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# Patriarchy and discordant discourses in the contemporary Roman Catholic Church : the voices of priests and women in parish settings

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**PATRIARCHY AND DISCORDANT DISCOURSES IN THE CONTEMPORARY  
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: The voices of priests and women in parish settings.**

by

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**BA(Hons)**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth

in part fulfilment of the degree of

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PATRIARCHY AND DISCORDANT DISCOURSES IN THE CONTEMPORARY  
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Geraldine SHARP

ABSTRACT.

This thesis explores the sexual theology and contemporary teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and considers their implications for women and priests. It examines the salience and relevance of traditional teaching in the everyday lives of priests and women. It questions the link between a traditionally formed priesthood and the customary beliefs and practices of 'ordinary' English Catholics.

Feminist scholarship has produced powerful insights into the ways in which organised religion has subordinated women through patriarchal structures and organisation, although there has been little exploration of the gendered nature of Catholic sexual theology. This thesis suggests that the negative construction of women's bodies in sexual theology, underpins the continued subordination of women in the Catholic Church. It argues that religious inscriptions on women's bodies are central to the continued control of women in a patriarchal Church.

This thesis uses patriarchy, sexual theology, and power and authority, as the main themes of discussion. An examination of the discourses of traditional sexual theology and contemporary teaching reveals that patriarchal inscriptions on women's bodies are central to each of these themes and they are mutually supportive and sustaining.

Sociological research has demonstrated a disjuncture between contemporary teaching and the beliefs and practices of 'ordinary' English Catholics. This thesis adds a gender dimension by suggesting that the English parish is a place of contradictions in which differing attitudes

towards women are a significant factor. It also examines the links between contemporary teaching and the beliefs and practices of English Catholic priests and women. The evidence suggests that traditional sexual theology has little relevance in the everyday lives of English Catholic priests and women. There is a lack of 'fit' between the traditional teaching of the Church and social experience. Nevertheless patriarchal ideas and beliefs continue to exist and have value, both in contemporary teaching and in the day-to-day life of the parish, and contribute to the contradictions and conflict of contemporary parish life.

The discourses of English Catholic the priests and women in this study suggest, that both have been affected not only by the dominant discourse of the Church , but also by the critical discourses of the surrounding world. Views of women are emerging, which are in contrast to the negative view of women in Catholic sexual theology. The discourses of women and priests have much in common with each other but little in common with either traditional sexual theology or the teaching of the current pope. Together these discourses represent a significant point of resistance to the negative view of women in Catholic sexual theology and to traditional power and authority in the Catholic Church.

A 'customary Priesthood' with an affinity to the 'customary Catholicism' of English Catholics appears to be emerging. This calls to question the legitimacy of traditional teaching and papal authority.



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**ALPHABETICAL LIST  
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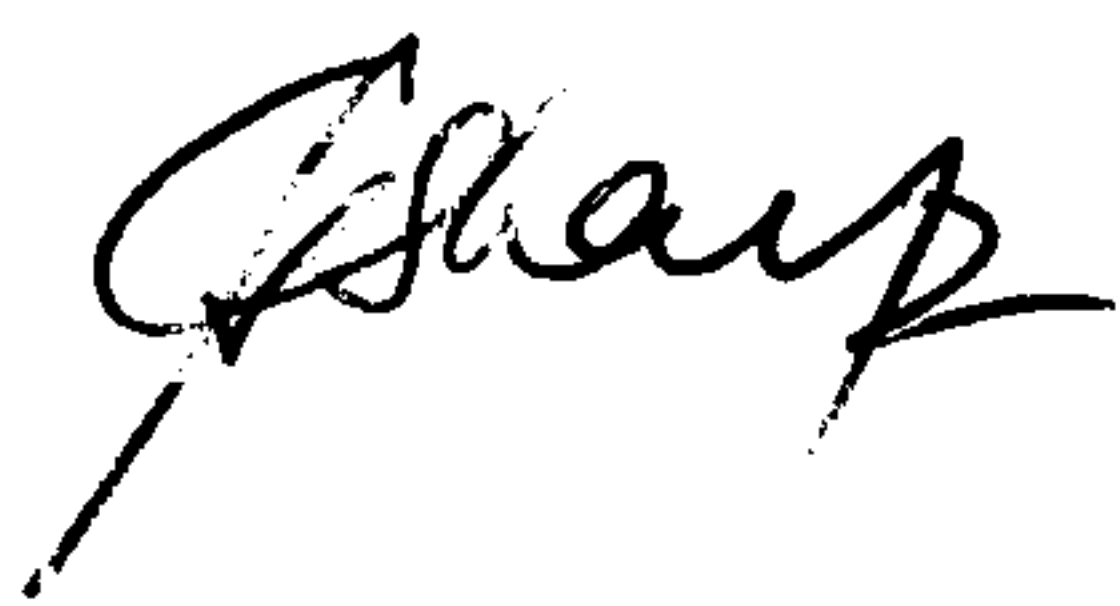
AA	Apostolicam Actuositatem
AT	Authoritative Teaching
GS	Gaudium et Spes
LG	Lumen Gentium
ME	Mysterium ecclesiae
NHL	Nag Hammadi Library
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
SC	Sacerdotalis Coelibatus
VS	Veritatis Splendor
VT	De Sacerdotalis Ordinatione Viris Tantum Reservanda

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Geraldine Sharp  
University of Plymouth  
July 1998.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION.**

At no time during the registration for this degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award. Following an initial grant from the Diocese of Plymouth, the author mainly financed the study.

A programme of advanced study was undertaken which included a programme of reading suggested by the supervisors and attendance at postgraduate seminars which included the University of Plymouth BSA/ ESRC Summer School September 1994. Relevant seminars at the theology department at the College St Mark and St. John Plymouth were also attended.

### **Presentations at conferences.**

‘A study of an English Deanery’. Sociology of Religion Conference. St. Mary’s University College, Twickenham. 1993.

‘Stress in the Priesthood’. Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement Conference. London 1993.

‘A Feminist Critique of Veritatis Splendor’. Sociology of Religion Conference. University of Lancashire. 1994.

‘The Changing Nature of the Marriage Contract’. Sociology of Religion International Conference. Laval University. Quebec. 1995.

### **Seminars presented.**

‘Sexuality and Gender: Implications for formal and informal carers’. Alzheimer's Disease Society Annual Conference. Warwick University. 1996.

‘Sexuality in the Workplace’. National Institute of Housing. Sheltered Housing Wardens' Conference. Keele University. 1996.

‘The relationship between sexuality, gender and the abuse of elders’. National Institute of Housing. Sheltered Housing Wardens' Conference. Keele University. 1997.

### **Publications.**

G.G. Giarchi and G. Sharp.(1993). **Turning the Barque Around.** Plymouth Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustees. Exeter 1993.

G. Sharp.(1996). ‘The Changing Nature of the Marriage Contract’. **Theology and Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality** No.4; March 1996.

Signed  .....

Date July 1998 .....



## INTRODUCTION.

This thesis is fundamentally concerned with patriarchy in the Catholic Church. It is especially concerned with the way in which the contemporary Church approaches women and in particular, how women are viewed by the official Church and by ordinary English priests, for historically, Catholic teaching and tradition have segregated and subordinated women. The reforms of Vatican II (1962-65) did not result in a change of status for women, but did increase their participation in the everyday life of the Church. In the English parish of the 1990's, there is a tension between old ideas that subordinated women, and the ideas that underpin the increasing participation of women in parish life. Whilst participation of the laity was encouraged, power remained in the hands of the clergy. There was resistance to clerical authority, especially with regard to teaching on personal sexual morality. Church teaching was often in contradiction to critical discourses on liberty, justice and equality and came into conflict with the lived reality of women's lives in a western liberal democracy. Consequently, the contemporary English parish is a place of contradictions.

Following Vatican II, parishioners were encouraged to become actively involved in the life of the parish in ways which Tridentine Catholicism, with its strict divide between priests and laity, could never have accommodated. Priests and people, the 'people of God' were now a 'royal priesthood' journeying together as 'pilgrims' towards the Kingdom of Heaven. These reforms were not fully understood by many priests and laity, and successful implementation was largely dependent upon the attitudes of local bishops and priests. Poor socialisation and implementation of reform contributed to the conflict in the parish.

The democratic forces of the post-war years together with the reforms of Vatican II with an emphasis on the participation of the 'people of God', held a promise of a more collaborative pattern of clergy/lay relations and a less autocratic style of leadership. Parish councils, a new addition to the Catholic parish, gave an impression of democracy, but were generally dominated by parish



priests and/or men of the parish. In some parishes, parishioners did experience a more democratic style of decision-making in the parish, which contradicted the autocratic style of leadership of the official Church that remained in place after Vatican II.

Women participated more fully in the everyday life of the Church, but continued to be excluded from the priesthood and from the decision-making processes of the Church. For example, women were allowed to distribute the Eucharist, but were not allowed to consecrate the host. Some parishioners found women Eucharistic ministers unacceptable and preferred to wait in 'Father's queue' rather than accept the Eucharist from a woman. The level at which women participated was often dependent of the attitude of the local parish priest. Some parishes were characterised by contradictions concerning women's participation, for example, in some parishes priests continued to refuse girls as altar servers whilst accepting women as 'ministers of the Eucharist'.

An emphasis on community and active participation became part of everyday parish life.

Parishioners were encouraged to set up prayer-groups and house-groups within which they attempted to apply Scripture and Church teachings to the lived experience of their everyday lives, but in many parishes these lay groups remained under the jurisdiction of the parish priest. Lay women and men also participated in catechetics, especially in the preparation of adult 'converts' to Catholicism. In some seminaries lay men and women became involved in the training of priests. Yet, the authority to teach remained with the bishop and his consecrated ministers.

In terms of beliefs and practice, there were in the parish a pluralism of Catholic types, which differed from one another in terms of doctrinal beliefs, practice and institutional involvement. Hornsby-Smith (1991) provides convincing evidence of how Catholics differentiated between creedal or 'core' beliefs and non-creedal or peripheral beliefs (including papal infallibility) and between personal and social morality. Ordinary English Catholics distinguished between the official religion of the clerical leadership and the 'customary Catholicism' of ordinary Catholics.



There was substantial disagreement with official teaching, as an alternative was sought to the rule-bound, absolutist and deductive teaching of the hierarchy. Few Catholics conferred unqualified acceptance on papal teachings. The leadership was seen to be lacking in credibility and legitimacy and many Catholics said that they 'made up their own mind' on an increasing range of issues. Lay compliance to ecclesiastical discipline was problematic and there was confrontation and conflict in matters of sexual morality, especially with regard to contraception, divorce and re-marriage and institutional celibacy. Many Catholics increasingly took circumstance and proportion into account when deciding on the gravity of sins, preferring to rely on personal conscience and using the teaching of the Church merely as a guide to action. For example, despite the fact that the Church's hierarchy continued to forbid artificial methods of contraception, all forms of abortion, divorce and remarriage, some Catholic women used artificial birth control, some had abortions and some divorced and re-married. Such women, whilst rejecting teachings on personal sexual morality continued to stay within the Church when others left. Some divorced and re-married Catholics continued to practise as far as they were allowed and some priests, in direct contravention of official teaching, gave the sacraments to some remarried Catholics whilst continuing to refuse others.

In line with a plurality of beliefs were differing attitudes towards reform and especially with regard to the increased participation of women. Whilst some priests and parishioners accepted women's participation as right and proper, the attitudes of some priests and parishioners appeared to be influenced by traditional teachings which linked women to sex, sin and impurity. Some priests, recognising the exclusive nature of the everyday masculine language of the Church made attempts to 'add women in' by using inclusive language. Attitudes towards the use of inclusive language varied from priest to priest and from parishioner to parishioner, from the belief that it was 'a good thing' to the belief that it was 'a load of nonsense'. Some priests were either not aware that language may be an issue, or felt unable to do anything about it. Attempts to use inclusive language were not supported by the exclusively masculine language used in official documents,



especially that of recent encyclicals and statements of Pope John Paul II. The ideas underpinning these papal pronouncements also contributed to the contradictions in the parish. The pope continued with traditional patriarchal images of femininity, role and status and assigned to women traditional roles of motherhood, virginity or martyrdom all of which bore little resemblance to the everyday lives of women in a liberal democracy and to the more open culture within the other Christian churches.

There was a lack of 'fit' between the official Church and the parish. This thesis is concerned with the ideas that inform and underpin the contradictions in the English parish. It attempts to uncover those ideas that informed traditional teaching and continued to exist and have a value in the contemporary Church, in order to identify where contradictions may arise. The empirical research explores what women and priests say about key issues in the Church. It attempts to discover how what they say 'fits' with traditional teaching, and how what they say and do contributes to the contradictory nature of the English parish.

This research uses Foucault's notion of history as genealogy in order to go behind the teachings and tradition of the Church. It is not a search for origins and does not pretend to go back in time in an unbroken continuity, but aims to follow a complex path highlighting significant ideas, errors, reversals, false appraisals and deviations which have affected women and their place in the Church. It is not a consideration of doctrine as such, but a look at the ideas that informed the theology, institutions and structures of the Catholic Church. It examines historical and contemporary documents of the Church in order to uncover those that have given rise to the ideas and beliefs that continue to exist in the Church and have value. It traces the complex course of these ideas through significant episodes in Church history and asks how the challenges posed by Catholic and Protestant reformers, the Enlightenment and the second Vatican Council affected these ideas and their value.



This thesis is concerned with how women's bodies have been inscribed by the ideas of patriarchy and how these ideas were taken up by the Church. It examines the ideas and beliefs inscribed on women's bodies and the process by which women's bodies were denigrated and destroyed.

'The body and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil, is the domain of *Herkunft*. The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings and errors.....the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas) .....Genealogy, as an analysis of *descent*, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body' (Foucault, 1986:83).

The contemporary discourse of the official Church is examined, in order to establish whether the ideas that inscribed women's bodies continue to exist and have value.

This research does not pretend to be an examination of the whole English Catholic Church, but it does provide a significant contribution to our understanding of the beliefs that underpin parish life at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It builds on the work of Hornsby-Smith (1991) who highlighted the transformations of religious authority in the English Catholic Church. Whilst breaking new ground, this work lacked a gender dimension, which this thesis goes some way to address in that it focuses directly on priests and women in the English Church. This research will attempt to establish the salience and relevance of traditional teaching and religious authority in the everyday lives of women and priests, as it examines the links between sexual theology, the nature of God, the nature of authority, the status of women, sexual morality and the institution of celibacy. It also questions the link between a traditionally formed priesthood and the customary beliefs and practices of 'ordinary' Catholics at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In order to illuminate these issues, it will examine the historical and contemporary discourses of the official Church and the contemporary private discourses of priests and women.

Chapter One sets out the conceptual framework and recent relevant research. It considers the concept of patriarchy in relation to the Catholic Church and outlines Foucault's notion of history as genealogy, that is, as *descent* and *emergence*, as a stimulating guide to asking historical



questions and conceptualising historical phenomena. It explains the use of discourse as a means of getting behind the ideas contained within traditional teaching and tradition and as the means by which ideas continue to exist and have value. The concept of sexuality as discourse is pertinent to this thesis, not only because in the 'history of bodies', both male and female bodies have been invested by power and knowledge, but also because the discourse of sexuality in the Church, is intimately connected to sexual theology. Sexuality as discourse is an element (apparatus) of power, which has attempted to create and sustain a norm and produce conformity. It is part of a structure of heterogeneous apparatuses of power, which contain strategies of relations of forces supported by and supporting types of knowledge. As such, a knowledge ceases to be liberation and becomes a mode of surveillance and control. These apparatuses of power have served to segregate and subordinate women in the Catholic Church.

