherhood is dangerous to women because it continues the structures within which females must be women and mothers, and, conversely, because it denies to females the creation of a subjectivity and world that is open and free'.²⁵⁰

Nevertheless, she recognises that many women still choose to become mothers. Even feminist women desire to bear babies and have children. There is a fierce determination among feminist mothers to do motherhood differently – to find ways to use this biological reality as a source of creative and life giving power. Christian mothers no longer have to accept the traditional hetero-normative family pattern of father being spiritual authority and head of the household, and mother being selfless, surrendered and subservient. The presence and praxis of clergy mothers shatter the illusion that this dichotomy creates. Instead of focusing on the theology of bodily sacrifice within motherhood, there is the option of celebrating incarnation and our own transubstantiation – the holiness of human birth and the mysterious transformation of our bodies and lives that will never again be the same after being marked by the passage of our children's bodies and lives.²⁵¹ Instead of simply replicating an aggressive, dominating and competitive power over others that is rampant in human (and corporate) relationships, the participants stories indicate that clergy mothers can offer an experience of a carved out being-for-others that shifts the ego and makes room for creating relationships that are less self-centred.

Emma Percy in her book: *Mothering as Metaphor for Ministry* speaks of how the language that is used to describe the work of priests is too often associated with leadership roles and managerial models and that this is neither conducive nor adequately descriptive of the real experience of many clergy:

²⁵⁰ Jean Grimshaw, *Feminist Philosophers: Women's Perspectives on Philosophical Traditions*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, (1986), 13-14.

²⁵¹ This has been explored at length in an article by Eliza Getman and Sarojini Nadar, "Nativity and Motherism: Embodiment within Praxis of Spiritual Leadership," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 26, no. 2, Special issue: Continuities and Departures: Women's Religious and Spiritual Leadership, (2013): 59-73.

It is my contention that we need to use more imaginative language and to find metaphors for ministry that can provide clergy with models of working that relate better to their day-to-day experience [...] Through looking in more depth at the role of mothering, which is both a relationship and an activity, and then using this as a metaphor for parish ministry, I suggest we can enrich our understanding of the latter and find a language to cherish many aspects of good practice that appear to be side-lined under the prevalent leadership models.²⁵²

Leadership and managerial models have been ways in which power traditionally manifests within the church. The corporate world regards leadership and management as a function of male activity. Biblically, leadership roles have been reserved for men too (Paul's male headship theology has been the controlling metaphor of priestly and domestic leadership for centuries). And yet, while giving birth is something only women can do, mothering is not exclusively female work. Ministry is a form of mothering, as Percy argues. The activities of mothering opens up possibilities for fracturing power and equalising relationships in ways that traditional leadership models can fail to do.

Clergywomen, and I would contend, in particular those who are also managing the primary domestic responsibility for young children, are reconceiving notions of ministry and power within ACSA. Childbearing and child-rearing priests are a witness and a challenge for the institutional Anglican Church and for the congregations in which these clergy mothers minister. The iconography aside, for the clergywomen themselves who are negotiating both vocations, the logistical, psychological and spiritual journey is complex - and sometimes maddening. The nurturing power of pregnancy, birth, nursing and child rearing is transformative in both practical and symbolic ways. The draining (and fracturing) impact of children on the bodies, energy, time, and identities of the mothers must not be underestimated. Clergy mothers are powerful and profoundly vulnerable in our procreative embodiedness. Adrienne Rich's poem "Power" about Marie Curie's discovery of radium ultimately being the cause of her demise ends thus:

²⁵² Percy, *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry*, 1.

She died a famous woman denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the same source as her power.²⁵³

This recalls the sacrificial experience of vocation that “Ruth” spoke about in her interview:

“Ruth”: I think the vocation itself is life giving. The exercising of it, in the present structures and forms that we’ve been given, is life draining in the extreme... It is hell. It’s hell. Ja. I mean most times you feel as though you are hanging on - I always have this analogy - it’s like I am hanging on by my fingertips and I am SO bleeding! It is like I am pouring with blood out of my fingertips. Ja, no, it is very hard.

While the pain of her experience as a clergywoman is palpable, “Ruth” also expresses that the key to finding our wholeness as the body of Christ lies in changing the iconography in a way that genuinely includes the children:

“Ruth”: The little ones will come up and they jump around you, and their legs go round you, and they call you mummy, and you know they come and tell you their big sob stories and, they come and play with your kids at home, and they are used to you shouting, and telling them “I said take your dirty feet off my couch I am going to voota you”, you know, and it is okay. And you get the slightly older ones, like the young adults, and because you are not their mother, but because they feel so free with you, you know, they come and they tell you all their stories, and they tell you things they would never tell another adult, you know. And they are always at the house, and they know it is a safe place, I think, as well, where they can always be. With women in the parish... Ja, they know you are their priest, but they [kids] primarily see you [...] as a mother-figure, but not their mother-figure. So therefore with women in the parish they see you as a sister, or sometimes as a daughter, so you immediately have access into that whole world of things that would normally never be shared with a male priest – [they are] never going to share those things.

Elizabeth: The intimacy...

“Ruth”: Exactly. And you have got space... I sometimes feel it must be really hard to be a male priest, because I know that there are things instinctively that I can do with women that you could never do as a male priest.

²⁵³ Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, (1978), 3.

The presence of “Ruth” as a mother priest reminds the church of the embodied nature of real life. It is an affirming reflection of their own realities, which too often the church ignores by focusing on the life to come rather than the kingdom of God here on earth. Seeing women priests in this way calls into question a male centred eschatology that is built on the “negation of the mother”. Ruether asserts that:

Male eschatology is built on negation of the mother, rejection of sexuality and procreation is not merely a function of prudery. Or, rather, anti-sexual aestheticism is itself based on the fantasy that, by escaping the female realm of female sexuality and pro-creation, one can also free oneself from finitude and mortality.²⁵⁴

Jantzen offers us a more helpful theoretical framework by which to understand how to fracture the power of this male eschatology that has held the church (and women in particular) captive for so long. She calls us to view ourselves as natals more than mortals. Natality reminds us that we are all embodied and all born through our mothers’ bodies. Mothering is revalued and vindicated through notions of natality.

Much of the sacramental services, the work that priests do in ministry, correlate directly with different aspects of mothering. Obviously, other than birthing and breastfeeding, fathers can also practice engaged parenting. Adrienne Rich declares that bringing men into a “comprehensive system of child-care [...] would be the most revolutionary priority that any male group could set itself.”²⁵⁵ She explains further:

It would not only change the expectations children--and therefore men—have of women and men; nor would it simply break down gender-roles and diversify the work-patterns of both sexes; it would change the entire community’s relationship to childhood. In learning to give care to children, men would have to cease to be children; the privileges of fatherhood could not be toyed with, as they are now, without an equal share in the full experience of nurture.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 144.

²⁵⁵ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 216.

²⁵⁶ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 216.

