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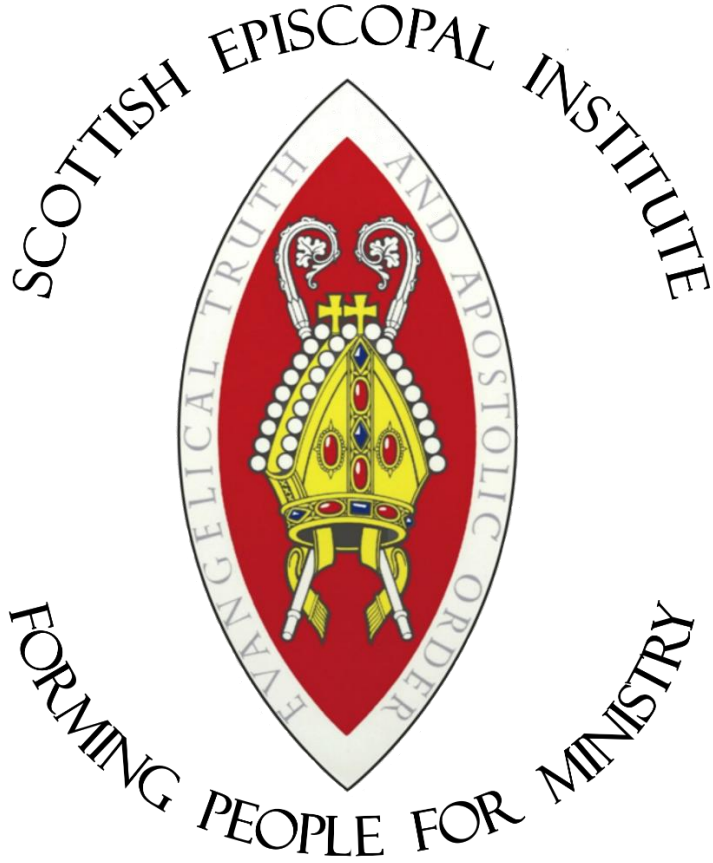

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ARTICLES

REVIEWS

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Editorial: En/gendering God and Church? What does it look like? How does it feel? What does it mean?

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Contributors to this Special Edition of the *Journal* were given a very broad remit to engage with gender in the context of the Church or the churches. Gender is a term that has a range of meanings both scientific and cultural. It has also had a history of being controversial – perhaps particularly in its relationship with feminism, which could be defined as a movement that advocates for gender equality. So, there was promise of a lively, but also a considered response which is arguably what these seven contributions (that also encompass a series of framing conversations with peer reviewers) have delivered.

Several themes predominate. There is considerable critical interest in liturgy: the gender inclusiveness or otherwise, of its language in practice (Thomassen), or more broadly, its in/capacity to be sensitive to trauma resulting from male violence against women (Browell), not the least within church contexts themselves (Browell, McWhirter). All these papers, implicitly if not explicitly, examine the impact on women, girls and those identifying as LGBTQ+, of finding themselves discounted as groups or categories, their alternative perspectives on liturgical leadership, performance or change – offered in good conscience – passed over if not actually proscribed (Wills). Whilst these have implications for all forms of Christian community and worship, they are of particular interest, perhaps, to the 'liturgical' Christian denominations represented in the collection: Churches in the Anglican communion, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church of Norway.

All seven authors write with knowledge of the history of gender-based restrictions within Christian churches and of centuries of unthinking devaluation of women and girls as leaders and teachers within those communities. But there is also recognition that feminist theologians since the 1970s and 80s have had a huge impact, not the least in revisiting and reconstructing so many narratives of female figures who have played their part in our formation as Christians. In the spirit of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's classic work, *In Memory of Her* (1983), which laid bare in devastating detail, the likelihood that most of the women in the New Testament stories have either been reduced in significance or written out altogether, several authors in this collection choose to celebrate Christian foremothers. Julian of Norwich's daring use of language, in the 14th-15th

centuries, predates the modern movement of feminist theology and liturgical reform by more than 600 years (McWhirter) though her reference to God as Mother and Father has never become mainstream (McWhirter, Thomassen). Her contemporary, Margery Kempe, opened a dazzling seam of sex and body positive reflection on human relating to God and Christ and modelled a quite startlingly impressive and effective way of skilfully defying the normative masculinity of ecclesiastical authorities (Isherwood). In a quasi-liturgical procession around St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh, Jo Clifford invites visitors or congregants to remember and name the foremothers: Mary, 'mother of god' but also Mary Walker, mother of the Walker sisters whose endowment enabled the cathedral to be built. Though the overemphasis on women as mother or on motherhood seems to have had an impoverishing effect on some efforts to reimagine God (god, 'God') (Thomassen), this procession around the Cathedral also embraces the presence there of the Mother's Union. They are no longer just compliant domestic helpers but 'a quietly radical force' addressing the needs of women and girls in abusive relationships. And there are others to name if we accept the invitation: to notice a memorial to the priest Pamela Skelton; to sit or stand with the female prophet who waits faithfully on that still small (non-exclusively gendered) voice.

But practising a feminist *anamnesis*, in bringing or re-presenting historical and biblical female figures, is not the only tool we have been gifted by our more contemporary feminist foremothers. Adrienne Rich notably described the process of revisioning as 'the act of looking back, or seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction',[1] and this is a key theme for Anna-Claar Thomasson-Rosingh. She claims pneumatology as a vital area often neglected in feminist theological research. And in her revisioning of the fourth century theologian Basil of Caesarea's, *On the Holy Spirit*, Thomasson-Rosingh sees inspiration and confluences – Basil's is the image of an equal trinity, not just 'a lone man at the top' – as well as points of frank disagreement with a writer who could hardly be called a feminist. Drawn through this encounter with Basil into a profound reflection on the trinity, Thomasson-Rosingh moves on into a new ecofeminist and post anthropocentric concern with the Holy Spirit as the shared interactivity of the persons of God. The Holy Spirit breaks down barriers set up to guard limited goals, proposing instead, to be, strictly speaking, superfluous. Framed in metaphors that bring to mind the cosmic as well as the human, this reimagining of Holy Spirit challenges doctrinal and

[1] Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision' in Barbara and Albert Gelpi (eds), Adrienne Riche's Poetry and Prose (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co, 1993), p. 167.

cultural monocultures with possibilities of wilder but more fruitful ecotonal hybridities in interrelationships between the human and multiple other than humans.

Another notable feature of this collection are its invocations of the creative and poetic. Three authors describe themselves as poets and two are creative writers, one an artist. Working in different contexts with different levels of professional involvement in the arts, they nevertheless bring a characteristic tone to the work in which they are participating in this Special Edition. Some are excited by the great power language has, and has always had, to form, stretch, break or heal our perceptions of who we are and what it means to be gendered within a context of such divinely cosmic complexity. Others explore the play not just of weighty and freighted words and metaphors but also of visions, gestures, processions, inter or spect-actions and of the immensity beyond the anthropocentricity of texts, in their efforts to unwind, liberate, remediate or re-cover the potential of our en-genderings. As authors and readers will likely agree, the discussion of gender in liturgy, in theology, in church contexts or more widely in our different societies, will not be resolved in the short term. Browell's study of trauma theology and the development of theological scholarship on male sexual violence against women takes us back at least thirty years but seems, discouragingly, still to have plenty of mileage in the mid-2020s. McWhirter draws attention to historic sexual abuse in the Church of England that continues to impact both the lives of its victims and the church's reputation which, at the same time, is still mired in accusations of system wide inequality.[2] An assessment of our current political situation suggests that forms of misogyny and sexual abuse, disproportionately directed at women and girls, is far from dead in spite of decades of legislation. 'Anti-woke' celebrities and podcasters meantime, try to claim as simply 'social liberalism', efforts to bring an end to gender inequality that sit centrally and securely within our Christian prophetic tradition. Meantime, many so-called 'popularist' leaders, the vast majority of whom are men, adopt 'Strong Men' policies that are significantly (or militantly) traditionalist when it comes to gender roles. And even while there is still widespread acceptance in many parts of the world, of the idea of the equality of women and men and of the freedoms of variably gendered people to enjoy without fear their work-lives and relationships, gay sex and transgender remain polarising in some quite capacious pockets of society,

[2] The organisation Women and the Church (WATCH), for example, is involved at the time of writing in trying to raise awareness of discrimination against women on the grounds that there is still significant sexism in the Church of England. See https://www.womenandthechurch.org.

including some church and women's groups. McWhirter takes an eirenic line when she suggests that '…in developing our God language today, it's important to stress the care we must take to note the risk of essentialising gender, or, equally important, of negating the space we seek to create for women'.

I commend this collection of essays as an excellent place from which to start or continue the work of exploring gender equality as a significant feature of Church life and Christian witness. Of course, there may be those who feel that the issue of 'gender' has been too exclusively associated here with female gender and that the men who feature are disproportionately 'bad actors' and it is true that I have not sought out equal numbers of male and LGTBQ+ perspectives. Men of good will and those identifying as gay and transgender are also impacted – differently – in theology or liturgical language that touches on or employs binary gender and in their embodied experiences of church life and worship. And, of course, the issue of ex- or in-clusion raises questions about many other people who may feel their perspectives have been ignored in this question of gender. Discussions of intersectionality[3] are old enough now to stop us from assuming that we can say it is only gender that makes us more or less vulnerable to damaging forms of violence and ex-clusion. In response, I acknowledge the limitations of this edition and welcome continuing discussion of these issues. It is perhaps fruitful ground for a further Special Edition on this subject.

[3] In the early 1990s an African America civil rights activist and feminist professor of Law, Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the notion of intersectionality to help us recognize that oppression does not fall equally on all. Her theory proposed that not all women are the same. Moreover, whilst a relatively wealthy white woman may have to deal with the impact of patriarchy in significant ways, this impact will be intensified for many other women by intersecting forms of struggle against racism, ableism, ageism, cis-sexism, enslavement, poverty. So, intersectionality is a belief that oppressive factors are interlinked and cannot be solved simply as separate issues.

A Journey to the Quiet Place

Jo Clifford
Playwright, Performer and Elder in the United Reformed Church

When I was a child, I was imbued with a sense of God as a father figure: benevolent and loving, yes, but also distant and stern when he needed to be.

A bit like my own father, in fact… and I felt myself vastly inferior to him.

And the churches and the cathedrals which I visited and in which I worshipped were imbued with the same masculine authority.

Beautiful places, yes, and holy too: but also places of male hierarchies and male power.

A bit like the structures of the society we live in, in fact: the structures we are resisting and struggling to change.

And now that I've become an adult, after a lifetime of writing for secular spaces, I'm now creating sacred performance for sacred places:

Performances of both devotion and resistance.

In 2024 I made a piece for St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, for performance as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe - a piece I hope to revive in August (2025).

It's a tour round the cathedral: telling stories and inviting reflections as we go.

We start at the site of the font in the west end, take in the shape of the building, the story of its foundation, the memorials on the walls, one of its artistic treasures, and we end in the Lady Chapel in the east.

It's since occurred to me that every church building has these features: and that it would be possible to adapt this sacred promenade to any sacred building anywhere.

Especially since the title is now 'A Journey to the Quiet Place' and ultimately what it's about, I think, is the inner journey to the Sanctuary inside ourselves.

Being a trans/queer person, it comes naturally to me to want to subvert the male order of things. Perhaps never more so than in the Lady Chapel:

So, this is the lady Chapel.

The space dedicated to Mary the mother of god.

In a cathedral dedicated to Mary the mother of the 2 sisters who had it built.

You'd imagine it might be a place full of female energy.

But it's not. It's as patriarchal as all the rest.

Patriarchs in all the stained glass windows.

And the icon of the Mother and Child on the altar looks like it's been put there as an afterthought.

And while there's Mary on a hanging by the window

She's at her most submissive.

And she's on a tapestry.

On a piece of embroidery:

Women's work.

Never considered as important as men's.

But there are little subterranean signs of change.

Up there in the corner there's a tiny memorial to the first woman Anglican priest in Scotland.

Her name was Pamela Skelton; she overturned centuries of misogynist prejudice; and so she was a true revolutionary.

The Mother's Union are very present here, too.

And although when I was a child they were thought of as just domestic helpers to the men who ran the parish, and used to run church teas and baking competitions,

If you go to their website now, you'll find they're a quietly radical force in the world

Enabling women to gain education in patriarchal societies

And here in Edinburgh they offer safe spaces and help to women in abusive relationships.

Women who need to escape the abusive men in their lives

The men who are afraid of losing their power

And try to maintain it through abusing the women

Who maybe once loved them.

Frightened men make a lot of noise these days.

Frightened men who are afraid of losing their power

And who try to retain it through fighting terrible wars.

In Ukraine. in Gaza. In Sudan.

There is a story of a prophet of god

And the prophets these days are the women and the queer people

like me and probably you also

people trying to subvert the patriarchal order

the activists working to mitigate the climate emergency

the activists working in the cause of peace.

The story goes that one of us prophets

Was broken defeated and fleeing for her life

She went one day's journey out into the wilderness

And collapsed there under a juniper tree

And said:

Take me Sister Death

For I'm defeated and I'm good for nothing.

But Sister Death did not take her

Instead she sent an angel

Who touched the prophet and said:

Arise and eat.

And the prophet looked and there, a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water.

So she ate and drank and then lay down again, being so very weary.

And the angel came again a second time and touched the prophet and said:

Arise and eat, for the journey is too much for you.

And the prophet arose and did eat and did drink and then began walking.

She walked and walked for forty and forty nights and came to Horeb, the holy mount of God.

And when she came to the holy mountain she hid in a deep cave.

And there was a voice came and said

What are you doing here?

And the prophet said: I've been doing my best to do good in the world. And I've failed. They've killed all my companions and I'm the only one left and they want to kill me too.

And the voice said: go out and stand at the entrance to the cave.

And a great wind roared past, breaking the rocks into pieces. But our Mother was not in the wind.

And after the wind came an earthquake: but our Mother was not in the earthquake.

And after the earthquake a fire. But our Mother was not in the fire.

And after the fire a still small voice.

And it was so. And the prophet heard it.

And wrapped her face in her cloak, and stood at the entrance to the cave.

Waiting.

And as she waited she renewed her strength.

And went back to do her work in the world.

Early on a Friday morning each week I come to this place

Weary and exhausted, often,

And disheartened by the struggle.

In despair at the folly of the rulers of the world.

I come in the door, and she takes me in, the cathedral,

And it's as if she takes the burden off me

And offers me a sanctuary.

And I sit in this chapel,

In this chapel dedicated to Mary the Mother of God,

And a priest comes, and we pray together,

For the state of the world and for each other

And then the priest tells the story

The story that has been told here

Early each morning

Told here since the day the cathedral was built

Told here each morning whether or not there's anyone present to hear it

The story of the man who told us to love one another

Love each other because we, too, are loved.

And who on the night that he was betrayed
Broke bread and gave it to his friends to eat
And poured wine and gave it to them to drink
And told us to remember. Remember his story.
And the priest remembers.
The priest gives us bread
And the priest gives us wine
And gives thanks
And blesses us
And sends us out in love and peace
To love and serve the world.

Margery Kempe:
God's Wild Housewife (1373–c. 1438)

Lisa Isherwood
Professor of Feminist Theology, University of Wales,
Trinity St David

Margery Kempe was born into a prosperous merchant family in King's Lynn, Norfolk in 1373. King's Lynn, or in Margery's time, Bishop's Lynn, was a thriving crowded town which proudly displayed many fine public buildings amidst its dirty, narrow, bustling streets. There was a constant flow of newcomers into the town from both home and abroad and this was good for business. It also made Lynn a place where ideas as well as goods were freely exchanged. Margery's father, John Brunham, was a powerful, influential man in their community having been mayor on five occasions. He was one of two Members of Parliament for the town and served over a period of twenty years. He was also alderman of the influential Trinity Guild as well as at different times being Coroner, Justice of the Peace and Chamberlain. Margery was very proud of her powerful father but never mentions her mother or her childhood. At the age of 20 she married John Kempe and had fourteen children with him. While she records how physically attractive, she found him he never quite measured up to her father in her eyes even though he had considerable standing in the community.

Margery paints a picture of herself as frivolous and shallow, caring only about fine clothes and social status. However, she was also a businesswoman who tried her hand at two different types of business, brewing and milling, which were moderately successful. She must also have been a physically strong woman who not only bore 14 children but also went on pilgrimages throughout her life and even at an older age she went as far afield as Jerusalem. We know these details from the Book of Margery Kempe[1] which is often referred to as the first autobiography in English and it is remarkable for that because she was a married woman and an illiterate one at that.[2] This does not

[1] B.A. Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Translated with an introduction (London: Penguin, 1985).

[2] Margery had two scribes working for her. The first may have been her son who died at the time the second was employed. The second scribe was more scholarly, he was a priest, and with his employment the Book started to take shape. More detailed explorations of the role

imply she was uneducated and indeed she was aware of a wide range of written sources which were perhaps read to her. Scripture, with which she was very familiar, would have been conveyed via preaching, liturgical activities, church murals and stained glass. Margery also tells us she had robust conversations with priests as well as figures such as Julian of Norwich (1342- after 1416) and the theological commentator Alan of Lynn (1347-1432). The Book of Margery Kempe also tells us much about the determination of this woman. It took until she was 60 for the book to be finished and she had to keep replacing scribes, the first not being very able and then dying while the second proved better. Apart from a few sections of the book being mentioned in the 16th century her book was lost until the early 1930s when it was found by accident in the home of the Butler Bowdens, a Catholic family from Derbyshire. They had guests for the weekend two of whom worked at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Fortunately, they felt the books looked interesting and took them to London to be examined. The result being that in December 1934 the *Times* announced that a work by a medieval mystic had been discovered. As during her life, people in the 1930s had much to say about Margery the mystic! While the book was highly valued most comments were about Margery herself and few were complimentary. She was judged as mad, egotistical and a charlatan. It may have been the case that she is too earthy for those who wish to understand mysticism as an ethereal science. Or perhaps she is too wild for those who see mysticism as a sobering force that maintains the status quo. Whatever the case, it was Dean Inge who summed up the feelings of many who read her book when he said, 'she was certainly queer, even in a queer age',[3] a view that has been picked up in the 21st century with not quite the same meaning!

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and influence of Margery's amanuenses include: Sebastian Sobecki, '" The writyng of this tretys": Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015), pp. 257-283; Joel Fredell, 'Design and Authorship in the Book of Margery Kempe', *The Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 12 (2009), pp. 1-28; Rebecca Krug, 'Margery Kempe'in Larry Scanlon (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 217-28.

[3] Sandra McEntire, *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), p. x.

Margery opens the Book with a description of the birth of her first child and the emotional turmoil and spiritual crisis that accompanied it. She suffers what we in the twentieth century might call post-natal depression of the most severe kind as she had to be restrained for fear of hurting herself or her child. She was also sure she would die and with this in mind she called for her confessor who 'was a little hasty and began sharply to reprove her'.[4] His manner made it impossible for her to confess, and:

> Anon, for the dread she had of damnation on the one side, and his sharp reproving of her on the other side, this creature went out of her mind and was wondrously vexed and laboured with spirits for half a year, eight weeks and odd days. [5]

She was rescued from her anguish by a vision of Christ asking her why she had forsaken him when he had not forsaken her. He appeared to her as a handsome young man clad in a beautiful purple silk mantle. We see in her description that her eye for fine clothes and fine young men[6] is not dimmed by her torment. Christ is by her side as flesh and blood in this vision and there is nothing ethereal about him which remains true for the rest of Margery's visions. It is interesting that Margery sees no heavenly hosts or majestic choirs but just has a simple encounter with Christ who sits on the edge of her bed. This unassuming directness contrasts with the way the priest, who represented the institutional church, treated her. There may be echoes here of the tensions that were arising between the institutional church and the people during this period, or it may simply have been Margery remembering how she experienced the two encounters.

During this time there was a public debate between the church and secular power. With the rise of the merchant classes, the Church was losing its grip on trade, and the power it generated both financially and parochially. The Church challenged the merchants over both economic control and control over the law.[7] With both sides evoking piety as the reason the other should not be involved in the power game of trade. The clergy declared that only they were holy enough to be uncorrupted by amassing wealth, while the merchants

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[4] Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 23.
[5] ibid., p. 24.
[6] ibid., pp. 27 & 35.
[7] Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim. The Book and World of Margery Kempe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 75.

argued that religious people should stay away from such a temptation if their sanctity were to be preserved. Margery as a bourgeois religious woman embodied these tensions and in the midst of it she tells us she hungered for God's word and wished her soul to be filled with it. This desire led her to practice many of the techniques of prayer common in that era such as affective piety by which people placed themselves in scenes from the life of Christ. Margery was extremely skilled at this practice, and it often led to her weeping loudly and uncontrollably if she was involved in tragic scenes from the life of Christ. She was variously accused of hypocrisy, drunkenness and demonic possession, the latter being a fear she too sometimes had. She however tells us Christ said to her:

> I give thee sometimes small weepings and soft tears for a token of the love I have for thee and sometimes I give thee great cries and roarings to make people afraid of the grace I put in thee.[8]

Margery wanted to act as a mirror reflecting the glory of God and showing how he works in the ordinary lives of people and for her this gift of weeping was one way to do this. Interestingly, we are not told that Margery wept at times in life when she might be expected to such as the death of a son and her business failing and so we can conclude that she perhaps understood her weeping as an activity with purely religious/spiritual meaning.

Women in the medieval world and even today face several issues in relation to their bodies and sexuality and so it is unsurprising that Margery was looked on with suspicion. However, Caroline Walker Bynum[9] points out that there were strands in the medieval religious tradition that helped women deal with the otherwise overwhelming negativity about women's bodies. One such was the incarnation itself through which emphasis on the humanness of Christ enabled women to express the positive aspects of their own humanness. When I first discovered Margery, this fleshy incarnational emphasis was the hook for me to look more deeply. As a 20/21st century feminist body theologian I take seriously the central message of Christianity, incarnation. By incarnation I do not mean the once-and-for-all Son of God descending to earth to save the world through his death, but

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[8] Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 222.

[9] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982).

rather the glorious abandonment of the divine into flesh and the passionate dance of the human/divine that ensues.[10] And the purpose of this taking of flesh is life in abundance, liberated and embracing radical embodied equality. As a feminist I also take very seriously the understanding that how one's body manifests in the world affects how one is perceived, treated and the access one has to institutions as well as the power one has over one's own life.

Therefore, for me Margery Kempe is a fascinating figure to view through the lens of feminist discourses about the body. We are all familiar with the arguments for the pervasive nature of hetero-patriarchy and the way in which it begins through acts of intimacy, be they child rearing or love making. We are bred into it and our bodies encouraged not only to enact it, but also to find it attractive and attracting. We are encouraged to become willing victims of a discourse of dominance/submission that does not allow for full flourishing. The unequal nature of this enfleshed contract was encouraged by the Church Fathers who understood woman as the inferior creation and that woman's rebellion would be sexual in nature and so the control of her had to be embedded in sexual relations and sexuality.

But here we have a woman who changes the script placed on women in the medieval period through her physicality and, as we shall see, her physical encounters with the divine. As a feminist I have learnt to hear women to speech[11] and so I have always approached this book taking the words at face value which has made the journey an interesting and challenging one.

There were many conversations between Jesus and Margery recorded in her book and one of the most intriguing went as follows:

> Therefore I must be intimate with you and lie in your bed with you. Daughter, you greatly desire to see me, and you may boldly, when you are in bed, take me to you as your wedded husband, as your dear darling, and as your sweet

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[10] Lisa Isherwood*, Liberating Christ*, *Exploring the Christologies of Contemporary Liberation Movements*, (Cleveland OH: Pilgrim Press, 1999).

[11] The expression 'hearing women to speech' originated with African American feminist theologian, Nelle Morton, who argued that we can and must overcome the silencing and invisibility of women in the Churches because we are heard by God's Listening Ear, our first step to becoming fully human (*The Journey is Home, (Boston: Beacon Press*, 1985).

> son, for I want to be loved as a son should be loved by the mother, and I want you to love me daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband.[12]

It is perhaps misleading to call this conversation a vision since Margery is not whisked off into another dimension of reality but remains firmly in the world experiencing intimacy with Jesus who is brought solidly and physically into her world. As noted, Margery was extremely skilled in this way of devotion and had many such encounters. She tells us that she attended the Virgin during her pregnancy and birth, holding her hand, assisting the baby into the world and giving the exhausted mother mulled wine. During this conversation the Virgin Mary gets annoyed with Margery and asks her to leave! She was there at the crucifixion, consoling the onlookers and questioning the crowd. She was, in this scenario, acknowledged by those at the foot of the cross. Margery would not have been alone in all these rather standard devotional scenarios but where she parts company with others is in the physical intimacy of many of her 'conversations'. What is extraordinary is the way in which she remains on solid earthly ground drawing the divine in and reporting the impact these conversations had on her life.

Not content to bed Jesus Margery married God! This was a grand affair with Jesus, Mary and all the apostles in attendance.

> And then the Father took her by the hand, in her soul, before the Son and the Holy Ghost: and the Mother of Jesus and all the twelve apostles and Saint Katherine and saint Margaret and many more saints and holy virgins with a great multitude of angels, saying to her soul:- ' I take thee, Margery, for My wedded wife, for fairer, for fouler, for richer, for poorer, so that thou be kindly and gentle to do as I bid. For, daughter, there was never a child so gracious to its mother as I shall be to thee, both in weel and in woe, to help thee and comfort thee. And thereto I make thee surety'. Then the mather of God, and all the saints that were present in her soul, prayed that they might have much joy together. [13]

They exchanged the traditional vows, but significantly God also promised to be more obedient to her than any child ever was to his

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[12] Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 126.

[13] ibid., p. 123.

mother. This is extraordinary theology and there is more to come. As they lay in bed God spoke to Margery: 'take me to thee as thy wedded husband, as thy dearworthy darling…kiss my mouth, my head and my feet as sweetly as thou wilt'.[14] Is this the mystic marriage of the soul experienced by many monks and other mystics? Perhaps, but Margery did not simply fly off into raptures or even orgasmic ecstasy at the sight of her God as we are told some did but rather she engaged in sexual play with her God which she finds more satisfying than with her husband. Margery's communion with the divine was transgressive. Her transgression was not only through sexual acts, but was also theological, for she placed herself at the centre of the witness of angels, saints and the son of God himself, and was focused on and adored as the spouse of God. Not content with this, we read that Jesus himself wished to come into her bed as both son and husband. What kind of Trinitarian theology does this give rise to?

Queer theorist Carolyn Dinshaw[15] celebrates the fact that what we see in these conversations is a very queer family emerging, one that in her view shows up the limitations of earthly families. Dinshaw sees Margery engaged in an energetic struggle against the nuclear family and its bonds. Margery's life as described to us in her book appears routinely arduous and even thankless and rather irrelevant in terms of what truly matters in her life. Dinshaw suggests then when mapped on to her spiritual life they have a different context and significance. This rupture with earthly arrangements can be seen as queer as Margery is disrupting what is expected of Christian women within a Christian family.