Chapter Two traces the complex course of *descent* within the genealogy of sexuality, through significant deviations, reversals, false appraisals and calculations, which gave rise to those ideas about women and about men that underpin Catholic teaching and tradition. It examines the beliefs and attitudes concerning women and men in the world from which Christianity sprang, in order to uncover the ideas and knowledge, which have informed the gendered discourse of the Church. Greek literature is contained in primary sources, Aretaeus (T.Adams,1856), Aristotle (R.Forster (Ed),1893), Galen (G.C.Kuhn,1823) and Nag Hammadi Texts (J.M.Robinson (Ed),1977). The representativeness of the discourses on women is supported in the literature of the day, in Greek literature such as the Iliad and Odyssey, Greek philosophy, the laws of Rome, and the first five books of the Old Testament, which formed the matrix of European literature.

Chapter Two challenges the notion of the early Church as a unified and homogenous community, as it examines competing discourses amongst Christian groups and provides evidence that the patriarchal beliefs of the wider world influenced the development of the



Church. It demonstrates the link between discourse and discursive practice by showing that ultimately only men formed the legitimate body of the community and women were accommodated in terms of 'service' to men and to the Church. Women were not involved in the development of sexual theology and were excluded from any involvement by the grid of reference placed upon them by Church Fathers. Finally it examines specific Church documents, in particular those of Augustine and Aquinas, *Confessions*, *City of God*, *Summa Theologiae*, and *Contra Summa Gentiles*, in order to uncover the ideas that influenced the development of Catholic sexual theology. The gendered nature of the discourse is evident in significant discourses in the Early Church up to and including the Middle Ages.

Chapter Three is concerned with *emergence*, that is, a moment of arising, as it examines the ideas of the Catholic reformers prior to the Reformation, during the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. It notes the persistence of patriarchal ideas about women in Catholic and Protestant churches alike. It also considers the ideas of the Enlightenment and the Church's response to a world that espoused freedom from imposed dogmas and acceptance of a plurality of beliefs. For as Fulton and Gee (1991) note, the processes which religion undergoes that have been traditionally encompassed under the label of secularisation, are but one side of the coin. What also has to be considered is the ongoing engagement with the political, economic and other-cultural world in which religious movements are subjects. Did the Catholic Church after having lost its former autonomous power, meet the challenges posed by the Enlightenment and adjust to dramatic changes in the world? Did it revise its doctrines?

Chapter Four is concerned with another significant episode of *emergence*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council (1962-1965) [Vatican II] and the following decades up to the 1990's. It considers the impetus to the Council and notes the descent of ideas from the conciliarists of the Renaissance and those of the Catholic and Protestant reformers. Documents from Vatican II are examined in order to illuminate any change in the gendered discourse of the Church and to establish the



official view of woman at the time of the Council. It also considers the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) (which banned the use of artificial contraception), the power of the papacy and the loss of clerical authority following the ban. The exhortation to use the 'rhythm method' (i.e. periodic abstinence) of birth control is also considered. The public discourse was dominated by an absolutist papacy, which refused all debate. As contraception continues to be a key issue for women, what women say about contraception is important. This will be explored in chapters eight and nine together with abortion, divorce, remarriage and celibacy. The persistence of patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status are also highlighted in the public discourse, which excludes women from ordination. Public debate on women's ordination has been denied, therefore this research will attempt to discover what women and priests in the English Church say in private about the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The final part of this chapter examines the years following the Council and the forces that exist and struggle against one another in the contemporary Church. The discourse of John Paul II is examined in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and in his *Letter to Women* (1995), in order to trace continuities and identify discontinuities with the traditional ideas of the Church.

Chapter Five considers the institution of celibacy as an apparatus of power, a case of *Herrschaft*, a relation of domination and subordination that damages both women and priests. Power is not exercised without insubordination and obstinacy and it is evident from the level of resistance and non-compliance during the centuries, when institutional celibacy was being codified, that an elitist group gradually imposed their ideas on a largely reluctant clergy. An examination of the linkage of ideas between sexual theology, patriarchy and institutional celibacy, highlights the mutually supportive and sustaining nature of the overarching gendered discourse of the Church. Institutional celibacy relies for its legitimacy on the apparatuses of power, namely, discourse, law and theology, within which patriarchal ideas and beliefs are supported and sustained.



Chapter Six shows how at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Catholic Church along with other organisations has had to adjust to dramatic changes in the world in which it works. The English Catholic Church in line with the European Church has experienced a change in the norms of Catholicity. These changes are considered in the context of the ideas arising from the Renaissance, Reformation and the Enlightenment. In a more sceptical and secular world, no monolithic structure of belief held sway, as politics, science and economics pushed the modern mind to disengage itself from traditional religious belief. The Church, following the Council of Trent (1554-1556), was able to enforce strategies for the containment of dissent, which were maintained up until the 2nd Vatican Council (1963-65).

Hornsby-Smith (1991) clearly identifies a transformation in the beliefs and practices of English Catholics and the ways in which they have responded to issues of religious authority in the several decades following the 2nd Vatican Council. He also charted the distinction between the official religion of the clerical leadership and the customary religion of ordinary Catholics where 'customary Catholicism' interpreted religious beliefs and practices in light of social experience. Building on the work of Hornsby-Smith this thesis provides an exploration of the beliefs and practices of ordinary English Catholic priests. It also explores what ordinary Catholic women say about issues of power and authority, sexual morality and the position and place of women in the Church.

In the English Catholic Church women form the majority of attenders. The question of why women remain in a patriarchal Church is considered with reference to psychological and deprivation-compensation theories and theories which focus on women's role in the Church. The chapter concludes by raising the issues which relate to the research and which have contributed to the research aims and objectives of this project.

Chapter Seven describes the aims and methods used in the second half of this project. The general aim of this overall project is to trace through *descent* and *emergence* those traditional ideas and beliefs contained in Catholic teaching, which continue to exist and have value in the contemporary Church. Within this general aim, there are several specific aims:

1. to uncover Catholic constructions of woman as revealed in the historical and contemporary discourses of the Church;
2. to measure the salience and relevance of traditional sexual theology and contemporary teaching in the everyday lives of priests and of women;
3. to question the link between a traditionally formed priesthood and the customary beliefs and practices of ordinary English Catholics;
4. to discover how traditional teaching and code of practice 'fits' with what English priests and women say and do.

Chapters Eight to Ten complete the work of tracing through *descent* and *emergence* by the in-depth contemporary analysis of discourses on women by Church practices, clerics and people within a designated unit of Church life and administration. There were three stages in this second half of the research. Stage one investigated the research site, the English parish of the 1990's in a comprehensive study of an English deanery by Giarchi and Sharp (1993). This study involved interviews and the completion of questionnaires by parish priests, parishioners, neighbours, primary and secondary school pupils in the Plymouth deanery. This data from the deanery study was used in stage one of this research, which is covered in chapter Eight. The discourses within the parish confirmed the existence of a 'customary Catholicism', which contained both traditional ideas and ideas arising from the discourses of the wider world.

Stage two of the research investigated the beliefs and practices of Catholic priests. Chapter Nine presents the findings following interviews with priests. These private discussions are analysed in order to identify similarities and dissimilarities between priests and continuities and



discontinuities with traditional sexual theology. It explores the relevance and 'fit' with contemporary teaching regarding issues of sexual morality, that is, contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage, institutional celibacy and the position and place of women in the Church in the everyday lives of priests.

Stage three of the research investigated the beliefs and practices of Catholic women. Chapter Ten presents the findings following group interviews with Catholic women. These discussions are analysed in order to identify the relevance of contemporary teaching in the everyday lives of women especially with regard to issues of contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage. The views of women on institutional celibacy and the place and position of women in the Church are also analysed. It considers the 'fit' between the priests' discourse and women's discourse and how these together, compare with the discourse of John Paul II.

Chapter Eleven provides a summary and discussion. It begins with a consideration of the appropriateness of the tools used to uncover and conceptualise certain historical phenomena, which have influenced the construction and development of the structures, teachings and practices of the Catholic Church, which have subordinated women. The fundamental underpinning concept in this thesis is that of patriarchy, that is, the domination by birthright that prevails in the area of sexuality. The chapter then moves to a discussion of the contradictions and tensions in the contemporary English Catholic parish. It concludes with the suggestion that an emancipatory project of Church is necessary if women are to achieve equality in the Church.

This thesis attempts to draw attention to the ideas and beliefs, which have underpinned the theology, doctrines and institutions of the Church and to demonstrate how they continue to exist and have value in the contemporary Church. It draws attention to the private, alternative discourses of priests and women in the English parish. It attempts to establish the salience and relevance of traditional teaching in the everyday lives of priests and women and questions the

link between a traditionally formed priesthood and the customary beliefs and practices of ordinary Catholics. Finally, it seeks to make an interesting and original contribution to the sociology of religion in a secularised society.



## CHAPTER ONE.

### The Conceptual Framework.

#### Introduction.

This examination of Church history as genealogy aims to follow a complex path highlighting significant ideas, errors, reversals, false appraisals and deviations which have affected women and their place within the Church.

‘Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations, or conversely, the complete reversals, the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents’ (Rabinow,1986:81).

This thesis is particularly concerned to highlight those patriarchal beliefs and assumptions about women and men, which were explained by reference to biology. The privileged position of the present allows for the errors in biological explanations of the past to be revealed. Patriarchal beliefs about women and men, which either arose from or were a consequence of, an earlier biology can also be re-appraised. Genealogy is used in this attempt to trace the ideas and concept of patriarchy as these ideas emerge at different times and with different interpretations. It aims to identify those things that continue to exist and have value for us.

The concept of patriarchy as a universal scheme for domination by birthright, which prevails in the area of sex (Millett,1971), is fundamental to this thesis for, at the ideological level, sexual politics obtain consent through the socialisation of both sexes, to patriarchal ideas regarding temperament, role and status, and these patriarchal ideas are contained within a traditional sexual theology, which has formed the basis of Catholic doctrine and teaching. Discourse is seen as the means by which ideas are created, sustained and continued through history (Foucault,1972;1982). The thrust of discursive creation is control and the Catholic discourse on

sexuality is seen as part of the heterogeneous elements (apparatuses) of power, which contains relations of forces supported by types of knowledge. Knowledge about women has been supported by the inscriptions placed on women's bodies through discourse. These discourses have produced a negative definition of 'woman', which has been accepted as the norm. These discourses have been productive and have been instrumental in the surveillance, regulation and discipline of women and their bodies.

This chapter begins with the conceptual framework. Foucault's (Rabinow, 1986) notion of history as genealogy is used to question what was previously considered to be the 'truth' about women. Patriarchy is the fundamental underpinning concept and is closely aligned to the concept of sexuality as a relation of power supported by types of knowledge. It raises the issue of power/knowledge contained and sustained by discourses, which aim to regulate and control both women and men. The Catholic discourse on sexuality emphasises patriarchal beliefs about man's superiority, what is 'natural' and 'normal', and fixed gender identities based on images of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. The consideration of sexuality as discourse and social practice is in direct opposition to the sexual essentialism of Catholic sexual theology. Sexuality is an especially dense transfer point for relations of power and the traditional discourse on sexuality underpins many of the contradictions in the contemporary Church.

### Genealogy.

In this thesis Foucault's (1986) notion of history as genealogy provides a stimulating guide to asking historical questions and conceptualising historical phenomena. Such an examination of history is not a search for origins, it does not pretend to go back in time to restore unbroken continuity that operates beyond the displacement of forgotten things, neither is its duty to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present. Rather, the objective of genealogy is *Herkunft* (descent) and *Entsehung* (emergence).



*Herkunft* is the equivalent of stock or *descent*, that is, the ancient affiliation to group, sustained by bonds of blood, tradition or social class. It is an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures and heterogeneous layers, which can threaten from within or without those injustices and instabilities which are the final consequences of logical inaccuracies, hasty conclusions or superficiality of the past.

This search for *descent* in the Church is not an attempt to uncover foundations, but to question what was previously considered to be the 'truth' about women. It attempts to trace the genealogy of the ideas and concept of patriarchy as it affects the Church and as these ideas emerge at different times and with different interpretations.

*Entsehung* or *emergence*, 'the moment of arising', should not be thought of as the final term of historical development, but merely as current episodes produced through a particular stage of forces. *Emergence* describes for example, the movements that led up to the Reformation. Episodes of *emergence* are produced through a particular stage of forces, which struggle against one another and against adverse circumstances in the attempt to avoid degeneration and regain strength by dividing these forces against themselves.

Whilst *descent* qualifies the strengths and weaknesses of an instinct and its inscription on the body, *emergence* designates a place of confrontation, but not as a struggle between equals, rather as a 'non-place', a pure distance, which indicates that the adversaries do not belong to a common space. Consequently, no one is responsible for *emergence* as it always occurs at the interstices. The Reformation did not for example, start with Martin Luther, and the 2nd Vatican Council did not start with Pope John XXIII.

Using genealogy as a guide, this thesis considers particular ideas and beliefs that have underpinned sexual theology and the structures and institutions of the Church. It explores how

these ideas became established in the Church and how they continue to exist and have value in the contemporary official Church and in the everyday lives of priests and women in the English parish. Episodes of confrontation in the early Church, the Reformation, Counter-Reformation and Vatican II are examined, in order to identify any challenges to traditional ideas and to note any reversals or deviations that have affected the contemporary Church and which continue to be significant.

### Patriarchy.

Patriarchy is a universal scheme for domination by birthright and prevails in the area of sexuality (Millett, 1971). Millett argues that whilst groups that rule by birthright are fast disappearing, an examination of the systems of sexual relations in the West, points out that the situation between the sexes is both historically and currently, a case of what Max Weber (1967) defines as *Herrschaft*, a relationship of dominance and subordination. Through this system, a most ingenious form of 'interior colonisation' has been achieved that is more effective than any form of segregation or stratification and is more uniform and enduring. Millett considers that although its present form may be muted:

'sexual domination obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power' (Millett, 1971:25).

In patriarchal societies, every avenue of power within society including coercive forces of police and military is entirely in male hands. In patriarchal religions, all power is in male hands and women are tolerated as passive believers. This thesis concerns itself with the Catholic Church, which can be described as patriarchal in the sense in that it has traditionally operated a relationship of dominance and subordination based on gender differences and male domination.

At the ideological level, sexual politics obtain consent through the socialisation of both sexes to patriarchal ideas regarding temperament, role and status. The formation of personality through stereotypical images of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' is based on the needs of the dominant



group. Masculinity is based on what men admire most in themselves, aggression, intelligence and efficacy. Femininity is based on what men find most convenient in the subordinate group, passivity, ignorance and ineffectiveness. These images have been incorporated into a sexual theology in which men have associated themselves with spirituality, or soul without a body, and women with the embodied person. Patriarchal images of the passivity, ignorance and ineffectiveness of women combined with their absence of spirituality are convenient and ensure the continued domination of women in the patriarchal Church.

Temperament is complemented by sex-role assignments, men by virtue of their reputed greater intelligence, aggression and efficacy, assign to themselves all positions of power in society. Women, by virtue of their ignorance, passivity, ineffectiveness and biology are assigned roles designed to service men both materially and sexually. Patriarchal religions and popular attitudes assume that these psychosocial distinctions are based on biological differences between the sexes. Cultural arrangements are assumed to be merely co-operating with nature, and to attempt to alter temperament or sex-role assignment is seen as contrary to the natural order. Images of masculinity and femininity, role and status do not appear to be a constant in human nature. Physical or intellectual strength for example, does not constitute a sufficient explanation for male supremacy, for *all* men are neither physically, nor intellectually stronger, than *all* women. Male superiority cannot be assumed to be inevitable on physiological grounds and is more likely to be the result of the acceptance of a patriarchal value system. Catholic sexual theology assumes that biological differences between the sexes are fixed and that stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity, gender role assignment and status are merely co-operating with nature. The acceptance of sexual theology by followers depends on the continued belief that patriarchal ideas about men and about women are natural, normal and divinely ordained.