Rich is not alone in recognising that there is a problem with the gender roles and division of “maternal labour”. Secular English journalist and producer, Rebecca Asher has written an accurately entitled book critiquing societal expectations and gender imbalance in the domestic sphere called *Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the Illusion of Equality*. In her book she documents interviews with (secular) parents about contemporary parenthood and the frustrations and limitations that it imposes (overwhelmingly on mothers). She describes her research and her reasoning as:

a quest to understand why, for contemporary women, becoming a mother entails such a profound break from our past lives and expectations, why the disparity between men’s and women’s experiences of parenthood is so great and why progress towards sexual equality on the home front so far has moved with such glacial slowness. [...] I argue that this entire structure is built on the unquestioning assumption that mothers will take on primary care for their children. At the same time, fathers are treated as extras in the drama centred on their own children. [...] It’s women whose illusions are shattered, but it’s mothers, fathers and, most importantly, their children who lose out under our broken system.²⁵⁷

There are many disgruntled, disillusioned and shattered mothers who would like to renegotiate the terms of engagement. Critically thinking mothers have much to offer – but (in Asher’s words) first we need to:

discover if there is another way of organising our homes, communities and workplaces which would enable both men and women to give wholeheartedly to their children and to experience the joy of deep connection with them, while retaining other fulfilling elements of their lives.²⁵⁸

The stories of the clergywomen in this thesis have shown that deconstructing and renegotiating family life will benefit the family, the community and the wider public domain – including the church. The irony, of course, is that most Anglican priests are still men, and the work that they do is symbolically and ritually a form of mothering. Yet, part of the renegotiation of roles includes the

²⁵⁷ Rebecca Asher, *Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the Illusion of Equality*. London: Vintage, (2012), 8-9.

²⁵⁸ Asher, *Shattered*, 9.

scenario that when men mother, it not need to be applauded as unusual. Conversely, mothering by clergymen ought not be equally taken for granted. All mothering needs revaluing. And a mothering ministry focused on nurturing and serving others ought not reach the point of self-sacrifice. Explicitly bringing experiences of motherhood to bear on the traditional conceptualisations of priesthood can certainly contribute to the fracturing of power within these roles.

We need new ways of recognising, addressing and celebrating the change that clergywomen bring to church. The traditional services still largely ignore or deny our presence, our praxis and our power. The *Anglican Prayer Book* (1989) perpetuates the dominance of masculine language and imagery in the sanctuary. I have found two valuable companion liturgical books that bring in female experience and voice. Janet Morley's *All Desires Known* is indispensable. *Women's Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated* edited by Geitz, Burke and Smith offers pastoral liturgies for such events as pregnancy loss or stillbirth, divorce, and even a litany after suicide.²⁵⁹ It begins with a prayer written by Barbara Harris who was the very first woman (suffragan) bishop in the Anglican Communion:

Spirit of Christ, visit us and draw out our exquisite female essence, that we may exude the strength of tenderness, the power of humility, the mercy of redemptive suffering, and the joy of unearned grace. So girded for life in this inequitable yet exhilarating world, we may reflect your essence, through which we are sustained and empowered to be your loving, gracious, wounded hands that embrace then propel toward greatness the formed, human, breathing dust of your creation. Come Holy Spirit, come. Amen.²⁶⁰

Harris embraces the paradox of our faith: the power of wounded vulnerability. She reminds us to live with the hope of resurrection instead of under the threat of crucifixion. A focus on miraculous natality (and Incarnation) as opposed to an obsession with violent mortality changes everything. Instead of

²⁵⁹ Elizabeth Geitz, Marjorie Burke and Ann Smith, eds, *Women's Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, (2000), 348-357.

²⁶⁰ Geitz et al, *Women's Uncommon Prayers*, iii.

longing for a perfect spiritual life to come, we can experience the divine in our own unique bodies on imperfect earth. As a natal, born of a woman, I recognise that my own (and others') subjectivity has been constructed within a physical body in a particular context. Ali Green embraces the fecund female imagery embodied in the female priest and this bears repeating:

The womb, the primal place in which we become body, is the human crucible of new life. It offers an eloquent image of God who nurtures life and brings to birth.²⁶¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, through the stories of the participants and through considering the power that women bishops might bring to ACSA, this chapter has shown that women priests who are mothers are modelling new choices and new possibilities for styles of leadership and authority. This presents the opportunity for fracturing the power of the patriarchal institutional church through the embodied presence and praxis of clergywomen at the altar and beyond. The spotlights are no longer trained exclusively on the church fathers who lead us. As I will suggest in the concluding chapter, perhaps motherhood is the new priesthood – or at least embracing motherhood as a positive option instead of cutting off that aspect of our female power offer an important witness and testimony of fractured power that embraces embodied vulnerability to the church.

²⁶¹ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 52.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Some of you I will hollow out.
I will make you a cave.
I will carve you so deep the stars will shine in your darkness.
You will be a bowl.
You will be the cup in the rock collecting rain...

I will do this because the world needs the hollowness of you.
I will do this for the space that you will be.
I will do this because you must be large.
A passage.
People will find their way through you.
A bowl.
People will eat from you
and their hunger will not weaken them to death.
A cup to catch the sacred rain....

Light will flow in your hollowing.
You will be filled with light.
Your bones will shine.
The round open center of you will be radiant.
I will call you Brilliant One.
I will call you Daughter Who is Wide.
I will call you transformed.

-- Christine Lore Webber²⁶²

In this thesis I have shown how through the hollowing out and the carving of the clergywomen profiled, through their presence, praxis and power they are bringing new experiences, insights and wisdom into the structures and manifestations of ACSA. As stated at the very beginning, this has been a journey of pilgrimage, and my primary companions (the ones with whom bread has been broken and shared) have been the wise women participants. These women of spirit have shared the stories of their experiences of joy and pain within the context of the church. Through their reflections and their theorising they have taught me how to be more conscientious and engaged in my praxis of motherhood and priesthood. They have confirmed and affirmed

²⁶² Christine Lore Webber, "Mother Wisdom Speaks" in *Woman Prayers: Prayers by Women throughout history and around the World*, ed. Mary Ford-Grabowsky, (New York: HarperCollins, 2003): 123.

my dual vocations that are sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting, but never entirely mutually exclusive. And more than anything, the conversations with these remarkable pioneering women have helped me to become more human.

The critical and transformative stories that these (and other) clergywomen have told (and must continue to tell) has, in part, answered Betty Govinden's appeal:

The longing that women have for homecoming, to their Holy Mother the Church, to a place where there is love and acceptance and growth into full humanity, should not go unheeded.²⁶³

But their stories are accompanied by the metaphorically excruciating pain of childbirth. Pain is accompanied by the birth of new insights that can make contributions to transformative knowledge. These insights will be explored further below.

Presiding Like a Mother²⁶⁴

The first insight gained from this study is that these clergywomen's experiences can be instructive for both women and men because as Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns suggest, the phrase 'like a woman':

eschews essentialist meanings of gender: men can, potentially, pray, preach or preside 'like a woman'. It does not assume any one meaning of what it means to be a woman and invites contextualization and narration from different perspectives and settings. [...] Women give and receive leadership and presidency in as many different ways and forms as women do anything, depending on their context, histories, multiple identities (of which, of course, gender is only one, and not necessarily a straightforward one) and commitments.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Govinden, "No Time for Silence", 285.

²⁶⁴ This turn of phrase comes from the series of books that began with Nicola Slee's *Praying Like a Woman* (London: SPCK, 2004). The latest contribution to the series is: Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns, eds, *Presiding Like a Woman*. London: SPCK, 2010.