Susan Dickman[16] adds to Dinshaw's observations by suggesting that Margery interpreted her spiritual experiences in social terms and through these experiences she highlights the strangeness of the normative earthy family with its structures and manipulations of bodies, needs and desires. She argues that through Margery's eyes we see how lonely, controlled and indeed lacking in true intimacy normative family can be. As an example, Margery tells us that she wore a hair shirt[17] and her husband did not notice it when they made love.

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[14] ibid., p. 127.

[15] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities Pre and Postmodern,* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1999) p. 150.

[16] Susan Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the pious Woman', in Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England,* (Cambridge: D.S Brewer, 1984) p. 161.

[17] Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 47.

The fluid, interchangeable relationship that Margery has with the Godhead opens a world beyond the normal constraints of gendered sexual life yet grounds it in bodies, that of Margery and Christ. If we dare to take Margery seriously, we must face some very tough and disquieting questions about the rigid gender and sexual prescriptions of Christianity.

For me Margery more than most illuminates Carter Heyward's assertion that 'our sensuality is the foundation of our authority'.[18] Despite her fears and they were many, for she feared demonic possession on the one hand and rape during her travels on the other, she had an embodied sensual knowledge that sustained her through the many trials in her life. She had tasted, touched and been loved by God himself and his son, and had experienced this not only in her heart but on her skin.

Margery, the married mother who experienced fourteen pregnancies, lusted after and arranged to meet other men, and still saw and touched God, must have been rather a shock to the establishment. She places before us not a neat and tidy cloistered life but an embodied struggle, and she opens the way for those beyond clerical power to claim access to the divine. It is not at all surprising that Margery was viewed with suspicion by those in power or that she was on more than one occasion accused of heresy and brought before courts in Bristol, Leicester, York, and Hull. Lollardy was rife particularly in Margery's part of the world with the priest of her church being the first to be executed on suspicion of it. The Lollards were an anti-clerical Christian reform movement who were followers of John Wycliffe and their anti-clericalism in a highly clerical age led to them being considered heretics. Margery was so fond of talking about God and expressing her opinions that she was accused of preaching which, for those not ordained, was banned in orthodox circles and allowing lay people to 'preach', was viewed as a sign of Lollardy. The way she dealt with this accusation was typical of her. She claimed she did not preach but rather talked to people, on their level, about God. In one movement she defended herself and made a point to the authorities about relating to the people in a manner they understood, so lacking in the clergy. Each time Margery was questioned by the church authorities she answered the questions about matters of faith to the satisfaction of the bishops who tested her. Further in her defence pilgrimages were not approved of by the Lollards and so the

[18] Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989).

fact that she went on many may have helped her appear innocent. Although there is no evidence that Margery was a Lollard, I cannot help thinking that she adapted something of their approach to her own needs. Despite a certain fascination with clergy her anti-clericalism is obvious as is her direct access to the body of Christ.

Margery was a courageous woman, and not only because she faced the perils of a woman wandering alone around Christendom, but because she faced the dangerous power of the Church which was harsh on heretics. She acknowledged her fear, she described how her hands shook when she was questioned before a bishop, but she spoke up. Far from shrinking in the face of authority she met it full on. Margery knew the Bible very well and quoted it wisely during her trials. She was also not averse to pointing out the faults of her accusers and then asking their blessing when she was released. Her attitude towards those in authority may have come from her background, the confidence of the middle class, or it may have been from a deep trust in her own experience. It is difficult to know to what extent her family position kept her from ultimate harm but whatever the case she did, despite being disrespectful and disruptive, manage to stay on the correct side of orthodoxy.

Dinshaw [19] also thinks that her boisterous and disruptive performances subvert the very basis of heteronormative behaviour and demonstrate a queer tradition of answering back. Answering back to male authority is still not encouraged but in the medieval world it was a dangerous thing to do. Margery's generally disruptive behaviour is viewed by Dinshaw as an alternate mode of communication which is transgressive and demonstrates the contravention of allocated female space and a reaching out with body and voice beyond that space. It is interesting to note that by wearing white clothes, which Margery decided to do after embracing celibacy with her husband, she infuriated the secular authorities in the shape of the Mayor of Leicester who accused her of wishing to run away with the wives of the town.[20] Carolyn Dinshaw finds this accusation of sexual deviancy a predictable statement and instead understands the white clothes that Margery adopted as a form of transvestitism as they mark a disjunction between her body and her desires. The mother of fourteen wearing the clothes of a virgin would place her beyond being categorized by her bourgeoisie heteronormative community. Dinshaw [21] suggests that

[19] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, p. 150.
[20] Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 153.
[21] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, p. 156.

this queerness would challenge the community to question the adequacy of categories such as heteronormative families.

Margery certainly had a knack of agitating people and being accused of all manner of things from heresy to wife stealing and by implication lesbianism. It has been suggested that her extensive travels and the number of her confessors she engaged with reflect deliberate strategies to undermine clerical power in her life and further by declaring Christ himself as her teacher she engaged in a neat trick of subversion. It would be wrong to suggest that Margery managed to negotiate equality through her actions, however, she did create a space for a married medieval woman that was quite extraordinary. Through the expression of physical and sexual visions and enactments with the divine and through weeping and thus boldly inhabiting public space, this housewife expanded her life and the way she was able to move in the world. How she did this is of great interest to me as a body theologian.

Richard Rambuss's[22] research in erotic desire and the sacred in Christian history shows the way in which the sacred erotic transgresses the boundaries of vanilla heterosexuality, that form of sexuality that is paradoxically upheld with such vigour by Christian morality and underpinned by Christian understandings of gender. He gives many examples ranging from Catherine of Sienna who at some point sinks into the passionate flesh of a female Christ, to John Donne[23] who implores the divine to ravish him, take him, break him and imprison him which Rambuss says sounds like a rape fantasy through which, as a homosexual rape fantasy, redemption is sodomized.[24] Reading Rambuss, Michael Warner says that we see how 'religion makes available a language of ecstasy, a horizon of significance within which transgressions against the normal order of the world and the boundaries of self can be seen as good things'.[25] I argue that in the life of Margery Kempe we see many such transgressions that offer ways for women, then and now, to subvert the power of patriarchy.

What is interesting for the present paper is that Rambuss demonstrates how through the Christian centuries the worshipped and iconised body of Christ is very changeable and does not hold fast

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[22] Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

[23] John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959) p. 7.

[24] Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, p. 57.

[25] Warner in ibid., p. 58.

to sex, gender or sexuality either or in those who adore it. Rambuss insists that closet devotion 'is the technology by which the soul becomes a subject' [26] a space in which the sacred may touch the transgressive and even the profane.

As we read Margery, we see both these moves spoken about by Rambuss: she is intimate with father, son and spirit whom she understands as female and at times, she is also intimate with Mary, the mother of Jesus. And further we see how her intimacy did not limit her life but expanded her sense of self and the freedom of the self to express itself, her soul and body became a subject not simply an adoring object.

Margery gives us a graphic example of a woman who in her lifetime moved from the traditional to the totally transgressive, changing her economic, physical, sexual and social circumstances as she went. From the confines of her birthing bed, on which she nearly lost her mind, she engaged with the person of Christ as a handsome and sexually desirable young man who spoke words of comfort and hope to her. This embodied encounter was the beginning of her revolution. It was the first of many intimate moments Margery would share with Jesus and God, each leading to a greater assertion of her own being and bringing her closer to a full and free life. These divine enfleshed encounters propelled Margery towards her own 'godding'. Godding is a term used by Carter Heyward[27] to refer to the process by which Christians develop their Christian natures to the point of embracing their own divinity. Heyward argues that Christ is also the divinity that Jesus himself grew towards and therefore is a task for us all.

As an incarnational theologian I affirm that incarnational theology requires more humanness and less abstraction of the self. However, in the West, at least, we are fed a diet of abstracted desires. We are told that it is "otherness" that ignites our desires, but it is this otherness that has not served women well. This rhetoric is deeply rooted, and Western Christianity has for much of its history depended on the otherness of God both for the love and devotion that such a God requires and for the social control that such a God generates.

However, for many years now, feminist theology has been removing the otherness of the divine and locating it within and

[26] ibid., p. 54.

[27] Heyward, *Touching our Strength*, p. 93.

between people. Theologians like Carter Heyward[28] have located the divine within the erotic, the raw energy and power that is our birth right and which lies within and between us, the force that draws us out, attracting us to each other and the world in a dance of justice seeking. It is this energy that leads to our godding and to the redemption of both God and ourselves. Although Heyward does not wish to do away with a part of the divine that exists separately from us, her theology does make it difficult to see where this separate existence may be. The result of this is that God is never wholly, if at all, other. Conversely, we are never "other" to the divine. This is a relationship of mutuality and co-creation. In truth we have heard this language before in one way or another and still the world and the churches remain committed to the perpetuation of 'otherness', the large gulf between the one incarnation and the incarnate world.

Margery Kempe can help us with this gulf as she places before us the embodiment of moving beyond otherness. She weds God, but this is still the Godhead who for her is father, son and spirit (whom she often understands as female), with one very important addition: Margery herself. We are boldly told that God himself declared to her "and God is in you and you are in him"[29] and further that she is wedded to the Godhead as a whole, and not just one part of it. This is a very extraordinary marriage, which crosses all kinds of boundaries and opens all kinds of possibilities. As we have seen, everything is thrown into disarray, but what emerges is a relationality based on radical subjectivity. Radical, because this is subjectivity with no hidden corners, but rather a raw and gaping laid bareness of the self in relation to the self/divine with total absence of otherness. Margery shows how a desire for the other/God moves on and develops into an erotic engagement with the divine/self, and most importantly how this changes things dramatically. There can remain no otherness, and to a degree her weeping demonstrates this. Margery does not simply observe the beauty or suffering of others, whether Jesus, Mary, the saints or other people in the street, she embodies it all and is consumed by it. She illustrates graphically the movement beyond otherness which heightens all experience as it is based in the core of our being, that place where all are one and all is connected.

The beyondness that it becomes possible to think about when we dare to take Margery's story seriously is not the otherworldliness

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[28] Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Lanham, University of America Press, 1982).
[29] Windeatt, *The Book of Margery* Kempe, p. 125.

of much Christian theology. It is not a moving beyond in a spatial and temporal sense but rather a destabilising of identity while also affirming it, a type of nomadic subjectivity. Margery's self becomes so much bigger when she is both wedded to and an integral part of the Godhead. Her edges are expanded but at the same time she moves around her own core in a dance of autoerotic, erotic self-discovery. The nomad in her experiences Margery the father, Margery the son, Margery the spirit at the same time as she embraces father, son and the female spirit as her wedded lover. Of course, in this mutual subjectivity father, son and spirit all experience their divinity through Margery. The more her identity becomes nomadic, the more her subjectivity is heightened, but this is no mere gender performance. Father, son and spirit are all interchangeable and go beyond gender categories and into animal, mineral, ether, bread, wine, presence and absence and so much more. This is a subjectivity with no edges, a contradiction, a boundary-lessness that gives meaning but fixes nothing, this is queer embodiment. Through not losing her identity, but rather divinely affirming it, Margery moves her world and places before us endless possibilities.

So, can we dance with the Wild Woman?

What does Margery offer us in relation to authority and the body, particularly the female body? Quite clearly, she shows how to move from despair and lack of empowerment to a claiming of the divine self and through this personal, religious and social space. However, if we take her seriously then she also places transgression, real and at times shocking transgression, at the heart of theology. She does this not simply because she speaks of sex with God, but because of the tangled web of divine/human relationships that she embodies as her holy path. Her body connects her erotically to the core of the divine unfolding, divine cleansing flows in her tears, redemption and salvation run through her veins and resurrection throbs in the intimacy of her relationality.

This changes everything. Through this experience, she changes the object of her discourse (devotion) and thus her own subjectivity. Through changing 'the subject', she is released into a fuller life and through being so liberated she expands the boundaries of theology. It has long been the contention of feminist liberation theologians that the divine is not complete but is in process just as we are.[30] Margery demonstrates this through her sexual union with all aspects of the Godhead through which all the fixed categories become fluid and

[30] Isherwood, *Liberating Christ*, p. 150.

changeable. This movement and change allow for growth which is necessary within any process of becoming, divine or human.

Margery appears to be without boundaries; she propels us to explore limitless embodiment and radical subjectivity and in so doing truly to incarnate the gospel of radical equality. The authority for this lies in the female body which has learned to listen to itself and thus claim its own divine power. She illustrates for us that while we allow the enactment of fixed binary opposites, stable and unequal categories on and through our bodies by sexual stereotyping and sexual intimacy we fail to open to the diverse and surprising wonder of radical incarnation. Dinshaw[31] claims that touch is central to the queerness of Margery Kempe, to the way in which she destabilizes fixed categories and places skin on skin as a central aspect of incarnational religion. She suggests that queerness knocks signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies making them strange and working in a way to bring about perpetual shifts and responses in those touched. We certainly see this in terms of Margery's embraces with the Godhead, but Dinshaw also points out that her effect on communities is corporeal. She is mostly viewed as too loud and too bodily, but her narrative also tells us that at times people are totally changed by an encounter with her, leprous women are changed, perhaps not healed but significantly changed and a woman out of her mind after childbirth allows Margery to touch her and is calmed and restored to mental well-being by the touch.

Margery is troublesome! In a world where a closed womb and a closed mouth were preferable, she had neither. It would be far too easy to write her off as mad, she may have been once, but she found herself through embracing the humanness of Christ and the physicality of God. She is challenging for religious women because she is controversial, troublesome, self-assured, physical and gloriously wild. But in Margery we see a woman who was immersed in the religious conventions of her day and by using them in her own flamboyant way expanded her world and gained authority in her life as well as offering it to others. As Dean Inge suggested she was indeed queer even in a queer age and this too is a great gift as she opens worlds beyond the norm yet fully grounded on this earth.

Margery shows us that our bodies as women are the foundation of our authority, and this authority is the site of redeeming enfleshed incarnation.

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[31] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, p. 163.

Voicing God as 'Mother': Using Julian of Norwich to Support Female Victims of Male Abuse

Liz MacWhirter
Novelist and Poet

> As verely as God is oure fader, as verely is God oure moder. (Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love*, 59:10)
>
> [As truly as God is our father, so truly is God our mother.]

For women and girls who have been traumatized by male violence and abuse, the radical gender-balanced portrayal of God in the medieval contemplative theology of Julian of Norwich[1] can provide a healing refuge. Ultimately Julian points to the divine as beyond gender and language,[2] but voicing Julian's theology of relating to God as equally mother and father can help restore the shattered female self-image following abuse.[3] Following the publication of the Makin Report[4] highlighting patriarchy as a driver of abuse, this article suggests ways to use words as a healing gift drawing on Julian's theology, providing a semantic bridge for victims and survivors to cross over into post-traumatic integration.

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[1] The anchoress Julian of Norwich is the earliest known female writer in Middle English. In May 1373, she experienced visions of Christ in a traumatic illness that formed her theology.

[2] See Liz Herbert McAvoy (ed.), *A companion to Julian of Norwich* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer. 2008); Laura Moncion, 'Bodies that talk: Julian of Norwich and Judith Butler in conversation', *Postmedieval,* 9, 2 (2018), pp. 216-230.

[3] Ally Moder, 'The Changing Self; Forming and Reforming the *Imago Dei* in Survivors of Domestic Abuse'. In Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross (eds), *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture & Church in Critical Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 2020), pp. 225-247.

[4] See Church of England, *Independent Review into Church's handling of Smyth Case*, 2024 Section 9.1.10. https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/independent-learning-lessons-review-john-smyth-qc-november-2024.pdf

To many in the church today the notion of God as mother is still received as surprising, unsettling or even subversive; 'Father' is one of the most deeply institutionalized metaphors in Christianity.[5] And yet the Scottish Episcopal Church 2022 'Best Practice Guidelines' [6] challenge the status quo: 'liturgists ought not presume that there is only one pronoun for God'. We should use 'expansive language' to 'seek to tell as much truth about God as we can', expressing 'the fullness of the triune God', using 'inclusive language' to respect the dignity of every human being as an image of God, noting that 'gendered language for God can sometimes imply otherwise'.

Where the one pronoun persists, the question arises: does patriarchy linger in language in Christian complicity with oppression?[7]

Consciously using expansive and inclusive language in the liturgy and everyday speech would enable us to imagine and relate to God, each other, ourselves and all of nature in more expansive ways. And Julian of Norwich can provide a model for us to open ourselves to this possibility.

Language matters

No language is ideologically innocent:[8] this is a given in academia today. Philosopher and literary theorist Terry Eagleton summarises four decades of critical thought across the Humanities and wider culture[9] that have led us to Post-Criticism, or Post-Theory: we need to perceive all language through a critical lens. Yet in wider society, any

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[5] Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (eds), *The writings of Julian of Norwich: A vision showed to a devout woman and a revelation of love* (University City, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 308

[6] See Supporting Document for Resolution 2022-A060, Guidelines for Expansive and Inclusive Language. Recognising that the gift of language is 'damaged, finite, and limited', 'development of liturgical language must enlist the skills of scholars, poets, linguists, musicians, and cultural specialists'. Scottish Episcopal Church, 'Appendix B: Best Practices Guide.' From *Supporting Documents for Resolutions of the 80th General Convention*, 2022.

[7] Al McFadyen, '" I Breathe Him in with Every Breath I Take": Framing Domestic Victimization as Trauma and Coercive Control'. In O'Donnell & Cross (eds), *Feminist Trauma Theologies*, p. 80.

[8] Terry Eagleton, *Literary theory: an introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 208.

[9] See ibid., Afterword in the 40th Anniversary edition.

work that questions things taken to have fixed meanings can attract strong criticism, particularly when it comes to religious orthodoxies, a point raised by Kevin Mills in the most recent volume of the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*.[10] In one context, words encode and enshrine doctrine; in another, they interpret and question. Such is the uneasy relationship between literature and theology; a position I occupy as a poet, author and theologian. In his chapter, Mills points to the important work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in developing a hermeneutics of suspicion during recent decades of revolutionizing critical thought that 'leaves room for hope',[11] and faith. Given the context of this article, urgent questions need to be asked. And in the asking, we can explore the ways in which words diminish, alter or expand our semantic space. Crucially, the ability to hold open possible meanings, enlarging our semantic space, enables cognitive reframing, innovation and change.[12]

Opening and growing our shared semantic space benefits our perception, our imagination and cumulatively, the cultural imaginary. Holding uncertainty with curiosity can be part of our work with God to help new possibilities come into being.

Sam Wells, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields in London, at the time of writing, emphasizes that we can never know enough to assume our understanding or judgement is accurate. He invites us to hold all our conclusions with humility.[13]

Perhaps the posture of staying open contributes to a constant rebirthing and remaking process in Christ, or to paraphrase Julian, making all things new.

Using generative language for God supports healing and growth.

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[10] Kevin Mills, 'Literature and theology'. In C. Knellwolf and C. Norris (eds), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 9* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 387-400.

[11] Ibid., p. 395.

[12] Jonathon Crewe, 'Creative writing as a research methodology', *New Vistas* 7, 2 (2021), pp. 26-30. See also divergent thinking in X. Yang, F. Xu, K. Qin, Y. Yu, Q. Zheng, A. Zhu, B. Hu and C. Gu, 'How does the Dunning-Kruger effect happen in creativity? The creative self-concept matters', *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 54, 101638 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2024.101638

[13] Sam Wells, *Love Mercy: The Twelve Steps of Forgiveness* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd., 2020), p. 58.

And oure savioure is oure very moder, in whome we be endlesly borne and
never shall come out of him. (Revelation 58: 9-14)

[And our saviour is our very mother, in whom we are endlessly born and never shall come out of him].

Trauma victims and survivors in church today

So, how do we talk about God? The need is urgent to adjust the way we use language to create safer spaces for female trauma[14] victims and survivors of male abuse in faith communities. Not least, we should be ensuring our theology is trauma-informed.[15]

The shocking wider context is that in Scotland in 2024 the Police highlighted a 10% increase in reported domestic abuse[16], though we cannot know if this is due to an increase in abuse or reports made, or both. Four out of five incidents of gender-based violence were committed against female victims by male perpetrators.[17] Over their whole lifetimes, one in five women in Scotland experience gender-based violence.[18] Women are still institutionally disbelieved: this was the damning finding of a recent report into the experience of victims of domestic abuse in Scotland, which identified profound continuing

[14] The word trauma derives from the Greek word τραῦμα (wound). Using the wound as metaphor for visible and invisible traumatic harm is a biblical tradition, such as *Jeremiah*, 6.14.

[15] The leading trauma theologian Shelly Rambo refers to the scene after the resurrection in John 20 where Christ invites the disciples to touch his wounds. See Shelly Rambo, 'How Christian theology and practice are being shaped by trauma studies: Talking about God in the face of wounds that won't go away' *The Christian Century*, 20 (2019) https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/how-christian-theology-and-practice-are-being-shaped-trauma-studies; *Resurrecting wounds: living in the afterlife of trauma* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2019); 'Response to Willie James Jennings' *After Whiteness*', *Modern theology* 37, 4 (2021), pp. 997-1005.

[16] https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2024/september/policing-performance-report/

[17] Scottish Episcopal Church, 'General Synod Agenda and Papers', 2024, p. 22. https://www.scotland.anglican.org/agenda-and-papers-published-for-general-synod-2024/

[18] ibid., p. 22.

gender inequality within the criminal justice structures.[19] A 2022 Scottish Government Report on misogyny reports that prejudice, malice and/or contempt for women are still rife throughout culture. Misogyny upholds the 'primary status of men and male entitlement', driving abuse and violence, subjugating women and taking away their agency and freedom.[20] Under the principle of human rights and freedom of thought, misogyny itself cannot be a crime, but the upcoming Misogyny Bill should allow judges in Scottish courts to take misogyny into account in crimes against women.[21]

The Scottish Episcopal Church's Best Practice guidelines[22] exhort us to 'fully respect the full range of power differences and prioritize safety first and [our] comfort second'. Speaking of the divine as solely paternal and male can alienate women and girls who are abused in masculine authoritarian power plays – especially in the home. Whether such events are in the past or present or both, perceptions of an exclusively 'male' God reinforces patriarchal power. This is particularly the case where church communities are dominated by male leaders. Such a portrayal increases the sense of shame and confusion for victims of dehumanizing behaviour.

To avoid causing further damage to trauma survivors, as theologians Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross urge,[23] we must not be so rigid in our church traditions that we cannot reimagine our theologies in the light of lived experience. Refusing this change tragically closes the door to so many people who find their complex realities unmet in church, when narratives offered may not meet people in their place of need.

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[19] Emma Forbes, *Victims' Experiences of the Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Abuse: Beyond Glass Walls* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021.

[20] See Scottish Government, 'Misogyny, A Human Rights Issue', 2022. https://www.gov.scot/publications/misogyny-human-rights-issue/pages/1/.

[21] https://spice-spotlight.scot/2024/09/06/the-2024-25-programme-for-government-reaffirming-the-four-priorities-child-poverty-economy-climate-emergency-and-public-services/

[22] Scottish Episcopal Church, 'Appendix B: Best Practices Guide', *Supporting Documents for Resolutions of the 80th General Convention*, 2022.

[23] See Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross (eds), *Bearing witness: intersectional perspectives on trauma theology* (London: SCM Press., 2022).

The Church must listen and respond in a trauma-informed way to victims and survivors of abuse. Quite apart from the human impact, following the conclusions of feminist standpoint theory,[24] it could be said that those who are marginalized are the best qualified to critique a culture, as they are most likely to be the victims of its power dynamics.

The Makin Report identified 'muscular Christianity' [25] and 'misogyny and patriarchy' [26] as contributing factors in the horrific abuse of children and young men by John Smyth and the shocking failures of the Anglican church in the many choices it made, to ignore early and continued reports by victims, enabling further abuse to take place. Responding to the Report, a press release by the Church of England on 07/11/2024 admits that 'the response was not trauma-informed'.[27] Commenting on the Makin Report, an article published by the organisation Women and the Church, WATCH, warned that abuse of women may be the next scandal to hit the Anglican church, pointing to evidence showing that male privilege is a driver of violence against women. [28] The article says, in the increasingly conservative

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[24] Sandra Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* (Hove, East Sussex: Psychology Press, 2004).

[25] See Church of England, *Independent Review*, 9.1.17: 'Muscular Christianity' is also described as a 'conducive cultural and organisational factor' by Dr Elly Hanson in her paper produced for this Review. Dr Hanson suggests that this may have assisted or contributed to John Smyth's abuse: 'John Smyth's personality, the array of strategies he deployed to achieve his abuse and their interaction with conducive cultural and organisational factors and how he was treated and revered, created a formidable invisible web in which he entrapped numerous boys and young men'. https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/independent-review-churchs-handling-smyth-case-published

[26] See ibid., 9.1.10.

[27] ibid., 9.1.10.

[28] Martine Oborne, 'Why the next big safeguarding scandal in the Church is likely to be the abuse of women,' Women and the Church (WATCH) Blog, 2024. https://www.womenandthechurch.org/blog/why-the-next-big-safeguarding-scandal-in-the-church-is-likely-to-be-the-abuse-of-women

atmosphere of the Church of England, many of the biggest churches are teaching 'complementarianism' or 'headship' theologies. Even when enabling violence is far from their intention, in practice such beliefs reinforce privileging-devaluing gender power dynamics.

Legislation and best practice procedures alone do not prevent harmful attitudes and behaviours or make amends for millennia of prejudice. These principles need to be enacted in systems, behaviours and our choice of words. Indeed, the Scottish Episcopal Church Best Practice guidelines stress the need for 'poets, scholars, linguists and cultural specialists' to be involved in developing new liturgical language.[29]

As a poet, author, theologian and researcher, this article is offered in the spirit of imagining new possibilities for expanding the way we use language for the mystery we call God. Everyday usage of gender-balanced language for the divine would potentially expand our semantic space, our understanding of God, each other and ourselves, bringing about a healthy, healing balance.

Julian's theology of compassion

In the heretical atmosphere of late medieval Britain, Julian of Norwich wrote and intended her reflective theology for 'alle mine evencristen',[30] that is, for all her fellow Christians, with courage and conviction. Her theology was formed through visions of Christ which she experienced in May 1373 during a harrowing illness. Two texts have survived over the centuries: *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and *A Revelation of Love*.

A Revelation, her later text, depicts a compassionate, kenotic, self-emptying God who chooses to be born into frail flesh and is as much mother as father. More than a metaphor [31] or a model for human parenting, to Julian, motherhood is a reality of the divine, and the divine acts through human mothers.

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[29] See Scottish Episcopal Church, Introduction to 'Appendix B: Best Practices Guide', *Supporting Documents for Resolutions of the 80th General Convention*, 2022.

[30] See Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (eds), *The writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 26.

[31] ibid., p. 312 and p. 314.