The possibilities of innate temperamental differences are remote, as no definite equation between nature and temperament has emerged. The character of gender, that is, personality structure in terms of sexual category, appears to be cultural rather than biological in character. 'Core gender identity' is established in infancy and appears strongly influenced by socialisation. Research with inter-sexed patients has shown that gender is determined by post-natal forces, regardless of the anatomy or physiology of the external genitalia (Stoller 1968). It now appears more likely that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are socially constructed, rather than absolute biological givens. That this socialisation continues as a universal condition through an acquired value system, indicates the strength of patriarchy and its resistance to biological and psychological evidence, which undermines its ideology.

Patriarchy as a governing ideology is also damaging to men, for it prevents men as well as women from developing and experiencing their full humanity, as it produces conformity aimed to control its subjects. The success of patriarchal ideology, with its mutually exclusive, contradictory and polar qualities of categories of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', consigns male and female personalities to only half of their human potential and allows for a limited range of activities. Men and women in the Church, consigned as they are as bipolar opposites, are prevented from developing their full spiritual potential. Patriarchy in the Church represents a power division between men and women and between men and men which is based on sex.

Conformity and control operates at both the public and the private level. Sylvia Walby (1994) distinguished between public and private forms of patriarchy. In private patriarchy, the main site of women's oppression is based on household production and reproduction, where the expropriation of women's labour takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the household using a strategy of exclusion. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites, such as employment and the state, and is a more collective appropriation. The principal strategy is that of segregation and subordination. Public and private forms of patriarchy are present in



all patriarchal religions. At the public level, patriarchal religions segregate and subordinate women. At the private level, patriarchal religions provide religious justification for the operation of private patriarchy by individual patriarchs.

In the Catholic Church the public segregation and control of women is evident, in the refusal to allow women access to the priesthood, or to positions of power within the Church. Public control of men is most evident in the control by some men, of other men, in the institution of celibacy. Private patriarchy has been condoned and encouraged by the religious justification of the patriarchal family type, in which women and men have been contained within stereotypical roles. Public and private patriarchy in the Church has also controlled women and reproduction.

Whilst men have been damaged by patriarchy they do at least have the possibility to reach a position of power themselves; women on the other hand, are denied such a possibility simply because they are women. Women have been hedged in with taboos and rituals, which have served to exclude them from full participation in the Church. The control of women's bodies by both public and private patriarchs, has been justified by a biologically determined sexual theology.

Central to both public and private patriarchy is the control of women's sexuality, most especially the control of reproduction. Marielouise Janssen-Jurrott (1982) considers that:

‘The quintessence of patriarchy is the male control of reproduction which is orientated to maximise the security of the individual paterfamilias, the oldest member of the clan, the chieftain or the men of the ruling social classes’  
(Janssen-Jurrott, 1982:335).

The control of reproduction has been and continues to be a concern of Church leaders. Central to this concern is the felt need to control sexual activity, which is associated with passion, lust and sin. The human sex-drive, considered as ‘an unruly passion’ in need of control, has been hedged in with prohibitions, which have attempted to control sexual activity and women's



generative capacity. Janssen-Jurrott (1982) argues that men have strong motives to want to control women and reproduction. First, population increase is not a result of a 'blind passion' for reproduction, but a consequence of reproduction ideologies and conceptions of morality, which provide security for the economic foundations of patriarchy. Men have an interest in the production of the next generation, as it maximises the security of the nation, the clan, the family and the patriarch. Second, if men wish to maintain patriarchal institutions they must develop sex-specific solidarity structures. In order to win allies in the next generation, male children must be convinced of the insignificance of women and of motherhood. This is achieved through processes of socialisation, especially through initiation rites, which exclude women and alienate boys from their mothers. The older men shape the identity of the boys in a system of communication and meaning in which they exclude the women. Membership of men's organisations is dependent on these initiations. In the Church, authority to teach lies with the hierarchical priesthood, a sex-specific solidarity structure, which initiates men into a system of communication and meaning denied to women. Through this structure, an hierarchical elite reinforces their position over subordinates, other men, all women and children.

The denigration and subordination of women is underpinned by male history and myth. These systems of communication and meaning have excluded women from history and in so doing have eliminated the social and political destiny of half of humanity (Anderson and Zinsler, 1990). Myth and religion together represent the truth in society, as they attempt to deal with the meaninglessness of events and of existence. Both corroborate and justify existing conditions in the present and establish rights and duties of the sexes. Myths have been important to the ways in which women are perceived, as in myth the world view of the initiated is expressed. History and myth have supported and sustained beliefs in male supremacy. Myths about procreation aim to place men in the primary role, even as co-creator with God, whilst women appear only as the caretakers of young children. In sexual theology, the myth of Adam and Eve played a significant part in establishing the rights and duties of the sexes, and led



to the association of woman with sex and sin in the doctrine of 'original sin'. The doctrine of 'original sin' also contributed to the myth of a pre-lapsarian purity, which could be accessed only by the male virgin.

In the male history of the Church, women's social and political contributions to the early Church have been either downplayed or eliminated. Systems of communication, meaning and spiritual property have been controlled and handed down by men. Women's spirituality has been denied or ignored. The legitimacy of male claims to sovereignty has been established through the male God, apostolic succession from Peter and the maleness of Christ himself. In the Catholic Church, male leaders obtain the exclusive right to explain the meaning of human existence and they interpret religious meaning for the entire community. The exclusion of women, from priesthood and from interpretation, communicates women's inferiority in the 'unsaid' and the 'said'. The use of exclusive language and the association of women with sex and sin, reinforces the biological and spiritual inferiority of women. Whilst women may not accept all male judgements, the interpretation of religious meaning affects their lives through purity rules, taboos and rituals of conduct towards men, which express women's subordination in the Church.

The exclusion of women from positions of power and authority in the Church was mirrored in patriarchal societies. Religious belief and practice supported and sustained the segregation and subordination of women in the state. Patriarchal religion and the patriarchal state are mutually supportive and sustaining. It is unsurprising therefore that gradually with the rise of political authorities and the rise of the nation state, the state became the guarantor of patriarchal power. Private patriarchy operated in the interests of the patriarchal state. Sexuality provided a transfer point for relations of power, as the control of the sexual impulses of the individual and the father's total control over sons, daughters and wives, served to internally maintain the order of the state, the stability of which was dependent on a rigorous hierarchisation and the strict



compliance to command and obedience. As such, the patriarchal family provided the building block for both Church and state.

Historically, the patriarchal state controlled women and reproduction. Women had few rights over their bodies, to divorce, to extramarital relations, to the acceptance of out of wedlock children, to marriages based on love, to contraception or to abortion. Women who did not conform were punished severely. Long before the Christian era, Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian codices made abortion a criminal offence. In Hindu law, abortion made a woman an outcast. More recently in western liberal democracies, whilst the ideology of patriarchy remains, it is to some extent muted and women have become accustomed to making decisions about their sexual relations and fertility for themselves. This raises the question of how Catholic women, living in a western liberal democracy, deal with the inherent contradictions between what is now acceptable in the society in which they live and what is acceptable in terms of the Catholic Church and its sexual theology.

Closely associated with the myth of man's primary role in procreation are patriarchal beliefs surrounding semen. Semen was believed to contain the whole foetus in embryo. The womb was merely a container for man's 'seed'. The belief in the primary role of semen in procreation has been shared by patriarchal religions. In the Hindu religion a devout Hindu who did not have intercourse with his wife during her fertile period was described as an embryo killer (Janssen-Jurrett, 1982). In Judaism the waste of semen was seen as delaying the arrival of the Messiah, for the Son of David would not appear until all the souls of the unborn were born. Similar concepts are found in Christianity: increased fertility would increase the population in heaven, and ejaculation of semen other than into the womb was considered seriously sinful. Patriarchal beliefs about semen were incorporated into Catholic sexual theology and provided biological justification for patriarchy in the Church. The centrality of beliefs about semen in Catholic sexual theology is examined later in this thesis.



### Discourse.

Discourses are not merely linguistic phenomenon but are productive (see Sarup,1993). They are not neutral conduits for ideas, but are the means by which ideas are created, sustained and continued through history. The thrust of discursive creation is control and discourses often attempt to create and sustain a norm and a conformity. Patriarchal norms about temperament, role and status absorbed into the discourses and institutions of the Church, produced discursive practice, which served to control women and men in the Church. In the Catholic Church, the dominant discourse is an apparatus of power that supports and sustains patriarchal power in the Church.

An examination of discourse in this thesis allows for the isolation and analysis of techniques of power, which are implicated in the ways in which the female body and the social institutions related to it have entered into political relations. In this examination, Foucault's (1982) three modes of objectivisation by discourse are relevant. In the first mode of objectivisation, the constituted subject can be seen as a victim caught in the processes of objectivisation and constraint enacted by others. In the second mode, Foucault shows how the body was increasingly treated in discourse as a thing and how this objectivisation was paralleled and complemented by dividing practices. The third mode of objectivisation concerns the ways in which a human being turns her or himself into an object. The person initiates active self-formation through a variety of techniques, that is, through operations on people's own bodies, on their souls, on their thoughts and on their own conduct (Foucault,1980). These operations characteristically entail a process of self-understanding, but one which is mediated in discourse by an external authority figure, a confessor, or psychoanalyst. These three modes of objectivisation of the subject are accomplished by the power of discourse itself.

In the discourses of patriarchy and of Catholic sexual theology, the first two modes of objectivisation of the subject are particularly pertinent to women. Patriarchal discourse objectified woman as a thing to be used by men and sexual theology continued this objectivisation of women, which together with dividing practices and the spatial, temporal and social compartmentalisation of women in the Church, ensured their continued objectivisation and subordination. In the third mode of objectivisation, authority figures such as Church leaders or confessors may strongly influence the subject to 'fit' with the dominant discourse. Active self-formation on the part of the subject may also be constrained by a lack of critical consciousness.

It cannot be assumed that individual subjects are unable to act upon their own intentions and become emancipated, for if there is no resistance to power the 'passive body' of discursive determinism becomes a reality. Power and resistance are implicated in each other, we are neither entirely socially constructed nor are we entirely autonomous subjects, power and freedom are not mutually exclusive (Gordon, 1980). In order to understand what gives us meaning and value we have to examine dominant discourses and consider whether the conceptual underpinnings of these discourses stand up under the weight of current knowledge and social experience. We also have to be aware of the alternative discourses and examine their significance in relation to their 'fit' with the dominant discourses in society, or as in this thesis, with the dominant discourse of the Church. The empirical research will endeavour to discover what ordinary priests and women say about issues of power and authority, sexual morality and the place of women in the Church, and how this 'fits' with the dominant discourse of the contemporary Catholic Church.

#### Power/knowledge.

In the Catholic Church structures of heterogeneous elements (apparatuses) such as discourses, doctrine, institutions, the 'unsaid' as much as 'the said', contain strategies of relations of forces



supporting and supported by types of knowledge. Foucault (1973a) argues that knowledge is power over others, it is the power to define others. In this view knowledge ceases to be a liberation and becomes a mode of surveillance, regulation and discipline. The exercise of such power is through what Foucault names *disciplinary power*, that is, a system of surveillance, which is interiorised to the point that each person is his or her own overseer. *Disciplinary power* allows for power to be exercised continuously at minimal cost and to great effectiveness. A parallel can be drawn between the 'panoptican' (the all-seeing) and the all-seeing, all-knowing Christian God. The confessional was a means by which interior surveillance ensured individual regulation and control. In the confessional, individuals, after an examination of conscience, accused themselves of wrong-doing measured against that which Church leaders had defined as 'right' or 'wrong' in the certain knowledge that the all-knowing God had taken note of every transgression.

*Disciplinary power* can be described as a *gaze*, a regulatory gaze. In contemporary society, there is for example, the physician's gaze, which is concerned with the patient's bodies and their capacities for production and reproduction. The teacher's gaze is directed towards ensuring that the student is prepared for the world of work, sexuality and family life. The social worker's gaze is directed at the bodies of the poor and the rejected aiming to bring order to disorder. In the Church, the *celibate gaze* is directed at the sexual bodies of priests and people aiming to regulate and control desires and actions.

'There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints, just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, or gaze in which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be at minimum cost' (Foucault, 1980:155).

There is of course the question of how effective any *gaze* can be. It cannot be assumed that individual subjects, constituted by discursive formations and inscribed by social practices, are unable to act upon their own intentions and become emancipated as subjects. For example, in



the Catholic Church despite the persistent condemnation of the use of contraception, there is evidence that many Catholic women and men have practised contraception. It may be that although there are infringements on particular issues, these appear to go hand in hand with an acceptance of others, which suggests the presence of inner contradictions and/or resistance. In Foucault's later work the discursive determination of the notion of 'passive bodies' is superseded, by one which opens up the possibility of resistance to dominating power. Power and resistance are now seen as implicated in each other, 'where there is power there is resistance'.

'The relationship between power and freedoms refusal to submit cannot be separated. The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude (how could we seek to be slaves?). At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of.....a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitement and struggle' (Dreyfus and Rabinow,1982:221).

There is never a perfect fit between the individual subject and the social order. Power is not exercised without insubordination and obstinacy. In the Catholic Church individual women have resisted the power of Church leaders and have questioned their knowledge particularly as it relates to women. Some women have used prohibited forms of birth-control, some have had abortions and some have divorced and re-married. Many of these women remain in the Church, which indicates an acceptance of some aspects of the Church whilst rejecting others, most especially those areas concerning the control of women and their bodies. This lack of 'fit' forms a significant element in the empirical research undertaken in this thesis.

There does not appear to be a perfect fit between some theologians and the dominant discourse of the official Church. Leading theologians have challenged doctrines, structures and institutions of the Church. Neither does there appear to be a perfect fit between some priests and the discourse of institutional celibacy. Over the past twenty years more than 20, 000 priests have left their ministry (Rice,1991) and institutional celibacy is implicated in this exodus (Sipe,1990). Whilst some priests have left others remain and some continue to challenge the



need for institutional celibacy. These refusals to submit indicate a lack of 'fit', which is evidenced by insubordination and obstinacy, especially in the area of sexual theology. It is not only this lack of 'fit', which the empirical research undertaken in this thesis attempts to identify, but also the modes of avoidance, resistance and dissent which priests and women employ in the face of domination. Leonard (1984) introduced the concept of 'contradictory consciousness', which is based on the need to explain how individuals come to resist the determinate social order, how it is that opposition to it is mounted, individually and collectively. Leonard explains the concept using the example of late capitalism, which like its earlier forms is continually facing its own contradictions.

'These contradictions within and between, for example, the economy, the state, the family and the forms of mass cultural production, the work ethic and long-scale unemployment, sexual diversity and family ideology, mass consumption and environmentalist critiques, imply that although we might say that subjects are produced by the social relations characteristic as a specific social formation, because these relations contain certain contradictions ...there is never a perfect fit between the individual and the social order' (Leonard,1984:46).

The grip which dominant discourses have on their subjects, is always imperfect: structural contradictions and their attendant struggles enter the consciousness of the subordinate subject as a *disturbance*, which points to a gap between dominant discourses and the actual material experiences and practices of everyday life. The notion of 'contradictory consciousness' points to the internalisation of contradictions, which the subject experiences as conflict or minimally as discomfort, the internalisation of both compliance and resistance within the same process.

It is this gap between the dominant discourses of the Church and the everyday discourses of priests and women that the empirical research attempts to address. Is there a *disturbance* caused by struggles arising from the internalisation of contradictions which can be identified in priests and in women?