²⁶⁵ Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns, "Introduction" in *Presiding Like a Woman*, eds. Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns, (London: SPCK, 2010), 2.

The changes brought by the presence, praxis and power of clergywomen can assist all clergy to renegotiate and realign priorities. So what can be learned from clergywomen at the altar, in the pulpit, in the pastoral role and in their domestic lives? All clergywomen have particular ways of ministering that can be instructive.

The repetitive ritual of consecration and distribution and reception of the Eucharistic feast raises certain questions: What feeds us? Who feeds us? And in turn whom do we feed? Eucharist (the bread of life and the cup of salvation) recalls our dependence on food and on God for our survival. A shared communal meal is the central act of worship in the Anglican tradition. It is a reminder that God is in every meal that we ingest. It is also a reminder of the Incarnation. Jesus is the Bread of Heaven from Nativity to Crucifixion and into the contemporary lives of all Christians. When the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us, Jesus blessed our births and our bodies with his birth and his body. Jesus' mother, Mary, co-created with God within her body and then feed this divine baby at her human breast. She cooked for him and fed him at the family table. And then when he reached maturity, she trusted him to turn the water into wine. She handed on the hospitality mantle to her son at the wedding at Cana. Her mothering empowered her son to practice mothering others. Food is the symbol, the comfort, the hope that Christ offers.

I would argue that breastfeeding and the family meal around the kitchen table are also Eucharistic expressions. The body of Christ is broken for us and offered as a communal feast whenever we are fed. In our embodiedness, it is our biological mothers' bodies that feed us first, particular women's bodies grow particular people into being – just as their own mothers' bodies incubated and gestated and encompassed them. Iconically (and practically) speaking, it is generally the mother's responsibility to feed her babies and her children. In Jewish tradition the mother is the spiritual leader of the family. She lights the candles and says the prayers in the private sphere. For Christians, Eucharist is the public symbolic meal recalling the Passover Last Supper. It is no surprise that women come easily to the role of preparation and serving of

this feast as we have been socialised for thousands of generations to cook and serve and feed. Ali Green explains the centrality of this ritual in Anglican tradition in the following way:

From my own confessional standpoint as an Anglican, I understand the Eucharist as central to God's continuing self-revelation. It is a sacramental re-enactment of a historical event, a ceremonial banquet and a sacrifice shared by the whole community which forms the nexus between the narrative of faith and the praxis of discipleship.²⁶⁶

Green argues that the presence, praxis and power of clergywomen can change stereotypes and assumptions about God and ourselves. I concur with Green that this is a very positive opportunity. Mothers at the altar further shift representations and interpretations of the religious symbolic. Mothers bring to the Eucharist our own experience of feeding other people. Green sees this experiential understanding as an integral part of her theology of women's priesthood. She quotes Linda Walters who is a minister of the chalice in Australia:

I stand in the sanctuary with a brimming chalice of red fragrant wine in my hands... I know how to put this cup to these lips. I am a mother. I stoop and rise. I am a nurse. I am a woman who knows about blood... No one has to show me how to do this. I have been doing it all my life it seems. I am at home in the sanctuary in this supremely ordinary act – this sacrament which focuses all our acts of feeding, all our meals, all our ordinary day to day relating and depending on one another.²⁶⁷

Pregnant women and mothers of small children know instinctively about being the food given for others. Whether the foetus is devouring our body from the inside, or the suckling child is nursing at our breast, or the growing children are sitting at the table eating (or not, as the case maybe) the food that we have set before them, this is part of our calling. This is what drains us physically and emotionally. In an ideal world, this is what can give mothers (in part) a sense of wellbeing and contribution and identity. In her book

²⁶⁶ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 3-4

²⁶⁷ Green, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, 153.

Motherhood and God, Margaret Hebblethwaite addresses the link between mothers and the Eucharist. She says:

[The mother] brings with her an experience of life that gives richness and perspective to the Eucharistic mysteries. The eucharist is a very physical event, concerned with the body and with blood and with eating. These things make up the stuff of a mother's life. She is in intimate relationship with bodies whether making love, or giving birth, or cleaning bottoms, or wiping noses. She is surrounded by physicality from the moment she wakes up to find hot little bodies squeezing into bed next to her, to the evening scramble of getting those dirty little wriggling bodies washed and dried and put into pyjamas and chased upstairs to bed. She has her share of blood too [...]. As for eating, literally hours of her life go into shopping and planning meals, cooking and serving up food, clearing the table and washing the dishes. The elements of the eucharist lie at the centre of a mother's life, boringly central, even grindingly tediously central.²⁶⁸

In the liturgical ritual, the priest breaks a wafer (or a loaf of bread) and declares: "The bread which we break, is it not a sharing of the body of Christ", and the congregation responds: "We, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread".²⁶⁹ As much as this ritual can be likened to breastfeeding, it is also a symbolic birthing. The body broken of Christ (like the broken body of the mother) gives birth to new life. As we re-member Christ, we reconnect with community and with God. It is a moment of re-attachment through the love of a mothering God.

We are invited to participate in the feast over and over again and we come with open hands knowing that we will never have everything we need independent of God and separated from community. Opening our hands, hearts, bodies, minds to receiving is an admission to the reality that we are not sufficient alone. Mothers are constantly concerned with making sure that others' needs are attended to. This kind of attentiveness is another thing that clergy mothers can bring to ministry. We receive not to hoard, but to share with others.

²⁶⁸ Hebblethwaite, *Motherhood and God*, 118.

²⁶⁹ Church of the Province of Southern Africa, *An Anglican Prayer Book* (1989), 127.

Any discussion about these liturgical traditions and rituals raises question about who is permitted to receive the blessings and who is excluded. There are many restrictions. Unless churches are consciously inclusive, leadership far too often finds excuses for keeping people out. Some churches do not communicate the children on the pretext that they need to be old enough to understand the meaning of the sacrament. Eucharist provides us with an opportunity to “make a preferential option for the children.” This is a second insight gained from this study.

An Epistemological Privilege of the Children

Echoing the phrase “the preferential option for the poor”,²⁷⁰ made popular by Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, I would define mother priests who recognise and attend to their children’s needs as part of their ministry (of presence, praxis and power) as declaring “a preferential option for the children”. And so, a second insight drawn from the stories of these clergywomen is the need, I would argue, to extend the discourse of liberation theology whose central tenet is an “epistemological privilege of the poor”²⁷¹ to include an “epistemological privilege of the children.” One does not have to be a biological mother (or even be female) in order to learn from mothers’ ways of knowing. Sara Ruddick discusses the idea in her book *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*. She suggests that maternal thinking can be useful for clarifying different priorities, attitudes and virtues. It also helps to shift our understanding of what constitutes achievement. Ruddick says:

Maternal practice begins in a response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a “mother” is to take upon

²⁷⁰ The phrase “option for the poor” describes one of the basic tenants of the Catholic social justice movement. It first appeared in a letter penned by Jesuit Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus. The “preferential” was added by Gutierrez in his book Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation*. 15th Anniversary Edition. New York: Orbis Books, (1988).