This fair, lovely worde, 'moder', it is so swete and so kinde in itselfe that it may not verely be saide of none, ne to none, but of him and to him that is very mother of life and of alle. (Revelation 60: 39-42)

[This fair, lovely word 'mother', it is so sweet and so kind in itself that it may not be truly said of anyone but of him to him that is the very mother of life and of all.]

In A *Revelation of Love* Julian builds the case for a Trinity with multiples names: Father, Mother, Son, Brother and Lord. From chapter 52 to 63, Julian uses the word 'moder' [mother] to describe the divine on more than 80 occasions, rotating familial nouns in ways that clarify each definition and expand upon her meaning.

Significantly, Julian does not negate the male nouns and pronouns. Rather, her complex language and argument deepens our understanding of the mystery of God.

And than shalle the blisse of oure moderhed in Crist be new to beginne in the joyes of oure fader God.
(Revelation, 63:40-41)

[And then shall the bliss of our motherhood in Christ completely renew our many joys in our father God.]

The ways in which Julian incorporates the Father and Son as Mother can model expansive ways to use balanced language for God. For example, as mentioned earlier, Julian uses birthing imagery to convey her sense of our spiritual birth: through Jesus there is a second birth in grace that brings us back into God.

Thus I understode that all his blessed children which be come out of him by kind shall be brougt againe into him by grace.
(*Revelation, 63: 43-44)*

[And so I understood that all blessed children who are delivered out of him in the flesh shall be brought again into him by grace.]

It is a maternal enclosing, Julian calls it a 'beclosing', that is referred to 15 times in *A Revelation of Love. Beclosing* also denotes a mutual indwelling: God carries us; we carry God. As all strength, wisdom and goodness, God tends to us, nurtures us, *becloses* us.

Likewise, we are all entrusted as precious carriers of God to *beclose* God the father and the son and the holy spirit.

For the almighty truth of the trinite is oure fader, for he made us and kepeth us in him. And the depe wisdom of the trinite is our moder, in whom we are all beclosed. And the hye goodnesse of the trinite is our lord, and in him we are beclosed and he in us. We are beclosed in the fader, and we are beclosed in the son, and we are beclosed in the holy gost. And the fader is beclosed in us, the son is beclosed in us, and the holy gost is beclosed in us: all mighty, alle wisdom, and alle goodnesse; one God, one lorde.

(Revelation, 54.15-20)

[For the almighty truth of the trinity is our father, for he made us and keeps us in him. And the deep wisdom of the trinity is our mother, in whom we are all beclosed. And the high goodness of the trinity is our lord, and in him we are beclosed and he in us. We are beclosed in the father, and we are beclosed in the son, and we are beclosed in the holy ghost. And the father is beclosed in us, the son is beclosed in us, and the holy ghost is beclosed in us: all mighty, all wisdom, and all goodness; one God, one lord.]

Professor of medieval literature, Nicholas Watson, emphasizes in his footnotes to these verses in chapter 54 that Julian's language 'speaks out strongly against the notion of union without distinction'.[32] As in Trinitarian perichoresis, our discrete self is not absorbed into nor negated by intimate union with God.

And oure savioure is oure very moder, in whome we be endlesly borne
and
never shall come out of him.
(*Revelation, 50: 40-49)*

[And our saviour is our very mother, in whom we are endlessly born, and never shall come out of him.]

Could Julian's qualitative, discrete union rewrite a patriarchal myth that contributes to misogyny?

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[32] Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (eds), *The Writings of Julian of Norwich,* p. 296.

Some psychoanalytic theory points to the abjection of women deriving from the unconscious fear and horror of being overwhelmed by and of re-absorption into the mother of the child.[33] In several works the medieval literary scholar Liz Herbert McAvoy brings Julian of Norwich into conversation with Julia Kristeva, a feminist literary theorist and practising psychoanalyst. McAvoy writes that Kristeva identifies the maternal space as 'the pre-symbolic site of unity which underpins all human existence.' She argues that Julian configures perichoretic unity with God as a 'restoration of primary unity with the (m)other.' This unity is 'pre-discursive and extra-linguistic'. It 'reinstates woman alongside man for a fully coherent expression of full humanity and divinity'.[34]

If so, the triumph of patriarchy is to have convinced us otherwise.

Moving beyond metaphor

Returning to the post-critical understanding of language, the way we talk about God can diminish or expand our semantic space. Used well, language can enlarge our understanding and support experience of an intimate God in our journey to healing and growth. Julian's eighty references to motherhood offer a rich diversity of language we can draw upon to achieve this.

However, in developing our God language today, it's important to stress the care we must take to note the risk of essentialising gender, or, equally important, of negating the space we seek to create for women. We must also be aware, as theologian Merete Thomassen writes, of the experience of the Lutheran Church of Norway, that gender-inclusive language sometimes risks confirming patriarchal language rather than challenging it. And as Thomassen asks, 'what about women who are not mothers? What about women who are mothers, but who have not given birth to their children? Most of all: what about women who have given birth? Is motherhood all that is to say about such women?' [35] By introducing a moderate amount of gender-balanced language, our focus can be on a common humanity. Crucially, Julian moves beyond the language of the nuclear family and

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[33] See Janice L. Doane and Devon L. Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic feminism and the search for the 'good enough' mother* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

[34] Liz Herbert McAvoy (ed.), *A companion to Julian of Norwich,* p. 263.

[35] Merete Thomassen, 'Responding to the Sacred', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 21.3-4 (2022), p. 304.

gender in her theology. There is so much in her whole theology that can help us today in parsing the words and behaviour of Christ.

In the critical element of my doctoral thesis,[36] I develop the academic intersections between Julian's theology and trauma-informed theology, articulating the possibilities for transfiguration of the wounds of trauma in post-traumatic integration and growth.[37] The intersections reach far beyond and away from any gender, such as Julian's 'Lord and Servant' [38] parable that alleviates shame. The creative part of my thesis enacts these findings in poetry and fictional lived experience, giving the research insights public impact. One of my PhD creative outputs includes the chap book, *Blue: a lament for the sea*, which will be published by the poetry press Stewed Rhubarb in 2025. I have also written a novel about a violated nun on the Isle of Iona – soon to be submitted - which is located at the time of Julian of Norwich.

Conclusion

The Makin Report states that patriarchy within the Anglican church[39] has created the climate for abuse to flourish and therefore must be tackled. Inspired by Julian of Norwich, speaking of God as mother-father can help us participate in a cognitive reframing, restoring dignity and negating shame for female victims of male abuse and violence. Rotating the familial terms could enable church communities to accommodate the surprise of hearing the maternal divine spoken of in the same breath as the paternal. Expansive, inclusive language that goes beyond metaphors of gender and the nuclear family can also enlarge our understanding of God. Might an everyday inclusion of Julian's mother-father God even strengthen the female self-image before any shattering through abuse can occur?

To amplify Mark 16.17, we are called to tackle the evil of injustice in the speaking of new language.

The logo of the Scottish Episcopal Church evokes medieval illustrations of the side wound of Christ. Following Christ's example in John 20.19-29, as the body of Christ, let us healthily bear witness to the wounds. Let us be sensitive and fully trauma-informed so that wounds

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[36] At the time of writing, in Thesis Pending, my submission date is June 2025.

[37] Post-traumatic growth is evidence-based. See S. Haines and S. Standing, *Trauma Is Really Strange* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2015).

[38] Julian of Norwich*, A Revelation*, 51:179-199.

[39] See Church of England, *Independent Review*, 9.1.10.

can become transfiguring crossing points to healing and integration for the individual and our community.

The Work of Imagination and the Word: Art as a Para-liturgy of Protest

Kathryn Wills
Artist, Writer, Poet and Theologian

This article is personal, pastoral and academic. Inhabiting these three worlds sets up various tensions for me as a writer, and may prove a difficult read, so patience dear reader! It is also about how I have used my art to reflect more creatively on problems within the Roman Catholic (RC) Church, my church. The issues I identify and discuss most fully here, will refer to ways in which LGBTQ+ individuals and women are excluded from participating in the Church's liturgy, simply because of gender or sexual identity. I have linked these issues with the themes and resources of liberation theology and to the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) created by Brazilian dramatist Augusto Boal.

But I will begin with where the two pieces of my own artwork in question, come from, connecting them to my liturgical experiences. As I do this, I will try to explain the relevant doctrines of my church and the constraints they present.

The first piece is a performance artwork, the second, a poem. The first responds to the manifest exclusions of LGBTQ+ individuals from many mainstream Christian Churches, but also to elements of liturgy which exclude women and others, such as non-inclusive language. The second responds more intimately to my own situation as a Roman Catholic woman who is debarred from being a priest, celebrating the Eucharist or preaching. Specifically, the poem is a lament about being silenced – refused permission publicly to give the homily as part of the Mass. Why might any of this be of interest to this readership? It might, firstly, be of interest to note that the performance art in question was created in response to a series of online conference discussions about gender and liturgy, organised under the auspices of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) in 2021 and 2023, and still accessible on You Tube.[1] I hope therefore to relate this piece of artwork, to the concerns of this theological and liturgical context.[2]

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdcJ2TJ7A3s, accessed January 10, 2025.

[2] A brief word on nomenclature in the RC Church: a homily refers to the priest's address which interprets the scriptural readings. In other Christian Churches this is called a sermon. A Mass in the RC Church is

What is liturgy and where does it come from?

In beginning to address the question, 'What is liturgy and what is its function?' I will focus mainly on those familiar experiences of the RC Church which have framed and often restricted my work, although there will also be some references to other traditions.

What then is liturgy in the RC church and what is it for? At its simplest, we might think that liturgy is what church services are about. If we wanted to deal with it in greater complexity, we might focus in more detail on one view: Jean- Yves Lacoste's phenomenological approach,[3] according to which, all experience is ultimately liturgical is one somewhat attractive example. We inhabit liturgy, much as we inhabit the world; liturgy is thus about our whole encounter with the earth and cosmology. For Lacoste, as for his precursors such as Teilhard de Chardin, living in the world makes us participants in divine liturgy. However, I am interested here in laying out the far more limiting pragmatics of doctrine, as these have had the most immediate impact on my own religious life. In the RC Church, the Mass is the source and summit of human life, of human interaction with the divine. Liturgy is directly salvific; the Mass both reconstitutes and renews the individuals for whom it is offered, celebrating the love of God in specific ways which have been laid down in scripture and tradition. It works to educate the congregation and to attract people from outside the fold, in order that they may be drawn to the truth. The Mass in the RC Church recreates the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, not just symbolically, but in real terms. This is, therefore, the effective means of grace for all worshippers who receive the Eucharist. The Mass is also the self-definition of the Roman Catholic Church and characterises what it means to be Roman Catholic far more than any set of beliefs or doctrine. A quotation from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*[4] (Chapter Seven),

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a celebration of the Eucharist with scriptural readings, a homily and prayers. The Eucharist refers to the celebration of the sacrament itself, consisting of a Eucharistic liturgy and the distribution of communion (the consecrated bread and wine). Holy Communion is another name for the Eucharistic celebration, but the whole service itself is always called the Mass.

[3] Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans., Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

[4] Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Holy See: 1963) https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/do

makes clear just how important it is: 'In the liturgy, the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is by the Head and his members. From this it follows that every liturgical action, because it is an action of Christ the priest and his Body which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its effectiveness'.[5]

It is also clear from this quotation, that RC liturgy is ultimately authorised by a Vatican hierarchy having the power and taking responsibility for ensuring that what is delivered as liturgy, conforms to tradition and to written instructions such as *Liturgiam Authenticam.* Typically, this Vatican hierarchy grants executive power, for example, in England and Wales, to the Bishops' Conference and its Liturgy Committee in these places, [6] to take forward its authoritative injunctions.

In historical terms, the actual structure of the Mass and, in particular, its prefiguration in a form of table fellowship, dates back to the earliest Christian period[7] evidenced by the account of St Justin Martyr in 150 CE: '…when we have concluded the prayer, bread is set

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cuments/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html produced by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of The Sacraments by the Second Vatican Council as its definitive statement on liturgy.

[5] Not to attend Sunday Mass without good cause is still a serious sin. Liturgy here constitutes individual and communal identity. As one might expect, given this extraordinarily important role, liturgy is heavily prescribed: what liturgical texts are used, what Bible translations and even conditions under which one might participate. For example, you are, according to this rubric, unable to receive the Eucharist if you are deemed to be in a state of mortal sin without having gained sacramental absolution. In official Catholic teaching, there are less serious venial sins, such as getting angry and shouting at a family member, and mortal sins. Mortal sin is a much more serious matter such as murder and implies the full intention of cutting oneself off from God. To be absolved from sin involves sacramental confession to a priest.

[6] See https: //www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/liturgy/liturgy-committee/

[7] For a history, see Josef Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (Indiana: Notre Dame Christian Classics, 2012).

out to eat, together with wine and water'.[8] There are also, of course,[9] examples in the New Testament , most obviously, of Jesus (in all four gospels) breaking bread with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion, and then at Emmaus after the Resurrection (Luke 24:13), but also of members of the earliest Church devoting themselves, 'to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers' (Acts 2.42).[10]

Much closer to our own time, the key liturgical document produced by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* established a new form of liturgy for the RC Church that was revolutionary: the priest faced the people for the first time and the Mass was said in the vernacular as opposed to Latin. Additionally, there was a new emphasis on the inclusion of the Word: the readings of scriptural texts and their interpretation by the priest in a homily. In other Churches too, this proved groundbreaking.[11] Stephen Burns suggests this reform of the Roman Catholic tradition led to a notable re-emphasis on the sacramental dimension of the liturgy in the Church of England and some other churches in the Reformed tradition. Thus, there is now a lectionary significantly shaped by the Second Vatican Council, shared by many Christians. It should be said, however, that the RC Church has had less liberty, than these other Churches, to deviate from it or make changes.[12]

More recently still, in 1998, a retranslation of the Roman Rite (undertaken by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)) gained broad approval from English Bishops and the laity, and was due, by 2001, to be introduced more widely in Catholic churches. However, in a move that clearly demonstrates the kind of authoritative high handedness of the RC Church, the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship chose, at this point, to take over responsibility for the translation. Drawing, as it claimed, on principles referenced within *Liturgiam Authenticam,* the Congregation's argument was that the English translation needed to prioritise its Latin sources. The 1998 translation apparently fell short in this respect and was not approved. The International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), that had previously overseen the work of translation, was summarily replaced with a new body called Vox

[8] Stephen Burns, *Liturgy* (London: SCM Press, 2008), p. 22.
[9] Ibid., p. 19.
[10] Ibid., p. 20.
[11] Ibid., p. 31.
[12] Ibid., p. 28.

Clara (Clear Voice). The net effect was that in 2010, Vox Clara produced a retranslation of the Roman Rite or Mass in English, that was vehemently opposed by many of those forced to use it. The way in which the translation had been enforced was thus felt to be 'distressing' in itself, 'but the change in translation practice announced [under the presidency of Cardinal George Pell] and the manner in which he had expressed himself seemed … to mark a distressing departure from the spirit of collegiality in favor of authoritative imposition'.[13] Here there was no discussion or consultation, though many academic and clerical voices raised before the new translation was introduced, argued strongly in favour of the 1998 English translation on the grounds that it was both more scholarly and worked better with the natural flow of the English.

At the time of writing in 2024, a new English translation of scripture readings used in the Lectionary of the RC Mass has been introduced. The translation is based on an existing, authorised Roman Catholic version of the Bible, the English Standard Version (ESV). However, ESV texts have been scrutinized by a team of RC biblical scholars who have made certain changes, 'to meet the requirements of Catholic orthodoxy… and with respect to *Liturgiam Authenticam* for use in the liturgy'.[14] The Bishops advise on their website that it will prioritise formal equivalence over dynamic equivalence for translation, meaning it will focus on accuracy as regards individual words and phrases over dynamic equivalence where the quality of the target text, its fluency, is given priority.[15]

And, of course, all this touches on the more personal aspect – how these examples of change imposed by an authority that seems radically out of touch with 'the people' has affected and motivated me in response. So let me try to explain or explore this response and what can happen, even happen creatively, when you experience this liturgy week after week particularly when the formal criteria for participating in it are not being met by so many people. Because the RC church stipulates that those who may participate in the Eucharist at the Mass, in other words participate fully in Christ's sacrifice, must be in a state of grace,[16] it automatically excludes a whole range of individuals.

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[13] Gerald O'Collins with John Wilkins, *Lost in Translation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2017), p. 11.

[14] *Catholic Bible: ESV-CE*: English Standard Version, Catholic Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017). Foreword: no page numbers included.

[15] https://www.cbcew.org.uk/lectionary/ accessed 10th January 2025

[16] See above, footnote 5.

People living in a state of so-called mortal sin, according to official teachings, includes people with active sex lives who are LGBTQ+, those divorced and remarried, and those who are using artificial means of contraception. Such people are welcome to attend the Mass but are debarred from receiving the Eucharist. There has been some movement on divorced and remarried couples, but the other prohibitions stand, unless the presiding priest is of a particularly liberal persuasion. Pope Francis has allowed for a brief blessing of the union of same sex couples,[17] but this has so many qualifications, some might (justly, in my view) feel offended by it. Nor does it mean the couple can then receive the Eucharist afterwards. Yet the implications are potentially very serious. As things stand in the RC Church in doctrinal terms, if you are excluded from taking communion, the source of salvation is removed from you.[18] And even in a different register, in which the matter at issue is the Church's survival as an institution, attendance at Mass in RC churches has declined massively in recent years and one reason is certainly this formal exclusion of so many people who are deemed to be in a state of so-called mortal sin. In an anecdotal sense, I am aware of openly gay couples who have attended RC Mass because the priest was sympathetic, but then left the church when another, less sympathetic priest was appointed. In this way, the Mass as mediated by a priest, also fails to encourage the faithful in their practice of faith.

My first piece of artwork responds to these kinds of exclusions based largely on matters of gender and sexual lifestyles. I have not been excluded myself, but I identify with many who have been. I feel shame that my church contrives to make so many people feel unwelcome and unloved, when I understand Christ's message to be distinctly other than this.

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[17] See https://www.usccb.org/news/2023/doctrinal-dicastery-explains-how-when-gay-couples-can-be-blessed Accessed 12th February, 2025

[18] There may be those who feel able to ignore the various rules which the RC Church maintains in relation to those who are or are not allowed to receive communion. But this for me would be a very difficult step to take: first, I wonder how it can be a good thing to receive communion in a state of ignorance or indifference about the Church's current teaching. And then secondly, why would anyone choose to participate, without a note of question or protest, in something from which, in significant ways, they have been excluded?

The performance art piece: Six ways of reading church, modelled by human bodies

Place: Outside, in a Green Space.

Activity: Participants: a group of twelve people to perform, an organiser, a coordinator/initiator who gives out or explains the rules, and someone to provide (read/write?) a creative, poetic focus for each phase of the activity.

Who can participate? This is a safe space and all are invited – from regular churchgoers to curious atheists; members of the LGBTQ+ communities are especially welcome and anyone who feels rejected or excluded by a church to which, in whatever way, they are reaching out.

Before the activity, there will be two workshops, so participants/performers can develop their ideas, perhaps working on forms of movement and/or interactions to represent their responses to church. Having twelve people allows participants to develop their identities as disciples if this feels appropriate; disciples can be contemporary figures drawing on people's individual lived experiences. But they can also be linked to characters in the Gospels, such as John the Baptist: living a life in the desert – arid, parched – this could be a method of representing those who are thirsty for authentic church. Such a time of preparation gives a measure of control to the performers and provides opportunities to make the enterprise more collaborative rather than determined exclusively by a director.

The performance itself (the following six 'ways' can be developed differently. Here, only the first 'way' has been drawn out in more detail):

Way One: This represents the church as exclusive institution. Performers are in a tight group, facing inwards, their movements stiff and solemn. Each performer will build up his/her/their own individual movement as a variation of the whole but intertwining. Not everything about this modality of church is displeasing. Improvising on the idea of exclusion, inspiration could come from many different contexts such as the abstract stained-glass window of organ pipes in Edinburgh's St Giles Cathedral, [19] in which each carefully constructed and tuned pipe sings separately to the glory of God, and together with other pipes, formally arranged, produces the beauty of a certain kind of exclusive harmony.

Way Two: This represents the church as hierarchy. One suggestion is for participants to perform in pairs, exploring ideas of dominance and inferiority.

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[19] The original proposed location for the performance art.

Way Three: Fragmentation of the old modes of being church.
Way Four: Death of existing structures.
Way Five: New shoots of growth, new life emerges from the human body.
Way Six: Regeneration of the church – new models.

This liturgical or para-liturgical piece of performance art creates a ritual that has the potential to allow people who desire to be associated with Christian Churches to do so without being required simply to exclude anything of their own experiences of the divine and each other that raises questions for powerful institutional structures (for example, the Vatican authorities, within the RC Church). Instead, those involvements are drawn upon and offered up in praise of God. The Church is not visualised as walls and stones but represented by the performers as living malleable, spirit driven bodies. They evoke the beginnings of the church, in which disciples, according to the scriptural accounts, first began to understand some of the meanings of resurrection or incarnation. The body is now a holy temple as God has become human. What I have created is a liturgy without walls which begins in a response of praise to God; this liturgy begins with every person moving in the group. It responds to my sense that the exclusion of people in any church is wrong, by including everyone who wants to be included, by encouraging the participation of all, and by beginning to show, how closed off individuals in existing forms of church liturgy, can perhaps become a conjoined group through the fragmentation of traditional and exclusionary structures.

The poem

My next piece of art, a poem, is a product of the exclusions operative in my church which are a result more exclusively of gender. Every liturgy (the Mass) is presided over by an RC priest who must be a man. Only an RC priest can consecrate the elements and preach. It is possible to apply to a local bishop for exceptions to the preaching rule, but these are rare, and it is still a stipulation that only the priest can deliver the homily. If someone else gives an address, it is not a homily and cannot be delivered in the church. Christian ministers from other traditions have been allowed to preach on special occasions but this opportunity has never been extended to Catholic women of any kind, lay or religious. This exclusion has been painful for me as the poem explores.

The poem was written in May 2024, and I became aware that as I was articulating these feelings, I was also forming thoughts about the

spiritual life; that is to say, delivering a kind of para-homily. The title of the poem reflects this. It is a pastiche of René Magritte's surrealist painting, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (This Is Not a Pipe),[20] which features a naturalistic representation of a pipe (for smoking). This title plays with the paradoxical implications of the painting. Clearly this is a pipe, but because it is a painting it is also not a pipe. In the same way, the poem suggests this is a homily but acknowledges it cannot be one (it cannot be delivered to a congregation) because this is forbidden by the RC Church.

Ceci n'est pas une homélie
The core of a black hole is gravitational anomaly
of infinite possibility.
But they cannot know this by experiment
for black holes do not forgive.
This, my mysterious heart, is both black hole (desperately corrupt),
and tiny nutshell whose growth exceeds
the thrumming of galaxies,
the congregation of the stars.
For this my soul was scarred once by bright blood in green valleys;
an indelible hue of grief recalling me to
a language of sin.
And these my repressed selves now bubble up,
reclaim existence –
brutal,
mud-raw monsters,
or small incendiaries waiting.

The Ock Valley has come to birth – frivolously spurting blossom;
my solitary tree opens up spring leaves
but no frilliness; it is enshrouded still by another mass
of living green –
emerald coruscation. It awaits the Word-Sap
to blossom. Mother-Spirit holds it, but the dance of love
is to come. I wait with it for consummation of
Easter blessings.
A half-boiled egg is this Fool-
Half-achieved, half-redeemed-
Eschatologically part-way.
There needs healing but only in encounter

[20] René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images* 1928-1929.

With him bruised before the foundation of the world.
But even boundless love cannot bring this mud to good:
unless I can discern where the Spirit flies
unless sin is behovely and

yet I cannot contain the love of the Lord,
and I burn to be a prophetic voice. To stand
in the Temple and open my mouth for my Lord.
Preach
to the beasts only, for they at least are blessed
with pure souls and no voice of outrage.
I am the branch of a vine,
trampled for wine which is cast aside.
In the marrow of my soul God claims
Her holy place.

Insights from liberation theology and the theatre of the oppressed

Both the performance art piece and the poem suggest that there are ways to protest injustice and the unwarranted claims of churches to decide whom to include and to authorise as ministers and whom to exclude. My performance art piece is fundamentally an alternative form of liturgy, where the participants are moved by the need to praise God. The performance is designed to show what the constraints imposed by exclusivity and the hierarchical structures of Church government feel like, and how fragmentation of these structures might allow for a new form of Church where liberation is key. A subtext is the idea that the Christian Churches are declining in numbers and authority, and that this fragmentation might be the mainspring of change, like a form of death and resurrection. What I had envisaged as the start of regrowth was in line with the ideas of liberation theology and of figures like Gustav Gutiérrez.[21] In the 1960s and 1970s the movement of liberation theology was initiated, responding in part to changes in the Church instigated by the Second Vatican Council, that aligned the church with the very poorest, seeking to free them from the structural oppressions of right wing regimes in Latin America. Gutierrez argued that human beings are constrained by a variety of personal and societal oppressions – ranging from addictions to relationship problems – but also by forms of societal sin where social structures reward some excessively while others are left with nothing.

[21] Gustav Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

Liberation theology, which initially emerged within the Roman Catholicism of South America, promotes the possibility of universal liberation through Christian faith. However, concerned with freeing people from structural economic and political oppressions as well as from individual, inner compulsions (both linked to sin), it has challenged the ways in which the RC Church itself has sometimes compounded the problems faced by the poorest members of society. This unwillingness or inability to put itself on the side' of the poor has reduced the efficacy of church liturgies or services to sensitize people to spiritual harms or to any awareness of the possibility of freedom from those harms. These critical insights suggest that participation in the Mass and the sacraments should sensitize participants to the concerns of justice for the poor and marginalised as much as to the impact of sins defined in traditional terms. In line with this, my performance art piece is a way of sensitising performers and observers through preparation workshops and performances to the injustice of exclusions based on some of those traditional readings of human relationships and desires. The movement of my performance artwork is, conversely, from oppression to freedom, expressing an inner mainspring of growth which I envisaged as a divine principle – the Holy Spirit.

The acting out of such ideas might be envisaged as liberative in a theological sense, since the actors and spectators experience in themselves an opening up of church, a freer religious structure. However, it might be argued by way of a critique, that it would be more helpful to see a detailed process of fragmentation within the performance so that the mechanisms for revealing and removing strategies which maintain church power (especially that of the RC Church) might be more clearly explored.

Equally, my performance artwork is modelled on some of the ideas of Augusto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed which developed from the experimental theatre of the 1960s and 1970s.[22] Like liberation theology, the Theatre of the Oppressed came from Latin America and was about providing techniques to help those oppressed by poverty or personal issues. It was entirely secular in its approach but aimed to use theatre as a tool to empower individuals to break through the constraints which threatened to dominate their lives.

[22] Catherine Wood: *Performance in Contemporary Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2022), p. 12.