## Sexuality.

This thesis locates sexuality as the possible area of contradiction for:

‘Sexuality is the name that may be given to a set of interlocking historical mechanisms; not some reality below the surface on which it is difficult to get a hold, but a great surface network on which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of sciences, the strengthening of controls and resistance are linked together in accordance with a few great strategies of knowledge and power’  
(Foucault,1980:105-6).

Pertinent to this thesis, is the manner in which the bodies of women and of men have been invested by knowledge and power, and how this has influenced the development of a sexual theology, which legitimates those structures and institutions of the Church that continue to exclude women. It emphasises the biological determinism of Catholic theology and the continued existence of biological explanations to justify the segregation and subordination of women in the Church. Theoretical perspectives, which emphasise the social and cultural construction of sexuality through discourses and practices, whilst acknowledging the biological constitution of human beings, attempt to distinguish between what is biological and might therefore be considered ‘natural’, ‘normal’ or even universal, and that which is the clear result of the social construction of subject positions. There has been an increasing recognition of gender as socially constructed and as distinguishable from the sexual differences between women and men. Traditional discourses on sexuality place great emphasis on what is ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. These discourses contain a strong commitment to the logic of binary opposites and fixed subject identities.

Catholic discourses on sexuality follow these traditional lines. Traditional discourses of sexuality and the traditional discourse of sexuality in the Catholic Church are mutually supportive and sustaining. In all of these discourses great emphasis is placed on what is ‘natural’ and ‘normal’, on man’s superiority and women’s inferiority, on gender identities and on images of masculinity and femininity, on gender role assignment and on strict divisions between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Foucault (1981) argues that biological capacities



do not determine things, but are constituted by social practices and are therefore historically and culturally relative. Sexuality is socially constructed through discourses and practices, through a 'machinery of sexuality', which acts on the social partners, reproducing acts of relations traditionally through a family form, which has controlled the female body and infantile sexuality.

The notion of sexuality as a discourse and social practice, is in direct opposition to the sexual essentialism of the Catholic discourse, in which sexuality is perceived of as an unruly power that is biological in nature and in need of restraint in the interests of the individual and of society. In the Catholic discourse, there is an emphasis on the sexual act and on 'sexual sins'. Marriage has been seen merely as a vehicle for procreation and within which to contain lust. Within the Church women and men have been defined, their personalities fixed, their role and status established, through a discourse on sexuality as biology and instinct, which has masked the heterogeneous nature of sexuality under a single notion of sex as a basic human drive which requires regulation.

Sexuality is an 'especially dense transfer point for relations of power', for in a 'history of bodies', that which is most material and vital in them has been invested by knowledge and power. In the contemporary world, patriarchal inscriptions on the body have been challenged, consequently, patriarchal knowledge about the body and the power associated with such knowledge has been undermined. Patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status enshrined in sexual theology, have been challenged by alternative discourses on sexuality in wider society. The dominant discourse of the Church is out of kilter with discourses arising from advances in medicine, biology, psychology and sociology. For example, the Church's discourse on contraception appears largely irrelevant to many women and the ban on artificial contraception has been marked by massive disobedience as women have gained access to the means of regulating their own fertility.

It is also evident from their actions that many women are resisting traditional images of femininity and gender-role assignment. Many women hold positions of power and authority in the wider society, some divorce and re-marry, others choose to live independent single lives. Many Catholic women and men tend to 'make up their own mind' about issues of personal sexual morality, using the Church's teaching merely as a guide to action. There is a tension between the discourses of the wider society and the traditional discourse of the Church. Contradictions exist, between what ordinary Catholics say and do, and what the official discourse tells them to say and do. It is these contradictions that the empirical research will address in order to discover how Catholic women and priests deal with these inconsistencies in their everyday lives in the parish.

Calls for optional celibacy are significant as the power and authority of the celibate male is justified by sexual theology and institutional celibacy has been implicated in the mass exodus of priests. Institutional celibacy has also been preferred over the married state, not least because of the presumption that abstinence from sexual activity elevates the celibate male to a state of higher being than other mortals. Do women and priests believe this to be so? How, for example, does the notion of the 'royal priesthood of believers' and a more positive assessment of the married state, which emerged from the 2nd Vatican Council, fit with the elevated status of the celibate enshrined in sexual theology? How do priests and women deal with these contradictions?

### Recent research.

The ideas contained within traditional sexual theology have been and continue to be important to women, as sexual theology supports and sustains apparatuses of power that segregate and subordinate women in the Church. Sexuality has been an especially dense transfer point for political relations and the inscriptions on women's bodies have been central to the control of



women, especially in relation to the sexual act and reproduction. Feminists have recognised that religion has been a major institution for the social control of women and have attacked institutionalised religion and its treatment of women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1895 (1972), Mary Daly in 1975 (1985), and more recently feminist scholars, Rosemary Radford Ruether (1991), Daphne Hampson (1990,1996) and Elaine Pagels (1988,1990) have produced powerful insights to the ways in which religion has oppressed women. A number of sociologists have attempted to identify the extent to which organised religion and religious ideologies have fostered sexism (Barrish and Welch,1980; Himmelstein,1986). Patriarchal religions have sanctioned the subordination of women as divinely ordained. The masculine nature of God has supported all-male clerical structures that exclude women.

Some feminist research has focused on the resistance to women's ordination. The acceptance of women into ministry by some mainline Protestant denominations led to research into placement of women in positions in the ministry (Lehman,1980b; Royle,1982; Schreckengost,1987).

Other research examined the experience of women in the seminaries (Charlton,1987; Kleinman,1984). Another area of interest has been the resistance to women in the ministry, in denominations where ordination had occurred and in denominations where it had not yet been sanctioned (Lehman,1980a,1981,1987,1990; Nason-Clark,1987a,1987b; Royle,1987). Unlike most Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church has continued to refuse ordination to women. Women have benefited from the official enthusiasm for lay participation following the 2nd Vatican Council, but an exclusion zone, that of ordination, has remained.

Some women have taken full advantage of opportunities for participation. They have participated in public ministry in several ways, including distributing communion wafers (previously blessed by a priest) as lectors, and as chancellors of dioceses (Wallace,1988).

Female and male religious, deacons, laymen and women have administered 'priestless parishes' where priests have been in short supply. Wallace (1991,1992,1993) has argued that these lay



pastors represent the initial phase of transformation of the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church.

Involvement in or exposure to the women's movement mobilised many Catholic women to seek changes in the Church (Trebbi,1990; Wallace,1988). Groups of lay women including prominent theologians and women religious began to organise and by the 1970's were pressuring Rome for the ordination of women. The response from Rome was to issue a declaration reaffirming its position that the ordination of women was impossible. Traditional arguments were used to explain the continued exclusion of women from ministry; Christ had only ordained men, only men could 'image Christ'. Pressure from these Catholic women continued and early in the 1980's, *Woman Church* emerged from a coalition of Catholic feminist organisations with the aim of keeping women's ordination a live issue. *Woman Church* also created:

'a special place for women to reconstruct a religious culture around feminine experience and to theorise on that experience' (Trebbi,1990:351).

As the feminist critique of the Church broadened, to emphasise changing the structures instead of merely allowing women to participate in the established structure, *Woman Church* sought allies among women of other religious traditions as well as secular feminists.

Not all Catholic women felt comfortable with this feminist critique. Some women accepted existing structures and appeared content with the masculine nature of authority in the Church and in the home. Fundamentalist and evangelical Catholic women who supported the pro-family ideology, saw feminist ideas as a threat. Studies of evangelicals and the new Christian right, suggested that women as well as men saw themselves as having something to gain from the pro-family stance, which sanctioned hierarchical family relationships based on age and sex (Ammerman,1987; Ginsburg,1989; Luker,1984; Stacey,1990). Some women were attracted to charismatic groups where family symbolism remained. Amongst charismatic groups, God as Father continued to support the masculine nature of authority in family and Church, but this



Father God had been transformed. Neitz (1987) described a transformation of the figure of God-the-Father from an authoritarian patriarch to the 'Daddy-God' of the charismatics. He was still the Father, but what he offered was unconditional love to his children. This transformation from an authoritarian God to a 'Daddy God' owed much to new notions of 'church' that emerged from Vatican II. Post-Vatican II, the Church was described as a 'pilgrim Church' in which all the 'people of God', that is priests and people journeyed together to the kingdom of God. The image of a 'caring' God appealed to women and to men in that it liberated them from the wrathful, judgmental patriarchal God of the Old Testament.

The feminist critique was unacceptable to many older women in charismatic groups. These charismatic women, who were socialised in the pre-Vatican II Church, tended to take rules of submission for granted. At the same time, they found the notion of an unmediated relationship with God freeing. Some younger married women saw submissiveness as a way to solve problems in their marriages; they traded formal authority for their husbands' emotional expressiveness and involvement in family life (Neitz,1987; Rose,1987). For those women who accepted the masculine nature of authority in the Church and in the home, the feminist critique, which challenged existing male hierarchical structures, was regarded as a threat. These conflicting positions are later considered in the examination of the contemporary discourse of 'ordinary' English Catholic women.

There are several areas of feminist research, which remain to be explored. Some religious organisations are making a transition between being male-dominated and allowing women greater participation and status. This change must be assessed (Hargrove,1987; Hiat,1987; Shriver,1987). Some religious organisations continue as highly sex-segregated institutions and the feminist project of asking how any given experience is gendered continues to be important. This thesis is an attempt to contribute to this project.

## Conclusion.

History as genealogy exposes the body as imprinted by those in power. These imprints Foucault (Rabinow, 1986) calls 'stigmata', that is, wounds inflicted on the body by those in power. Foucault's objective was to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. The subject is objectified by a process of division either with itself or from others. In this process of social objectivisation and categorisation, human beings are given both a social and a personal identity. This notion of social objectivisation is useful to this thesis, which explores how 'woman' and 'man' were constructed in Catholic sexual theology.

All positions of power in the Church are held by men, and women are defined as passive believers. Stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity are presented as natural and sex-role assignment in the Church is merely collaborating with nature. The basis for patriarchal ideology in the Church rests in biology, that is, in the biological differences between women and men and the presumed temperamental, intellectual and efficacious characteristics that arise from these.

The success of patriarchy within the Church has rested in the acceptance of an acquired value system, which supports male power. The socialisation of women, men and children, which produced conformity and control in wider society, was supported and sustained by doctrines and institutions which gave religious legitimacy to male supremacy, but Church authority has only ever been partial. The strenuous efforts made by Pope Paul III (1534-49) at the time of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, is but one example of the ineffectiveness of the *gaze* on many ordinary priests and laity. Public and private patriarchy was supported by the patriarchal discourse of the Church and male supremacy was supported at both the public and the private level using strategies of containment and exclusion. The patriarchal family was the microcosm of the patriarchal Church. The individual patriarch could command the obedience of women,



young men and children. This thesis is concerned with how contemporary priests and women respond to the doctrinal *gaze* as patriarchal strategies of exclusion and containment of women begin to break down.

The sex specific institutions of the Church with their privileged access to knowledge, truth and ritual, exclude women and provide for older men's control of younger men and ensure the maintenance of patriarchal institutions into the next generation. Leaders of these institutions claim the right to explain the meaning of human existence and to interpret meaning and truth, not only for the Church, but also for the world.

The Catholic Church and those states (from late antiquity to medieval, and those from Counter-Reformation to modern Catholic monopoly) of which it formed an integral part, has mutually supported and sustained patriarchal ideology. A male God provided for the legitimacy of patriarchal structures in Church and state. Eventually the state became the guarantor of patriarchal power. The patriarchal family, the microcosm of the patriarchal Church, supported and sustained existing sexual politics and provided for the maintenance of order in the state.

Central to the control of patriarchy in both state and Church was the control of women and their bodies. The quintessence of patriarchy is the male control of reproduction. Church fathers have consistently sought to control women and reproduction, through prohibitions surrounding marriage and sexual intercourse, and through the association of all forms of birth-control with sin. Sexual desire has been seen by Church and state as an unruly force in need of control. The state has also felt the need to control the sexual activity of its population, not least the need to control population size. Patriarchal states have sanctioned birth-control for example, where the need for human labour has decreased, state regulations against birth-control are eased and women can divorce and have access to contraception and abortion.

Patriarchal discourses rely heavily on the biological differences between the sexes. Cultural distinctions are assumed to be merely co-operating with nature, and to alter temperament or sex-role assignment is contrary to the natural order. Images of masculinity and femininity, role and status do not appear to be a constant in human nature. In patriarchal discourses the patriarchal myth that semen was the primary agent in procreation, was significant in establishing the differences between woman and man. Semen was a symbol of male power. The significance of the penis in phallic symbolism has long been understood. What has not previously been considered is the significance of semen in supporting notions of male superiority and power. Semen is the missing link, which connects phallic power with notions of male superiority and the womb merely as a symbol of passivity. The beliefs surrounding semen played a significant part in the construction of Catholic sexual theology and offer a partial explanation for the Catholic emphasis on 'sexual sins'. The origins of the discourse, which constructed woman as inferior to man, and in which the beliefs about semen played a central role, may be long forgotten, but its discursive creation remains. As Foucault (1980) points out, a particular discourse can figure at one time in an organisation, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice, which itself remains silent.

The gendered nature of Catholic sexual theology has not been given enough consideration. This thesis attempts to address the gendered nature of sexual theology as it highlights the relevance of the negative construction of women's bodies in Catholic sexual theology. Meredith McGuire (1990) challenged the social sciences to 'rematerialise the body', but her work gives little attention to how religious interpretations of the body are gendered. This thesis highlights how interpretations of the body in religious discourse have been significant in the position and place of women in the Catholic Church.



## CHAPTER TWO.

### **The Foundations of Catholic Sexual Theology.**

#### Introduction.

In this chapter, genealogy interrogates the past from the vantage point of the needs and from the perplexities of the present. In so doing it debunks some of the most cherished values and institutions in the Catholic Church, by demonstrating that they originated in 'mere' historical contingency and in petty ignoble practices, incommensurate with the loftiness usually ascribed to them (Goldstein,1994). Genealogy arises from the background of archaeology, a basically 'vertical' conception of successful cultural forms, stacked one upon the other so as to emphasise self-containment and radical differences from one another (Delaporte and Toews,1989). Here, genealogy accentuates the 'horizontal' dimension, its hallmarks are 'eventuality' and narrative process. While the components of this genealogy are built together in the manner of narrative, that narrative is resolutely non-teleological. It is concerned with the conceptualisation of the historical field as composed of heterogeneous elements and universal combinations. It follows the development of the Catholic Church in its organisation, institutions and theology.

The Church that began with itinerant artisan journeymen evolved into a specifically urban and above all civic religion. In the early period women played a prominent part in the development of the Church, but as doctrine became adjusted to religious needs women were accepted only as passive believers and were segregated and subordinated. In its early period self-appointed charismatic leaders were followed by those who believed them to be extraordinarily qualified, either because they had known Christ or had been the subject of 'divine revelation'. A variety of Christian groups sprang up and some of these groups were marked by their enthusiasm and revolutionary ideas. In some of these groups, women were considered equal with men, which was in contradiction with the patriarchal ideas of the surrounding world. Fraternisation and an emphasis on community, were important features of all of the early Christian groups. Competing

ideas about the nature of God, authority and organisation, led to a broad division between them. In the battle of ideas which resulted the Orthodox Christians emerged successful and the loose association between the groups broke down.