²⁷¹ Per Frostin, “The Hermeneutics of the Poor: The Epistemological ‘Break’”, in *Third World Theologies*, *Studia Theologica* 39 (1985); Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation*. Lund: Lund University Press, (1988).

oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantive part of one's working life.²⁷²

She goes on to speak of the demands of children that mothers must meet:

In this sense of demand, children "demand" that their lives be preserved and their growth fostered. In addition, the primary social groups with which a mother is identified, whether by force, kinship, or choice, demand that she raise her children in a manner acceptable to them. These three demands – for preservation, growth, and social acceptability – constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training.²⁷³

Therefore, raising children is concerned with the protection, flourishing and promotion of young people. Survival and thriving goes beyond the basic physical needs and includes emotional and intellectual well-being. Ruddick's list of maternal virtues as summarised by Jean Grimshaw follows:

a responsiveness to growth (and acceptance of change), along with a sort of learning that recognises change, development, and the uniqueness of particular individuals and situations; *resilient good humour and cheerfulness*, even in the face of conflict, the fragility of life, and the dangers inherent in the process of physical and mental growth; *attentive love*, which is responsive to the reality of the child, and is also prepared to give up, let grow, accept detachment; *humility*, a selfless respect for reality. a practical realism which involves understanding the child and respecting it as a person, without either 'seizing' or 'using' it.²⁷⁴

These maternal virtues can be helpful in ecclesiological circles. Liberation theologies also have a significant contribution to make in this regard – for clergy mothers and our children who have perhaps felt marginalised on some level and for the whole church. Daniel Migliore explains:

Liberation theologies, suspicious of premature calls to reconciliation that often bypass the reality of oppression and the need to struggle against it, understand the proper service of the church as participating in God's liberating activity in the world, exposing conditions of

²⁷² Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 17.

²⁷³ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 17.

²⁷⁴ Grimshaw, *Feminist Philosophers*, 240-241.

bondage, calling for the conversion of people and corporate structures, prompting prophetic action on behalf of justice and freedom, and sustaining believers in their struggle against the power of evil and in their solidarity with the poor.²⁷⁵

I would argue that the stories told by the clergywomen in their interviews were largely an indictment of a church that has not yet learned to practice the maternal virtues indicated above. The complex and painful (and positive) experiences of these and other clergywomen prompt an epistemological shift towards deeper conversation and renegotiation of the terms of engagement. As Migliore's insists, there are many contexts in which preferential options must be made:

If particular groups and certain economic classes are being turned away from the church, either directly or indirectly, because they do not find their concerns and needs taken seriously then it is necessary to become partisan for these people, as black theology, feminist theology, and other forms of liberation theology do. When the church makes an option for the poor, it demonstrates rather than denies its catholicity. The other side of the coin, however, is that every partisan act must be intentionally universal, or it becomes not the partisanship of God but a divisive and destructive party spirit.²⁷⁶

In light of this, clergy mothers' concerns and needs must be recognised for the greater good. The preferential option for the children is a sign of healthy and living church. Teaching the children how to be integrated and engaged in healthy ways in wider society is central to the work of mothering and priesting. Barrett explains that in turn, children have much to teach us:

Presiders and congregations who seek to learn the way of discipleship by embracing, 'overaccepting', the interruptive initiatives of little children might, I suspect, be slowly but surely trained themselves in the childlike art of interrupting, and playfully, creatively, 'overaccepting' (rather than simply 'yielding' to), the 'liturgies' of the world: drawing attention to the 'holes, silences, inabilities' in the world's cosmologies that tyrannically claim comprehensiveness; and temporarily creating, or occupying spaces which subvert the controlling gaze of the state,

²⁷⁵ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 197.

²⁷⁶ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 203.

through an attentive transgressive touching of the apparently 'untouchable.'²⁷⁷

Nativity and Maternal Thinking

The third insight that has been gained from this study is to shift theological thinking from mortality to natality. For each and every one of us, the story begins with our mothers and our own births – but birth is not the final outcome. The babies and the growing children are the life of the church. They keep us rooted in the absolute present and the children are the only hope for a meaningful continuation of the beliefs and rituals that so many Anglicans hold so dear. Children are not a liability. They are the present reality, and the promise of continued life. They keep us anchored firmly in the present moment. The Incarnation, the Nativity, and even the Crucifixion all point back to natality. My own embodied and experiential practice of the theology of natality coincided with the birth of my first son. It was encapsulated in the Christian Aid organisation's motto "we believe in life before death."²⁷⁸ But I only encountered the theory through doing research for this project. I found references in Denise Ackermann's, and Ali Green's, and eventually Janet Trisk's writing about Grace Jantzen's idea of natality. Trisk explains the crux of Jantzen's philosophical project:

The question which runs through the writings of Grace Jantzen (1948 – 2006) for at least the last ten years of her life is this: Why are we so preoccupied with death rather than life? She notes that this preoccupation with death is gendered, entwined with violence and leads to an aversion for bodies (especially female bodies), the material world and beauty. This question and the alternative she sought to explore, namely an imaginary which focuses on natality and the flourishing of the earth and all its creatures, shapes her discussion of creation and salvation.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Alastair Barrett, "In persona Christae," in *Presiding Like a Woman*, eds. Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns, (London: SPCK, 2010), 175.

²⁷⁸ Christian Aid. <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/reflections/do-you-believe-in-life-before-death.aspx> (Accessed 14 November 2013)

²⁷⁹ Janet Trisk, "Grace Jantzen: "They shall flourish as a garden,"" in *Creation and Salvation: Volume 2: A Companion on Recent Theological Movements*, ed. Ernst Conradie (Lit Verlag; Munster and Vienna, 2012), 259-263, 259.

Jantzen's thinking is inspired, complex and densely postmodern. I cannot engage with it more than superficially in this context, although her philosophy and theology have much to offer in terms of further South African reflection and praxis.

The above scholars led me to Sara Ruddick's practical philosophy of "maternal thinking" which, as indicated above, has been key to this project. She says: "Conceptions of natality and a well-tended death determine the organizing themes of the history of human flesh that I imagine mothers telling."²⁸⁰ The fleshiness of the stories told by the participants in the interviews reflects such conceptions. Ruddick's maternal thinking makes a strong case for the politics of peace and "sturdy antimilitarist conception of the body."

In this conception the body is not fearful, either in its pleasures or its suffering. Birth is privileged over death and with that privilege comes a commitment to protect and a prizing of physical being in its resilience and variety. Bodies are at least as important as the causes that use them.²⁸¹

She continues:

Every body counts, every body is a testament to hope. The hope of the world – of birthing woman, mothers, friends, and kin – rests in the newborn infant. The infant's hope resides in the world's welcome.²⁸²

The power in vulnerability that is incarnate in our flesh is made most obvious in the Incarnation of Jesus. In the end, the authoritative roles of both priesting and mothering are all about the reconceptualisation and the redistribution of power. We break bread and we feed people. There are many forms of power, and love (the most incarnate) is the most difficult manifestation of power to negotiate. Love calls for vulnerability and guarantees suffering. Increasingly, women are entering positions of church leadership and authority – and now

²⁸⁰ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 216.

²⁸¹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 216.

²⁸² Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 217.

particularly as mothers take up these roles – a shift in the power relationships is occurring within the church.