Boal's techniques have been extensively documented, not least by himself, in *The Theatre of the Oppressed*[23] and *The Rainbow of Desire.*[24] The essence of this new theatre is that the old hierarchies between performer and what Boal calls the 'spect-actor'[25] are broken down, that theatre is being used as a therapeutic tool to enable individuals to understand the nature of their oppressions and, concomitantly, how to deal effectively with them. For Boal the technique sprang from a desire to help the 'oppressed' who were the peasant class of Latin America where the gap between rich and poor was vast, but also, he saw people oppressed by reason of domestic abuse or, indeed, psychiatric symptoms.[26]

In practical terms what Boal set out to do was to create a repertoire of techniques which groups could use to help them understand the oppressions from which members of the group were suffering. In essence, Boal would create the space and opportunity for a group to improvise the situation that was at issue and, therefore, he gave the protagonist in the lived situation the key role as actor. The working out of the performance, eliciting responses from the spect-actors, would empower the key actor to experiment with different scenarios to enable him/her to discover the nature of her oppression and what, plausibly, might be done to ameliorate it. Before the performance, the actors would undertake a variety of group workshops in which activities and discussions would be used to explore what the main protagonist needed from the performance.[27] Boal worked with peasant communities, abused women, and psychiatric patients among others. There were also various theatrical techniques Boal created[28] such as 'The Practice' in order to facilitate the use of performance as a form of therapeutic analysis (in the 1980's Boal added therapeutic practices to The Theatre of the Oppressed). For example, actors might be asked to act out their roles in silence – a technique designed to help them focus on the hermeneutic of images,[29]

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[23] Augusto Boal, *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

[24] Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire* (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 1994).

[25] ibid., p. 13.

[26] ibid., p. 47.

[27] ibid., p. 47.

[28] ibid., p. 75.

[29] ibid., p. 78.

rather than being distracted by the infinite potential interpretations of particular words.

Here, in my performative art, by a process of preparatory workshops and by the work itself, individuals would be sensitised to the issues which oppress people within the RC Church.

Analysis of the poem

Coming back to the poem, the situation of oppression in this case is a personal experience of being told that I cannot preach in my own church; despite feeling I have a vocation to do so. The poem starts with a mention of black holes and suggests the strangeness of this 'gravitational anomaly'. And the suggestion is that black holes do not conform to Newtonian laws of physics, but that they rely on the physics of general relativity instead and produce quantum effects so that this anomaly offers 'infinite possibility', precisely for this reason. Current research on ancient black holes formed billions of years ago suggests that they also consume volumes of light far more voraciously than was previously thought. No one can know exactly what is inside a black hole and practical experiment would suggest they do not 'forgive' in the sense that they would annihilate any human being.

I compare my heart to the black hole because of its quality of being unknown – even to myself and because of both the beauty of this unknown vastness and its destructive capacity which I link to Jeremiah's idea of the heart as 'desperately wicked' (Jeremiah 17:9). This might constitute also a form of acknowledgement of sin and a need for repentance, usually the first part of a Mass. Perhaps the poem also represents a form of para-liturgy. Yet the heart is also a nutshell, an idea suggested by Julian of Norwich where the nutshell represents the self before God – whose potential growth is therefore infinite, despite its minute size; after forgiveness, comes the God-given ability to develop as a person in relationship with the divine, beyond the capacity of stars or galaxies, because as people we are gifted with the ability or scope to grow in relationship.

The next section has something to do with negative experience – something about previous repressions and how trauma and sin have obtruded from my past life demanding to be dealt with. 'Bright blood in green valleys' feels like violent death, possibly sacrificial – maybe it is an allusion to the Mass which, in Roman Catholic dogmatic theology, is a sacrifice. The idea of the repressed self, returning as a raw-mud monster is powerfully influenced by Louise Bourgeois's psychoanalysis of repressed experiences returning to her

consciousness.[30] They are like small incendiaries in the poem because they may just explode when they are remembered and trouble the mind (hence the support of the psychotherapist is helpful).

The next stanza tries to capture a sense of what happens when there is a movement towards vitality after the trauma, the repression, and the coming to consciousness of what has been repressed. The image of Spring symbolises the eschatological dimension in the release of trauma and its healing, now in Christian terms. Ultimately, the Paschal Mystery (located within and itself part of Spring) allows trauma to be released, processed, and accepted in the partially realised soteriology of Holy Saturday – Jesus is risen, trauma and sin are healed, and we are part-redeemed, but it is only in the apocalypsis that the final healing is accomplished.[31]

The context of the next stanza is a walk I regularly take along the Ock Valley in my home town of Abingdon – a walk between two rivers, the Thames and the Ock - and on the way back, I encounter a variety of trees, including my favourite tree which has not yet, in the poem, produced blossom, despite the "frilliness" of the blossom in the other trees. It is like the soul waiting for the final *eschaton* – shrouded by green and spiritual growth therefore, yet still unfulfilled, not fully itself with blossom. The Word-Sap is Christ who will come finally to redeem the tree and the soul - sap or energy being transfused into its trunk. The Holy Spirit as Mother is also invoked, also latent within the tree/soul and the 'dance' which is to come. I think this is something like *perichoresis* – the dance of the Trinity in love. Again, it is in the final *eschaton* that all this will come, as the 'consummation of/Easter blessings' suggests.

The idea of the Fool and the half-boiled egg comes from the Shakespeare play *King Lear* where Lear's Fool mocks him for having given away his kingdom to his rapacious daughters – the egg symbolising the kingdom and Lear himself becoming more like a Fool than his official Fool. There must also be a subliminal connection with Easter and its usual celebration with eggs. Healing will happen on a personal level, but only because of an encounter in prayer with Christ, 'bruised before the foundation of the world' because his atonement and death were planned in eternity, before creation and the fall. No matter how much God loves the individual soul, it is only in individual encounter with God that this love is actualised, and there is a

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[30] Louise Bourgeois, *The Return of the Repressed: Psychoanalytic writings by Louise Bourgeois* (London: Violette Editions, 2012).

[31] See Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, p. 137.

discernment of spirit, and 'sin is behovely,' in the terms of Julian of Norwich.[32] This suggests that it is in such encounter that sin is made sense of – is seen to be part of the beautiful pattern of creation, despite all sin's negative potential for cutting the sinner off from God.

The final stanza deals with the personal impact of such an encounter - being thus full of love or spirit-filled (or inspired), I burn to preach, even to be a prophetic voice - but Canon Law stipulates that it is only ordained Catholic priests who are given this privilege and responsibility. Standing in the temple recalls me to Anna's prophecy where Jesus is presented as an infant. She speaks about the child to all who are looking forward to the redemption of Israel. However, there will be no preaching by me in the temple and I can therefore be like Francis of Assisi, preaching to the beasts, since they are pure – incapable of sin – and cannot, like male clerics, claim authority to police my preaching; there is no voice of outrage.

The last part of the poem deals with the consequences of being sidelined as a preacher: I feel like the branch of a trampled grapevine whose wine is cast aside. The image recalls Jesus' many references to vines – he is the vine, for example, and he and I are both trampled on in the poem – made to suffer because of what we say or represent. The wine produced, metaphorically, is cast aside because no one wants to hear the preaching. There is a final crescendo which maintains a link with God in this situation, because the suffering connects us more deeply than ever – and now God is seen as a woman – significantly, because it suggests that this revelation is a result of the whole process of trying to preach.

The poem is, therefore, a homily of a different kind – it deals with very personal experience and emotions about my spiritual life and preaching itself rather than relating directly to scriptural extracts. It does not prescribe any rule of life or moral conduct (typical in a homily or sermon). It is more difficult to unpack because of a poem's dense, allusive quality.

Why use art?

Art is where this article began – art rooted in an academic context in meditating on Gender and Liturgy in a group, as an offshoot of a conference. Art, we felt, represented a way of solidifying and exploring ideas, creating a potentially long-lasting monument which might draw in other people long after the event.

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[32] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love,* trans. Barry Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2015), p. 20.

Looking at 'why use art?' in a more analytical way, I feel now that it is the visceral quality of art which draws me into creating as a reaction to some of the issues we explored. Art gets under the skin – especially forms of art which do not depend on words such as music or sculpture. However, I am principally concerned here with performance art which includes a verbal dimension and poetry which is of course mostly about words, though sound, metre and rhythm also play a huge part. Even here, however, there is a quality of imaginative engagement, right-brained mind, which enables creator and audience to bypass some of the intellectual impasses which can be the result of the purely discursive. In performance and poetry, powerful emotion can be transmuted into something other, potentially something beautiful. Theological discussion tends to become polarised into forms of binary opposition – such as traditional theology versus more progressive theology, deductive theological method over inductive. But in considering the range of ideas which crystallise around key theological debates there is still a need to be attentive to quieter voices; voices that may be concretised into something silent – such as an artwork sculpture or painting.

My own art begins with ideas and is then transmuted by a strongly personal reaction which overspills into an imaginative space where experiment and creativity are key drivers.

What might art do for the audience?

There is a long tradition of Christian art which is used within churches and as part of individual prayer – so paintings and sculptures are placed in churches and religious poems are used often in private devotions. We might ask what relationship such art has with prayer and include my art within this discussion. There has long been debate between those who favour the use of such devotional art and those who find it problematic, broadly speaking: iconophiles and iconoclasts. The first group quote Colossians 1:15[33] to back up their argument: 'He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation' and link it to the opening of Genesis and the creation of Adam: 'In the image of God he made him.' The logic is that, just as Christ was an image of the Father and as God made human beings in God's own image, so artists creating images of God are following this process.

However, the iconoclasts would argue from Deuteronomy (5:8): 'You must not make yourselves any image or any likeness of anything

[33] All Bible quotations hereafter are from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Reader's Edition (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990).

that is in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth'. This verse suggests that God should not be represented by anything made by human beings. However, despite the serious defacing of many paintings and statues during the Dissolution of the Monasteries and periodic bouts of iconoclasm, it will be evident that the iconophiles are irrepressible.[34]

Looking at a particular example of contemporary religious art may help me clarify some of these ideas and explain how I see art's function in Roman Catholic churches. In the main UK Jesuit Church in London, the Immaculate Conception (Farm Street), there is a painting by the resident artist, Andrew White (2012) of The Last Supper. The website tells us, '[t]his was the beginning of a new branch of spiritual creativity for the artist, the pursuit of capturing eternal truths through a figurative metaphor'.[35] The title of the painting is *In Memoriam* which is taken from words spoken at the consecration of the bread and wine in the Roman Catholic Mass: 'Do this *in memory* of me' recalling the Last Supper. The disciples are individualised but still dressed as first century Palestinian Jews. Judas is shown as a brooding presence at the front of the painting with Jesus as a bearded man in the middle. This traditional scene is represented in many Roman Catholic churches; what makes it so contemporary are the individualised paintings of the disciples who might be people you meet on any street – some, like Jesus, bearded, while others are not. The painting certainly reinforces, rather than challenges, the ideas and narratives inherent in the liturgy

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[34] Arguments continue, however, on the subject between academic theologians as well as extreme Protestants. For example, Jean-Luc Marion, a French phenomenologist who is also a devout Roman Catholic, maintains that images of God may be idols as well as icons and that it is possible to have conceptual idols and icons, as well as ones created by artists – see, for example, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Marion maintains that an idol is a god made to reflect the person looking at it, so that the person sees God as themselves; an icon, on the other hand, is an image which contains measureless depth – so that a person looking at it can enter the 'endless hermeneutic' of God's presence. Images might also refer to a poetic image – a simile or metaphor. More on this can be found in Kathryn Wills, *A Sacerdotal Poetics*: *Yves Bonnefoy's Reforging of WB Yeats* (Eugene, Or: Pickwick, 2023).

[35] See https://www.farmstreet.org.uk/resident-artist accessed 12 December 2024

since it depicts the event of The Last Supper. It could properly be said that the images are iconic rather than idolatrous, in the sense that these are, evidently, real people with imperfections and individual personalities. They might have been shown with all individuality removed, so that the observer no longer encounters them as other, but as idols, mirrors for her own desires. The art I have created would be different from this, obviously in part because a poem is a collection of words, and performance art relies on people moving around. But both could be recorded, and shown on a screen, to potentially 'iconic' effect; something video artists like Bill Viola have achieved in work shown to audiences in many different venues including several cathedrals.[36]

Further ideas on performance art and liberation theology

However, the question arises – what has performance art specifically got to offer the Roman Catholic Church and how does such art fit into its potential outreach to those who have been excluded from the liturgical celebration, especially the Mass?

The techniques of empowering actors are, ultimately, theatrical, even though Augusto Boal subverts what he calls the 'aesthetic space' (the stage[37]) in order that it becomes a space of dramatic encounter for actors whose actions are designed to assist the key protagonist in recognising her oppression and experimenting with different ways of dealing with it. The audience are active participants (hence 'spect-actors') who can intervene to suggest possible scenarios.

Liberation theology is also relevant here because it suggests a way in which the RC Church might open itself up to embrace excluded minorities or the marginalised – here the very poorest communities and the dispossessed of Latin America. Arguably, if the RC Church can open itself up to these people on the grounds of justice and mercy, it can surely do the same for the other excluded minorities or marginalised groups I have mentioned – women and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Liberation theology has significant similarities with the Theatre of the Oppressed. It too aims to free people from oppression – starting with the liberation preached by Jesus in the Gospels. It began as a social and political form of Christianity in Latin America after the Second Vatican Council which had tried to open the Church up to the world. Liberation theologians started to ask questions about why

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[36] See https://www.stpauls.co.uk/martyrs-and-mary-by-bill-viola accessed 12 February 2025

[37] Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire,* p. 12.

some people had to survive on so little, while others were incredibly rich, and what Christian people should be doing about these injustices - as Gustavo Gutiérrez says, poverty kills.[38] Some Christians, reacted negatively, seeing this theology as being dangerously close to Marxism. Certainly liberation theologians urged the church to free the oppressed from the wrongful structures of capitalism, just as Marx and Engels had urged the proletariat to resist and, ideally, dismantle the bourgeois state apparatus.[39] It might also be argued – by Christians, suspicious of liberation theology - that Boal's improvisations always focus on oppression, whereas the ideal church service should be a *celebration* of God's saving action. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Mass (and many other Christian services) acknowledge Jesus' crucifixion, and the intense suffering that goes with this, alongside any final rejoicing in resurrection. Even in Roman Catholic terms reenacting the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is an essential part of the liturgy; the praxis of faith, therefore, necessarily involves sensitising the faithful to ways in which suffering can be brought into creative engagement with God's purposes.

Of course, important differences remain between liberation theology and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed: religious praxis, that is, prayer and liturgy as individual and community activities, are seen by Gutiérrez as vital preliminaries to reflection or theology – although both are necessary.[40] For Boal, it is the workshops which precede the improvisation, rather than prayer and worship, that raise awareness of the issues which the improvisation will address. This points to another difference between the praxis of Christian faith and the praxis of theatre as envisaged by Boal, because Christian praxis is rooted in the language of an individual's sense of a Triune God, of relationship with this God, and of this relationship as conditioning a Christian's whole lived experience. For Gutiérrez, therefore, there is no sense in which a materialist ideology such as Marxism, despite superficial similarities with liberation theology, can be considered as analogous to a Christian theology of liberation.

The three meanings of liberation for Gutiérrez clarify this point. Liberation first expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples, next, liberation is humanity 'assuming conscious responsibility for its own destiny', and, finally, liberation brought by Christ, frees us from sin.

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[38] Gustavo Gutiérrez, A *Theology of Liberation*, p. 11.

[39] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, The Communist Manifesto*, 1848. Reprint (Ballingslöv, Sweden: Wisehouse, 2016), p. 28.

[40] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 50.

Gutierrez argues that 'liberation' is, therefore, the best word to explain the yearning of the poor for justice.[41] For Gutiérrez, every Christian must espouse a theology of liberation in all three aspects. It is the legacy of the Second Vatican Council and represents a way for the RC Church to recognise the social and political dimensions of its mission, moving beyond a preoccupation with unchanged truths which must be preserved eternally as the 'deposit of faith'.[42] For Gutiérrez, proposing a more Thomistic theology over an Augustinian one, 'grace does not suppress or replace nature, but rather perfects it'. Thus liberation theology 'opened the door to possibilities of a more autonomous and disinterested political action'.[43] Notably in this context, Gutiérrez also claimed that oppressed people are traumatised psychologically, as well as in terms of economic deprivation, and this should also be, the concern of the Church.[44] Surely then, this injunction should apply in the case of those excluded from the RC church because of their sexuality or gender identity; in many cases, these people have been psychologically traumatised by their treatment.

I situate my piece of performance art in the context of these techniques and ideologies of liberation. It is rooted in the Boalian method of staging workshops to raise awareness of issues and then improvising on them, but it also draws on Christian praxis and reflection because it is about how certain groups feel excluded from mainstream Christian Churches. Both Boal's techniques and liberation theology have powerfully influenced my ideas.

Conclusion and analysis

Liberation theology, in conclusion, suggests exactly the kind of opening or inclusion of minorities and marginalised people for which I have been advocating in this article. If my church can adopt a theological position that, in Gutiérrez's sense, stands up to and challenges forms of human oppression in respect of economic or climate injustice, there seems to me to be no good reason why it should not also welcome, oppressed minorities such as LGBTQ+ individuals

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41 ibid., p. 75.

42 A phrase commonly used to describe Roman Catholic tradition – for example, in the opening speech of Pope John XXIII– see the website: herehttps://web.archive.org/web/20221011093118/https:/www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/10/11/on-pope-john-xxiiis-opening-address-at-the-second-vatican-council/ (accessed 29th January 2025).

43 ibid., p. 87.

44 ibid., p. 15.

or make more fundamental efforts to address the genuine trauma suffered by women in the church by the denial of their priestly or ministerial vocations. My conclusion is also that these insights have come, in a significant sense, from my having engaged in creative artwork. Of course, artwork is not a straightforward problem-solving exercise, but I contest that it is a powerful source of hope, drawing strength from political theology as well as a long-standing Christian theology of art.

In this article more generally, I have reflected on the liturgies that have formed me, and described two pieces of art, created in response. I have shown how the Roman Catholic liturgy of the Mass is one of the most exclusive liturgies in existence and that it routinely excludes many, including LGBTQ+ individuals, those divorced and remarried, and those women or married men who feel called to minister as priests. I have discussed how art works in my personal context and suggested it has a powerful contribution to make in the life of the individual Christian. I have tried to incorporate insights from personal, academic, and pastoral discourse throughout the piece.

What are my conclusions from all this and what am I asking from my reader? I conclude that we need art as a method of protest and of inspiration. Through my art, I intend to sensitise people, especially those with power in my Church (that is, a male clerical elite), to what needs to happen. I believe that if the Roman Catholic Church does not open up to minorities and those marginalised on the grounds of gender - in the specific sense of allowing them vocations both to receive the Eucharist and to priestly roles - we run some genuinely theological risks. If we take the RC Church's sacramental theology at face value, these exclusions risk further reducing the numbers of those who, can be drawn into salvation, condemning the excluded for unabsolved sin.

My concern is thus that the Roman Catholic Church (and other churches, *mutatis mutandis*) needs to act decisively to overcome the obstacles to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals and to remove barriers preventing women (and others) from taking on a full priestly role. Not only is this a question of justice, divinely understood, but it is also a question of survival. If the Roman Catholic Church cannot open itself up, it will languish and die because of a lack of congregations and even priests. So, in this context, art may even have a prophetic function, warning that injustice in terms of divine law could lead to ecclesiastical disaster.

Gender Inclusive Language in the Church of Norway: A Story of Silence, Resistance and Silence Again

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The story of gender inclusive language in the Church of Norway reflects a fifty year long, complex development. In short, the story goes from gender inclusive language as a non-existent and silenced topic to a fierce debate through more than two decades from the middle of the 1990s, up to the present situation where gender inclusive language is once again a silent topic. Or it has been silenced. One theory considered in this essay, is that other theological approaches, first and foremost eco-theology, indigenous theology, disability theology and LHBTQI-theology, make it difficult to maintain a separate awareness of the theological implications of gender. Another theory is that gender inclusive language is such a difficult case to fight that the battle has been lost. A third – perhaps, overly optimistic – theory about the current state of silence, is that matters of gender have now been resolved in the liturgical practice in the Church of Norway. In the conclusion, I will point to some possible interpretations and argue that gender perspectives do not need to be held in competition with other marginalized perspectives within the context of the Church of Norway but that they can and should be viewed in conjunction with them.

The pioneer ministers: Feminist theological silence

Norway and some other parts of Scandinavia are known to be among the most gender equal societies in the world, with well adapted feminist values and practices. Admittedly, this is rather a simplified presentation of the real situation, but it is true, in the sense that gender equality is implemented by legislation in most areas; the Norwegian Gender Equality Act is binding, even on the national Church of Norway. On the other hand, religious life in Norway is still strongly impacted by the Protestant revival movements of the past. In the revival movements that emerged throughout the 17th century, the laity became a crucial form of opposition to the established clerisy. This led to a more culture-critical theology, rather than one focusing more particularly on inner spiritual matters. In the Church of Norway, this conservatism relating to several cultural and political questions has

led to greater resistance to radical ideas such as feminism.[1] Thus the early Women's Movement, was considered as a potential threat to the integrity of the churches and their religious communities, and as something that needed to be resisted. [2] This is not to say that Norwegian revivalists completely excluded women preachers and leaders in the past - some women figured in church life from as early as in the 19th century - but more recent concepts of Women's Liberation, or feminism from the middle of the 20th century, have been judged non-Christian and secular.[3]

The Church of Norway is a national church. Until 2017, the King was the supreme leader of the Church, and liturgical orders, ministers and bishops were authorized or appointed by the King-in-Council, even if that authority was gradually distributed to the Church Council from 1989.[4] Since 2017, the Church of Norway is an independent entity but still in a privileged financial and symbolic position as a 'folk church'. So, while the Storting, the national parliament and supreme legislature in Norway, accepted the idea of women ministers from as early as in 1938, no ordination of a woman minister actually took place until 1961, when Ingrid Bjerkås was the first to be ordained in the diocese of Hamar. For quite some years, she was the only female minister in the Church of Norway. Not until the 1970s, did the number of women ministers and theologians become significant or influential. These changes were certainly happening at the same time as feminist theology was being discussed and debated widely in the US and

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[1] See Aud Valborg Tønnessen, *Ingrid Bjerkås: motstandskvinnen som ble vår første kvinnelige prest* (Oslo: Pax, 2014); Kristin Molland Norderval, *Mot strømmen: kvinnelige teologer i Norge før og nå*. (Oslo: Land og kirke/Gyldendal, 1982); Synnøve Hinnaland Stendal, *'-under forvandlingens lov': analyse av stortingsdebatten om kvinnelige prester i 1930-årene* (Lund: Arcus, 2003).

[2] Merete Thomassen, 'Kvinnelige prester, kvinnelige gudsmetaforer og kampen mot vranglæren' (Oslo: Verbum, 2011), pp. 284-301.

[3] For a more detailed presentation of this topic, see Merete Thomassen, 'Construction of Gender, Liturgies and Dichotomies from a Norwegian Perspective'. Chapter. In *Exploring a Heritage: Evangelical Lutheran Churches in the North,* Göran Gunner, Anne-Louise Eriksson,and Niclas Blåder (eds), (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), pp. 192-206.

[4] The Government of Norway, 'Historikk om forholdet stat og kirke'. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/tro-og-livssyn/den-norske-kirke/innsiktsartikler/fra-statskirke-til-stat-og-kirke/fra-tidslinjen-historikk-om-forholdet-stat-og-kirke/id2426318/ 2023.

elsewhere in Europe, insisting on feminist 'God-talk',[5] or reflecting the ways in which women as well as men were made in the image of God.[6] However, North American feminist theology cannot be said to have been the only or strongest influence on early Norwegian women ministers. They appear to have been at least as sensitive to the direction of existing or traditional theological practice and teaching, adjusting themselves to the prevailing stream and struggling to convince the Church of Norway that, as women, they were able to conduct ministry in the way male ministers did. The strategy was probably not to make too much noise theologically, given that the noise caused by their female gender was more than loud enough.[7]

Gender-inclusive language: Theo-logical and anthropo-logical levels[8]

First and foremost, feminist theology, was an issue among theological students. The Norwegian Christian Students' Association (NCSA), a member of the international World Student Christian Federation, was a forerunner here, pioneering the introduction of gender inclusive language in services celebrated on the 8th of March (International Women's Day).[9] At the start of the 1970s, the NCSA developed liturgies using a specific gender inclusive language, naming God as Mother, referring to God as She, and seeking to address the congregation as 'sisters and brothers'. The strategy was to raise consciousness of the idea that God cannot be exclusively represented - liturgically or theologically - in terms of the generic male or masculine, and to stress the fact that the make-up of parishes, as of the whole of humanity,

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[5] See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

[6] See Mary Daly, Beyond *God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1973).

[7] See Kristin Molland Norderval, *Mot strømmen;* Merete Thomassen, 'Kvinnelige prester'.

[8] This presentation draws significantly on my doctoral thesis: Merete Thomassen, 'Kjønnsinkluderende liturgisk språk. En analyse av norske gudstjenester under Det økumeniske tiåret 1988-1998', Dr. theol., Det teologiske fakultet, Universitetet i Oslo, 2008. Translated as 'Gender Inclusive Language. An Analysis of Norwegian Services During the Ecumenical Decade "Churches in Solidarity with Women" 1988-1998.'

[9] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language'.

consists of both genders.[10] In this sense, these early Norwegian gender inclusive services reflected feminist theological aims derived from North American feminist theologians - especially Mary Daly, who proclaimed: 'If God is male, then the male is God'[11] – and taken up with particular enthusiasm by students in Norway's Universities.

Gender inclusive language (in respect to liturgy or theology) has been touched on in several earlier editions and articles in this journal, but it might be helpful, nonetheless, to present a brief account of the origins of the debate below. The origins of the term 'inclusive language' undoubtedly owe something to broader concerns at the time with questions of equal visibility and forms of discrimination on the basis of factors like gender, race, health and economic situation that were being articulated in these terms within sociolinguistics.[12] However, American feminist theologians such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Marjorie Procter Smith, and Elizabeth A. Johnson also insisted on the need for a theological and ritual language to reflect inclusiveness and equality. In doing this, they are working on what I consider to be two different levels.

First, they refer to the *theo-logical* level, which is, in its deepest sense, the speech of God, or 'God-talk'; the latter a notion often associated with Rosemary Radford Ruether.[13] At the theo-logical level, God is not male or masculine, and is assumed instead, to be beyond gender. Nonetheless it is in God's image that gendered human beings are created. The theological implications of the *Imago Dei*, the teaching of a similarity or likeness between God and human beings, is very much in play on this first level of gender inclusive language. Thus, feminine or gynomorphic metaphors for God become important, but not only these. Gender neutral notions and metaphors are explored as well, to dispute the idea of an exclusively male deity.

Second, these feminist theologians are working on the *anthropo-logical* level, which concerns speech about human beings. Gender inclusive language in this sense, aims equitably, to address congregations of men and women, and also to reflect and make women more visible in church, society, and history. Thus, the need for inclusive language on the anthropological level reflected objections and resistance to the practice of addressing parish congregations as

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[10] ibid., p. 80.