Ideas were selected and reinterpreted in the interests of the Orthodox Christians and were successful because they had an affinity, a point of 'coincidence' with the common-sense notions of the surrounding world. These ideas legitimated the organisation, institutions and theology of orthodoxy. Patriarchal ideas were incorporated into sexual theology and by the Middle Ages, they formed an integral part of Catholic tradition. The ideas contained within Catholic theology helped shape the ethical peculiarities and cultural values of the western world.

'Certain conceptions of ideal values, grown out of a world of definite religious ideas, have stamped the ethical peculiarities and cultural values on modern man' (Weber, in Spratt, 1967:72).

In order to uncover significant beliefs and attitudes, which provide the basis of Catholic teaching and tradition, the chapter begins by considering the beliefs about and attitudes towards women, in the countries around the Mediterranean in the centuries immediately prior to and following the death in Palestine of 'the Christ', Jesus (d. c33 AD). The cultural and philosophical discourses of the Greco-Roman world provides us with a clear picture of 'woman' and 'man' which probably reflects the 'common-sense' notions of the day. It then turns to the discourses of the developing Church in order to discover if they were influenced by the patriarchal discourse of the wider world.

The chapter then examines the role of women in the early Church in order to identify any correlation between discourse and practice. By the end of the 2nd century AD the Christian Church had become an institution headed by a three-rank hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons who claimed to be the definers and guardians of spiritual 'truth'. How had this come about? What were the implications for women of an all-male hierarchical structure in the Church?



Attention then turns to the ideas instrumental in the formation of Catholic sexual theology, as sexual theology is central to the control of the body in Catholicism. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic sexual theology concerns itself mainly with the discrete behaviour around the sexual act, where the imperative appears to be the control of the emission of semen and of the control of women and their bodies. Why does Catholic sexual theology focus on the sexual act and emissions of semen? Why are there these emphases? The sexual theology of the three Fathers of the Church Augustine, Albert and Aquinas, who provided the foundations of Catholic sexual theology, is examined in order to illuminate these questions and to discover whether the beliefs and attitudes of the wider world, influenced the development of their sexual theology.

At this point, the negative construction of woman in sexual theology is considered with reference to Mariology, because the Church offers women Mary, Virgin and Mother, as an impossible project for their bodies. Why was the mother of Christ constructed in such a manner and how is Mary used as an element in the Church's apparatuses of power?

The ideas that informed sexual theology continue to exist and have a value in the Church. The empirical research will examine the strength and value of these ideas in the contemporary Church and in the English parish. The continuities and discontinuities between traditional and contemporary sexual theology will be explored as will the salience and relevance of traditional and contemporary beliefs and teachings for English Catholic priests and women.

#### Discourses of patriarchy in the wider world.

Significant discourses from the first two centuries AD provide the cultural and philosophical context of the countries around the Mediterranean, the cradle of Christianity. These discourses reveal that in the world of Jesus and the world of his followers, the superiority of man was accepted as natural and normal. Evidence for this lies in Greek medical and philosophical discourses, which provided the theory to support the 'fact' of male superiority and in the



creation stories of the Hebrew bible, which clearly identified woman as man's helpmate and subordinate to him. The focus here is on the biological explanations for assumptions of male superiority, which were bound up with the belief that men held the primary role in procreation a belief that was significant in supporting and sustaining patriarchy. Brown (1991) shows that at the root of biological explanations for male superiority are the beliefs surrounding semen. These beliefs articulated by Galen and Aristotle provided the theory, which supported and sustained the social, political and cultural arrangements of patriarchy, were later advanced in the Christian world.

In the discourses, the constructions of woman and of man were biologically determined. In Greek medical discourse, semen is central to the construction of man as a superior being. The possession of semen made men virile, hot, well-built, deep voiced, strong in thought and deed. Woman was everything that man was not. The lack of 'vital spirit' (semen) in women 'made them more soft, more liquid, more clammy-cold, altogether more formless than men' (*Galen*, in Kuhn (Ed), 1823, cited in Brown, 1991). A significant belief was that semen gave men the primary role in procreation. Philosophical discourse supported the medical discourse. Aristotle (*Aristotle*, in Brown, 1991) asserted that the male semen was the most important factor in the conception of a child. It was assumed that the male seed contained the entire foetus in embryo, a woman's function was simply to act as an incubator as the child grew. Each embryo was destined to become a male child. If the foetus did not obtain the proper conditions during incubation a female child, that is a 'failed male', would result. The 'primary role' belief was fundamental in legitimating male control over children and control of women and their bodies.

It becomes evident, that the beliefs surrounding semen were instrumental in the formation of temperament through their association with stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity. The possession of semen was pivotal in the beliefs men held about themselves. Males were



those foetuses who had realised their full potential. They had amassed a surplus of 'heat' and 'vital spirit' in the womb.

It was said that the hot ejaculation of the male seed proved this:

'For it is the semen, when possessed of vitality, which makes us men, hot, well-braced in limbs, heavy, well-voiced, spirited, strong to think and act' (*Aretaeus* in Brown, 1991).

Females, on the other hand, were a mistake of nature. Nature had intended all foetuses to be male, but if enough 'vital spirit' did not come to the foetus in the womb, a female child, that is a 'failed male', would result. Lack of 'vital spirit' ensured that woman could not have the masculine attributes associated with the possession of semen. The male discourse on semen is therefore a key factor in the patriarchal discourse on temperament.

Images of masculinity were reinforced by the fear of becoming 'womanish'. A man's 'heat' and 'vital spirit' might cool, leading a man to approach the state of a woman. The physician Galen suggested that lack of heat from childhood could cause the male body to collapse back into a state of undifferentiation (*Galen, De semine* 1:16, *Galen Opera* 4:586). If the heat was to maintain its effectiveness it was never enough just to be male, a man had to strive to remain 'virile', he had to exclude all signs of 'softness' which might suggest his loss of manhood. Effeminate characteristics were to be feared. Peter Brown (1991) illustrates this concern.

'The small-town notables.....noted a man's walk...reacted to the rhythms of his speech....listened attentively to the telltale resonance of his voice. Any of these might betray the ominous loss of a hot, high-spirited momentum, a flagging of the clear-cut self-restraint, and a relaxing of the taut elegance of voice and gesture that made a man a man, the unruffled master of the subject world' (Brown, 1991:11).

The underlying concern was loss of male power through becoming identified with the powerless. Images of masculinity appear to be more to do with supporting male power than they are to do with what it means to be 'man'.



It is with the question of homosexual activity that the concern for male power is thrown into relief. A marked degree of tolerance was accorded to men on the matter of homosexuality. That men might wish to caress or penetrate other beautiful men was of little surprise (Richardson, 1984). What the doctors and townsfolk could not understand or accept was that the pursuit of pleasure might lead some men to demean themselves by playing the female role (Schrijvers, 1985). Concern about homosexual relations centred on the breakdown of the strict hierarchical structures between the sexes rather than on the sexual act itself. Thus, the beliefs surrounding semen contributed to the fear of 'loss of manhood'. The loss of 'heat' and 'vital spirit' would lead to 'womanishness' and with this the 'natural' power of man by virtue of his possession of semen would be lost. The protection of 'vital heat' that is semen, became a major preoccupation for men (Foucault, 1985).

Woman was not only assumed to be biologically inferior but also intellectually inferior.

Notions of women's mental incapacity were found in Hebrew law: women, children and slaves were classified together.....because they had 'light flighty minds' (Loewe, 1966). In classical Greek culture, the male was active, identified with civilisation, reason and order; women were passive, identified with nature, emotion, and chaos. Only men could apply reason and logic to life, to control emotion and instinct, women were subject to impulse and selfishness. The 'natural' incapacity of women justified male domination. The Roman Jurist, Cicero in 1<sup>st</sup> century BC argued that 'because of their weakness of intellect, all women should be under the power of a male' (Lefkowitz and Fant, 1982). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, Ulpian asserted that guardians were necessary for women 'on account of the weakness of their sex and of their ignorance in business matters' (Lewis and Reinhold, 1996). The 'levity of mind' of all women (except the six Vestal Virgins who were considered the exception to the rule) meant that women and their children must be under a man's guardianship. The law gradually supplemented male control of women. In Roman law, 'Paternal Power' gave the father sole and absolute authority over his wife and children. The paterfamilias had the power of life and death over all members



of his family (Lefkowitz and Fant,1982). Aristotle, who has been considered an objective observer of nature stated that the male was naturally superior to the female, the inequality was a permanent factor due to her 'deliberative faculty' being 'without authority' much like a child's. In constructing women as biologically and intellectually inferior men provided legitimate reasons to control women and their bodies.

A further important factor in men's felt need to control women was their fear of women and of the power of sexuality, a fear which was well established in the world from which Christianity was to spring. In Homer's writings (5<sup>th</sup> century BC) his image of the Goddess probably mirrors the accepted view of human woman. Homer's images of the Goddess embodies men's fears, that unless female power is controlled by a male principle, women will be dangerous to men. The desirability of women's ultimate subordination can be seen in the figure of Hera in the Iliad. She embodies female beauty and sexual power. Zeus the male God, fearful for his power, struggles and ultimately wins out over her (for discussions on the impact of Greek mythology on traditions, which have subordinated women, see Anderson and Zinsser,1990:15-23). Fear of women and of sexuality is later echoed in early Christian sources and is clear to see in several of the Gnostic Gospels, which were circulating up until the Council of Nicea. From this time, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John became the foundational books of the New Testament. The Book of Thomas the Contender warns 'Woe to you who love intimacy with womankind, and polluted intercourse with it!' (Book of Thomas the Contender,144:8-10 in Nag Hammadi Library(NHL):193). Nature is described in the Paraphrase of Shem as a horror who:

'turned her dark vagina and cast from her the power of fire, which was in her from the beginning, through the practice of darkness' (*Paraphrase of Shem*, 27:2-6, in NHL:320).

In the Dialogue of the Saviour, Jesus warns his disciples to 'pray where there is no woman...[and to] destroy the works of femaleness' (*Dialogue of the Saviour*,144:16-20, in NHL, 237). The 'works of femaleness' is apparently the activities of intercourse and procreation.

Pagels (1990) argues that in each of these cases the target is not women but the power of sexuality.

The negative association of women with animal physicality was evident over a range of simple societies and religions. Miles (1989) suggests that this association has been one of the most decisive factors in the history of women. Central to notions of pollution is the issue of blood. Of all human substances, blood is highly charged with power and danger. Menstrual blood has been associated with mystery, uncleanness and contamination.

‘A woman in her courses is not to gaze upon the sacred fire, sit in water, behold the sun, or hold conversation with a man’ (Edwardes, 1965;48).

Menstrual taboos stigmatised women, set them apart and disbarred them from full participation of society. Menstrual taboos are evidenced in most simple societies and many of the world religions (Lowe and Hubbard, 1983) and the strength of the taboos demonstrates the high level of fear and danger associated with menstrual blood and its uncontrollable nature.

Philosophical and medical discourses reveal subjective and prejudicial explanations of women, their bodies and their natural functions. In 2<sup>nd</sup> century Greece the physician, Galen, taking the male as the ‘norm’, decided that women were men turned inside out. The ovaries were ‘smaller, less perfect testes’ (Lefkowitz and Fant, 1988). Plato explained that the womb was like the penis which:

‘becomes rebellious and masterful, like an animal disobedient to reason and maddened with the sting of lust’ (*Timaeus*, in Lefkowitz and Fant, 1988:81-82).

The uterus was seen as a ‘revolting animal within an animal’.



The association between semen and 'vital heat', the primary role of semen in procreation and using man as the norm against which to measure woman, led to medical explanations for menstruation. The physician Galen considered 'vital heat' necessary in the development of the foetus. Those foetuses that had not received enough 'vital heat' in the womb had resulted in female children. Consequently, women could not retain 'vital heat'. Galen explained menstruation as the periodic loss of surplus heat. Periodic menstruation demonstrated that women could not burn up surplus heat, which then coagulated within them. There was however a dilemma, for this surplus heat was needed for the development of the foetus (*Galen, De usu partium* 14:6, in Brown,1991). Presumably, during pregnancy women retained enough 'vital heat' to nurture the foetus. Galen does not go on to consider the possibility, that woman might have been purposely designed by Nature to play an equal part in procreation. He warned though, that if these surpluses were not for the nurture of the foetus, men might think that:

'the creator had purposely made one half of the whole race imperfect, and, as it were mutilated' (*Galen, De usu partium* 14:6, in Brown,1991).

In his *History of Animals*, Aristotle recorded that a menstruating woman could make a mirror turn 'bloody dark like a cloud' because the menstrual blood passed through her eyes to the surface of the mirror. He also observed that women had fewer teeth than did men. Such errors in the work of a normally careful observer point to Aristotle's prejudices about women overriding his evidence. These discourses supported and sustained the patriarchal construction of woman and contributed to prejudicial beliefs about women.

Fear of women, fear of sexuality and the belief in male superiority together with the power to sustain and support negative views of women in discourse, effectively denigrated those processes and organs unique to women, gave legitimation for male control of sexuality and confirmed man as the perfect human being, against whom woman was to be measured. Prejudicial notions about menstrual blood persisted for centuries. Such ideas contributed to the



denigration of a woman's role in conception and notions of uncleanness associated with childbirth.

If these ideas from the world were to influence the developing Church we would expect to find the persistence of patriarchal notions about temperament, role and status underpinned by biological explanations. Patriarchal images of masculinity and femininity would persist and homosexual activity would give cause for concern because of its perceived threat to masculinity, hence male power. If woman continued to be constructed as biologically and intellectually inferior to man, we would expect to find male control and supervision of women perpetuated in the Church. A continuing fear of women and of the power of sexuality would lead to an imperative within the Church to control both women and sexuality. If the belief in semen as the primary agent in procreation continued, we would expect to find a continuing concern to protect semen. If prejudice against women continued there would be an association between women, uncleanness, menstrual blood and childbirth. If there were such continuities between the ideas of the world and those of the developing Church, it could not be denied that the Church was influenced by the world from which it sprang

#### Discourse and discursive practice in the early Church.

The 'official' picture of the early Church is of a Christian community where possessions were shared, a single teaching preached and all believers worshipped together under the authority of the apostles (Pagels, 1990). Church history suggests that it was only after that golden age that conflict, then heresy, emerged. The discovery in 1945 of texts from the early Christian era at Nag Hammadi, reveals not one discourse but several competing discourses amongst early Christian groups. Early Christianity was not an homogenous group, but made up of competing factions with a variety of claims to interpret spiritual property. The texts provide an insight to the Christian discourses of the time and the nature of theological dissent amongst early Christian communities. Dissent focused on two related issues, the nature of God and the power



and authority of the clergy. In so doing they reveal the centrality of assumptions of male superiority in Orthodox discourse. These religious debates about the nature of God or Christ simultaneously bear social and political implications that were crucial to the development of Christianity, the rise of the clerical caste, the position and place of women in the Church.

The nature of God is a religious question, which involves social and political issues. One of the greatest battles between competing factions in the early Church concerned the nature of God (Pagels, 1990). In its simplest form, many Gnostic Christian groups correlated their description of God in both masculine and feminine terms. Most refer to the creation account of *Genesis 1*, which suggests an equal or androgynous human creation. Gnostic Christians often took the principle of equality between men and women into the social and political structures of their communities. Many Gnostic Christians talked of women as being equal with men.

The Orthodox pattern is strikingly different; it describes God in exclusively masculine terms, and typically refers to *Genesis 2* to describe how Eve was created from Adam and for his fulfilment. These beliefs translated into social practice. By the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Orthodox community came to accept the domination of men over women as the divinely ordained order, not only for social and family life, but also for the Christian churches. As the Orthodox Christians insisted on 'one (male) God', they simultaneously validated the system of governance in which the Church is ruled by 'one bishop'. The doctrine of the 'one God' confirmed for Orthodox Christians the emerging institution of the 'one bishop' as monarch ('sole ruler') of the Church. The Orthodox description of God (as for example Father Almighty) serves to define who is included, and who is excluded, from participation in the power of priests and bishops (Pagels, 1990).