Grace Jantzen, drawing on Foucault, notes in her book *Gender, Power, and Christian mysticism*:

It is essential that in any analysis of the shifting relations of power in the genealogy of any concept, including the concept of mysticism, thorough regard be taken of the ways in which gender and power are interlocked.²⁸³

Furthermore, Jantzen clarifies that generally power relations are not observed from the perspective of those who are on the receiving end of the power. Jantzen clarifies the importance of developing a feminist philosophy of religion that is engaged with real life and real suffering:

From a feminist perspective, becoming divine is inseparable from solidarity with human suffering: a symbolic of the divine is a symbolic of outrage, imagination and desire, and compassionate action, not the detached and objective intellectual stance which traditional philosophers of religion assume and which they take also to be characteristic of God. [... A] feminist strategy intent on becoming divine would be to use the power of that anger in the work of love, transforming outrage into solidarity and compassionate action for love of the world, recognizing and accepting the solidarity and compassion of one another also in our own suffering. Such action for love of the world obviously includes theory, but theory where imaginative insight has an important place. [... A] feminist approach would be to start from engagement with suffering at some concrete level and see what sorts of theory such engagement requires or would find helpful. The struggle against suffering and injustice towards flourishing takes precedence, beyond comparison, to the resolution of intellectual problems; and although it is important that the struggle is an intellectual one, there is no excuse for theory ever becoming a distraction from the struggle for justice itself.²⁸⁴

If compassionate action is the authentically divine response, then our understanding of authority and divinity must shift away from judgment and

²⁸³ Jantzen, *Gender Power and Christian Mysticism*, 15.

²⁸⁴ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 263-264.

control. Mothers who have helped children to grow and mature and be empowered offer a model of leadership that the church can learn from.

Maternal Leadership

When I speak of the inherent value of the mothering priest, in no way do I advocate the domination of clergymen by clergywomen, or the infantilisation of the laity. Quite the opposite is required: we all, clergy and laity, male and female, can learn to practice mothering each other into maturity. All have to potential to be empowered to do the work of social justice and building equitable relationships and rethinking our roles and rules of engagement. This is what we are all called to do as baptised Christians. Zikmund et al. explain how clergy women are transforming ministry and the church:

The experience and sense of calling among clergy women in the 1990s show that clergy women are not merely survivors; nor are they breaking down old barriers simply to get into a vocation shaped and still dominated by male perspectives. Rather, clergy women are reinventing ministry for the future, refusing the old definitions and expectations. Clergy women are expanding the very essence of Christian ministry and guiding the whole church to rethink and renew its leadership and ministry.²⁸⁵

All of the clergywomen interviewed were conscientiously engaged in this process to varying degrees. Most were acutely aware of this engagement and the responsibility that they bore to the next generation of women who are considering ministry. As women are claiming our authority and mentoring each other into roles that provide authentic leadership, we can practice a “fracturing of power”. It is not about clergywomen attempting to dominate the church. Clergy mothers are attempting to merge our double vocations without neglecting our domestic responsibilities (although, it must be reiterated that those who are in fulltime ministry with young children tend to be chronically exhausted and overwhelmed). A conscientious power (and labour) sharing in the form of equal opportunity mothering and priesting would benefit the whole family and community.

²⁸⁵ Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 133.

Allison Moore's book *Clergy Moms: A Survival Guide to Balancing Family and Congregation* makes a clear case for broadening the vision and horizon of vocation. Clergy mothers can model something different that can benefit everyone. It is not about doing it better than the men or even proving ourselves as equally professionally competent. It is about being inclusive and welcoming of difference – in terms of gender, biology, orientation, perspective, worship style, and so many other variables. In an article called "Gender, Women and Leadership" Cheryl de la Rey addresses the question of whether women leaders might be in a better position to work towards a new moral order. She notes the participative and encouraging approach that women leaders have been found to employ and says:

This results in a team-based management approach, and fosters a relationship based on mutual trust and respect. Women leaders are acknowledged as possessing entrepreneurial vision and effective communication skills, and operate from a reward power base, which results in a work atmosphere where all individuals are motivated to work together to achieve the organisation's mission.²⁸⁶

She goes on to admit that this is a difficult project, particularly when individual women leaders are isolated by sexism and tokenism (among other things). She recognises that critical mass is generally necessary to effect lasting change. What is more, as the interviews indicated, new leaders (be they bishops or clergy or mothers) need training and role models and genuine practical and political support if we are to manage the complexities of our callings. Cochrane's research in faith communities has also found that women understand that training leads to competence:

Competence, in this context, is power. It involves a capacity of the self, not derived in dependency upon others, to manage a life situation in a manner that sustains and strengthens the community in the face of a specific need. The question of gender, and the way in which gender structures power relations and defines needs, presents itself here.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Cheryl de la Rey, "Gender, Women and Leadership," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 65, (2005):9.

²⁸⁷ Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity*, 81.

Women in leadership challenge the traditional structures of power relations and redefine what the actual needs of a wider circle of people might be. One of the most significant results of clergywomen and clergy mothers leading public worship is the opportunity for the congregation and the bishops to be empowered to listen to alternative voices and hear the call to transform our family lives and our community lives in lasting and authentic ways. Celia Hahn writes about the transformative effect of practising a more integrated authority:

Integrated leaders *will* help people grow—just be being who they are. They have no interest in keeping others powerless but instead will be eager to evoke the authority of others and glad to share that evoking task with many colleagues. Saying clearly who they are and where they stand, those leaders will encourage others to do the same, bringing all their experiences and the symbols of the tradition into enlivening conversation. Their integrative skills will also help people bring together many dimensions of their inner lives and find creative ways to join many different people's gifts. They will attend to the process, to "the way we are living here together," to the message conveyed by the medium. In this they follow One who called himself the Way (rather than the destination), and made conversations on the road the centrepiece of his leadership training.²⁸⁸

Christians can live with the audacious hope of resurrection instead of under the constant threat and fear of crucifixion. A focus on miraculous natality (and Incarnation) as opposed to an obsession with violent mortality changes everything. Instead of longing for a perfect spiritual life to come, we can experience the divine in our own unique bodies on imperfect earth. As a natal, born of a woman, I recognise that my own (and others') subjectivity has been constructed within a physical body in a particular context.

Working to transform the Anglican Church is not a feminist project. It is a Christian project. Our authentic and transformative power as Christians is drawn through the way of the Cross – a symbol of surrender and vulnerability that fractures bodies, lives, certainties and all attributes and manifestations of worldly power. The Cross is a symbol of birth into new life more than a symbol

²⁸⁸ Celia Allison Hahn, *Growing in Authority, Relinquishing Control: A New Approach to Faithful Leadership*. New York: The Alban Institute, (1994), 174.

of death. Christ crucified is alternately mother and child – the birther and the new life that is born.

A wider church community can also be involved in this mothering work. Becoming a mother is a far larger and broader conceptual and theological project than just the physiological experiences of pregnancy and giving birth and breastfeeding. Idania Fernandez was a young Nicaraguan mother and liberation struggle activist who was killed in 1979. Shortly before her death she wrote a letter to her daughter that is printed in its entirety in the Circle publication *With Passion and Compassion*. Fernandez writes:

“Mother” does not mean being the woman who gives birth to and cares for a child; to be a mother is to feel in your own flesh the suffering of all the children, all the men, and all the young people who die, as though they had come from your own womb.