[11] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1973)

[12] Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and linguistic Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1992).

[13] See, Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*.

'brothers', which is rooted in older Norwegian translations of the Bible where the Greek 'adelphoi' (as in the letters of Paul) is invariably, and problematically, rendered as 'brothers'. It also took up some implications of second wave feminism, that was struggling to reconstruct women's history by making both ordinary and extraordinary women visible by retelling their hidden stories. In feminist theology, the corresponding project was to rediscover and draw attention to women in the Bible and in the history of the church, as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza did, most notably perhaps, in her influential research on women in the texts of the New Testament, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins.*[14] The early gender inclusive liturgies in Norway seem to have operated on both the theo-logical and anthropo-logical levels in naming God as Mother and She, using the gender neutral formula 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer' for the Trinity, addressing the parish as Sisters, Brothers, Daughters, Sons, and Siblings, and making more visible, Biblical and historical women.

However, early Norwegian gender inclusive liturgies are no longer widely available and are rarely referred to in research studies, though still celebrated as 'underground liturgies'. There were some publications: the Norwegian Christian Students' Association (NCSA) published some liturgies. A small, but important association, 'Forum Experimentale' the forerunner of a most influential record – and art – company, 'The Church's Cultural Workshop' (Kirkelig Kulturverksted), [15] has remained active in arranging alternative eucharistic services and occasionally arranging services on International Women's Day (8 March), recording music and creating ecclesiastical art, and this has had, arguably, a significant impact on liturgical development in the Norwegian context. The Norwegian Women Theologians' Association also arranged services annually at the General Assembly. In fact, the practice of gender inclusive language was probably close to comprehensive in the 1980s though the situation was disorganized and lacked any strategic overview. In spite of this, several feminist theologians argue that feminist liturgies did emerge in this stream of ideas leading to a *Women's Liturgical Movement* that showed several of the same traits as the contemporary Liturgical Movement, that is, focusing on a critique of power, lay

[14] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

[15] See: https://www.kkv.no

involvement and efforts to give marginalized experiences greater visibility, which led to the emergence of a *theology from below.*[16] Through my involvement in producing gender inclusive liturgies in 1993-1996, I became aware of the view that the movement took root in Norway not least, as a result of international contacts among theological students and women ministers.[17]

Later, towards the end of the 1990s, a former journalist who had worked for the Norwegian national broadcaster, NRK, Helene Freilem Klingberg, produced an important study, financed by a scholarship from the Church of Norway, sampling so-called 'Women's Services'. These were mostly taken from parishes where idealistic ministers and lay people arranged services on International Women's Day. Although this piece of work was never published, I was generously given access to it in 2000, early on in my doctoral studies. This gave me a broad impression of gender inclusive liturgies not only in Norway but in other Nordic countries as well, such as 'The Women's Church' in Iceland.[18] Some of Freilem Klingberg's findings will be considered below.

The ecumenical decade 1988-1998: Authorization of gender-inclusive language

It was not until the early 1990s that the Church of Norway started taking inclusive language more seriously, when the World Council of Churches' 'Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women' raised expectations amongst women theologians and others. The statement for the decade contained twelve feminist-theological aims or theses to be integrated into national churches. However, it appears these theses were too radical for the Church of Norway, a skepticism

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[16] See Teresa Berger, *Women's ways of worship: gender analysis and liturgical history* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); Ninna Edgardh Beckman, *Feminism och liturgi - en ecklesiologisk studie.* PhD Thesis. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2001; Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In her own rite: constructing feminist liturgical tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); Marjorie Procter-Smith *Praying with our eyes open: engendering feminist liturgical prayer* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[17] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language'.

[18] ibid.

particularly associated with the issue of gender inclusive language.[19] As a result, a separate Norwegian plan of progress was put together, which looked more moderate, at least at first sight.[20]

Nevertheless, the Ecumenical Decade was of the utmost importance for the development of gender inclusive language. Early on, a working committee was asked to make a simple, non-eucharistic liturgy for use on International Women's Day. This initiative was meant to lead to an authorized liturgy drawing on existing unofficial 'underground' liturgical streams which, over a much longer period, had made and celebrated feminist services. The idea was to offer a more worked through and legitimate liturgical alternative, prepared by competent theologians.

In February 1993, the first officially authorized (non-eucharistic) liturgy with gender inclusive language was published and distributed to Norwegian parishes through the eleven diocesan administrations. It used a moderate version of gender inclusive language, mostly working on the anthropo-logical level by, among other things, addressing congregations as 'sisters and brothers' and highlighting historical and biblical women. However, on the theo-logical level, in the confession, God was addressed as 'God, our Mother and Father', and in the opening and blessing, the Trinity was named as 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer'.

These two formulas on the theo-logical level raised a storm that lasted for at least twenty-five years and rumblings can still be heard today. Five out of eleven bishops refused to allow congregations in their dioceses to make use of the liturgy. The debate caught the attention of the secular media, and in theological journals, the discussion went on for several years.

Non-biblical, heretical and sexualized liturgies

These reactions were clearly, first and foremost, a response to the metaphors used for God and the Trinity. The gender specific 'Mother and Father'-metaphor and the gender neutral 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer'-metaphor were believed, first, to mark a break with the biblical image of God and Christian anthropology, next, to represent a break with the ecumenical and liturgical consensus, and third to suggest a gnostic and heretical sexualization of the image of God. And

[19] See Gunvor Lande, 'Visjonen om likeverdet : det økumeniske tiåret 1988-1998 - kyrkjer i solidaritet med kvinner i El Salvador og Noreg, Kenya og Japan' (Lund: Arcus, 2002).

[20] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language'.

yet, at the same time, the need for a gender inclusive language on the anthropological level was generally acknowledged. Even several of the most conservative theologians were still clear that it was important to include women at the anthropological level in liturgical language and affirmed this part of the gender inclusive project. However, reactions to the gender inclusive metaphors on the theo-logical level were fierce. For example, Bishop Per Lønning, talking about 'God, Our Mother and Father', stated: 'Such a deification [of women] exists today only in extreme movements called feminist theology'. He continued: 'When God is addressed as Mother and Father in a prayer, this is not biblical language. Such things have occurred historically in sects that are trying to split God up into demigods. If God is Mother and Father, then we all are demigods, with the right to act as such'.[21] Given certain assumptions, Bishop Lønning's argument has some weight. What he appeared unaware of, or was unwilling to acknowledge though, were the claims of feminist biblical and theological scholarship, that the exclusive use of male metaphors for God has led to exactly this outcome – men have come to believe themselves to be demigods with the right to act as such, especially in their relationships with women and the feminine. In Mary Daly's words again, 'If God is male, then the Male is God'.[22]

Several of the participants in the debate argued that it was important to make a difference between *addressing* God as Mother and *comparing* God to a mother. Bishop Odd Bondevik presents a representative argument in claiming: 'There is no biblical evidence on which to argue for such [gender inclusive] language. It is right that you can find places in the Bible where God is described with feminine characteristics. But God is never addressed as Mother'.[23] As we will see, the same argument was still being made in the debate twenty years later.

The dean at the MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society,[24] Olav Skjevesland, argued that '[w]hen God is addressed with

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[21] All the quotes are taken from my doctoral thesis and translated by me: Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language', pp. 100ff.

[22] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*.

[23] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language', p. 100.

[24] MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society is a private institution, established in 1907 to resist forms of liberal theology which assumingly were corrupting the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo or 'TF'. 'MF' is shorthand for 'Menighetsfakultet'

masculine metaphors, this does not mean the Bible is implying anything about sexuality'. [25] At the same time, however, he also claimed that feminine metaphors *did* lead to a sexualization of the image of God; a sexualization that existed in the ancient Orient and was something that the Bible warned against. The idea of men as gender neutral and women as gendered and sexualized, was obviously at play in the debate. Alongside Skjevesland, several others more than implied that gender inclusive services were to be considered as some kind of sexualized orgy and the Christian newspaper *Dagen* picked up this idea, subsequently using the term 'priestesses' for women ministers involved in gender inclusive services.

Some months after the reception of the liturgical order, the debate calmed down a little. The Church Council of Norway took a brave decision, suggesting that the debate revealed immature ideas of gender and theology, and that this topic needed further attention. Thus, the work continued and eventually resulted in a booklet with five new liturgical orders three years later, which I will elaborate below.

A story of resistance

In 1996, the Church of Norway published the liturgical resource booklet, '8th March: Orders for 8th March- services and other services from the perspective of women'.[26] This booklet was the result of a three-year long process following on from the debates in 1993. As a theological student at the time, I had been asked, along with other theological students and several ordained women ministers, to be a part of the working committee for this project. I have a vivid memory that when I was asked to join the committee, I considered that by associating myself with this group and with gender inclusive language and feminist theology, I risked losing my career and my ordination. Gender inclusive language was so controversial that it caused 'touch aversion' among many theologians who feared to be openly linked with it whilst silently supporting the cause. In retrospect, I am impressed by how idealistic and brave we were and how willing we

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which means 'The Congregations' Faculty'. Traditionally, MF is a far more conservative institution than TF. The latter has become a forerunner in matters like women priests, same-sex marriage and political radicalism.

[25] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language', p. 105.

[26] Kirkerådet, *8. mars: opplegg til 8. mars-gudstjenester og andre gudstjenester med kvinneperspektiv* (Oslo: Kirkerådet, 1996). My translation.

were to pay the price for promoting gender inclusive language. As it has turned out, it neither cost me my career nor my ordination, but in the following years there was significant uncertainty and anxiety about how this involvement would affect the members of the committee. My bishop was suspicious and always kept a wary eye on women ministers who were occupied with feminist theology.

Even if my academic work on gender inclusive language is coloured by personal memories, there is no doubt that this was a work of resistance. Despite the suspicions of bishops and other leading theologians, these new liturgical orders were thoroughly well-prepared and tested in the context of real live services. We decided to thematize different liturgies: 'Women's Wrath', 'Women's Longing', 'Women's Faith', 'Women's Fight' and a new liturgical order for International Women's Day, 8th March. All the liturgies were Eucharistic liturgies, strictly following the Ordo – the stipulated order of service. One of the most valuable resources for development of the liturgies was actually a British book, *Women Included. A Book of Services and Prayers,* published by the Saint Hilda Community in London.[27] The Eucharistic liturgy used in the Norwegian liturgies was a translation of the Eucharistic liturgy made by the St. Hilda Community, with some small adjustments like skipping prayers for the dead, to align with Lutheran theology. Thus, the impact of Anglican and Episcopal theology is notable in Norwegian gender inclusive services! The well-known Norwegian church musician Inger Lise Ulsrud, who is now professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music, composed liturgical music for the Eucharistic liturgy.[28]

The themes also reflect the preoccupations of feminist theology at this time; the gender inclusive services were concerned with *women's experiences*, typically linked in second wave feminism with making women's different lives and experiences more visible. [29] Admittedly, this interest in experience tended to assume a rather rigid distinction between women's and men's experience which was also

[27] Monica Furlong (ed.), *Women Included. A Book of Services and prayers: The St. Hilda Community* (London: SPCK, 1991).
[28] Kirkerådet, *8. mars.*
[29] See Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *Praying with our eyes open;* Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*; Anne-Louise Eriksson, 'The meaning of gender in theology: problems and possibilities', 6 (Distributor: Almqvst & Wiksell International, 1995).

viewed as homogenous, assumptions that are criticized by more recent forms of feminist scholarship, and to which I will return.[30]

However, in the process of making and celebrating liturgies, the debate about gender inclusive language continued. Several of the members of the working committee (1993-1996) argued publicly that gender inclusive language was a much broader issue touching on the Christian daily press, national broadcasting, and theological journals. To attempt liturgical development under such circumstances was very demanding, indeed. And the most burning concern continued to be the feminine or gynomorphic metaphors for God.

Nevertheless, the argument against addressing God as Mother, but in favour of a form of comparison between God and mothers or motherhood, led to some genuinely sophisticated discussion about metaphor. In this work, Sallie McFague's *Metaphorical Theology: models of God in religious language* turned out to be a valuable resource, as did Elizabeth A. Johnson's *She Who Is: the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse*.[31] However, given that these liturgies had to be approved by the Norwegian National Council of Churches, it was impossible to negotiate very far. The committee had to accept the formula, 'God, you who are *like* a Mother and Father to us', while the trinitarian principle had to be safeguarded by an apposition: 'In the name *of the Triune God;* The Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer'.[32] For all this, when the booklet was published in 1996, the story of gender inclusive language in the Church of Norway could have been read as a moderately successful story of resistance. However, there is more to say.

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[30] From early on in 1995, Anne-Louise Eriksson is making an important point, arguing that feminist theologians are tending to essentialize the gender categories by their insistence on women's experiences. She maintains a focus on the diversity of women's experiences and argues that feminist theology needs to turn to a feminism of sameness, rather than a feminism of difference to avoid simply reproducing gender stereotypes. See Anne-Louise Eriksson, 'The meaning of gender in theology'.

[31] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical theology: models of God in religious language* (London: SCM, 1982).

[32] Kirkerådet, *8. mars.*

Reproducing gender stereotypes and heteronormativity

As I was working on these liturgical orders, I became increasingly concerned that the idea of gender inclusive language was being folded into what had become quite an essentialist, gender stereotypical and heteronormative project. Claims from both critics and advocates of gender inclusive language, about what women *preferred* liturgically to feel included, were expansive and, in my opinion, insufficiently critical. I was worried about the dominating Mother- metaphor and did not think it was a good idea to deify mothers. The reference to women's experiences coincided overwhelmingly with experiences of motherhood, nurturing and caring, which I thought was reactionary. I was also worried about issues of liturgical aesthetics, for example, the idea that women – as opposed to men, presumably - were fond of liturgical dancing and so-called 'poetic language', which I considered to be simply sentimental.

My concerns led me to write my doctoral thesis,[33] analyzing twelve Norwegian services or liturgies, using gender inclusive language. These partly consisted of the five liturgies from the 8th of March-booklet, and partly of seven liturgies from the sampling made by the journalist Helene Freilem Klingberg.[34] All of the twelve liturgies had been celebrated, and I even managed to get the sermon manuscripts from eleven of them. Due to my aim of anonymizing, I have not identified any of the liturgies from the sampling except geographically.[35] In my concluding analysis, I drew on the work of Swedish theologian, Anne-Louise Eriksson, who analyses forms of feminist theology as theoretical approaches with variably critical and constructive characteristics.[36] As a critical project, she suggests feminist theology can be aligned with a feminism of sameness. That is, it begins from the assumption that women are subordinated and invisible but, that they want to be a part of church, or to do theology, *in the same way as men*. On the other hand, as a constructive project, feminist theology tends towards essentialism, in accordance with a feminism of difference. That is, it begins from the idea that women

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[33] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language'.

[34] See above.

[35] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language'.

[36] See Anne-Louise Eriksson, *Meaning of Gender in Theology: Problems and Possibilities: No. 6 (Uppsala Women's Studies)* (Leicester: Coronet House Publishing Ltd., 1995); Merete Thomassen, 'Responding to the sacred', International *Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 21, 3-4 (2021), pp. 301-306.

have a *different contribution* to make, one *reflecting feminine values or tropes* like care, bodiliness or beauty.

In summary, I concluded that gender inclusive language in the Church of Norway was very important as a critical project. As a critical project, it challenged the idea of God as generically male or masculine, and it gave clear evidence that women are excluded from the Bible, the church and society. However, as a constructive project, gender inclusive language tended to confirm gender stereotypes and heteronormativity. So, in using family as a root metaphor, God becomes more like a divine parent. The parish, in being addressed as sisters and brothers and daughters and sons, underlines the Christian church as a divine nuclear family. Instead of supporting the idea that God is beyond gender, the Mother-metaphor simply gives the impression that God the Father has a wife! [37]

If gender specific metaphors in this context appeared to be clearly stereotypical, another linguistic strategy was almost as striking. Instead of replacing some or all masculine metaphors with feminine ones, anxiety about traditional masculine images like King, Lord or Shepherd, seemed to have led to the removal of *all* gendered metaphors. My conclusion was that liturgical language in these services had ended up being not so much inclusive as impoverished, often opting simply for 'God' and 'You' rather than enrichening the language with new and differently inclusive metaphors. [38]
This 'God-strategy' seems to be the most dominant approach even up until the present day, as we will see below.

Reform of the Sunday service 2011: The genderless God

In 2003, the Church of Norway adopted a comprehensively reformed Sunday Eucharist service. The reasons for the reform were various. Most of all, the values of the Second Vatican Council had finally reached Norway. The Second Vatican Council 1962-1965 aimed at revitalization of the liturgy through the claim for *aggiornamento,* an *update* of the liturgy through, among several other things, using the vernacular in the services, and making the laity visible as ministrants and readers. The Second Vatican Council stimulated a lot of theological

[37] For a more comprehensive discussion about this in English, see Thomassen, 'Responding to the Sacred'.
[38] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language', pp. 254ff.

activity which had a comprehensive ecumenical impact.[39] At the same time, there were other factors at work in different parts of the Norwegian church landscape that, just like the gender inclusive language issue, had existed as underground activities but, by the beginning of the 21st century, had become intrusive. Impulses towards liturgical revision came partly through the social-ethical movement in the aftermath of the World Church Council meeting in Uppsala in 1968, just three years after the Second Vatican Council, partly through the impact from liberation theology and contextual theologies, and partly from the feminist liturgical movement.[40] There was thus urgent motivation for a liturgical order that was more inclusive of the laity and more contextual, in a country consisting of very different cultures, from the Sami in the North to the Bible belt in the South. The core values for the reform were *flexibility, contextuality and involvement*.[41]

Gender inclusive language was one of several important aims for the reform, pinpointed in the strategy plans. It was argued that there was a need for an enrichened image of God, corresponding to the idioms of our own time, and for making more visible the idea that all human beings are created in the image of God.

So far, so good. The process of the Sunday service reform was, nevertheless, complex. A large committee, including several sub-committees, worked with the four parts of the Ordo for four years. In 2008, an enormous amount of liturgical material was distributed to various parishes that had volunteered to be involved in experimental use. Through the course of almost two years, these parishes used the liturgical material to determine which parts worked well, and which parts needed to be changed or eliminated.

When the test period was over, the time came for the final consultation process. All the parishes wrote consultation statements,

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[39] See Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1973; Aidan Kavanagh *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo, 1982); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A theology of liberation: history, politics, and salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973); Jan Byström, Jan & Leif Norrgård, *Mer än ord : liturgisk teologi och praxis* (Stockholm: Verbum. 1996).

[40] Merete Thomassen, 'Gender Inclusive Language'; Merete Thomassen and Sylfest Lomheim, *Når dere ber: om liturgisk språk og utforming av bønner til gudstjenesten* (Oslo: Verbum, 2013).

[41] See Merete Thomassen, 'Construction of Gender, Liturgies and Dichotomies from a Norwegian Perspective'.

and so did the theological faculties, the bishops, and all the ordinary consultation bodies and other stakeholders. The consultation statements, 159 in total, were not published, but mostly presented through the Christian daily paper 'Vårt Land'.[42]

There is a great deal to say about this liturgical material, and elsewhere, I have written extensively about the neo-capitalistic trends and tendencies detectable in this contemporary Norwegian liturgical practice.[43] However, regarding the gender inclusive language, once again, the debate reached boiling point on the theo-logical level. For the most part, the liturgies made use of what I previously characterized as the 'God-strategy': many traditional male metaphors like King, Lord and Shepherd were removed. And it was interesting to observe the syntactic creativity deployed in certain prayers to avoid using 'He' when referring to God! One of several examples is the prayer after baptism, the proclamation, which is said while the minister is holding her hand on the baby's head:

> The Almighty God has in baptism given you the Holy Spirit, given birth to you anew and taken you into the community of believers. *God* strengthen you [using the gender-neutral genitive-pronoun, 'sin' (roughly his, hers, its, theirs in Norwegian)] with grace until you reach the eternal life.[44] [45]

The second sentence in this prayer was previously: '*He* strengthen you with *His* grace.' Even if it is difficult to make an adequate translation of this prayer into English, my point is to demonstrate that in prayers

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[42] The consultation process is documented in my article: Merete Thomassen, 'Kvinnelige prester'.

[43] See Merete Thomassen and Sylfest Lomheim, *Når dere be.* See also, Merete Thomassen: 'Frelse fra dommen eller for selvet? Om teologiske endringer i kristent gudstjenestespråk', (2017); 'Liturgisk forordning og frihet i Den norske kirke. Mellom alterboksfundamentalisme og selvspiritualitet' *Kritisk forum for praktisk teologi* (2019), pp. 27-36; 'Jeg brenner jo for delaktighet i gudstjenester med økt oppslutning'. *Teologisk tidsskrift* 9, 2 (2020), pp. 38-54.

[44] Kirkerådet, *Gudstjeneste med veiledninger = Gudsteneste med rettleiingar*. 1. utgave. ed.*Gudsteneste med rettleiingar* (Bergen: Eide forlag, 2020).

[45] 'Den allmektige Gud har i dåpen gitt deg sin hellige Ånd, født deg på ny og tatt deg inn i sin troende menighet. Gud styrke deg med sin nåde til det evige liv'. ibid., p. 141.

previously using *Him, He* and *His* at the theo-logical level, the Church Council chose a moderate makeover, avoiding masculine terms and replacing them with 'God' and pronouns that are gender neutral in Norwegian, although the prayers turned out to be syntactically peculiar. But notably, no one dared to replace 'He' with 'She'. Gynomorphic or feminine metaphors were limited to a single one, in which God was addressed as, '…like a caring mother gathers her children around her'.[46] Whereas previously, there was more scope for variation in gender to be invoked in the trinitarian welcoming, 'Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer' this was now premised on the masculine trinitarian formula: 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer'[47]

Once again, the debate appeared to be circling around the biblical foundations for *not* using gynomorphic metaphors, the difference between addressing God in female terms and comparing God with feminine traits, and the break such language created with the ecumenical and liturgical consensus. To someone like me, who had observed the debates almost twenty years earlier, it seemed as if nothing had happened except that it was perhaps now easier to get the importance of not using exclusively male metaphors for God accepted. When the new Eucharistic liturgy was implemented in 2011, God emerged primarily as a genderless being. But in key liturgical passages such as the 'Our Father' or the 'Sanctus', God remained as male or masculine as ever. In sections perceived to be open to more contemporary language, such as the Collects, the Confessions and the Intercessions, God's gender remained highly circumscribed in the terms already discussed. Thus, it could perhaps be said that the debate about gender inclusive language as an element of a critical project had certainly succeeded in problematizing God as generically male or masculine. However, as a constructive project, it had not really worked. Few dared to use specifically feminine or female language and metaphors. God remained within the orbit of a traditionally masculine imaginary, although, at the same time, rarely addressed as a male or masculine divinity. And overall, the image of God in contemporary Norwegian liturgy became blurrier and more impersonal.

[46] ibid., p. 44.
[47] ibid., p. 16

Why silence again?

In 2019, the liturgical order was again revised due to some quite different challenges. Gender inclusive language was not then an issue. In time, other burning issues had come up: the climate crisis and the question of Norwegian ethnic minorities, disability- and queer-theology had all emerged as important concerns with liturgical implications.

In the last few years, I have observed little if any work going on in respect of gender inclusive language in contexts of Norwegian theology. I have hardly heard the debate mentioned. Why is this?

I suggested several theories in the introduction and first, that it could be that gender inclusive language is a well-integrated value in the Church of Norway and didn't need further attention. I am sorry to say that I do not think that is the reason why the subject appears to have gone silent again. Norwegian society and the Church of Norway are having to deal with a feministic backlash, like so many other parts of the Western world. It could also be that some of us who have fought for decades no longer have the energy for another fight. What seems the most dangerous argument, however, is that other minority-perspectives are being positioned as both conflicting and of greater urgency and importance. It is hard to argue that God's gender could be such a pressing matter, as the climate crises becomes more and more intrusive. The same might be said about scandalous discrimination against ethnic minorities in Norway, or against disabled and queer people. Regarding LHBTQI-persons or issues. It might even seem old fashioned to argue for forms of female representation, when, as I agree, gender itself is clearly such an unstable category. But I must claim strong disagreement with the idea that these many important marginalized perspectives must be considered as something quite separate from the perspective of gender. Other marginalized perspectives are also struggling to make an impact. But to acknowledge this whole range of important human and theological/liturgical concerns, the answer does not seem to me, to be about silencing any of them. Whoever and whatever people are, and wherever they are living, gender remains a highly relevant perspective.

God is who She is

Right now, the world is under pressure from several visible and invisible crises and conflicts. One extreme weather event follows another. The wars in Israel/Gaza and Russia/Ukraine demand our attention, and a new president in the US presents us with other significant challenges. Why still insist on addressing God as a woman?

I would suggest that we just need to be brave and open our eyes and minds to what could happen if and where Christians have unlocked the metaphorical space and are daring to use gynomorphic metaphors in their theological language. It might make a difference. I have argued strongly that heteronormative family metaphors are problematic for people for several reasons. New gynomorphic metaphors in and for our time have still not been revealed to us. But an easy place to start is simply to use 'She' when talking of God. The next step could be to search for metaphors and attributes that do not abandon the parish to a very limited set of ungendered and blurry images of God. The Bible is the richest source of all, providing a plenitude of metaphors of all genders and none.

I do not know exactly what the next steps should be. What I do know, is that searching for appropriate names for God is not heresy. It is neither a break with the liturgical and ecumenical tradition, and even less a sexualization of the image of God. To search for names for God is exactly what believers always have done. God is who She is. And we are constantly called to investigate more of who She is.

From Monoculture to Ecotone: The Abundance of the Holy Spirit as Reorientation to the Abundance in Economy and Ecology

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And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'
And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.'
And let everyone who is thirsty come.
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.
(Rev. 22:17)

This essay (in its literal meaning of try-out) takes concepts from my dissertation and book *Searching for the Holy Spirit: Feminist Theology and Traditional Doctrine*[1] and translates them into a different imagery to find relevant and creative ways to speak of the Holy Spirit and her invitation to us today.

I start with two methodological remarks, one is borrowed, and one is my own. Coakley in her magisterial first part of a systematic theology claims that 'graced bodily practices' are a '*precondition* for trinitarian thinking'.[2] By this she means that prayer, contemplation and worship, both individual and liturgical, give certain sorts of philosophical insights that are impossible without them. I agree with Coakley that people who pray will think and write differently about the trinity and therefore also the Holy Spirit than people who do not. So, for certain trinitarian thoughts, a faith lived out in the practices of prayer and liturgy is a precondition. It might not be a precondition for *all* trinitarian thinking. A pneumatology rooted in prayer is not objectively more valid or better (although some might find it so), but it *is* different.[3] The pneumatology explored in this essay comes from 'graced bodily practices' which are used both as the source and

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[1] Anne Claar Thomasson-Rosingh, *Searching for the Holy Spirit. Feminist Theology and Traditional Doctrine* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[2] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self. An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: University Press, 2013), p. 16, 19.