The one male God ensured the development of sex-specific solidarity structures, rite and rituals from which women would be excluded on the grounds of sex. For when Gnostic and Orthodox

Christians discussed the nature of God they were, at the same time, debating the issue of spiritual authority. A male God gave religious legitimacy to patriarchy in the Church. The legitimate supremacy of the male, linked to the doctrine of the bodily resurrection, established the initial framework for clerical authority. The risen Jesus gave Peter all authority on earth. In the absence of historical evidence for this authority, adherents must believe this to be the truth. To receive a share in this authority bishops and priests must be able to trace their orders back to Peter. Even today the pope traces the primacy he claims over the rest, to Peter himself, the first of the apostles since he was the first witness of the resurrection (Pagels,1990). The Gnostics on the other hand insisted the resurrection was symbolic of a new experience of Christ's presence in one's life, which relied on an individual relationship with God not necessarily mediated by priesthood.

In the Orthodox Church, obedience to God became synonymous with obedience to bishops, priests and deacons.

‘Whosoever refuses to “bow the neck” (*Irenaeus*,1.2.2-3) and obey church leaders is guilty of subordination against the divine master himself’ (*Irenaeus*,1.4.1-1.5.4).

Any initial equality enjoyed by women was lost as a male God validated a system of governance from which women were segregated and subordinated. A male God and a heavenly hierarchy validated the hierarchical male-dominated clerical structure and supported and sustained patriarchy within the Orthodox Church.

Key factors in the success of the Orthodox discourse were its claim to ‘truth’, the simplicity of its recruitment and its appeal to existing patriarchal attitudes. By the year 200 AD both Gnostic and Orthodox Christians claimed to represent the ‘truth’, Gnosticism was for some regions ‘Christianity’ and they looked with scorn on the Orthodox, labelling them as unbelievers (Bauer,1971:xxii). In the Apocalypse of Peter, Orthodox Christians are the ones ‘who oppose the truth and are messengers of error’ (Perkins,1980). The author accuses the Orthodox of blind



arrogance in claiming exclusive legitimacy. In the text the *Authoritative Teaching* they are 'dealers in bodies' (AT 26.20-21, in NHL:282) worse than pagans with no excuse for their error. The Gnostics tended to regard all doctrines and speculations as only approaches to the truth.

The Orthodox Christians were in contrast coming to identify their own doctrines as the truth, the only legitimate truth. Their leaders claimed the right to interpret religious meaning for Christians and rejected all other discourses as heretical. Orthodox Christians strengthened their position by eliminating qualitative criteria for membership by providing a simple framework of doctrine, ritual and political structure. By the end of 200 AD Orthodox Christianity had become an apparatus of power in which a hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons held themselves to be the guardians of Christian spiritual property. Rome took a leading role in rejecting all other discourses as heretical. Every trace of heretical blasphemy was destroyed, or so it was thought until the discovery of the Gnostic gospels at Nag Hammadi.

At this point, it is important to remember the link between patriarchy and the religious hierarchy of gods, or one God that stands in the middle of religion. Christianity is a monotheistic religion and monotheism is not merely a religion, it is a concept, which produces relations of power between the sexes and between groups. Any monotheistic religion contains notions of primacy and supremacy. 'One God' has primacy over all others and adherents are supreme over non-believers. Monotheism is not exclusive to Christianity, the belief in the 'One God' is common to the major world religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Each of these monotheistic religions has assumed a duty to impose their beliefs on others. The Jews persecuted other tribes whose idols challenged the 'One God'. Christians persecuted Jews and Islam warred on Jews and Christians alike. As a power relation, monotheism inevitably creates a hierarchy of one god over all others, of stronger over weaker, of believer over unbeliever. Consequently, monotheism sets some men up to be the enemies of others, some men to dominate others, and



women to be accepted only as passive believers and generally excluded from positions of authority.

In patriarchal religions the concept of a relationship between God and man is exemplified in the belief that God created man in his own image, hence God was reflected in every human patriarch. Men as well as women, as enemies or subordinates, were also negatively affected by patriarchal religions. Men were however persecuted for extrinsic reasons not simply because they were men. The system also afforded opportunities for men to improve or even reverse their position in the patriarchal order. For example, enemies could convert, young men became old men, and sons became fathers. Women on the other hand were destined for a lifetime of subordination merely because they were women. It is evident in the discourses of the early Church that women played a prominent role in the developing Church. According to Brown (1991) the Church in its earliest years was remarkable in its openness to women. Ten to twenty years after the death of the founder, women held positions of leadership in local Christian groups acting as prophets, teachers and evangelists. Marcion (140-180) appointed women as priests and bishops (*Irenaeus*, 1.13:3-4). Women were accepted as leaders of Christian communities, performing all that would later be the sole prerogative of the male clergy.

The measure of equality which influential women were beginning to enjoy in surrounding societies may have had a resonance within the early Church. In Egypt, women had attained an advanced state of emancipation. In Rome, the patriarchal forms of marriage were giving way to a new legal form in which man and woman bound themselves in voluntary and mutual vows. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, upper class women were often living their own lives, involved in philosophy, literature medicine and mathematics (Anderson and Zinsser, 1990). It is unlikely that the majority of women enjoyed such status in what were basically patriarchal societies. In Jewish and in some pagan cultures the equality of women was unacceptable. Women in Jewish



communities were excluded from actively participating in public worship, in education, and in social and political life outside the family (Cacippo,1981).

The early Church depended on wealthy, influential women for its continued existence.

Influential women became effective protectresses of the new churches around Palestine and Syria. Marcia the concubine of the Emperor Commodus obtained a letter granting freedom for martyrs in Sardinia (Brown,1987). As late as the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, John Chrysostom's (347-407) mother Olympias spent twenty years supporting the Church at Constantinople.

Women's participation in the leadership of worship implicitly challenged assumptions of male superiority hence male power. The Orthodox Church reminded the Christian community of the divinely ordained order, in which man was superior to woman and must control her. Paul the apostle to the Gentiles argued that as God has authority over Christ, so man has authority over woman. Confirming the stereotypical gender roles of patriarchy the pseudo-Pauline Letter to Titus demonstrates what women's roles were to be:

‘Teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God might not be blasphemed’ (*Titus 2:3-5*).

By the end of the 2nd century AD, the majority of Christian churches opposed the move towards equality. The Orthodox discourse was accepted as ‘truth’ and the pseudo-Pauline letter of Timothy was endorsed as canonical. This letter exaggerates the anti-feminist element in Paul's views.

‘Let a woman learn silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men: she is to keep silent’ (*New Testament Apocrypha, 2:355*).

Paul's letter to the Colossians demanded that women be subject in everything to their husbands.

The Orthodox Church condemned levels of equality enjoyed by women in the other Christian churches. Equality for women in other churches threatened male power and authority in the Orthodox Church. All those who refused to conform to orthodoxy were condemned as heretics.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Orthodox community came to accept the domination of men over women as the divinely ordained order, not only for family and social life but also for the Church. Orthodox communities began to adopt the synagogue custom of segregating women and men at worship (Brown,1991). By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century women's leadership roles in worship was explicitly condemned and groups in which women continued to perform such roles were branded as heretical.

‘These heretical women, how audacious they are! They have no modesty, they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to exact exorcisms, to undertake cures, and, it may be, even to baptize!’ (*Tertullian De Praescriptione*,41).

‘....it is not permitted for a woman to speak in church, nor is it permitted for her to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer the Eucharist nor to claim for herself a share in any masculine function, not to mention any priestly office’ (*Tertullian De Baptismo*,1).

Patriarchal attitudes together with the power of the clergy led to a consolidation of male domination. Throughout the first three centuries, it is evident that the discourse was becoming one of control. Repressive measures regulated what a woman should wear, how she should do her hair, even when she should wash. The orthodox Clement of Alexandria (c 180) laid down strict dress codes for women.

‘Women should be completely veiled, except when they are in the house. Veiling their faces assures that they will lure no one into sin. For this is the will of Logos, that it befits them to be veiled in prayer’ (*Paedagogus* 111, 79, 4).



Clement writes, 'the very consciousness of their own nature must evoke feelings of shame' (*Paedagogus* 11, 33, 2). Chrysostom bade women to 'be veiled not only at the time of prayer but continuously' (*Twenty-sixth homily* on Cor.11.5). The length of a woman's hair signified her 'natural' subjection to the male. Control of women even extended to personal hygiene. Women were warned against frequent washing.

'Furthermore she [woman] should not wash all too frequently, not in the afternoon, nor every day. Let the tenth hour be assigned to her as the right time for bathing' (*Apostolic Constitutions*,1, 9.).

Women's social and religious activities were subject to control by Church Fathers. Women were firmly placed in the private realm by Clement of Alexandria.

'[women] should be made to practise spinning wool and weaving, and helping with the baking of bread, when necessary. Women should also fetch from the pantry the things we need' (*Paedagogus* 111, 50,1).

Women were gradually removed from roles in public worship and from sacred texts. It is noteworthy that up until the late Middle Ages not a single commentator had seen a man's name in Romans 16:7 (Brooten,1978). By then the Junia mentioned by Paul had undergone a sex change and been renamed 'Junias' as women were eliminated from Church history and Churchmen appropriated the result of women's endeavours to themselves.

The dilemma for men in the early Orthodox Church was how to accommodate women yet at the same time exclude them. The patriarchal belief that woman was an anomaly, different from men, provided for a limited number of responses (indifference, opportunism, exclusion and accommodation) (Douglas,1973). The Church could not afford to be indifferent to women as its very survival depended on them. As it could not be seen to be opportunistic, the rhetoric of women's accommodation became that of 'service' firstly to men and subsequently to the Church. Thus, the early Church reconciled the rhetoric of exclusion with social processes of accommodation as women were segregated and subordinated.



When Orthodox Christianity became the established religion of Imperial Rome the inferior position of women in the Church was assured, as the patriarchal Church was absorbed into Roman Imperial organisation and the state gradually became the guarantor of patriarchal power. Kee (1982) suggests that Constantine the Great (d.337 AD) was more concerned with the state than with religion and used Christianity in a way calculated to unite the Empire. He argued that Constantine was not a Christian, that is, he did not adopt Christ, but the warrior God of the Old Testament, which was a significant deviation, for in so doing Constantine transformed Christianity into something completely different and assured the success of orthodoxy. In this reversal Christ the champion of the poor and oppressed had no place in the Church of Imperial Rome. Constantine was concerned to provide absolute legitimation for his own values and for all sovereigns to come. As emperor, he was declared to be the manifestation of God on Earth.

The Church as an arm of the state began to organise on an imperial not a Christian model, replicating the symbols of the state. The Bishop of Rome was given the Lateran Palace and before long, bishops became 'Princes of the Church'. The 'Princes of the Church' began to exercise dominion over administrative districts parallel to the civil administrative districts of the Empire. Eventually Christians even owned slaves. With the military might of Imperial Rome behind it, the Orthodox Church was able to enforce Orthodox 'truth'. Control of Christian sects who did not adhere to Orthodox beliefs was almost total as penalties for heresy escalated.

It is evident from the examination of the discourses of the early Church that an ideology of patriarchy pervaded the Orthodox Church from its inception. In the Orthodox discourse there was a continuity between the assumptions of male superiority, which underpinned the male God and the sex-specific solidarity structures which excluded women. The Orthodox discourse clearly explained God in purely masculine terms. The masculine nature of God together with assumptions of male superiority provided the legitimacy for an all-male hierarchical caste. The belief that Jesus gave Peter and his successors spiritual authority on earth substantiated the



Orthodox claim to define and explain truth. Whilst women were clearly instrumental in the development of the early Church their position as leaders, prophets and teachers was problematic as it contradicted assumptions of women's natural inferiority in the Church and in the wider world. The dilemma for Churchmen was how to accommodate women but at the same time to exclude them. Women were segregated and accommodated in terms of service to men and to the Church, in line with patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status.

Having examined the cultural context of early Christianity the chapter now goes on to examine the sexual theology of Augustine (354-430), Albert (1200-1280) and Aquinas (1225-1274). It is concerned to discover if and how the ideas contained within the patriarchal discourse of the wider world, influenced the foundations of Catholic sexual theology.

#### The contribution of Augustine.

Three major writers in the early Church, Augustine, Albert and Aquinas provided the foundations of Catholic sexual theology. By the time of Augustine, Catholic sexual theology had established that the body itself was the site of sin (*Sermons*,151:8). Augustine's contribution to the discourse was to identify more precisely the site of sin, namely the genitals, in the act of sexual intercourse. The cause of sin was identified as woman. Crucial factors in Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of original sin were patriarchal beliefs, a fear of women and sexuality.

With his doctrine of 'original sin' Augustine institutionalised woman as the entry point of evil into the world. He reasoned that the 'original sin' had come from the genitals as, after Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, 'they were ashamed and covered their sexual parts with fig leaves' (*Sermons*,151:8). Augustine concluded 'this is where it [original sin] comes from' (*Sermons*,151:8). All sin originated with the 'original' sin, which had come from the sexual act. 'Original sin' was passed from generation to generation through sexual intercourse. Eve in the

place of all women had tempted Adam to sin therefore sin entered the world via a woman. As woman was the site and cause of sin, it followed that all women posed a threat to men through their sexuality. Through the doctrine of 'original sin' women, sex and sin were inextricably intertwined in Catholic sexual theology.

The doctrine of 'original sin' is significant in the assumption that the continent male has privileged access to truth. Augustine reasoned that sexual intercourse would not have been necessary in the Garden of Eden, for it was only after Eve had tempted Adam to sexual intercourse that an angelic state of purity was compromised (Ranke Heinemann,1991). The continent male body was presumed to have returned to a state of pre-lapsarian purity. As such the continent male was spiritually elevated above all other believers (*Tertullian De exhortatione castis*.10,1-2.). This elevated state was presumed to provide access to 'truth' which was denied to those who engaged in sexual activity.

Augustine's calculations that 'original' sin came from sexual intercourse ensured that sexual activity and sin would have the highest profile in Catholic theology. The identification of woman as the site and cause of sin ensured that women, sexuality and sin would be inextricably bound together in Catholic theology, as the doctrine of 'original' sin became a cornerstone of Catholic objective 'truth'. Implicit in this doctrine is the association of woman with nature and physicality, and the male with spirituality. The prejudicial notions about women and their bodies in the wider world are evident in Augustine's construction of this doctrine. Eve, not Adam was identified as the cause of sin in the world. Eve's body was the site of sin. Adam had been tempted to sin by a woman.

Augustine was convinced that had Eve not tempted Adam to sin, the human race would have remained in a state of pre-lapsarian purity. In his concern to ascertain whether Adam and Eve had sexual intercourse (*De bono con*.2) he reveals a link with the beliefs of the wider world.



‘I do not see what sort of help woman was created to provide men with, if one excludes the purpose of procreation, what other help could she be?’ (*De genesi ad litteram* 9:5-9).

Augustine also confirmed the inferior status of woman and her role of ‘service’. He used his mother Monica as an example, to remind women that their role in life was to serve men. He explained ‘When she reached marriageable age she was given to a husband whom she served as master’. Despite her husband’s infidelities, Monica avoided quarrels by never complaining.

‘They had all heard she said, the marriage contract read out to them and from that day they ought to regard it as a legal instrument by which they were made servants, so they should remember their station and not set themselves up against their masters’ (*Confessions* IX, 9).