My greatest wish is that one day you will become a true woman with pure feelings and a great love for humanity. And that you will know how to defend justice whenever it is being violated and that you defend it against whomever and whatever.

To do that, to know what it is to be a true human being, get to know, read about, and assimilate the great figures of our revolution and of all revolutions in other countries. Take the best of each one as an example and put it into practice so that you will be better each day. I know you can do it, and are going to do it. This gives me a great sense of peace.²⁸⁹

Mothering can be practised by biological mothers and fathers, adoptive mothers and fathers, and childless women and men. It can even be practised by grandparents and children. Encouraging the nurturing side of all people changes the way we experience God and community, as Karen Jo Torjesen explains:

Let us now consider God as the forgiving mother. The message of forgiveness remains the same, but the tones, nuances, and colors are changed, however subtly. When we imagine God as the forgiving

²⁸⁹ Fabella, Virginia M.M. and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds. *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*. New York: Orbis Books, (1996), 141-142.

mother, we gather into that image the feelings and experiences and longings that we associate with the idea of mother. [...] For some this makes the message of forgiveness more moving and compelling. For some it affirms the goodness of being female. If the idea of God can be expressed with the metaphor of mother, then woman are in the image of God. Women's ways of being in the world mirror God's ways of being in the world. Women's experiences of mothering, nurturing, and caring, mourning, grieving, and loving can also be used to describe the heart of God.²⁹⁰

The metaphor of the mother can help to heal our notions of an almighty and judgmental God, by including mercy and compassion in the symbolic of the divine. The inclusion of mothers in church structures breaks down and inverts notions of power. The recognition and acceptance of the fractured power of clergywomen (and perhaps the even more fractured power of clergy mothers) might provide a dangerous opportunity for all of us (mothers and fathers, clergy and laity, religious and secular co-habitants of this fragile planet) to attempt to renegotiate and to live and work together in new and healthier ways. It does not have to be a competitive power struggle. This research has affirmed that the finding that clergywomen, by their very presence at the altar and at the negotiating/decision-making table, challenge and change the traditional manifestations of power. But while the courage of clergy mothers may provide opportunities to learn how to preside differently, think differently and lead differently, their anger also provides a means for new thinking and being.

“Mother Anger: Theory and Practice”²⁹¹

Augustine of Hippo wrote: “Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.”²⁹² The interview conversations were

²⁹⁰ Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*, 264.

²⁹¹ Anne Lamott, “Mother Anger: Theory and Practice,” in *Mothers Who Think: Tales of Real-Life Parenting*, eds. Camille Peri and Kate Moses (New York: Washington Square Press, 1999), 89.

²⁹² As quoted by Robert McAfee Brown in *Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, (1988), 136.

brimming with both anger and courage. Augustine reminds us to be hopeful about the change that will result. “Eve” clearly articulated that change was inevitable. All of the other interviews indicated that as well. Clergywomen are moving the conversations about justice and equity forward. But it takes its toll on our bodies and families and lives. It is so important that we begin to talk about the underlying reasons for the frustration with the institution to which we are committed. This is how we will hear the solutions into speech. A verse from Adrienne Rich’s poem “Integrity” echoes Augustine’s words:

Anger and tenderness: my selves.
And now I can believe they breathe in me
as angels, not polarities.
Anger and tenderness: the spider’s genius
to spin and weave in the same action
from her own body, anywhere—
even from a broken web.²⁹³

An admission of brokenness counteracts the idealisation of both motherhood and priesthood. Recognition of the inherent difficulties in both vocations creates solidarity between mothers and priests. I would argue that the frustration with the institutional church expressed by most of these clergywomen is related to “mother anger” – a deep frustration with the institution and with the (daily lived – and far too often unsupported) experience of motherhood. Anne Lamott has written extensively on the topic of “mother anger”. Her own experience and reflection and articulation of such anger give context and recognition and acceptance to what so many mothers face. She writes as a Christian struggling (as a single mother with only one child) to come to terms with her own demons. Speaking of her young son whom she loves dearly and mothers well, she admits that “[h]e can provoke me into a state of something similar to road rage.” She admits something few mothers will say out loud because of the fear that other people won’t identify, that sometimes mothering makes us feel insane and “pathological [...], inept and out of control.”²⁹⁴ She goes on to say:

²⁹³ Adrienne Rich, “Integrity” in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978-1981*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993, 9.

²⁹⁴ Lamott, “Mother Anger: Theory and Practice,” 90.

[W]hen they get older, you'll still sometimes feel exhausted, hormonal, without a clue. You'll still find your child infuriating. Also—I am just going to go ahead and blurt this out—*dull*".²⁹⁵

Lamott's refreshing authenticity is a prayer form. She helps mothers to have necessary conversations by risking being vulnerable in her own imperfection and brokenness. She explains:

[N]ot only do moms get very mad; they also get bored. This is a closely guarded secret, as if the myth of maternal bliss is so sacrosanct that we can't even admit these feelings to ourselves. But when you mention these feelings to other mothers, they all say, "Yes, yes!" You ask, "Are you ever mean to your children?" "Yes!" "Do you ever yell so that it scares you?" "Yes, yes!" "Do you ever want to throw yourself down the back stairs because you're so bored with your child that you can hardly see straight?" "Yes, Lord, yes, thank you, thank you..."²⁹⁶

She admits the boredom and the frustration. She also admits the anger that is so taboo in the idealised image of motherhood and mothering. She explains that mothers are too often "chronically tired, resentful, and resented."²⁹⁷ There are millions of personal and political reasons that mothers can and do get angry with their children – or angry about other things and take it out on their children. Lamott explains this phenomenon so well when she talks about the manifestations of "mother rage".

While I love my children, I want a broader horizon of possibility for my own life than isolated mothering. Too often, the myth of the happy family rides on the mother sacrificing herself and her own identity at the altar of the needs and identities of her husband and children. Obviously, the imbalance implicates institutions beyond the nuclear family. The church is also programmed to think that the sacrificial status quo is normal and acceptable. This impacts on the hiring and relocating practices of this and other institutions. As one of my participants, "Eve", clearly stated: clergy family for the church means "male priest and supportive wife and obedient children." The real needs of clergywomen are ignored.

²⁹⁵ Lamott, "Mother Anger: Theory and Practice," 90.

²⁹⁶ Lamott, "Mother Anger: Theory and Practice," 90-91.

²⁹⁷ Lamott, "Mother Anger: Theory and Practice," 92.

Adrienne Rich writes about anger about the way things are for mothers at length in *Of Woman Born*. She expressed the difficulty of managing the competing needs – her own and her children’s – and the terrifying sense that she was losing her selfhood in motherhood:

My anger would rise; I would feel the futility of any attempt to salvage myself, and also the inequality between us: my needs always balanced against those of a child, and always losing. I could love so much better, I told myself, after even a quarter-hour of selfishness, of peace, of detachment from my children.²⁹⁸

Sara Ruddick also addresses the unsanitised reality of mothering. She offers a positive response to the complex reality through feminist consciousness and affirms Lamott’s kind of truth telling:

For a mother, “coming to know the truth” includes looking at the real feelings and conflicts of mothering. It is a feminist project to describe realistically the angers and ambivalences of maternal love. A feminist consciousness also requires mothers to look undefensively at women’s social status and the political relations between men and women, which exact from mothers – even those who are men – unnecessary and unacceptable sacrifices of power and pleasures.