[3] I argue this point more extensively in the article: 'Mapping the Spirit's Role in Prayer. How Liminality and Ecstasy in Romans 8 can Enlighten Pneumatology', *SEI Journal* 8, 2 (2014), pp. 34-36.

method for theological reflection. Coakley writes that, 'theology is always in motion' as the 'vision set before one invites ongoing (…) response and change'.[4] This is certainly the case for a theology rooted in worship, as it is an invitation to transformation both in the individual and the wider social sphere. This essay hopes to be just such an invitation. It is a call to reorientation, to think differently about the Holy Spirit and from those different ideas to act differently, both economically and ecologically.

The second methodological remark comes from my own work where I experiment with a methodology that I call 'interplay'. I bring theologians from different historical eras and diverse geographical and cultural locations together in an imagined dialogue. 'Interplay (…) indicates [an] imprecision and playfulness'.[5] For me playfulness is a conscious strategy in-between cataphatic and apophatic theology. In theology -as in life- we often take ourselves and our ideologies, hypotheses and judgements far too seriously. In important forms of prayer, we learn to be silent and listen. When after prayer we dare to speak again, I suggest we restrain ourselves with a certain hesitancy and playfulness. This way of taking –our own- ideas lightly, helps to make room for diverse and even conflicting thoughts so that mutual critique becomes possible. I invite you to come and play. Remembering that in the scriptures the word for 'spirit' means 'wind' I invite you to come and play with the wind…

Walls into bridges

In my book I used imagery from buildings: especially walls and bridges. The comparison between feminist theology and traditional pneumatology that I attempted, engaged with the boundaries in each, the gaps between them and how they might be bridged. I searched for places where traditional and feminist pneumatology might be able to encounter each other even though in other places they excluded each other. I explored limits and ways to cross borders. When thinking about walls and bridges: edges and boundaries there are always multiple sides to a divide. I explored boundaries, gaps and limits by highlighting moments that signalled inside, outside, other side, this side, that side and the opposite side.

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[4] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self,* p. 18.

[5] Thomasson-Rosingh, *Searching for the Holy Spirit,* p. 108.

For a traditional pneumatology I used Basil of Caesarea's *On the Holy Spirit* (*De Spiritu Sancto*) written in the fourth century.[6] In Basil's writing I found many boundaries due, not the least, to the fact that his treatise was written as a polemic against a group who thought that the Spirit was less divine than the Father; Basil calls them the 'Pneumatomachi'. In this work, he is explicitly trying to place a boundary around a particular statement of Christian doctrine. People who do not agree are heretics and should not be in the church. The Holy Spirit that emerges is the incorporeal and immaterial Spirit of the worthy and the hierarchy: 'only those who are worthy may share it'.[7] Doctrine thus becomes the prison of the Spirit. We are only allowed to speak of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, the church and the leadership. We are not allowed to give voice to our experience of the Spirit outside these structures. The church has enthusiastically inherited Basil's confines and still finds it hard to acknowledge the Holy Spirit's power beyond her own influence or her control. This is a challenge for feminist theology.

In feminist theology I had to search for a sustained pneumatology and the main obstacle – or wall- was that the Holy Spirit seemed mostly absent. The absence of critical engagement with pneumatology meant that either Christianity was dismissed (without exploring the potential of a Christian feminist theology of the Spirit) or traditional pneumatology was embraced uncritically as an excellent and exemplary feminist doctrine. Neither of these choices seems particularly beneficial for re-engaging creatively with Christian theology from the perspective of equality between men and women. Neither of these theologies offers a mutual critique between traditional and feminist theology. They both seem to run into a dead end.

Alongside hard boundaries that felt like prison walls and dead ends, I also found some surprising connections. Basil and those feminist theologians who did mention the Spirit, both had boundaries they wanted to break down. First, Basil's insistence on equality within the trinity gave the church an image of shared leadership. The ultimate supreme being, in Basil's theology is not the 'lone man at the top' -as in the imagination of many- but a relationship of love in difference. Here connection within God and between God and the cosmos is important. In my view it is sad that churches find it difficult to follow

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[6] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* (D. Anderson (trans.); Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).

[7] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit,* p. 43.

their Creator in adopting leadership by a group of equals. Basil's emphasis on community, love and equal honour is something some current feminist theologians are willing to work with. Catherine LaCugna, for example, foregrounds God's communion with all creatures in her reading of Cappadocian theology (of which Basil is one example).[8]

In chapter nine of *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil writes a poem about the Spirit.[9] In this poem he is not debating antagonistically or denouncing heretics. He just sings the praises of the Spirit, and his imagination leaps off the page with many phrases that would inspire theologians –feminist or otherwise - today. This is constructive pneumatology. So, for example, he writes about the impact of the Spirit on creation and about the angels as 'immaterial fire that assumes physical form'.[10] This is a beautiful description that will have been recognised by those who have prayed throughout the ages: a paradox that defies debate and excommunication; a playfulness that manages to value both the body and the soul; a place where the Spirit breaks open human boundaries almost literally; a wonderful doorway and bridge to current feminist thought.

The Spirit in relationship or as love, connects ideas from scripture via Basil (fourth century) and Augustine (fifth century) to twentieth century theologians like John Taylor, Yves Congar and Colin Gunton.[11] This theology is unifying. Its content speaks of unity and opens to a potential harmony. Feminist thinkers enthusiastically embrace this. They re-imagine and re-direct the Spirit as love in words like 'friendship' and 'desire'. Elizabeth Johnson explores 'interpersonal

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[8] Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

[9] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit,* pp. 42-4.

[10] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit,* p. 63.

[11] See J.E. Rotelle (ed.), Augustine of Hippo, *The Trinity,* trans. E. Hill OP (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2015); John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God. The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972); Yves M.J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* trans. D. Smith (London: Fontana, 1983); C. E. Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many, God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (The 1992 Bampton Lectures; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

experience'; [12] Sallie McFague speaks of God as 'friend'; [13] Nancy Victorin-Vangerud puts 'family' at the centre,[14] and LaCugna focuses on 'communion' and incorporates ecstasy and 'the sexual experience'. [15] In human relationships gendered embodiment is important. Pneumatology in the hands of feminist theologians can help move theology beyond one exclusive gender for God and open it out to diversity and gender fluidity.

Victorin-Vangerud's mutual recognition in the household of God bridges traditional perichoretic trinitarian thought based on self-giving into post-modern family life. She challenges values of self-surrender, self-withdrawal and self-giving and considers, in a different sense, 'self-assertion, differentiation, or confrontation as forms of self-giving in love'.[16] Her Spirit of dignity opens a space for conflict. Here shared authority, equal regard, proper trust and diversity in dignity make (divine) relationship possible. [17] Johnson breaches the hierarchical walls built by Basil by turning the trinity up-side-down and starting with the Spirit. She is keen to bridge women's experience and theology. LaCugna converses extensively with Cappadocian theology and finds a lever in pneumatology to open up patriarchy.[18] In this way she bridges what might have been deemed opposites.

The theology of the 'Pneumatomachi' that we can glean, reading between the lines of Basil's denouncements, also offers interesting meeting places. He writes that they think that the Spirit is like a 'freeman' (neither slave nor master in fourth century society). Basil ridicules this idea of a freeman: 'Who lacks both the strength to rule, or the willingness to be ruled? No such nature exists (…)'.[19] For a 21st century feminist reading of this text however, this offers the opportunity and possibility of seeing the Holy Spirit as being precisely like somebody who cannot be ruled nor is willing to rule. This could seem a very apt and exciting description of the Spirit who

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[12] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is. The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p. 125.
[13] Sallie McFague, *Models of God. Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).
[14] Nancy M. Victorin-Vangerud, *The Raging Hearth. The Spirit in the Household of God* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000).
[15] LaCugna, *God for Us,* pp. 351, 407.
[16] Victorin-Vangerud, *The Raging Hearth,* p. 163.
[17] ibid., p. 212.
[18] LaCugna, *God for Us,* pp. 53-79.
[19] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit,* p. 79.

overshadows Mary to conceive Jesus in Lk. 1:35, or who inspires his ministry in Lk. 4:14-15.

The main discussion in *On the Holy Spirit* detectable between Basil and the 'Pneumatomachi' is around the use of the preposition 'in' for the Holy Spirit. Basil is apparently being attacked for praying 'Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' rather than praying 'Glory to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit'. The 'Pneumatomachi' think only the latter should be used because the Spirit has a different nature indicated by the preposition 'in' which means 'time and place'. Although Basil condemns the idea that the Holy Spirit has a different nature from that of the other persons of the trinity, he does not refute the idea that the Spirit is 'time and place'.[20] Interestingly, time and place gives us a correlation with speed and movement, change if you will. Here then, there is potential for constructive work in pneumatology using fascinating and fresh imagery for the Spirit. The idea of place is closely interrelated with the idea of space. I wonder, to enter fully into the time and space of the Spirit, whether a change of metaphor would help.

From architecture to agriculture

As I re-examine the theology and imagery from *Searching for the Spirit,* I realise how anthropocentric and technocratic the architectural similes are. Biblical images of the fruits of the Spirit encourage us to look more closely at our interrelationships within the cosmos, and this seems rather prudent in the context of ecological disaster. It also seems fitting as pneumatology has from the very beginning had an inclusive streak that brings everything within the compass of the Spirit. Even Basil already writes of the Spirit: 'His powers are manifold: they are wholly present everywhere and in everything'. [21] This truly inclusive vision encourages us to look at all of creation for imagery of an inclusive and holistic Spirit. A way of making sense of this inclusive, interrelational understanding of the Spirit might be to look at monoculture and ecotone.

A monoculture focuses on the production of one crop and is very strictly controlled. Nothing else is allowed to grow. Difference, diversity and encounter are forbidden, and much energy is spent to keep it that way. No creativity is allowed. Even though physically a monoculture – like certain kinds of plantations for example - might be a grand open space, it can feel rather 'walled in'. Tree in her book

[20] ibid., p. 21.
[21] ibid., p. 43.

Wilding invites those who create agricultural monocultures to let go of control.[22] Alternative ideas about agriculture like permaculture invite us to mix species and let them encounter each other. [23] In pneumatology a monoculture would mean that heretics, non-believers or people of other faith have no access to the Spirit. Differing explanations and experiences are rigorously denied. In *On the Holy Spirit,* Basil does something similar. He denies the 'Pneumatomachi' and others who disagree with him, access to God. He writes: 'Who are headed for (…) eternal damnation? The transgressors: those who deny the faith'.[24] And this one crop or this one view of the Spirit is controlled top-down. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit becomes just another cog in the patriarchal power of the hierarchy. Could it be different? Could pneumatology also be 're-wilded', the seeds of the Spirit planted as a permaculture rather than a monoculture? Thus, we could enjoy the ideas of Basil, feminists and the 'Pneumatomachi' alike as ecotone.

An ecotone, then, in contrast to a monoculture is a place where not only many different species encounter each other: it is the place where two habitats meet. It is a fertile place where new species tend to emerge. Barrett and Harley describe it as a place where 'species (…) interact and intermingle, and a greater diversity and density of life is found there than in either of the two distinct habitats'.[25] The ecotone is on the edge not in the centre, marginal and wild. This fecund overlapping of two habitats is an outstanding image for the Holy Spirit as time and space, where not only different persons and disparate theologies can meet but where the divine and the human habitat overlap. In a similar way, the idea of interplay in *Searching for the Holy Spirit* can also be seen as an ecotone where Basil's habitat and that of current feminist theology meet. The place of the Spirit is *in* the encounter to reclaim an idea originally proposed by John V. Taylor.[26]

The Spirit, I believe, transforms walls into bridges and more excitingly also transforms monocultures into ecotones - the Spirit moving from the centres of power to the borderlands of potential and

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[22] I. Tree, *Wilding. The return of nature to a British farm* (Basingstoke: Pan Macmillan, 2018).

[23] P. Witefield, *Earth Care Manual. Permaculture Handbook for Britain and Other Temperate Climates* (East Meon (UK): Permanent Publications, 2004).

[24] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit,* p. 47.

[25] A. Barrett and R. Harley, *Being Interrupted. Reimagining the Church's mission from the outside, in* (London: SCM Press, 2020), p. 142.

[26] Taylor, *The Go-Between God.*

imagining the Spirit or describing the doctrine of the Spirit as a monoculture that may become an ecotone. This green picture calls forth not only the connecting power of the Spirit, discussed at length in my thesis, but also her abundance.

Both the monoculture and the ecotone are places of abundance. The monoculture is especially created to counteract food shortage, and as such it creates abundance of one thing for fear of scarcity.[27] The ecotone is not in the same way self-conscious about its abundance. Plenty and profusion just appear through the interaction of varied species with each other and an environment that is unusual to them. The change of habitat invites a creative response which creates a wealth of diversity. The abundance is unexpected, haphazard, uncontrolled, dangerous even. It is the kind of overflowing of one thing into another that we might find uncomfortable. It means a constant crossing of boundaries and going outside the boundary. Overflowing abundance is also 'superfluous' and superfluity can be seen as wasteful. '(…) my cup overflows' Ps 23:5, is the promise, but who takes care of the mess on the floor? Is a full cup not more than good enough? The psalm seems to invite us to respond to overflowing cups and messy floors with delight in the gift and the giver.

The abundance of the monoculture is seen as necessary as it is there to overcome a lack, to fill a gap. The abundance of the ecotone is not necessary in the same way at all. It just happens for no observable purpose whatsoever: superfluous. Does this remind us of the Spirit? The 'Pneumatomachi' already claimed that it was enough to be baptised just in Christ, as you do not really need the Spirit. Rogers explores this idea in depth and wonders: 'Is there nothing the Spirit

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[27] In a cautionary sense, it could perhaps also be said that monocultures can also create problems in the longer term. See, e.g. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt (eds), *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts of the Anthropocene* (London & Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), Introduction, p. M4: 'Plantations grow monocultures, or single crops that deny the intimacies of companion species. Modern dairy and meat farms raise a handful of supercharged breeds. A new kind of monstrosity attacks us: our entanglements, blocked and concealed in these simplifications, return as virulent pathogens and spreading toxins. Industrial chemicals weave their way through our food webs; nuclear by-products sicken us not just through our human cells but also through our bacteria'.

can do that the Son can't do better?'.[28] In his study of this question, he finds that unlike the Son the Spirit rests. The Spirit rests on matter and on narrative: the Spirit rests especially on the Son. But resting is not really an activity, it is more the opposite of doing. So, he does not exclude the possibility that the Spirit is superfluous. He concludes: 'If she [the Spirit] is superfluous, her superfluity turns out to be the gratuity that gives grace and beauty in her interaction with the Son, who through her is allowed to receive what he already has so that others who do not have can share it'.[29] I concur and conclude that the Spirit *is* superfluous, she overflows, she a-bounds, she defies the boundaries, transgresses them even, bringing partnership within the nature of God, connecting human and divine habitats, overflowing abundantly with fruits and gifts, inviting all to join.

Invitation to join

The abundance and superfluity of the Spirit is a playful and prayerful way to imagine that the divine life through the Holy Spirit imbues the life of creation. Like love, the Spirit and the trinity are not a 'zero-sum game'. When the Father gives to the Son or the Spirit it does not mean the Father loses and the Son or the Spirit gains. All three are enhanced by any exchange. This is how the creaturely life is also intended. As in the ecotone when different habitats share the same space, all are enriched, none is poorer, abundance abounds. This is a very counter cultural thought. The myths of our time are all built on scarcity, that there might not be enough to go around. Especially the stories we tell each other about how the market economy works. The fear that if I give you my food then I will go hungry, the thought that any money that is paid to the worker is a loss to the owner. But if we know the reality of God does not work that way, might it be that our reality also does not work that way? Could we let our ideas of God have an impact on how we view our own reality? Is the abundant divine habitat allowed to spill over into the scarcity of the human habitat? Is the divine economy through the Spirit allowed to overflow (or transgress) into human affairs? If we start with the abundance of God the Spirit and let it spill over in our lives, it asks for a total re-orientation of our thinking.

Pneumatology is not only about who the Spirit is but also about what the Spirit does. Traditionally 'sanctification' has been the Spirit's

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[28] E. F. Rogers Jr., *After the Spirit. A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 19.
[29] E. F. Rogers, *After the Spirit,* p. 208.

speciality. As the Spirit permeates human life, behaviour is changed. In the imagery of the transformation from monoculture to ecotone we are invited to let go of our control over 'nature' and our anxiety about scarcity. We are invited to move from the centre to the margin and see the abundance that comes from every encounter. We are invited to rethink how we live, what we grow and what we eat. There is a calling to be generous to our non-human environment, to make space for the wild things, to acknowledge the holiness of the universe. We are encouraged to stop ecocide in the name of production, take the risk to lose some comfort to gain much joy. Who knows how much we will gain when we start properly realising our interconnections with our environment and start living in mutuality with all that is?

The rethinking from scarcity to abundance does not only concern our relationship with the planet as something external, but also our interrelationships within it and with each other. When we start believing in the abundance of the Spirit our attitude transforms. A practical example of this can be seen in a project, *Creative Spirit,* working with people who were formerly defined by deficiency (like home-*less*-ness*)*, but are now viewed as abundantly creative.[30] This transformation is especially urgent in our thinking about the economy or production. We need to completely reorientate what it means to make, to own and to share. The generous Spirit, who is always willing to share all her riches calls us to stop worshipping ideologies based on belief in shortage and a zero-sum game: all that you have, I cannot have. She invites us to start worshipping, imitating and joining the trinity who is infinitely enriched by an eternal giving and sharing and working together: to share those gifts that God gave us in common like land, water and air; to know that sharing this space where different habitats meet will give us more than we in our greed imagined could be produced through our tightly controlled monocultures.

Conclusion

From walls to monocultures and from bridges to ecotones the doctrine of the Spirit gives much scope for re-appropriating ancient ideas of equal honour, immaterial fire, communion and prepositions of place

[30] Keith D. Thomasson, 'Creative Spirit. Conversations that Accompany Creativity in the Lives of Young People Who Are at Risk of Homelessness', in K.S. Hendricks and J. Boyce-Tillman (eds), *Authentic Connection. Music, Spirituality, and Wellbeing* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021), pp. 111-27.

and time to embrace values championed by feminists in visions of mutuality, flourishing for all and unexpected abundance. The Spirit's generously overflowing fruitfulness invites us to the ecotone where humanity and divinity overlap to pray and to play. The divine delights in letting go for others and inspires us to re-orientate our relationships in ecology and economy as encounters that will provide their own special wealth. We allow the Spirit to take us on a journey across boundaries not only of gender, race, sexuality or class but of ideology, ability, status and species to a place of true encounter.

Can We See More Clearly? Theology on Male Sexual Violence Against Women through an Existential Lens

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This paper offers a review of theological engagement with male sexual violence against women which constitutes a visible and troubling example of one way in which gender is indexed in a contemporary Scottish context. This review is one element of a wider research project in which I am asking what we can learn about liturgical experience in the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) by looking at it through the eyes of women who have been subjected to male sexual violence. The project includes interviews with women who have experienced sexual violence, discussing their experiences of SEC liturgy. Through the process of developing my methodology for the interviews, I discovered Max van Manen, a hermeneutic phenomenologist, and his four 'existentials'. [1] These existentials proved a valuable tool for conducting and analysing my interviews and for drawing together understandings of both trauma and liturgical studies. This paper will explore their value as an analytical lens for theological discussions on male sexual violence against women.

Van Manen's four existentials are '*lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)'. [2] Van Manen describes his existentials as 'fundamental existential themes which probably pervade the lifeworlds of all human beings, regardless of their historical, cultural or social situatedness'.[3] Lived space, as defined by van Manen, 'is felt space. … [It] is difficult to put into words since the experience of lived space (as lived time, body) is largely pre-verbal; we do not ordinarily reflect on it'. To communicate what he means, van Manen illustrates it thus: 'The huge spaces of a modern bank building may make us feel small … As we walk into a cathedral we may be overcome by a silent sense of the transcendental even if we ordinarily

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[1] Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 101–7. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=3408268>.

[2] ibid., p. 101.

[3] ibid., p. 101.

are not particularly religious or churchgoing'.[4] Lived space is an integral part of humans' experience of the world around them. Lived body is perhaps understood more easily, as van Manen explains, it 'refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world'.[5] Lived time, as presented by van Manen, 'is subjective time … the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture'.[6] Importantly, for the context of this paper, van Manen also describes lived time as '[t]he temporal dimensions of past, present, and future … Whatever I have encountered in my past now sticks to me as memories or as (near) forgotten experiences that somehow leave their traces on my being'.[7] Finally, van Manen's lived relation is to be understood as 'the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them. … In a larger existential sense human beings have searched in this experience of the other, the communal, the social for a sense of purpose in life, meaningfulness, grounds for living, as in the religious experience of the absolute Other, God'.[8] In conducting my research, a fifth existential emerged: *lived faith* (spirituality). Although van Manen mentions God, briefly, in his discussion of lived (human) relation, this existential did not seem to reach to the depth experienced by my participants in the realm of spirituality. The interviews revealed that the relationship with the Divine, along with sentiments regarding the written aspect of the liturgy required an additional existential.[9] Lived faith therefore developed as a fifth existential for my project concerning, centrally, the participants' relationship to/with God and how that was experienced through the liturgical text and context.

This article considers how these five existentials help in understanding how theological scholarship on male sexual violence against women has developed. For the purposes of my wider project, the existentials are valuable also for the way they link clearly with areas of study in liturgical theology. Although there is not space here to discuss the liturgical element, as the theoretical framework for my research, the existentials shape the following discussion of sexual violence and theology. The paper will explore how the existentials

[4] ibid., p.102.
[5] ibid., p. 103.
[6] ibid., p. 104.
[7] ibid., p. 104.
[8] ibid., pp. 104–5.
[9] ibid., p. 105.

interact with feminist theology on male sexual violence against women from before the turn of the century through to more recent scholarship. With a brief sidetrack to look at Juliana M. Claassens work in biblical studies, the paper will conclude by looking at the existentials in relation to foundational trauma theologians.

In and around the 1990s, two key issues were at the forefront of feminist theology scholarship addressing male sexual violence: power and the patriarchy, both of which can be understood as expressions of lived relation and lived body. In 1991, James Newton Poling argues that '[s]exual violence is both a violation of the telos of sexuality and an abuse of power'. [10] Poling predicates this argument on the assumption that power is formed in community and that '[t]o live is to desire power to relate to others'.[11] This interpretation of power sees it as a neutral concept which permeates all human life, all relationships. If power and relationships are central to human life, it follows that in a failed relationship (any type of relationship) where one party violates the other, this is an abuse of power. [12] Specifically, Poling suggests, sexual violence is used as a power move by men against women to 'keep patriarchy intact'.[13] In 1989, Karen L Bloomquist also highlights the significance of power in sexual violence situations. For Bloomquist, '[s]exual violence is both socially constructed and individually willed. Individuals *choose* to exercise violence, but that choice is influenced deeply by how one experiences one's place in the overall social order'.[14] The social order which Bloomquist refers to here is patriarchy. Similarly to Poling, Bloomquist argues that this male 'power-over' approach to society creates the environment for sexual violence to flourish.[15] For both theologians, the social order, and the imbalance of power built into it, provides the context in which male sexual violence against women flourishes. Also, for both

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[10] James Newton Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville TN: Abingdon, 1991), p. 25.

[11] ibid., p. 24.

[12] 'Relationship' here is being used in the general sense of all humans having relationships with those around them, rather than meaning in a specific romantic or familiar relationship.

[13] Poling, *Abuse of Power*, p. 145.

[14] Karen L. Bloomquist, 'Sexual Violence: Patriarchy's Offense and Defense', in Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (eds), *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), p. 63.

[15] ibid., p. 66.

theologians, the lived relation existential is predominant with a focus on relationships on both an individual and societal scale. Carol J. Adams, another feminist theologian writing in the 1990s, takes a different approach to the understanding of sexual violence as an abuse of power. Building on the work of legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon, Adams finds that viewing sexual violence as an abuse of power over and above its nature as a sexual crime diminishes the reality of gender and sexuality as 'power structure[s]' in and of themselves.[16] For Adams, we must look at the *multitude* of power structures involved in male sexual violence against women, all of which stem from a 'patriarchal culture'.[17] Adams is not arguing against the idea of sexual violence as an abuse of power, but rather suggesting that it cannot be seen as such in a singular way, diminishing the role of these other hierarchies in such acts. Adams' approach once again highlights the significance of lived relation. However, her emphasis on the sexual nature of the violence under scrutiny also brings lived body to the forefront of the conversation.

All three scholars focused on the relational aspect of sexual violence, show the significance of the lived relation existential to feminist scholarship on the subject at this time. Theologically, Poling turns to process theology and Alfred North Whitehead's 'doctrine of internal relations' to understand the experiences of sexual violence victim-survivors.[18] Poling suggests that in the search for healing survivors seek a 'loving community that is not characterized by the abuse of power'.[19] Bloomquist's theological turn looks toward the male-language for God which she submits 'comes to function [as] generative of violence … within the central power-over dictates of patriarchy'.[20] This turn towards the language for God brings lived faith into a more central role in Bloomquist's theology. As discussed above, the language of the liturgy and the relationship with God, which is borne out of language used for God, brought in this fifth existential. Adams' theological concerns begin with recognising that 'there can be

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[16] Carol J. Adams, 'Toward a Feminist Theology of Religion and the State', in Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (eds), *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* (London and New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 23.
[17] ibid., p. 29.
[18] Poling, *Abuse of Power*, p. 96.
[19] ibid., p. 122.
[20] Bloomquist, 'Sexual Violence: Patriarchy,' p. 67.

no gender-neutral theologizing'.[21] According to Adams, any approach to discussions about God and Christian institutions must first acknowledge perspective, including gender. Adams also addresses the issue of gendered language for God which for her reflects the multiplicities of hierarchies:

> Associating femaleness with God "debases" the Godhead because women's bodies represent sex. Language about God is metaphoric, but introducing talk about women irrevocably moves the focus from the metaphoric to the carnal. This will inevitably be considered blasphemous in a male dominant culture.[22]

This hierarchy of sexuality not only prevents a positive way forward for female-gendered language for God, but is, of course, central to the context of male sexual violence against women. This theologizing looked at through the lens of the existentials, once again highlights the importance of lived relation in Poling and Bloomquist's scholarship. Bloomquist and Adams also began to give experiences of the language used for God consideration which draws in the lived faith existential. Adams' discussion also draws more clearly on lived body. In any discussion of sexual violence, an experience which by nature involves the body, lived body will always be a central existential. However, Adams' work emphasises this aspect of an experience of sexual violence while Poling and Bloomquist wish to focus on the relational nature of the experience.[23]

Despite what feminist theologians may have dreamed thirty years ago, male sexual violence against women continues to be an important topic in theology, with the #MeToo movement – and the following #ChurchToo movement – giving the discussions more

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[21] Adams, 'Feminist Theology of Religion,' p. 24. Although Adams specifically discusses 'maleness or femaleness' as most scholars of her time, it would stand that no matter a person's gender, outwith this binary approach, this shapes their experience of theology.