It is evident from Augustine’s own discourse that his sexual theology was strongly influenced by the patriarchal beliefs and assumptions of the wider world. Augustine’s theology was a bio-theology with roots in biological determinism. His doctrine of ‘original’ sin was influenced by his beliefs in the inferiority of woman together with a fear of women and sexuality. This doctrine had a significant impact on the discourse on women and on the attitudes of continent males regarding women. Women’s bodies were the site of sin and sexual intercourse the expression of sin. Women, sex and sin were intertwined. This doctrine supported and sustained beliefs about the dangerousness of women, sexual activity and pollution existing in the wider world. Continent males therefore feared and avoided women who were seen as a threat to their sanctity. Women’s only acceptable role was to serve men and provide the means of procreation.

### The contribution of Albert.

In his discourse Albert the Great’s (c.1200-1280) appraisal of women reflected the prejudicial notions of a patriarchal world.

‘Woman is a misbegotten man and has a faulty and defective nature.....she is unsure of herself. What she cannot get she seeks to obtain through lying and diabolical deceptions....one must be one one’s guard with a woman as if she were a poisonous snake and the horned devil....woman is not cleverer but slyer, more cunning than man. Cleverness sounds like something good, slyness sounds like something evil. Thus in evil and perverse doings woman is cleverer that is, slyer than man, her feelings drive women towards evil, just as reason impels man toward good’ (*Questiones super de animalibus* XV, q,11).



Women were less qualified than men for moral behaviour. They were liars, untrustworthy and sly.

‘As I heard in the confessional in Cologne, delicate wooers seduce women with careful touches. The more these women seem to reject them, the more they really long for them and resolve to consent to them. But in order to appear chaste, they act as if they disapprove of such things’ (*Questiones super animalibus*, XIII, q:18).

This negative appraisal of women reflects patriarchal ideas of temperament, masculinity and femininity, in which men assign to themselves all that they most admire, and assign to women that which they find convenient.

The introduction by Albert of Aristotelian philosophy into Catholic theology, led to an increase in contempt for women. The *Corpus Aristotelicum* provided a wealth of observation, reflection and theory, which was new to the medieval (Copleston, 1982). Albert and his pupil Aquinas incorporated much of this ‘new’ thought into Church dogma. Copleston suggests that the philosophy of Aristotle appeared to a number of theologians to be dangerous and seductive, as it contradicted several points of Christian doctrine, however:

‘Aquinas...if he adopted and adapted a number of Aristotelian theories [did so] not because they were Aristotle’s nor yet because he thought them ‘useful’ but because he believed them to be true’ (Copleston, 1982:67).

Greek philosophy found a convenient resting-place in Catholic sexual theology. Together they supported and sustained patriarchy in the Church. Albert’s sexual theology demonstrates most clearly the continuity between the beliefs of the Greco/Roman world, which influenced the early Church and the Church of the Middle Ages.

### The contribution of Aquinas.

The discursive practice, which flows from discourse, is most clearly revealed in the sexual theology of Aquinas. The patriarchal construction of woman as mentally, physically and spiritually inferior to men is evident in his discourse. This construction leads to the imperative



for male control over women and their bodies. Echoing the views of the Greek philosophers Aquinas spoke of women as mentally defective.

‘[Woman] has a defect in her reasoning ability also evident in children and mentally ill persons’ (*Summa Theologiae* 11/11 q, 70a:3).

As mentally defective, women were excluded from Holy Orders. Divorce was also out of the question because:

‘woman is in no way adequate to educate children...the father on account of his more perfect reason [can better] instruct the children’ (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 111,122).

And:

‘the woman needs the man not only for generating and educating children but also for her personal master [for the man] is of more perfect reason and stronger virtue’.

The patriarchal construction of woman as mentally inferior to man serves to exclude women from Holy Orders and divorce and presumes that a woman is incapable of raising a child alone. Aquinas confirmed the patriarchal construction of woman as an inferior being. Man was the norm against which to measure woman. In unfavourable circumstances a woman, that is a ‘misbegotten’ man, was born. Woman [is] ‘a defect that does not correspond to nature’s first intention’ (*De animalibus*, 1:250) and ‘originating in some defect’ (*In II sent.* 20, 2,1,1; *De veritate* 5, 9 ad 9). As women did not respond to ‘nature’s first intention’ which aims for perfection, but to ‘nature’s second intention....decay, deformity and the weakness of age’ (*Summa theologiae*, 1,q. 99,a.2 ad 2), the only use Aquinas (as Augustine before him) could find for women in God’s plan is that ‘woman is intended for procreation’ (*Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 92,q.1).

Patriarchal attitudes, the patriarchal construction of woman and the importance of semen, are evident in this discourse. Aquinas, following the Greek philosophers and physicians, not only recognised semen as the active element in procreation but elevated it to the level of ‘divine liquid’ (*De Malo*, 15, 2). As Aquinas elevated semen to the 'divine', he re-enforced the

inferiority of women. Aquinas started with the principle that every active element created something like itself.

‘The energy in semen aims of itself to produce something equally as perfect, namely another man’ (*De animalibus*, 1, 25).

Implicit in this assumption was the further elevation of man, the possessor of semen. Women were confirmed as mere vessels for men’s ‘seed’.

The primacy of semen was a discursive creation at the heart of sexual theology. Whilst Aquinas gave married couples ‘excuses’ for sexual intercourse namely, procreation or the avoidance of fornication, his primary concern was to protect semen. Semen must be delivered in a ‘proper manner’ (the ‘missionary position’), into the ‘correct vessel’ (the womb), and for the ‘right reason’ (procreation). Man and woman must co-operate with nature and only have sexual intercourse in the ‘missionary position’, that is, with the woman on her back. Albert had told Aquinas that if a woman lay on top of a man the uterus was upside down therefore the semen would fall out (Ranke Heinemann, 1991). Aquinas considered positions other than this ‘missionary position’ as most seriously sinful as they were ‘unnatural’. In his concern to protect semen, Aquinas considered that sins worse than incest, rape and adultery were masturbation, bestiality, homosexuality, anal and oral intercourse and coitus interruptus (*Summa Theologiae* 11/11, q. 154, a. 12). In the case of incest, rape and adultery semen was delivered into the ‘correct vessel’ if not in the ‘proper manner’ or for the ‘right reason’. With masturbation, anal and oral intercourse and coitus interruptus, semen was not deposited in the ‘correct vessel’ or was ‘spilled on the ground’. Concern to protect semen overwhelmed any possible consideration for the ‘vessel’ that is woman. Woman was confirmed as an object to be used by men for the avoidance of fornication and for procreation.

Central to patriarchal control of women in the Church was the control of reproduction and contraception. As woman’s primary role was to co-operate with nature in the act of procreation,



in any act of intercourse a woman must always be open to the reception of semen. After the sin of murder the sin of preventing generation came second (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 111, 122).

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, contraception had been inflated to murder.

‘Those affected with this vice are murderers of human beings....truly murderers of children’ (*Bernard of Sienna* (d.1444), quoted in Ranke Heinemann, 1991).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Sixtus V introduced the death penalty (for women) for contraception through potions. Justification for such a severe sanction was that reproduction must remain in the hands of men for:

‘if women were to be allowed to prevent conception.....this would be an astonishing abuse and great damage would be done to human reproduction’ (Noonan, 1965:331).

Male control of reproduction and contraception was justified by the patriarchal belief in the greater intelligence and efficacy of men and the ignorance of women, which prevented them from making decisions about contraception for themselves.

Whilst there are continuities between Greek thought and the theology of Albert and Aquinas concerning the protection of semen there is a significant difference. In the Greco/Roman world the concern for semen was linked to the ‘care of the self’ (Foucault, 1985). The loss of ‘vital spirit’ or semen was linked to death, ill-health or becoming ‘womanish’. The sex act was associated with the whole body coming together in one act (Brown, 1991). The genitals were afforded no special place but performed together with the whole body, they were mere points of passage. In Christianity, the loss of semen became synonymous with sin and death of the soul. Christian sexual theology came to rest on the protection of semen and on genital sex. As it did so, the control of women and their bodies increased.

In describing woman as a ‘misbegotten’ man, Aquinas illustrates most clearly a direct continuity between the beliefs and assumptions of the Greek philosophers and the sexual theology of the

Catholic Church. The elevation of semen to the status of 'divine liquid' strengthened the imperative to protect semen. Unlawful emissions of semen were confirmed as sinful hence sexual activity became hedged in with sanctions and prohibitions. Women were confirmed as mere vessels for men's 'seed' and penalties escalated, for women who practised contraception.

Mariology, an element in apparatuses of power.

Sexual theology as an apparatus of power inscribed women's bodies as the site and cause of sin in the world, but in so doing it created for itself a problem. During the development of Catholic theology, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was elevated to the status of 'Mother of God'. This elevated status was not without its problems, for Mary was a woman and women had no status in a patriarchal Church. The solution was to make Mary 'exceptional'.

The doctrine of original sin posed the first problem. Augustine had concluded that original sin was passed from generation to generation by the act of intercourse. This meant that as Mary's parents had sexual intercourse they would have passed original sin to Mary. The Son of God could not be born from a mother tainted by original sin, so the solution was to declare Mary 'Immaculate' that is, she was the only human person, apart from Christ, to have been born without the stain of original sin. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception developed over many centuries culminating in 1854 with the papal *Bull Ineffabilis Deus* when Pius IX raised the *Immaculate Conception* to a dogma of faith. Mary was the exceptional woman. Mary represented woman before the fall. Mary was the 'Second Eve'.

The biological processes of conception and childbirth posed the second problem. Mary could not engage in sexual intercourse as other women, neither could she be contaminated during childbirth. The solution was to make the conception and birth of Jesus exceptional. Mary conceived from the Holy Spirit without knowledge of man. In response to Reformist rationalist theology Paul IV taught, in *Constitution Cum Quorundam Hominum* (1555), 'our Lord was



conceived from the Holy Spirit according to the flesh in the womb of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin', not from the seed of Joseph. Mary's role was not one of partnership with God, she was a vessel used in God's plan of redemption. Mary 'co-operated with God' in a spirit of perfect obedience. 'I am the handmaid of the Lord' (*Lk.1.28*). In order to remove Mary from the contamination of blood during childbirth her birth experience was exceptional. She gave birth 'miraculously', her hymen was not shattered but remained intact thus proving that she remained a virgin. Mary was thus undefiled by sex and sin, an obedient mother and virgin.

Whilst the belief in the 'unshattered hymen' was not raised to the level of doctrine it did form a significant part of the discourse. Sexual theology had re-constituted Mary as the exceptional woman and presented her to Catholic women as an impossible project for their bodies, the perfect wife, mother and virgin. Mary was an anomaly, the exception that proved the rule. Mary, by foregoing sex and adopting motherhood, heightened the awareness that marriage and childbirth or virginity was the unquestioned destiny of all other women. Mary, the perfect woman, became an element in the apparatuses of power which segregate and subordinate women in the Church.

### Conclusion.

The patriarchal discourse in the world in which Christianity took root was a discourse of biological determinism in which woman was constructed as man's inferior other. It is evident that Catholic organisation, institutions, theology and sexual theology were influenced by the world from which it sprang. Documentary evidence demonstrates that the early Church was affected by its immediate cultural milieu. The language patterns of early writings reflect patriarchal assumptions commonplace in the societies within which the Church was to flourish. Such early writings reveal that the ideology of patriarchy permeated the Church from its inception. Patriarchal beliefs and ideas about temperament, role and status informed its structures, institutions and belief system which together created a system of relations which

supported and sustained the power of the emerging Orthodox Church. The biological determinism of patriarchy was instrumental in the development of a theological determinism, which presented male superiority as 'divinely given'. Traditional Orthodox theology is in fact a bio-theology.

The patriarchal gendered Orthodox discourse produced discursive practice. Public patriarchy segregated and subordinated women as they were gradually excluded from public participation in the Church. A male God justified these political and social arrangements and a patriarchal discourse supported and sustained the rising power and authority of a sex-specific, clerical caste, an apparatus of power, which held spiritual property and interpreted religious meaning. The theological determinism of the Orthodox discourse supported and sustained patriarchy in the Church.

The discursive connection between women, sex and sin inscribed women's bodies as the entry-point of evil into the world and women, sex and sin, were inextricably intertwined. The discourses of Augustine, Albert and Aquinas were permeated with patriarchal assumptions of male superiority, fear of women and of sexuality. These discourses provided the means by which patriarchal beliefs about women would persist in Catholic sexual theology.

The biological evidence in Greek philosophical and medical discourses regarding the primacy of semen in procreation was central to the formulation of sexual theology. Men's primary role in procreation condoned male control of reproduction and sexual theology developed as an apparatus of power which controlled women and their bodies. Concern to protect semen concentrated attention on the discrete behaviour surrounding the sexual act with scant regard for women and their well-being. Women were victims in a process of objectivisation and constraint, in a system of power relations that favoured men. In the Church, this process of objectivisation was complemented by dividing practices, in which women were segregated and



compartmentalised. Knowledge about women and semen underpinned theological concepts and religious practice. Catholic sexual theology rooted in the beliefs surrounding semen, which emerged from the biological determinism of patriarchy, was a theology of semen. Any challenge to patriarchal ideas of temperament, role and status, any 'new' knowledge about women or semen is by implication a challenge to the apparatuses of power which depend upon a biologically determined sexual theology.

There were significant errors, deviations, reversals, false appraisals and calculations about women, their bodies, men and their bodies and reproduction, which gave rise to apparatuses of power which were sex-specific and damaging to women. The concepts that underpin these apparatuses, continue to exist and have value in the Catholic Church. The aim of *descent* is to question that which was previously considered absolute, therefore this thesis questions the validity and reliability of Catholic sexual theology, for it relies strongly on biological errors contained within the patriarchal discourse together with false appraisals and calculations about women and men which have been challenged by contemporary scientific knowledge. The empirical research will attempt to discover the value of these things in the everyday lives of women and priests.

Religious discourse was affected by the patriarchal discourses of the wider world. The cultural and philosophical discourses of the Greco-Roman world reveal the biologically determined beliefs about women and men, which became accepted as 'truth'. There was a correlation between the religious discourse on women in the Orthodox Church and that of the wider patriarchal world.

The patriarchal discourse of the world can be traced through the religious discourse on women in the medieval Church. The patriarchal ideas contained within the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, confirmed existing beliefs about men and women. The religious discourses of Augustine,

Albert and Aquinas demonstrate the persistence of patriarchal ideas in Catholic sexual theology.

The following chapter focuses on significant episodes of *emergence*, the Renaissance, Reformation and the Enlightenment. It also considers whether the religious discourse about women changed as a result of the Reformation.



## CHAPTER THREE.

### **The Renaissance, the Reformations and the Enlightenment.**

#### Introduction.

Chapter three traces the complex course of *descent* through the heterogeneous layers of ideas that gave rise to the significant episodes of *emergence*, that is, the Catholic and Protestant Reformations. It notes the existence of Catholic pre-Reformation movements in religious orders that were concerned to react against degeneration and gain strength through mortifications and piety. These were generally contained within the Church whilst lay reformers were excommunicated as heretics. Disillusionment with the papacy and the clergy in general provided fertile ground for the emergence of charismatic leaders who challenged the authority of the hierarchical priesthood. It also encouraged the growth of mysticism and popular religion. Some early reformers embraced humanism. Humanism was marked by a fundamental shift from a theocratic God-centred world, to an anthropocratic man-centred world that was credited with the notion of history as the processes of change and progress. The humanism of the Renaissance prepared the way for the Protestant emphasis on individual conscience. The Renaissance set in motion a long process of disintegration in which culminated the Reformation and the birth of modern Europe.