A feminist mother’s growing ability to name and resist the forces ranged within and against her undermines many varieties of self denial to which maternal thinking is susceptible. This does not mean that cheery denial, inauthenticity, or self-loss in attentive love – to take only three examples – can be “cured” by feminism. These are temptations endemic to maternal work. But a clear-sighted rather than mystifying apprehension of “oneself and one’s society,” combined with real increases in women’s opportunities and self-respect, shifts the balance away from illusion and passivity toward active responsibility and engagement. A mother acquiring feminist consciousness ferrets out the meaning of dominant values, asking whose interest they serve and how they affect her children. To be a feminist mother is to recognize that many dominant values – including, but not limited to, the subordination of women – are unacceptable and need not be accepted.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 23.

²⁹⁹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 237-238.

I observed in the participants, in the course of the interview process (and have observed within myself in the course of mothering and priesting) varying degrees of the kind of frustration discussed above. I am convinced that there is a correlation between “mother rage” and clergy burnout. Clergy are also required to bury the secret, angry, discontent aspects of ourselves to present a serene (or holy) exterior. The pressure to take care of others and be selfless and contained can build up to a point of desperation or destructiveness. Clergywomen and men, because of the maternal work that they all practice, can all benefit from a clear sighted, truth telling, feminist consciousness. The limitations of this thesis determine that it cannot be explored in this context, but perhaps it is a topic for future research.

Where to from here?

The answer, of course, is complicated. Our gendered bodies need not determine the labour that we are required to do (except of course, when it is the actual labour of birth). But embodiment does imply that gendered identity and gendered experience must impact on the context and praxis of ministry. Giving birth and raising children are potentially a significant part of female experience. As seen in previous chapters, theologian Mercy Amba Odooye (who is neither a mother nor a clergy person and yet has very relevant perspectives on both vocations) has discussed the African feminist context that differs from the Western model not least in that African women seem less ready or willing to sacrifice motherhood on the altar of professional or vocational engagement. In fact, for most women in Africa, choosing one or the other is not a choice. Stephanie May’s observation that celebratory rhetoric of white women being able to choose careers over motherhood, or manage both motherhood and careers, “belied the racial and economic realities for many

non-white or immigrant women who had long combined mothering and waged labor.”³⁰⁰ Clearly this is not a new (or exclusively Western) issue.

While motherhood adds a complex dimension to continuing education and professional advancement, it is a central aspect of African female identity and therefore many women manage themselves (and encourage each other) to find ways to wear both hats.

Rosemary Radford Ruether has challenged clergywomen to redefine ministry.³⁰¹ I am convinced by the research conducted for this study that clergy mothers have an important role to play in this clergy-led revolution that will subvert and transform the institutional church from within. Clergy mothers can help the church become the church that it is called to be, so that both women and men can experience the radical liberation that the gospel promises. This is the same call that Mercy Amba Odoyoye and others repeat for men and women to work together to “redeem the Church”.

So we end as we began, full circle, with an altar (or a kitchen table) in our midst. The pioneering clergywomen interviewed for this research are courageously claiming their authority and are determined to empower others. They are all aware of the powerful implications of practising being a priest in a female body. “Eve” articulated most clearly the importance of honouring (although she was even more forthright), “the demand to be conscious and true to who we are” as an inalienable necessity.

In the end, motherhood and ministry are both all about power: who wields it and how – and how we empower (or do not empower) other people. Jesus, born of Mary, shows us the power of vulnerability. Anglicans speak of the priesthood of believers that implies that all have valuable contributions to make in ministering to each other. Sacramental mothering and presiding like a mother can help to make that idea a valuable and valued common practice.

³⁰⁰ Stephanie May, “Mothers and Sons: Feminist Parenting and the Conundrum of Raising Males,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 121-133.

³⁰¹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 200.

Making a preferential option for the children resonates with what Alastair Barrett calls 'anti-liturgy'. He speaks about "presiding with children" in the book *Presiding Like a Woman* while recognising the ways in which Jesus embraced the interruptions of children. He even goes as far as to suggest that children "have the capacity to be 'co-presiders' while recognising that "this is not where our liturgies generally 'place' them".³⁰²

Bearing this idea of the co-presiding of children in mind, I end on a personal note with the following story about my little Sam who loves to come to our church (where he feels entirely welcome and at ease). Recently, he was an integral part of one of the regular Sunday morning services (at which I was presiding) when the childcare arrangement I had made fell through. So he processed in with the altar party, and stood beside me as I greeted, absolved and offered the peace to the congregation. The most humanising and amusing moment was when (after taking himself out to the loo) he raced in from the door of the church straight down the centre aisle and grabbed me around the knees while I was reading the Gospel. He was disruptive while I was leading the prayers. It was particularly stressful when he joined the clergy and lay ministers behind the altar for the consecration of the Eucharist. He was full of energy and curiosity and mischief. He even crawled under the altar at one stage. I was worried about how he would behave during the distribution of communion – but he sat like a little angel in the big chair to the left of the altar the whole way through. For me, despite the anxiety that my child might irritate or offend some clergy and congregants, I experienced this as one of the most real Eucharist feasts at which I have ever had the privilege of participating. The congregation witnessed me mothering my child and my child witnessed me priesting the congregation. The words of Sara Miles (quoting her rector Paul Fromberg) resonate here: "the surest sign of Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist is when there's someone completely

³⁰² Barrett, "In persona Christae", 173.

inappropriate at the altar."³⁰³ She declares in her book *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*:

That growing, changing, unruly flock of Jesus's was the only force that could reform the church: When you let the wrong people in, the promise of change could finally come true.³⁰⁴

The seven-year journey that I have taken in the course of researching and writing this project has lead me on a labyrinth of self-discovery and offered me complex insights into ACSA. I thought I was looking for guidance on how to be a mother and a rector. I have learned that both mothering and priesting are, in practice, joyful and difficult and entirely mundane. The emotional and practical demands of both vocations are relentless. I have learned that being a rector at this stage of motherhood is complicated. The burdens of church administration and management and politics can be overwhelmingly demanding at a time when young children still need an abundance of time and attention.

Therefore, I have chosen to make a preferential option for my children. But I have also learned that children ought not to be a liability for engagement with ministry. They can help to establish clear boundaries and keep priests who are mothers focused on priorities other than ministry. Children also can change the demographics and increase the noise levels and playfulness of a congregation. Perhaps clergywomen with children might even attract more young families into the church. As the interviews indicated, with careful orchestration, the two vocations can benefit each other.

Through the practice and rituals of motherhood and through listening attentively to the stories of other clergywomen's experiences, I have come to understand the rituals and practice of priesthood with a new resonance. Priesthood, like motherhood, is about reminding particular people of the stories that define us, caring for people in community, and walking with people

³⁰³ In private email correspondence dated 11 September 2014.