[22] ibid., p. 28.

[23] It might be noted that Marjorie Procter-Smith has not been included in this discussion. Procter-Smith's work on liturgy and gender-based violence focuses more on domestic violence, rather than specifically sexual violence.

momentum.[24] In 2015 Adrian Thatcher edited *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender* in which Pamela Cooper-White's chapter, 'Violence and Justice', reveals that the issue of whether sexual violence is more about sex or power is still on-going.[25] Cooper-White offers 'three possible alternatives' to the idea that rape is about power, not sex, 'to bring greater complexity to bear on the causes and dynamics of sexual injustice: "Rape is about power, *and* sex"; "Rape is about power, *using* sex"; and "Rape is about power, gender, and race"'.[26] Although providing some nuance to the understanding of rape as an abuse of power, Cooper-White, with reference to Poling himself, agrees with Poling. Cooper-White finds that sexual violence is 'at [its] core an abuse of power in relation to another human being'.[27] Cooper-White seems to consider carefully whether lived relation or lived body are more significant for theological discussions about male sexual violence against women, coming down on the side of lived relation. Once more reflective of Poling, Cooper-White suggests that power is bound up in community: '[a]n ethic of constructive, communally shared, and mutually authorized power – what I have termed "*power-in-community*" (Cooper-White 2012: 52-63), is a vision not unlike Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom (Isa. 11: 6, 9)'.[28] Cooper-White suggests that the Trinity offers a vision of 'a relational form of restoration of justice …[i]n keeping with the communal ethic of power advocated'.[29] By seeking to emulate the relational, mutual power of the Trinity, Christian communities might better serve victim-survivors of

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[24] The me too campaign was started in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke. The #MeToo hashtag went viral and enlivened the campaign in 2017. me too. and Tarana Burke, 'History & Inception', *Me Too.* <https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/> [accessed 31 October 2024]; Following on from the spread of the #MeToo campaign, Emily Joy started the #ChurchToo movement which focused specifically on abuses in the church: Emily Joy Allison, '#ChurchToo — Emily Joy Poetry', 2017 <https://emilyjoypoetry.com/churchtoo> [accessed 12 December 2024].

[25] Pamela Cooper-White, 'Violence and Justice', in Adrian Thatcher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 488–504.

[26] ibid., p. 490.

[27] ibid., p. 494.

[28] ibid., p. 499.

[29] ibid., p. 500.

sexual violence, offering a place of power-in-community. This consideration of how Christian communities relate to the Trinity draws on experience of lived faith, alongside the ongoing significance of experiencing lived relation. Cooper-White's theologizing on male sexual violence against women appears to emulate, and in some ways draw together, the central existential concerns of Poling, Bloomquist, and Adams. Lived relation remains the core existential in Cooper-White's work, though lived body and lived faith are also seen as significant.

Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw address sexual violence and theology head-on in their recent work, *Surviving God*. As Kim and Shaw see it, 'we find places where we can learn from survivors, and we recognize that survivors have unique locations from which to teach us new things about God'.[30] Looking at theology and the church through the eyes of sexual violence victim-survivors, Kim and Shaw concentrate on the relationship with God:

> For the church to move away from ignoring and accepting sexual violence, churches must move away from a dominating patriarchal notion of a God who must be obeyed without question and toward a more liberative understanding of a God who loves, welcomes, and embraces all people.[31]

Here Kim and Shaw are expressing how the lived faith experience for victim-survivors, and others, is determined by their understanding of who God is. Appraising the understanding of God through the perspective of sexual violence victim-survivors once again, reveals the role of the patriarchy in limiting progress towards a safer space for women: 'Our stories of surviving expose the structural inequalities that constrain and threaten our lives. They help us see where transformation is needed'.[32] Looked at through the lens of the existentials, Kim and Shaw are arguing that the lived faith of victim-survivors can be a tool for seeing shortfalls in theology and the church. Kim and Shaw also emphasise the significance of lived body alongside lived faith: 'For survivors of sexual abuse, the mind-body-emotion-spirit wiring has often been really messed up, and so feeling what we

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[30] Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Surviving God: A New Vision of God Through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse Survivors* (Minneapolis, MI: Broadleaf Books, 2024), p. 9.
[31] ibid., p. 39.
[32] ibid., p. 19.

feel, especially when it involves bodies, can be terrifying'.[33] Sexual violence is necessarily an embodied experience; it may also impact the way the body and spirit relate. This relationship between lived body and lived faith will be further drawn out below in the work of theologians focused on trauma.

Jayme R. Reaves and David Tombs' edited volume, *When Did We See You Naked?* considers the role of sexual violence in the life of Jesus. In the 'Introduction' Reaves and Tombs explain:

> Jesus is readily spoken of as a victim of suffering, and there is little problem in describing his suffering as torture. But to speak of him as a victim of sexual abuse is shocking and meets resistance. Why? We have come to see the *resistance* to the idea of Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse as part of the key to understanding what sexual abuse means and why it could be so important to our understanding of both Jesus' experience and our contemporary context.[34]

Although there is not space here for a full review, it is worth noting that Reaves and Tombs, together with the other contributors to the volume, recognise that understanding Jesus as a victim of sexual violence may have a real impact on victim-survivors today. The reading of Jesus as 'blameless', for example, is a contrast to the shame and blame experienced by contemporary victim-survivors. [35] Understanding the violence committed against Jesus as sexual may challenge the faith of some victim-survivors in the church today, while it may support others. The lived faith of victim-survivors may be directly impacted by theological conversations on the lived body experience of Jesus. In their chapter of Reaves and Tombs' book, R. Ruard Ganzevoort, Srdjan Sremac, and Teguh Wijaya Mulya discuss whether Christians 'should identify with the suffering Jesus or with the

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[33] ibid., p. 198.

[34] Jayme R. Reaves and David Tombs, 'Introduction: Acknowledging Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse', in Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa (eds), *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, (London and Canterbury: SCM Press, 2021), p. 2.

[35] Rachel Starr, '"Not Pictured": What Veronica Mars Can Teach Us about the Crucifixion', in Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa (eds), *When Did We See You Naked?* p. 170.

evil humans causing that suffering'.[36] According to the authors, the uncertainty proves especially problematic for victim-survivors.[37] This is not difficult to imagine in a society where victim-blaming is almost to be expected after an experience of sexual violence.[38] In a society that blames female victims for the crimes committed against them, both their experience of lived relation and lived faith can be understood as important for theologising on male sexual violence against women. In another chapter, Elisabet le Roux reinforces the role of communities, and therefore lived relation, in the story of blame and shame for victim-survivors of sexual violence: 'These [religious] spaces are key spaces, either in promoting stigma or in countering it'.[39] Reaves and Tombs' edited volume continues the development of theology concerning male sexual violence against women and the existentials of lived faith and lived relation. Lived body is also brought to the fore with the significance of Jesus' embodied experience.

Ganzevoort and Sremac also collaborated to bring together the essays in *Trauma and Lived Religion*.[40] Here Hilary Jerome Scarsella's 'Victimization via Ritualization: Christian Communion and Sexual

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[36] R. Ruard Ganzevoort, Srdjan Sremac, and Teguh Wijaya Mulya, 'Why Do We See Him Naked? Politicized, Spiritualized and Sexualized Gazes at Violence', in Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa (eds), *When Did We See You Naked?* p. 200.

[37] ibid., p. 200.

[38] This headline from the Daily Mail, though in reference to femicide, provides a recent example of victim-blaming in the media: Barbara Davies and Andy Jehring, 'Did Living in the Shadow of His High Achieving Wife Lead to Unthinkable Tragedy | Daily Mail Online', 2023. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11737871/Details-emerge-tensions-Epsom-College-head-husband-killed-daughter.html?ico=topics_pagination_desktop> [accessed 12 December 2024].

[39] Elisabet le Roux, 'Jesus Is a Survivor: Sexual Violence and Stigma within Faith Communities,' in Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa (eds), *When Did We See You Naked?* p. 188.

[40] R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac (eds),*Trauma and Lived Religion: Transcending the Ordinary*, Palgrave Studies in Lived Religion and Societal Challenges (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=5491921>

Abuse' is of particular interest.[41] Drawing her insights from both academic enquiries and conversations with sexual violence victim-survivors, Scarsella focuses on communion (or eucharist) and the embodied and relational aspects of communion's ritualization as understood from the perspective of the victim-survivors involved in her research.[42] In engagement with the work of Catherine Bell, Scarsella argues:

> Words do not seem to be necessary for ritual to be ritual. Communion can be practiced in silence. Language is not the primary location of ritual's power to function. The power of ritual qua ritual is located in the ways people constitute themselves in relationship via ritual action. However, when words are included in processes of ritualization, they matter.[43]

At its core, for Scarsella, the ritual of communion is as a relational action. However, in her conversations with victim-survivors, Scarsella learned of the significance of the bodies and words involved in the ritual.[44] In Scarsella's more theoretical theologising on the ritual of communion, lived relation seems to have been the only fundamental existential for the experience. However, in engaging with female victim-survivors of sexual violence, Scarsella was shown the importance also of the words, the lived faith, and the embodiment, the lived body, of communion.

Brandy Daniels and Micah Cronin make another recent contribution to critical work in the realm of sexual violence and theology in their chapter 'Un(En)Titled? Cissexism, Masculinity and Sexual Violence: Towards a Transfeminist Theological Hermeneutic Beyond Repair'. Although their focus is on sexual violence against transmen, rather than women, they offer a constructive criticism of feminist theology's engagement with sexual violence:

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[41] Rocio Figueroa Alvear and David Tombs also co-authored a chapter in this volume which includes interviews with victim-survivors of sexual abuse. However, their survivors are all male and were abused within a church context at a younger age (14-18) – not the demographic of interest for this project.

[42] Hilary Jerome Scarsella, 'Victimization via Ritualization: Christian Communion and Sexual Abuse', in R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac (eds), *Trauma and Lived Religion,* p. 228.

[43] ibid., p. 235.

[44] ibid., pp. 235–36.

> While we can and should be critical of how hegemonic masculinity functions in the world, when we centre it we, on some level, affirm its own operational (if not espoused) claim about itself: that authentic masculinity is characterized by (sexual) domination.[45]

How do we, rightfully, critique the role hegemonic masculinities play in male sexual violence against women, whilst resisting hegemonic masculinities' desire for (cis)men to be seen as more powerful than women? This question, and Daniels and Cronin's critique, highlights the need to recognise multiple levels of power as espoused by Adams (discussed above), and therefore the importance of multiple levels of experience, or existentials. Male sexual violence against women involves the power structures of gender, sexuality, and patriarchal culture. These power structures draw on the experiences of lived body and lived relation with concern for gender and sexuality - lived body and patriarchal culture - lived relation. Hegemonic masculinities develop in a culture of male power-over which determines that such power-over should be enacted not only politically, but also sexually. Lived time might also be understood to feature in this discussion, with the memories of past experiences playing a role in the continued espousing of toxic or hegemonic masculinities. As well as past experiences, ongoing toxic masculinities might also contribute to fear and anxieties around future experiences. This piece by Daniels and Cronin, appearing as a chapter in Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross' *Bearing Witness Intersectional Perspectives on Trauma Theology*, shows the turn towards trauma theology with a wider set of existentials playing a role in the theologising, as will be shown below.
Although the focus in this paper is on theological engagement with male sexual violence against women, I would like to include some consideration of Juliana M. Claassens' *Writing and Reading to Survive*. Claassens draws together examples of male sexual violence against women in biblical and literary stories, understanding both as 'trauma

[45] Brandy Daniels and Micah Cronin, 'Un(En)Titled? Cissexism, Masculinity and Sexual Violence: Towards a Transfeminist Theological Hermeneutic Beyond Repair', in Katie Cross and Karen O'Donnell (eds), *Bearing Witness: Intersectional Perspectives on Trauma Theology*, (London and Canterbury: SCM Press, 2022), p. 156.

narratives'.[46] She argues that 'we live in a so-called "trauma paradigm" or "trauma culture"'.[47] According to Claassens, an element of this culture is '"insidious trauma"' where, in some cases, trauma is considered to be on-going, caused by systemic devaluing due to gender, race, class, etc.[48] In such cases, trauma is not experienced singularly by an individual, but by an entire subset of society. This understanding of trauma is of significance for Claassens because '[t]he close connection between individual and collective trauma draws our attention to the fact that sexual violence, is, and ought to be, not merely a woman's issue, but intrinsically connected to the plight of the entire community'.[49] In Claassens we find another scholar centring the experience of lived relation in issues of male sexual violence against women. She also argues that 'symbolic language such as metaphors [have] been shown to be able to activate several areas of the brain simultaneously, so helping the brain to reintegrate emotion and cognition in the reframing of the traumatic events'.[50] At this point, Claassens' work draws in the lived faith existential, and it seems to me, therefore, that the communal aspect of trauma and its healing have theological implications. By recognising the relevance of symbolic language, traumatic healing relates directly to lived faith and the language and stories used in churches. Does the liturgical context, and the stories (and metaphors) which shape it, create a safe enough place where traumatic events might effectively be reframed? Claassens also considers finding 'a supportive community … an important factor in helping individuals come to terms with trauma'.[51] For Claassens, a supportive community is vital for significant healing from trauma, centring the experience of lived relation.

As has been shown, previous scholars have made similar arguments to Claassens, on the importance of a supportive community, lived relation. Claassens' claim that we are living in a 'trauma culture', however, is less pervasive, although she is not alone in making this

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[46] L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive: Biblical and Contemporary Trauma Narratives in Conversation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020).
[47] ibid., p. 5.
[48] ibid., pp. 14–15.
[49] ibid., pp. 159–60.
[50] ibid., p. 129.
[51] ibid., pp. 150–51, 162.

suggestion.[52] Claassens, building on the work of Laurie Vickroy, argues that 'the social and cultural environment is often shaped in such a way that many, even the survivors themselves, may fail to recognize the experiences as traumatic in nature'.[53] Claassens is making the case that 'trauma' is not used frequently enough to describe genuinely traumatic experiences, including those 'traumatizing effects of … experiences of ongoing violation based on gender'.[54] Claassens' idea of a trauma culture is an intriguing one. Is it reasonable to suggest that the use of male language for God in the liturgy creates an environment where women are constantly belittled and therefore, perhaps unconsciously, on the receiving end of insidious trauma? If so, what implication does this have for women's experience of the existentials? If the culture and the liturgical language are places of trauma, this would suggest that women are experiencing lived relation and lived faith, at least elements of these, as traumatic experiences. I will not be making the case here for the existence of a trauma paradigm in the Scottish Episcopal liturgical context. I include this slight diversion simply to show an alternative approach which, it seems to me, is not completely without foundation.

After considering Claassens' approach to trauma, we turn now to trauma theology. Although this paper is focused specifically on sexual violence and theology, it would be remiss to attend to this issue without at least a brief consideration of the work of Serene Jones and Shelly Rambo, two of trauma theology's founding scholars. Both Jones and Rambo build their trauma theology on Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (originally published 1992). In the development of her trauma theory, Herman conducted research with 'victims of sexual and domestic violence.'[55] In part due to this relevant foundation, the

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[52] Claassens makes her case with reference to: Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Ortin, 'Trauma Narratives and Herstory', in Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Ortin (eds), *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1–12; Others, including CL Wren Radford, have also made use of the idea of insidious trauma in their work: CL Wren Radford, '"A Stone You Need to Polish": Affect, Inequality and Responding to Testimonies Under Austerity', in Katie Cross and Karen O'Donnell (eds), *Bearing Witness,* pp. 311–34.

[53] Claassens, *Writing and Reading*, p. 15.

[54] ibid., p. 15.

[55] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Third (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p. 2.

work of Jones and Rambo subsequently played a role in the development of the more recent scholarship on sexual violence and theology which has already been considered. These texts of trauma theology were published in the early 2000s, the period between the two eras of feminist theology on male sexual violence against women which have been considered. With the introduction of trauma theory into the theological conversation, there is a slight shift in focus concerning the significance of the different existentials.

Jones' trauma theology was developed after witnessing a friend with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) navigate church. Jones comes 'to think about theologically engaging the traumatized mind as a challenge of *healing imagination*'.[56] Jones clarifies her use of the term 'imagination' as referring to the way in which we engage with the world through the stories in our minds. [57] Jones suggests that Christianity offers a 'common imaginative landscape' with features including 'agency, embodiment, diachronic time …, coherence, and interrelations' which trauma disrupts. [58] In this imaginative landscape described by Jones, it is possible to see aspects of van Manen's existentials. It is straightforward, therefore, to say that Jones centres the experience of lived body, lived time, and lived relation alongside her own theories of agency and coherence. Jones' notion of agency, which she describes as 'people who are agents in their own lives', does not appear to connect immediately with any of my five existentials.[59] Whereas coherence may be considered to fall under lived time and lived relation in Jones' description as '[people] coherently connected to their own pasts and the stories of others who came before them'.[60] There is not space here to explore further how Jones' agency relates to the five existentials in my research, though it is certainly a thought-provoking lack both in van Manen's original existentials and as a perspective that did not arise in my conversations with women about their liturgical experiences. Jones' focus, in any case, is on the idea that trauma survivors in the church can be helped through a healing of the imagination – an ability to reengage with the tools used in the imaginative landscape of Christianity. As Jones succinctly puts it:

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[56] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 20.
[57] ibid., p. 20.
[58] ibid., p. 21.
[59] ibid., p. 21.
[60] ibid., p. 21.

> The language of faith can reach straight into the heart of the imagination. The fragmented anatomy of trauma can leave one without a world, without speech, stories, memory, community, future, or a sense of self; theology's task is to renarrate to us what we have yet to imagine.[61]

In contrast to Scarsella, Jones centres the use of language, with narration and stories at the heart of imagination. Jones' imagination, developed in a religious context, might be understood as lived faith, perhaps with the inclusion of agency. As seen here, Jones also highlights the importance of embodiment (lived body), diachronic time (lived time), and interrelations (lived relation) in the experience of victim-survivors of trauma. It seems that building specifically on topics from trauma theory, in the realm of trauma theology, lived time becomes increasingly pertinent.

In her trauma theology, Rambo uses trauma theory to expose the gaps in traditional theological approaches. Rambo shifts the focus away from the cross or the resurrection – death or life – turning instead to what happens in the middle, to Holy Saturday. According to Rambo, this middle is the place where trauma victim-survivors live, and Rambo determines that a witnessing, a remaining, is required from the church in response.[62] Rambo suggests that when read through the lens of trauma theory, the Gospel of John teaches love is not about power, love is to witness, to remain.[63] This is just one of Rambo's approaches to her trauma theology which ultimately focuses on the presence of the Spirit as witness in the painful places. She draws her arguments together:

> [H]ope interpreted through the lens of trauma requires an even greater emphasis on imagination. 'Imagination' is a more theologically tenuous and suspect term than 'hope.' In the pneumatology that I have described, resurrection is not guaranteed life, but life that must be witnessed into being. The practice of imagining life in new ways and in new forms is an essential aspect of witness.[64]

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[61] ibid., p. 21.

[62] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), pp. 19–40.

[63] ibid., p. 149.

[64] ibid., p. 178.

Although not central to her trauma theology, Rambo's conclusions reflect the importance of imagination given by Jones. Rambo highlights how '[t]he enigma of three aspects in trauma – time, body, and word – constitute the challenge of remaining in the aftermath of trauma'.[65] As with Jones, Rambo sees lived time and lived body as elements of traumatic experience which must be considered within theology. She also notes 'word' as an 'engima[tic] … aspect of trauma' which might be considered lived faith, in a similar fashion to Jones' understanding of imagination. Despite acknowledging that in 'cases of trauma, a person's relationship to herself and to others is fundamentally altered', alongside the theory of 'witnessing', Rambo does not lean toward lived relation as particularly significant. Rather, for Rambo, it is the relationship between the human and the divine, the Spirit as witness, which is given the greatest consideration – lived faith, perhaps better phrased as *spirituality* in this case. Again the experience of lived time is shown to be of particular significance for trauma theology, alongside, in Rambo's case, lived faith and lived body.

Jennifer Beste's *God and the Victim*, written in 2008, might also be considered an early work of trauma theology. Though perhaps not referenced in later works of trauma theology to the same extent as Jones and Rambo, more recent scholarship, specifically addressing male sexual violence against women and theology does make use of Beste's work. Beste is of particular interest for this project due her research with the lived experiences of sexual violence victim-survivors. In *God and the Victim*, Beste addresses Karl Rahner's theology of grace and freedom, drawing it into consideration with trauma and feminist theories and the experiences of women who were subjected to sexual abuse as children. In doing so, Beste finds that:

> a revised Rahnerian account of freedom … moves beyond Rahner's repeated insistence that our main objective in this life is self-actualization to an explicit emphasis that our main task is to ensure that we and our neighbors have sufficient conditions that enable us to realize our freedom and live out a "yes" to God.[66]

Central to developing the idea that the 'main task' in life is to enable others – as well as the self – to live in the fullness of a life committed to God, Beste 'suggest[s] that a crucial way in which God mediates

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[65] ibid., p. 32.

[66] Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 104.

grace to remedy [the harm of trauma] is through the indirect means of interpersonal, loving relationships'.[67] By considering the stories of those who have experienced trauma, Beste finds that it is through relationships, distinctly positive ones, that God reveals Divine grace. This then develops into Beste's trauma theology concluding with her new perspective on Rahner's 'account of freedom', as expressed above. As well as her focus on the experience of lived relation, Beste also highlights the significance of the body. Beste 'argue[s] that the experiences of severely traumatized persons and the insights of feminist theory demonstrate Rahner's failure to acknowledge adequately the effects of relationality and embodiment for one's capacity to realize sufficient freedom to effect a fundamental option'.[68] Beste is critiquing Karl Rahner's theology by bringing to bear on it, the lived experiences of relation and body.

This paper has used the lens of my five existentials to explore the development of theological engagement with male sexual violence against women. Early scholars in the area, such as Poling, Bloomquist, and Adams revealed focus on lived relation, with the former two almost seen to be diminishing the experience of lived body by emphasising the importance of relational power in sexual violence. All three, as theologians, include a perhaps inevitable turn to the experience of lived faith as well. Writing about five years later, Adams begins to consider the significance of the experience of lived body. It is possible to see a shift in focus in the work of feminist scholars writing on the topic of male sexual violence against women after 2010. Although maintaining the importance of both lived relation and lived faith, as with Adams the later scholars also stress the role of lived body. In the work of Daniels and Cronin, lived time also begins to be seen as a more significant experiential aspect of sexual violence. On encountering the work of trauma theologians, it is possible to see where this later shift in focus for feminist theologians may have come from. Trauma theology, built on trauma theory, emphasises the lived body and lived time existentials in a way that the earlier feminist theologians did not. The later feminist theologians will no doubt have been familiar with the work of Jones, Rambo, and, likely, Beste. The existentials have been used as a helpful lens through which to view theological deliberations on the significance of power, community, embodiment, and latterly time, in and for the faith of victim-survivors of male sexual violence against women. I hope it has also been a useful

[67] ibid., p. 14.
[68] ibid., p. 16.

introduction to a specific area of feminist and trauma theologies for those who were unfamiliar with the subject. In addition to being an important lens for understanding some women's experience in the Scottish Episcopal Church, perhaps these signifiers can teach us something about the wider Christian experience.

REVIEWS

Joy Wright, *Trauma-informed Youth Work*. Y77. Cambridge: Grove Books, 2024. 28 pp. ISBN 978-1788274371.

This Grove book is written by the Founder of Emerge Advocacy, a youth work charity that supports people aged 10 – 25 in A&E and beyond because of self-harm, a suicide attempt or emotional crisis. The author has long worked with vulnerable young people in both youth work and NHS based roles. She has a BA Hons in Youth and Community Work and Applied Theology.

This book explores the term 'trauma-informed', explaining what is meant by trauma and how it affects emotional and physical responses. She focuses particularly on emotional dysregulation, which is the state of anxiety, fear, anger or extreme passivity which is a response to trauma and its triggers. She describes its opposite, an emotionally regulated state, in which a person is relaxed, calm, feeling safe and able to engage with others. She outlines the neuroscientific research which shows that our nervous systems automatically tune in to another person's state of regulation, very often without us realising it; moreover, a calm, regulated state is contagious and can help someone who is dysregulated to recover their equanimity. Working mindfully to help a traumatised person in this way is called co-regulation.

Wright then brings a theological perspective to the neuroscience of co-regulation. She explores how Christians seek to follow Jesus' example of being a light in the darkness for others, being a channel of God's peace and healing power. Finally, she details what trauma-informed youth work looks like in practice and has a great deal of wisdom to share about how trauma-informed youth workers, collaborating with health & social care professionals, can help a young person to heal and regain their place in society.

This book is helpful and affirming for anyone engaged in youth work: as she says herself, good youth work has always been instinctively trauma informed. A good youth worker seeks to build a relationship with a young person that empowers them, helps them self-regulate, enables them to build relationships with their peers and advocate for themselves.

More widely, this book is a good read for anyone involved in pastoral ministry, lay or ordained. Many of us engage pastorally with people in chaotic situations, who are living as best they can with their unexamined response to multiple traumas, often beginning with adverse childhood experiences. This book clarifies how we are affected by emotional dysregulation in others and how we can respond to it with peace and calmness in ourselves, seeking to be a channel of God's peace in that

situation or relationship. This confirmed my growing sense that calmness is a superpower in any leadership situation and when walking alongside troubled people. This book is particularly good at unpicking the way in which an unhelpful dynamic (the "drama triangle") can develop in a pastoral relationship, and how not to get sucked into this drama: how to avoid co-dependence, and how to support the vulnerable person to engage with professionals who can help them.

In conclusion, 'Trauma-informed Youth Work' is an inspiring, encouraging read with practical advice for youth workers and for anyone in ministry who is involved in the pastoral care of vulnerable people.

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Scottish Episcopal Church

M.S. Seale, Qur'an and Bible: Studies in Interpretation and Dialogue, Abingdon: Routledge, 2024, 124 pp, ISBN 978-1-032-94695 (hbk), 978-1-003-58127-7 (ebk), 978-1-032-94697 (pbk).

As part of its reflection on its own history and development, and in acknowledgement of errors made, particularly in the context of colonialism, some voices in the academy have recently suggested that the traditional canon of 'classics', for example in Theology and Religious Studies, needs to be discarded; anything over, say, fifty years old, in other words, is no longer deserving of study. Apart from the obvious difficulty which this view raises for any religious tradition which has a scripture from hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago, it seems rather overconfident of the insights of today's thinkers, suggesting that we today are somehow immune from blind spots, and that, in fifty years, people will not be saying of us 'how come they did not see that?', and 'were they blind?'

Scholars in the past, even great ones, certainly made mistakes, and formulated judgements which, with hindsight, are grievously in error, but surely this does not mean that they are no longer worthy of study. Their views should undoubtedly be subjected to critique and review, but that is the nature of the academic way-of-life, and that is how we learn, and move forward. Older works therefore definitely remain worthy of study.

In Islamic Studies, for example, it has been very good and helpful recently to have several significant and pioneering works re-published. Just to take one example, leading Islamic Studies publisher E.J. Brill has made available again a work which began life as a Ph.D. in the University of Edinburgh, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, by Australian scholar

Arthur Jeffery. The thesis was submitted in 1929, and a revised version of it was then published by the Oriental Institute in Baroda, India, in 1938, but one consequence of it being published there was that it was difficult to get hold of, and the very important questions which it raised did not necessarily receive quite as much scholarly attention as they deserved.

It was very good news, therefore, when, in 2007, E.J. Brill decided to republish Jeffery's work, essentially as originally produced, including the original pagination, and with just very light editorial work to correct minor typographical errors and, importantly, to re-number the citations of Qur'anic verses to follow what has become the standard numeration system, that of the 1924 Cairo edition of the text, rather than the nineteenth-century edition prepared by German scholar Gustav Flügel which had been used by Jeffery.

The new edition of Jeffery's work was prepared by Gerhard Böwering of Yale University, and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, the editor of Brill's 6-volume *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, and the fact that these two scholars deemed it worthwhile to devote their time and energy to the re-publication of Jeffery's work is powerful tribute to its importance and significance. Re-publication has also made the work available electronically, which has of course made it very much more widely accessible.

It is very good to see Routledge, as part of the Taylor and Francis group, now also deciding to make material from their very considerable archive more widely-available again, in both printed and electronic form, in a series known simply as 'Routledge Revivals' - Routledge Revivals. Within the very considerable religion list in the series, it is then also good to see this little volume, first published by Croom Helm in 1978, looking at the relationship between Qur'an and Bible, made available again. Its author, Morris Seale, from his base at the (Protestant) Near East School of Theology in Beirut, was an early pioneer of looking at the two scriptures from a comparative perspective, and of encouraging members of the two communities to look at each other's scriptures constructively, and this little volume brings together a number of the significant studies which he produced with these aims in mind.

The volume includes ten studies, some original to the volume and others reproduced from other sources, and the range of the author's interests and expertise is reflected clearly in the fact that these other sources include both journals in the field of Biblical Studies, for example *The Journal of Biblical Literature* and *The Expository Times* and significant journals in Islamic Studies, particularly *The Muslim World,* of which Seale served as the editor from 1964 to 1967. Topics include the world-view of pre-Islamic Arabia, as seen in the work of poets in particular; the 'wisdom tradition' of the Old Testament and the Qur'an; the puzzle of the 'mysterious letters'

which appear at the start of twenty-nine chapters of the Qur'an; a study of the Ode of Deborah in Judges 5, which Seale suggests should be seen as having some parallels to ancient Arabian literature; a translation of the 'Dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian' written by John of Damascus in the first half of the eighth century; a study of some common ground between the Bible and the Qur'an, as seen in the teaching of the two scriptures concerning creation, Moses, the Ten Commandments (particularly what is sometimes presented as the Qur'anic Decalogue, in Chapter 17: 23-37), and the Golden Calf; the ethics of Malamati (ecstatic) Sufis compared with those of the Sermon on the Mount; the Qur'an's view of Life after Death, with its imagery which is so similar to that of the Book of Revelation at various points; the glosses in the Book of Genesis, particularly with reference to the divine names; and a study of what Seale calls 'Outstanding Passages in Qur'an and Bible', which brings together half a dozen of the editorials of *The Muslim World* which he produced during his editorship of the journal.

Seale was born in Jerusalem, and came from a Russian Jewish background, converting to Christianity as a boy, before studying theology at Queen's University of Belfast and becoming a missionary of the Irish Presbyterian Mission in Jerusalem and then in Damascus. His insights into the relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Qur'an are therefore particularly interesting, and although the nature of this volume, as a collection of different studies on a wide variety of themes, means that it does not have the coherence of a study on a single theme, Seale always has something interesting to say, and the volume is perhaps particularly suitable for readers who may have a good knowledge of the Biblical scriptures, but know the Qur'an less well; and even where subsequent scholarship has moved the discussion on from Seale's presentation, his views remain worthy of consideration.

Republication of this volume is therefore a welcome addition to the literature available on the scriptures of the three traditions which, in different ways, trace their ancestry back to Abraham; and if Routledge are looking for other works which would be worth republishing in their 'Routledge Revivals' series, Seale's little book *Muslim Theology: a study of origins with reference to the Church Fathers*, originally published by Luzac in 1964, would be worthy of serious consideration.

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Margaret Cooling, *Handling Texts with Integrity when Preaching*. B113. Cambridge: Grove Books, 2024 28 pp. ISBN 978-1788274135.

According to the writer, personal Christian values must come into play when handling biblical texts for sermon preparation. Cooling lists these as love, honesty, humility, responsibility, honour, respect and offers numerous examples of her own use of texts, sermons, and other writing. A useful bibliography is included in her Grove booklet's conclusion. Cooling reminds the reader that how we live and how we read Scripture are related.

The writer discusses each of the biblical perspectives referred to above; how might the best reading be achieved. On honesty - 'while Provs 3:5-6 talks of trusting in God and not relying on our own understanding, this does not mean that we shun study or critical scholarship'. The closing discussion asserts that 'honouring the genre of a text means taking account of its style and form, not just its content . . . respecting the genre does not mean that the sermon has to be in the same genre as the text; that would be inappropriate for some texts' (p. 23). However, statements like these surely need expansion and qualification.

The overlong title could be improved upon, as could the structure, making the book more attractive and succinct. Biblical examples, interpretations and sermon snippets abound, but the quantity may well prove to be a distraction. The reader cannot concentrate on the main topic, as too much is being discussed. The brief reference to genre does not appear until p. 23. Prayer is excluded from the opening listing of values/virtues/attitudes, making a brief appearance on p. 13.

While there is no shortage of books about preaching, this concentrated, personalised approach of Margaret Cooling's 'Handling Texts . . .' could be very helpful to any preacher, lay or ordained, experienced or inexperienced, as a useful reminder, corrective, even challenge, prior to beginning preparation for yet another sermon.

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John Waller, *How to Plan Services in a Multi-church Setting*. W261. Cambridge: Grove Booklets, 2024. 28 pp. ISBN 978-1788274272.

I finished reading the Grove booklet, *How to Plan Services in a Multi-church Setting*, after receiving a copy to review. Written by a minister within the Church of England, the booklet is tailored to that specific context. However, many of the examples and recommendations are readily applicable to the

Scottish Episcopal Church. The author introduces the subject and details the difficulties in organizing a pattern of services across different church buildings in a multi-church setting. Three examples of different situations are given and then issues and questions about how to plan services are detailed. The booklet concludes with a shorter chapter on 'Exploring new opportunities'.

Most of the content of the booklet won't be new to ministers and leaders who have more than one or two years of experience – the difficulties and challenges are not unknown. It is, however, helpful to have them stated in concise and clear terms, all in just a few pages. Sadly, any suggestions for a way forward are only offered in the most general terms, and there were no surprises – at least not to this reader. All in all, a moderately useful read, and probably worth 30 minutes of your time while on your next train journey.

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D. Glenn Butner Jr., Jesus the Refugee: Ancient Injustice and Modern Solidarity. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023. xi, 230 pp. Print ISBN: 978-1-5064-7936-1; eBook ISBN: 978-1-5064-7938-5.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus are often described as 'refugees' in popular interpretations of the flight to Egypt in the Gospel of Matthew. The image resonates with contemporary Christians, who see echoes of the nativity story in the suffering of the situation of the forcibly displaced in our world today. Defining Jesus as a refugee has proved to be a popular rhetorical move, especially for Christians who advocate for the care and support of displaced people. The question often asked is: if we claim to serve the Lord Jesus, who was a refugee, should we not also care for refugees today? The Jesus-as-refugee image has grown in popularity over the past four decades.[1] As the

[1] For example, note the use of the phrase 'Jesus was Refugee' in a Google Books NGram analysis of publications from1800 to 2019 (https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Jesus+was+a+refugee&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3). I have written about the popular reception of the 'Refujesus' image in my article 'Rethinking Refujesus: Biblical Perspectives on a Popular Icon,' *Theology and Ministry* 8 (2022): pp. 16–33. A helpful examination of the reception of this idea in early Christian tradition can be found in Janice Capel Anderson, 'Jesus was a Refugee: Reception of Matthew 2:13–23,' in

politicisation of refugee policy has increased, the phrase 'Jesus was a refugee' has become more controversial[2] (especially in what could be described as dominionist and Christian nationalist circles),[3] but it continues to have traction in popular Christian discussions about ethical responses to the refugee crisis.[4]

While many Christians continue to claim that Jesus was a refugee, the ethical and theological implications of this description are often neglected. This is where Glen Butner's recent book *Jesus the Refugee* makes a unique and necessary contribution. Often, the phrase is used vaguely and fails to parse the full implications of this Christological title. Butner does not allow 'Jesus was a refugee' to remain in the realm of abstract or fuzzy (albeit well-intentioned) feelings. 'Refugee' can be generally defined as 'a person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution.'[5]

Anatomies of the Gospels and Beyond, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 91–108; regarding the portrayal of this image in European art, see: Martin O'Kane 'The flight into Egypt: Icon of Refuge for the H(a)unted,' in *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible*, ed. by Martin O'Kane (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 15–60.

[2] Craig Keener has noted that when he described Jesus as a refugee in 1997, it failed to generate controversy, though it has become increasingly, Keener laments, 'politically divisive these days'. Given the use of immigration and asylum policy as a political wedge, it seems unlikely that this controversy will abate anytime soon (Craig S. Keener, 'Jesus Was a Refugee—Matthew 2:13-15 - Bible Backgrounds,' *CraigKeener.com; Bible Backgrounds* [blog], May 25, 2020, accessed 1 February 2024, https://craigkeener.com/jesus-was-a-refugee-matthew-213-15/).

[3] Some examples can be found in Lucas Miles, *The Christian Left: How Liberal Thought Has Hijacked the Church* (Minnesota: BroadStreet Publishing, 2021), p. 19, John R. Schneider, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 2002), p. 124 and Bruce Warnock, *Observations on Redemption* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, 2019), p. 23; for a review of contemporary objections, see: Shira Telushkin, 'What Does It Mean to Say Jesus Was a Refugee?,' *Religion & Politics*, 21 Dec 2021 https://religionandpolitics.org/2021/12/21/what-does-it-mean-to-say-jesus-was-a-refugee/ (accessed 18 February 2024).

[4] For example, the conservative website The Gospel Coalition published Jenny Yang's article 'A Word of Hope for the Refugee', *The Gospel Coalition*, 23 Dec 2020, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/word-of-hope-refugee/ (accessed 1 Feb 2023).

[5] *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. 'refugee,' accessed 16 February 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refugee.

However, there is now a legal framework through which refugee status can be granted or denied, according to the interpretation of the UNHCR's 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.[6] Butner engages with the specificity of the latter and invites his readers to engage in a 'thought experiment'[7] in which Jesus the refugee is hypothetically placed in the current context of contemporary refugee and asylum policy.

We might want to claim that Jesus was a refugee, but would he and his family receive protection as refugees under our current systems? What challenges might they face? What are the practical ethical demands of using 'refugee' as a Christological title? Butner addresses all these questions, and more, with a comprehensive but succinct survey of relevant legislation, Scripture, theology, and ethics. Butner is clear about the purpose of his book: he hopes to 'compel a response of solidarity.'[8]

In the first chapter, Butner outlines the ground rules for this thought experiment which 'asks whether Jesus, Mary, and Joseph would receive protection within the United States or European Union, given modern refugee law, if they fled from Judea to Egypt under the actual historical circumstances of their flight.'[9] Sometimes the parameters of this exercise feel complicated at the outset. Thankfully, Butner often reminds the reader of the rules of his thought experiment, which remains admirably consistent. It is no easy task to convincingly bridge contemporary post-war refugee policy with the first century, but it works well. Nevertheless, it remains a hypothetical exercise with the occasional 'what if' popping up. Later in the book, Butner notes some possible exceptions and asks the reader, 'this is a thought experiment, so cut me some slack.'[10] Readers will be well rewarded for following Butner's innovative and compelling methodology. By bringing the precarious refugee status of the Holy Family into our own context, we are forced to move beyond platitudes. The book puts the reader in an uncomfortable position: it is as if Jesus is placed before an asylum substantive interview and the reader is like the decision-maker.[11] This forces the reader to scrutinise their fears and biases when it comes to asylum seekers and refugees.

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[6] See: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), '1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol,' accessed 01 February 2024, https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/3b66c2aa10.pdf.

[7] D. Glen Butner Jr., *Jesus the Refugee: Ancient Injustice and Modern Solidarity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023), p. 6.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid. p. 7.

[10] Ibid, p. 42 fn.6

[11] To use the terminology of the UK Visas and Immigration system.

The second, third, and fourth chapters extend the thought experiment by placing the Holy Family within the complicated and flawed machinations of contemporary refugee protection systems and policies. In doing so, Butner provides an informative and accessible overview of key terminology and legal frameworks. Anything to do with immigration policy generates considerable political and emotional heat, although the strength of feeling is not always matched by understanding. Key immigration terms are often misunderstood, a problem exacerbated by misrepresentation in the tabloid press and by reactionary politicians.[12] Butner's concise analysis is most welcome in this context. He covers refugee and asylum policy in the US, Europe, and the UK, making the book relevant to readers in most of the so-called 'receiving nations.'[13] In order to engage in meaningful discussions about refugee and asylum issues, clarity about key terms and frameworks is necessary to ground the issue in reality, rather than perception. Ultimately, Butner shows that although the Holy Family would qualify as refugees from our biblically informed perspective, they would be unlikely to be recognised as such under the current system. This would leave them highly vulnerable to violence and exploitation.[14]

In this section of the book Butner makes an original argument related to the historicity of the account of the flight to Egypt, which deserves further comment. The pericope appears only in Matthew and is not attested by the other gospels. This has led critical scholars to doubt the historicity of Matthew's account. Instead, the pericope is understood as a midrashic haggadah that presents Jesus as a Mosaic figure and places his childhood in a prophetic trajectory (Hosea 11:1, 16–18, Jeremiah 31:15, and Isaiah 11:1). The hermeneutic of suspicion applied to Matthew's gospel due to a lack of

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[12] On this issue, see: Julia M. Pearce and Janet E. Stockdale, 'UK Responses to the Asylum Issue: A Comparison of Lay and Expert Views,' *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2009): pp. 142-155 and Eiríkur Bergmann, 'Populism and the Politics of Misinformation,' in *Cultures of Populism*, ed. by Merle A. Williams, pp. 30-42 (Routledge, 2022).

[13] While some books offer user-friendly introductions to the refugee policy and definitions (e.g. Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Dr. Issam Smeir, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016] and Patrick J. St. G. Johnstone, Patrick Johnstone, and Dean Merrill, *Serving God in a Migrant Crisis: Ministry to People on the Move* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018]), they are often deeply embedded in the US context.

[14] Butner cites many documented examples of the violence experienced by refugees and asylum seekers today, a sobering reminder that it is not just a 'crisis' but real people who bear the *imago Dei*.

corroboration is made to parallel the scepticism towards refugees and their stories, many of whom do not have viable recourse to external evidence to support their claims. For readers who hold a high view of Scripture (or who are predisposed to accept Matthew's gospel as historically accurate), this is a persuasive argument. On the other hand, readers who take a more critical approach to the Bible might respond that doubting aspects of Matthew's historicity does not necessarily undermine the theological and ethical potency of portraying Jesus as a refugee.[15]

Another potential issue with the argument relates to the synoptic problem. Butner cites the Magnificat in Luke 2:46-55 as evidence that '[Mary] held the political opinion or religious belief… which would be the basis of persecution'.[16] He cites Luke's account to provide a political context for the flight described in Matthew. Despite Luke's clear interest in Roman politics and migratory movements (a prominent feature in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, e.g. Acts 8:1-4 and 11:19), this highlights the curious absence of the flight in Luke's account. So, to what extent can Luke be called upon to supplement Matthew's account of Jesus' forced migration? Matthew most likely includes the flight because it better fits his theological agenda. As Linda Stargel has argued, 'Matthew transforms the exodus source story for a new generation and a new socio-cultural setting. In doing so, he allows Jesus to take up this ancient identity'[17] this is not one of Luke's aims. The Mosaic echoes and prophetic fulfilment take prominence

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[15] To give a contemporary illustration of this point: although a work of fiction, Atia Abawi, *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* (New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2018) it draws on the author's own experience as a journalist covering the war. Tareq and his family are only fictional characters, but they nonetheless communicate powerfully about the experience of Syrian refugees and the moral imperative to provide welcome. The question of historicity becomes further complicated when the story could also represent the audience's post-80 CE situation (as in vănThanh Nguyễn, 'The Four Gospels: Jesus as the Marginal Christ,' in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration: Implications for World Christianity*, edited by Peter C. Phan [London: Lexington Books, 2020], p. 73) or whether Matthew built on a historical kernel with a complex matrix of scriptural references and cultural exchange (Thomas Staubli, 'Cultural and Religious Impacts of Long-term Cross-cultural Migration between Egypt and the Levant,' *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 12 (2016): pp. 51-88).

[16] Butner, *Jesus*, p. 21.

[17] Linda Stargel, 'Exodus in Matthew's Looking Glass: Jesus's Flight to Egypt (Matt 2:13-18) as a Reflection Story,' *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 43, no. 2 (2021): p. 184.

in Matthew's account, although the narrative framework is one of forced migration. Both features of Matthew's account need to be reckoned with in Christian theology and ethics. The reference to Luke is understandable given the implicitly canonical approach of Butner's book, but it may also raise unresolved questions about synoptic relationships.

In chapter five, Butner directly addresses some of the common fears that are unfairly attached to refugees and migrants: rising crime rates, terrorism, and economic strain. The analysis is thorough and sober, with well-documented references to peer-reviewed sources.[18] These fears are exposed as the rotten fruit of misinformed perceptions rather than reality. Statistics relating to immigration are placed in a broader context of general crime rates and economics, so that the perspective is not skewed.[19] Another strength of this section is that Butner addresses outlying studies that, on the surface, might appear to link immigration with increased crime rates and economic pressures. By engaging with sources that do not easily fit into his thesis (or are inconclusive, as in the case of some of the economic analyses), his argument that fears about immigration are generally unfounded is strengthened. The chapter concludes with an indictment of 'bearing false testimony' [20] about immigrants. The cumulative weight of Butner's

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[18] Although published after *Jesus the Refugee*, I would be interested to see how Butner would engage with the recent arguments of migration scholar Hein de Haas. In his book (Hein de Haas, *How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics* [London: Viking, 2023]), de Haas also debunks myths about migration (though he is more focused on the drivers of migration) and views migration as a fact of life. De Hass argues that the debate about migration is often divorced from the reality; he does not offer an ethical response. Instead, he argues that honesty about the facts must precede ethical responses and the formation of government policies (which, for de Haas, is a different question about what kind of society we want to live in). De Haas is also critical of the language of 'global crisis' being used to describe the current refugee situation.

[19] This contrasts with the use of statistics in Markus Zehnder's book *The Bible and Immigration: A Critical and Empirical Reassessment* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021). Here, statistics on crimes committed by immigrants are deliberately *disconnected* from the general population. Ideologically driven journalism and op-eds are often cited as sources. If he wished, Butner could certainly cite similar ideological sources to support his thesis, but he does the more difficult work of analysing peer-reviewed studies and coming to a balanced conclusion. Butner offers an erudite response to Zehnder's work in several footnotes.

[20] Butner, *Jesus*, p. 128.

comprehensive analysis leads to a challenging ethical imperative: the church must bear witness to the truth in response to a climate in which immigrants (and, by extension, refugees and asylum seekers) are often scapegoated for societal ills. In the way Butner marshals the sources with clarity and honesty, he leads by example. As the conclusion starkly describes, if Christians bear false witness against immigrants, they perpetuate the toxic xenophobic politics of Pharaoh (Exodus 1:9-10).

One of the challenges in communicating these statistics is that there can be a disconnect between how migration is experienced at a the local (or personal) level when compared to the national picture. Given the current deluge of misinformation and anecdotal vilification of refugees and other migrants on social media, Butner should be thanked for providing some much-needed clarity amidst the din. Of course, given the tendency to politicise immigration policy along partisan lines, we could be cynical about the effectiveness of this exercise. So, the onus is on the persuaded reader to challenge misinformation where they find it. Butner knows that 'Anecdotal stories can manipulate.'[21] There was a report last decade from the think tank British Future that analysed how 'myth-busting' exercises about immigration were effective in equipping the already convinced, but failed to persuade (and in some cases, hardening) the opinions of those who were worried about immigration.[22] One of the key findings of the study was that relationship was crucial to transforming the conversation. This relational aspect is also central to Butner's ethical proposals. In this case, his conclusions seem to be validated by external research (albeit in a secular context).

In chapter six, Butner argues for an ethical response centred on solidarity, restitution, and relationship. A biblical argument that underpins these principles is the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Solidarity with strangers, Butner argues, is solidarity with Jesus himself. He argues against interpretations of this parable that limits 'the least of these' (Matthew 25:40, 45) to Jesus' disciples. [23] Here Butner challenges the

[21] Ibid, p. 172.

[22] Sunder Katwala, Steve Ballinger, and Matthew Rhodes, 'How to Talk About Immigration' (London: British Future, 2014).

[23] As stated by Craig L. Blomberg, 'The sheep are people whose works demonstrate that they have responded properly to Christ's messengers and therefore to his message.' (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* [Nashville, Tenn: Broadman, 1992], p. 378).

conclusions of many exegetes,[24] although the limited understanding of 'the least of these' is not *necessarily* an either/or decision against wider hermeneutical applications.[25] Butner links the parable to legal texts in the Hebrew Bible, such as Deuteronomy 24:14-15, that 'fold the migrant into the family ethic of the Old Testament nation of Israel, suggesting that the new covenant family might adopt a similar approach.' [26] A strength of the argument is that Matthew 25:31-46 is not treated as an isolated proof text. Butner draws together the recurring imperatives in the Hebrew Bible to show solidarity with the stranger as the background to Jesus' challenge to his followers both then and now. This biblical understanding of solidarity means that it cannot be a matter of abstraction or mere charity but draws people into relationship. Restitution is also highlighted as a biblical concept, as in Zacchaeus's response to Jesus: 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much' (Luke 19:9, *NRSV*). When we consider the staggering costs of Western military interventions that play a role in creating refugee movements,[27] advocating institutional restitution challenges protectionist attitudes to wealth. By bringing together the personal and the institutional, the reader is forced to consider how their biblically informed ethics should affect their whole lives.

The seventh and final chapter shows what the principles of chapter six might look like in practice. Butner argues that incarnational solidarity (which draws us into reciprocal relationship) with refugees cannot be divorced from institutional solidarity (which challenges institutions by addressing our material and formal complicity in unjust systems).[28] The perspective on relationship and reciprocity reminded me of Christine Pohl

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[24] See the excursus in Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1995), pp. 744–745; of course, many refugees are Christians, so there is no 'easy out' in any interpretation.

[25] As found in Samson Uytanlet and Kiem-Kiok Kwa, *Matthew: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2017), eBook: section '25:31–46 Separating the Sheep and Goats'.

[26] Butner, *Jesus*, pp. 149.

[27] Douglas S. Massey, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, and J. Edward Taylor, 'An Evaluation of International Migration Theory: The North American Case,' *Population and Development Review* (1994): pp. 699-751 and Nicholas R. Micinski, 'Refugee Policy as Foreign Policy: Iraqi and Afghan Refugee Resettlements to the United States,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2018): pp. 253–278.

[28] This view is advocated in Zehnder, *Bible*, pp. 87 and 273.

and Joshua Jipp's theologies of hospitality.[29] Although Matthew Kaemingk's Kuyperian approach to the challenges of immigration is mentioned,[30] reference to the rich tradition of Christian theologising on hospitality might have furthered Butner's argument here.

Butner draws on liberationist perspectives to highlight the need to challenge systemic injustice in the refugee system.[31] At this point, Butner introduces a new category of solidarity: conflictual. He is honest that obedience to the 'Refugee King'[32] will involve conflict, nor is it without risk. I believe this is where the book is most likely to challenge its readers. The moral imperative to show hospitality to refugees outweighs the preservationist impulses towards national security, economic growth, and cultural hegemony. Some critics may argue that this perspective is impractical, but surely allegiance to Christ and his kingdom has never been about utilitarian practicality.

As this review should make clear, I am convinced by Butner's argument and believe that the book should be read by a wide audience. Nevertheless, I left the book with a few questions. The first relates to the relationship between the synoptics mentioned above: the book displays a high view of Scripture and appears to take a canonical approach. This is not a problem for a reader like me, who comes from an evangelical tradition. However, a brief statement on the approach to Scripture would have clarified later appeals to its 'canonical context'.[33] Second, Butner paints a bleak picture of the Jewish Diaspora in ancient Egypt.[34] While there is clear evidence of gross anti-Semitism, studies also show that the Diaspora flourished in Egypt despite the noted hardships. As Erich S. Gruen has argued, 'The experience of Jews in Alexandria from the founding of the city to the advent of the Great Revolt—nearly four full centuries—*was a predominantly positive one*. Jews played a full part in the social, economic, and cultural life of Ptolemaic Alexandria.'[35] The multifaceted dynamics of the

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[29] Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) and Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017).

[30] Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018).

[31] With the popular furore over critical theory and Marxism, this is bound to ruffle some feathers in the evangelical milieu.

[32] Butner, *Jesus*, p. 166.

[33] Ibid., pp. 152, 158, and 162.

[34] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[35] Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 83; emphasis added.

Diaspora community in Egypt (some of whom were descendants of refugees) that probably sheltered the Holy Family might have been an interesting area for further exploration in Butner's thought experiment. A more nuanced portrayal of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt would raise interesting ethical questions about hospitality that arises from, or is hindered by, the self-identification of refugee or immigrant heritage in host communities (particularly relevant in the US context). Third, Butner states that 'it is possible to show solidarity with refugees while affirming the moral good of borders and of obedience to government.'[36] He rightly points out that 'a full theology of the relation between Christian ethics and the pluralist state exceed the scope of my argument'. [37] However, given the vivid descriptions of the injustices in current refugee policies and the cruelty of militarised borders, it would be useful to have examples of ethically well-functioning borders or tangible proposals to that end. This would help inform constructive advocacy on the issue of borders and their ethical maintenance.

These few questions are somewhat tangential and do not detract from what is a well-constructed, accessible, and rigorously researched book. I hope that many Christians will read it and respond accordingly to its challenging call for greater solidarity with refugees. In my view, this book makes an original and significant contribution to the debate about ethical responses to refugee crises. Although provocative (in the most positive sense of the word), the book manages to be both clear and nuanced. Anyone teaching on Christian ethics and migration should make this book a core text.

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[36] Ibid., pp. 165.
[37] Ibid., pp. 193