³⁰⁴ Sara Miles, *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*. New York: Ballantine Books, (2007), 241.

whom we choose to love through transitional moments and ordinary time. Priest and mothers tell stories and teach, feed people, comfort and console people, counsel, mediate, hold people accountable and help to tidy up the messiness of life. This research has offered a glimpse into the complexities of the life and the work of both priest and mother. These vocations are invaluable, but still vastly undervalued. These vocations are a calling to serve, but also a calling to empower others to serve and to reconsider where power resides and how best to implement it so as to rebalance the home, the church and the world. I close with another collect called “Motherly Saviour” by Janet Morley that recalls the theology of Julian of Norwich:

Christ our true mother,
you have carried us within you,
laboured with us,
and brought us forth to bliss.
Enclose us in your care,
that in stumbling we may not fall,
nor be overcome by evil,
but know that all shall be well, Amen.³⁰⁵

EPILOGUE

I am grateful for the clergywomen who shared their experiences and their interpretations of those life lessons with me so that I have been able to reach my own conclusions about what is right for my own praxis of motherhood and ministry. They (and countless others) are pioneering role models who help demonstrate possibilities for practising priesthood (and motherhood) differently. They remind me that there is a new horizon of hope towards which I also can live and work. They remind me that God is love and that the church is called to be the body of Christ. Clergy and laity are still learning how to be a priesthood of believers working out our theology and our praxis in community with all Christians. This is the case whether we agree with those whom we encounter in our local and wider Christian community or not, and whether we feel comfortable with them or challenged by them. But regardless of where we are on the Christianity and theology spectrums, we all belong to the Body. My

³⁰⁵ Morley, *All Desires Known*, 26.

friend René August once explained the importance of speaking our truths because if we do not, “your silence robs me.” We need to continue to, in Nelle Morton’s words, “hear each other into speech” My hope is that the stories of the courageous participants in this study might help to expand other clergywomen’s (and clergymen’s) horizons and visions for themselves and for our beloved Anglican Church in Southern Africa. The following poem offers a glimpse of the justice and equity that a joyfully inclusive and attentive church can provide:

“At the table of Christa”

by Nicola Slee

At the table of Christa
The women do not serve
but are served
The children not silent
but chatter
The menfolk do not dominate
but co-operate
The animals are not shushed away
but are welcomed
At the table of Christa
There is no seat of honour
for all are honoured
There is no etiquette
except the performance of grace
There is no dress code
except the garments of honesty
There is no fine cuisine
other than the bread of justice
At the table of Christa
There is no talk of betrayal
but only of healing and hopefulness
No money changes hands
but all know themselves rich in receiving
Death is in no one’s mind
but only the lust for life
No one needs to command ‘Remember’
for no one present can ever forget.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶ Nicola Slee, “At the table of Christa,” in *Presiding Like a Woman*, eds. Nicola Slee and Stephen Burns, (London: SPCK, 2010), 178.

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Appendix A

Interview Semi-structured Schedule Questions

1. How do women priest differently? Are there particular contributions that you are able to make as a woman (liturgically, iconically, pastorally)?
2. Did your theological training prepare you for the realities that you face in your life and work as a woman priest (ie. Was it gender sensitive)?
3. How is this vocation different from being a working mother in any other professional capacity?
4. Is your vocation life giving or life draining?
5. How has your vocation impacted on (and how does it continue to impact on) your relationships with your partner/children?
6. How does having a family transform ministry?
7. How does engaging in ministry transform family life?
8. Is there a before and after comparison that can be made?
9. How do you establish boundaries to protect your family from the potentially all-consuming and unending needs of the people to whom you minister?
10. What are the obstacles that make the practice of your vocation particularly difficult in your context?
11. What are the support structures that make the practice of your vocation possible?
12. Does the church (institution and congregation) take your role as mother seriously?
13. Is sexism still rampant in the hierarchical institution and/or in the congregations that you deal with - and if so, do you think that equality in a patriarchal institution is impossible?
14. Is the ordination of women a subordination and if so how are women complicit in our own subordination?
15. Is the promise of some transformation of holy orders worth the costs we bear?
16. What are the implications of a female body to the aesthetic and the persona of being clergy? Do you wear clerical shirts/robes/vestments differently from your male colleagues?

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEACH: Embodied Priesthood: Narrative Interviews on Motherhood and Ministry with Clergy Women in South Africa

Have you been informed of the purpose of the study? **Yes/No**

- PhD thesis
- Data collected to be published in the form of a thesis
- Some of the data may be used for publication

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study?

• At any time **Yes/No**

• Without having to give a reason for withdrawing **Yes/No**

Has there been any pressure exerted to participate in this study? **Yes/No**

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions/discuss the study? **Yes/No**

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? **Yes/No**

Have you received enough information about the study? **Yes/No**

Do you agree to take part in this study? **Yes/No**

Do you agree to the researcher recording the interview? **Yes/No**

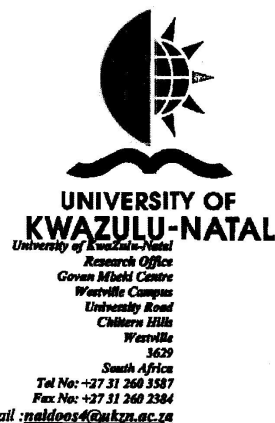
I, the undersigned, consent to being interviewed by Eliza Getman. I have not been unduly pressured into granting this interview and understand that I am free to terminate the interview at any stage. I understand that any information will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The data collected will be published in a mini-thesis as a requirement towards Rev. Getman's PhD. in Gender and Religion at the School of Religion and Theology at University of kwaZulu- Natal.

Signed _____ Date _____

(Please print name in block letters) _____

Appendix C

Ethical Approval



05 December 2009

Rev. E J Getman
c/o School for Religion and Theology
Faculty of Social Science and Humanities
PIETERMARITZBURG CAMPUS

Dear Rev. Getman

**PROTOCOL: Embodied Priesthood: Narrative Discourses on Motherhood and Ministry
with Clergywomen in South Africa**
**ETHICAL APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0836/2009: Faculty of Humanities, Development and
Social Sciences**

In response to your application dated 20 November 2009, Student Number: 207512632 the
Humanities & Social Sciences Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned
application and the protocol has been given **FULL APPROVAL**

**PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a
period of 5 years.**

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully


Professor Steve Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

SC/sn

cc: Dr S Nadar
cc: Ms B Jacobsen

Appendix D

A Guide to the Participants

- “Rebekah” is married to another Anglican priest and they have two young children. Her own mother died when she was a teenager. She no longer lives in South Africa.
- “Ruth” was previously married to a man, with whom she had two biological children and adopted four others. She divorced and was a single mother for many years. But shortly after the interview she married another woman and left the country.
- “Hannah” is married with two young children and works fulltime as a school chaplain at an Anglican girls’ school.
- “Rachel” is divorced and has made a conscious choice not to be a biological or adoptive mother.
- “Sarah” has never been married, but raised her late sister’s child as her own and now shares in the parenting of her grandson.
- “Mary” is single and childless, but this is due more to circumstance rather than choice, and she conscientiously practices mothering the children of those close to her.
- “Eve” is a single mother of two grown children and a grandmother. One of her daughters was still in school during “Eve’s” years of seminary training.