Catholic and Protestant reformers were concerned to 'purify' religious observance and reform Church structures. As reformers distanced themselves from each other in terms of doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues, schism was inevitable. The ideas of reformers such as Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, threatened the power and authority of the clerical hierarchy, for the Reformation was aimed against the whole concept of the Church, as a priestly-sacramental organism of salvation. The Catholic Counter-Reformation represented a force, which reacted against the challenges posed by the reformers and aimed to strengthen the Catholic Church. On the surface, the Counter-Reformation was a success, but conformity and uniformity was only achieved through

strict control of clergy and laity. The Council of Trent (1554-1556) set up the Jesuits, the Holy Office and the Office for the Propagation of the Faith as apparatuses of power dedicated to the durability of Catholic doctrine and tradition. These apparatuses of power were vehicles by and through which traditional ideas and values were perpetuated in the Church.

This chapter refutes claims that the Reformation improved the place and position of women in the Protestant Church or in the Catholic Church. Whilst reformers challenged the abuses of institutional power together with the authority to interpret the 'Word of God' that accompanied it they did not challenge male power in the Church or in the family. It could be argued that following the Reformation the position of women worsened in both Protestant and Catholic Churches.

The Church responded to the challenges posed by the Enlightenment in a way similar to their reaction to the Reformation. This time the major challenge came from without rather than from within. Scientific analysis and theories of evolution challenged not merely the traditional ideas of the Church but the need for a God or a Church at all. The *Syllabus of Errors* rejected the ideas of the modern world and any questioning of traditional teaching was declared anathema.

The other significant shift was the changing place of women in the western world. The rise of feminism posed a threat to patriarchy in the Church as feminists rejected ideas of women's inferiority and called for equal rights for women. The idea that women were equal to men presented the Church with a fundamental threat to its theology, institutions and structures. The Church resisted calls for women's equality wherever it could and continued to offer women traditional roles of motherhood or virginity. The traditional ideas of the Church remained intact as the Church retreated into a ghetto of its own making in an attempt to avoid degeneration and regain strength.



This chapter uses exclusive language to emphasise the masculine nature of the discourses of the Reformations and of the Enlightenment.

### The Renaissance.

The Reformation marked a 'moment of arising', an episode in which forces within Christianity struggled against one another and adverse circumstances in order to gain strength and avoid degeneration. Reform rode on the wave of religious revival, which swept through Europe during the Renaissance. The Reformation was launched by men who had every intention of keeping the Catholic Church intact. They were not concerned with the position and place of women in the Church; consequently, sexism remained unchallenged. Reformers within the Church were concerned to correct abuses and to return to the Gospel of Love, which by this time bore no relation to reality. What started as a broad religious revival within the Church gradually divided into two camps, the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Reformation. This schism fragmented the unity of Christendom as it revealed the heterogeneous nature of what had previously been presumed consistent.

The Protestant Reformation did not start with Luther, Calvin or Zwingli, but with the ideas that emerged over several preceding centuries. The nature of Church authority had, for example, been a concern of Marsilius of Padua (c.1275-1342) who opposed claims that the Church was a divinely instituted hierarchical institution with papal primacy. His book *Defensor Pacis* influenced conciliarist thought and the theologians of the Reformation, especially Luther. Marsilius attributed a normative value to Scripture alone, and rigorously applied the political philosophy of Aristotle to the Church (Neuner and Dupuis, 1983). Challenges to papal power and authority were met by the re-affirmation of the authority of the pope over the bishops and over secular rulers. In response to Marsilius, Pope John XXII in the *Bull Licet Juxta Doctrinam*, condemned especially: the denial of the divine institution of the hierarchy, of the papal primacy, of all ecclesiastical coercive power and the subordination of the pope to the



emperor. Six hundred years later the debate about papal power remained a live issue in the papal primacy versus collegiality debate during the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-65). The significance of papal primacy will be discussed in chapter four.

In Catholic pre-Reformation movements, reform broadly concentrated in two areas: in the religious orders and in schismatic movements led by charismatic leaders. In order to correct abuses and to avoid degeneration many religious orders were reformed or renewed and rules of austerity, self-denial and service to God were devised. In contradistinction to parish clergy, they submitted themselves to vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Later the sexual renunciation of the religious orders would provide a model for priestly celibacy. Benedict in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Bernard Clairvaux (founder of the Cistercian order) in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and later the Augustinian friars, reformed their rule. The Franciscans were founded in 1209 and the rise of the Dominican and Franciscan friars was a response to the inadequacy of parish clergy. These friars did not live in enclosed orders but went out into the world teaching and preaching whilst continuing to live under vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross reformed a branch of the Carmelite order, the Discalced (without shoes) Carmelites. Such reformers were contained within the Church but lay reform movements were usually treated as heretical.

Clerical and lay reformers of the Renaissance continued the concerns about the ruling hierarchy, clerical behaviour and attitudes. Huge revenues supported the magnificence of the papal court and Church leaders lived out their lives as true Princes of the Church. The lavish courts, Church patronage of high culture and the temporal ambitions of the papacy indicated a growing worldliness of the Church's hierarchy (Palmer and Colton, 1978). This together with the frequent use of ecclesiastical power for political reasons and the rejection of ecclesial authority by the various anti-clerical movements of the Middle Ages contributed to the Reformation. The Beguines refused to be subject to male, priestly supervision or to become cloistered. They were



eventually suppressed (Bynum,1982). A proliferation of popular sects sprang up: the *Fraticelli* or Franciscan spirituals, wandering mendicants, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the mystical *Gottesfreunde* or Friends of God, the Lollards in England, all of whom were persecuted by the Inquisition.

Concerns about papal power and clerical behaviour provided fertile ground in which a number of charismatic leaders emerged. Jon Wyclif (c.1330-84) Master of Balliol College who rejected papal primacy and denied the teaching on transubstantiation of the Eucharist, was condemned as heretic. Jan Hus (1372-1415) lecturer of the University of Prague who was influenced by Wyclif and conceived the concept of Predestination and the Church of the Elect, was excommunicated. Charismatic leaders attracted a following and lay movements were not as easily contained, as those of the religious orders.

The blatant abuse of ecclesiastical power was a factor in the retreat to mysticism with its emphasis on religious ecstasy and on the experience of direct communion with God (Tarnas,1996). The mystical tradition, which gave precedence to religious intuition over rational belief, found expression in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and took root in the population at large. In the wave of mystical fervour which swept through much of Europe, many clergy and laity no longer found the need for institutionalised sacraments and collective forms of worship as they aimed to achieve direct inner union with the divine. Popular religiosity and intense piety increased, not least as a consequence of the belief that the Black Death had been sent by God to punish the Church and its excesses. Authors such as Thomas à Kempis (c1379-1471), who wrote *Imitatio Christi* and Walter Hilton (d.1396), who penned *The Ladder of Perfection* and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, taught Christians to cultivate the inner life and to shun the world which they could not control and mortify the flesh.

The period from the Middle Ages to the Reformation was a period of transition, a melting pot of competing and often contradictory beliefs, ideas and interpretations of the world.

‘The world of the Renaissance and the Reformation was also the world of divination, astrology, miracles, and witchcraft (that is, perceived as such) folk lore, ghosts, omens and fairies. Magic continued to compete with religion and science. Indeed, the domination of magic among the common people held sway through a long period of cohabitation with the new ideas over two centuries or more’ (Davies,1996:469).

The Renaissance was the first major episode in which the forces that shaped the Reformation gained strength. It was a key stage in the development of ideas, which had evolved over several centuries and was the precursor to the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and to the Enlightenment.

‘[The Renaissance] was the spiritual force which cracked the mould of medieval civilisation, setting in motion, the long process of disintegration which gradually gave birth to modern Europe’ (Davies,1996:471).

The Renaissance and its religious reforms, becomes comprehensible with reference to the depths of disrepute to which the medieval Church, the fount of all authority, had fallen. The quality of the Renaissance was an ‘independence of mind’ which needed no outside authority for the formation of knowledge or beliefs. Theologians, scientists, philosophers, artists and writers were freed from the control of the Church. It was the birth of *l’homo universale*, the ‘complete man’ (Davies,1996). The principal product of new thinking was the conviction that humanity was capable of mastering the world. Man’s fate on earth could be controlled and improved, the opposite of the mentality of the middle ages, whose religiosity and mysticism were reinforced by the belief that man was helpless in the sight of God, unable to understand the environment or his own nature. Medieval attitudes were paralysed by the concept of universal sin. The Renaissance looked to the conquest of fear and inhibitions and opened the door to new ideas that would resonate through the centuries. These were significant in the later development of the maturation of individual conscience.



The cause of the Renaissance can be related to the rise of the cities, trade, the rise of rich and powerful patrons and technical progress, but the source of spiritual developments must be sought in the malaise of the Church and the despondency surrounding traditional teaching. The roots of the Renaissance and the Reformation can be found in the realm of ideas. The rise of biblical scholarship also formed an important bond between the Renaissance and the Reformation, which was to place special emphasis on the authority of Scripture. This emphasis on Scripture was not reflected in the Catholic Church and it was not until the 2nd Vatican Council that Scripture readings and study assumed an importance in the everyday life of the Church.

The 'humanism' of the Renaissance was marked by a fundamental shift from the theocratic or God-centred world-view of the Middle Ages to the anthropocratic or man-centred view of the Renaissance. Its manifesto may be seen to have been written by Pico in his treatise *On The Dignity of Man*; and in time diffused all branches of knowledge and art. Renaissance humanism is credited with the concept of human personality, created by the new emphasis on the uniqueness and worth of the individual and with the birth of history as the study of the processes of change and hence the notion of progress: it is also connected with the scientific principle that nothing should be taken as true unless it can be tried and tested. In religious thought, it is seen as the necessary precondition for the Protestant emphasis on the individual conscience. In politics, it gave emphasis to the idea of the sovereign state as opposed to the unity of Christendom, hence to the beginnings of modern nationality. Renaissance humanism contradicted the prevailing codes and assumptions of Christian practice and has therefore been seen as the destruction of religion. All the developments from the Renaissance, from Cartesian rationality to Darwinian science have been judged by fundamentalists to be contrary to religion; yet Christianity has accepted and accommodated them. Through all of the conflicts which ensued, a new and ever-changing synthesis was found between faith and reason, tradition and innovation, convention and conviction.



There has always been evidence of a diversity of ideas in the Church and the Reformation was no exception to this. Humanists were often prominent Churchmen, such as Cardinal Beaufort and Cardinal Olesnicki, who did much to marry the new humanism to Catholic tradition. The greatest amongst them was Gerhard Gerhards (c1466-1536) (better known as 'Erasmus'). A true Protestant against the abuses of the Church, Erasmus asked Julius II 'what disasters would befall if ever the supreme pontiffs, the Vicars of Christ, should make the attempt to imitate His life of poverty and toil'? Humanist ideas that competed with traditional Catholic teachings and practices were condemned. Erasmus encountered resistance and his books remained on the Church's *Index* (of prohibited books) for centuries, but they were freely printed in Switzerland, England and the Netherlands and his ideas greatly influenced the Reformation.

The stirrings of religious revival coincided with the nadir of the Church's reputation. The Papal Schism (1378-1414) gave great scandal, as Urban VI and Clement VII, both elected by the same College of Cardinals, preached over and against each other. The schism ended with the unanimous acclamation of Martin V (1417-31). Underlying these problems was the issue of papal power and the position and place of the College of Cardinals, an issue that was later to re-emerge as a struggle between competing forces at the 2nd Vatican Council.

The papacies of Rodrigo de Borgia (Alexander VI, 1492-1503) and Giuliano della Rovere (Julius II, 1503-13) did nothing to improve the reputation of either the papacy or the Church, marked as they were by the sexual excesses of Alexander VI and the love of war and conquest of Julius II. In order to finance his wars Julius II sold indulgences. Luther, Professor of Theology at Wittgenstein challenged the sale of indulgences when he discovered Johann Tetzel selling them in Germany. There is some question as to whether Luther ever nailed his 95 Theses (arguments against indulgences) to the door of Wittenberg's castle church, but following a series of public disputations Luther was excommunicated in June 1520.



### The Protestant Reformation.

The Protestant reformers only concerned themselves with teaching that differed from Catholic teaching. The issue of sexism in the Church was not on the agenda and the subordination of women continued to be a feature of Protestantism as it had been a feature of Catholicism.

As the ideas of reformers crystallised around key issues of doctrine and ecclesiastical power and as such ideas could not be contained within the Church, schism was inevitable. Charismatic leaders such as Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, formulated doctrines that challenged the authority and teachings of the Church. Luther wrote the primary treatises of Lutheranism; the *Resolutions, Liberty of a Christian Man, Address to the German Nation, On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church of God*, and publicly burned the papal Bull of Excommunication. In Switzerland, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) correspondent of Erasmus, challenged the Church on both ecclesiastical organisation and on doctrine. He denounced indulgences and shared Luther's concept of 'justification by faith', rejected the authority of the bishops and taught that the Eucharist was merely a symbolic ceremony. The underlying issues concerned male power and authority in the Church. In Geneva Jean Calvin (1509-64) the founder of the most widely influential branch of Protestantism, insisted on the competence of the local congregation. The competence of the local congregation was of course located in the men of the community and not in the women.

Where power lies in the Christian churches is a crucially important issue for women for in patriarchal churches all power and authority lies with men. The challenges to papal authority by the reformers did not extend to a challenge to male power *per se* and the subordinate position of women remained a feature of Protestantism and Catholicism.

Several major issues divided the Catholic and Protestant reformers and in some cases divided the Protestants amongst themselves. Crucial issues were the concepts of the Church and the

sacraments especially baptism and the Eucharist. Catholics accepted and elaborated on the New Testament teaching that the Church was established by Christ and endowed with the Holy Spirit and not a voluntary association of disciples. There was only one body founded by Christ. The Church's divine origin it was holy and universal and its doctrine was apostolic, and the purity of the sacraments ensured that it was the true Church. Any rejection of the Church's apostolic doctrine was seen as heresy.

A sacrament was according to Thomas Aquinas, 'the sign of a sacred thing in so far as it sanctifies men'. There were seven such signs, baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, marriage, holy orders and extreme unction. These seven sacraments ensured the superior status of the priest as the intermediary between God and the people. Of these, only baptism and the Eucharist were scripturally ordered, but during the Middle Ages Catholic views about the nature of Church and the sacraments, were continually being modified and it was not only the official teaching of the Church on these subjects that Protestant and Catholic reformers questioned, but also the practices associated with them.

Protestant reformers asked questions about the sacraments and about the nature of Church as a spiritual and temporal institution. Celebration of the sacraments was a public and communal act, which emphasised the community of the faithful rather than the individual relationship with God. As Protestant reformers stressed the unmediated individual relationship with God, they saw many of the sacraments as unnecessary. Many reformers believed that the only true sacraments were those in which Christ himself had participated. Thus, only baptism and the Eucharist were permissible and the ways in which these were administered, underpinned Protestant objections to authority in the Church.

The administration of baptism to infants was an issue for some radical Protestant groups. The Anabaptists for example, claimed that baptism could only be properly administered to adults,



which was reminiscent of the thinking of early Gnostic Christian groups. Luther and Calvin both advocated infant baptism. On the question of the Eucharist reformers differed over transubstantiation. Luther did not accept the doctrine of transubstantiation but preferred 'consubstantiation' or other alternatives. Zwingli maintained that the bread and wine were signs of the body and blood of Christ and were to be a 'remembrance of the sacrifice'. For Calvin the Eucharist was more than a sign of spiritual grace; it was also an instrument for imparting grace to the recipient.

The Catholic Church required that communicants were in 'a state of grace', that is, they should have expressed contrition for their sins, confessed them to a priest and performed a penance. The Protestant reformers refused to accept penance as a sacrament as they believed it was not necessary to salvation. Justification by faith not the acknowledgement of sins, was the sign of salvation.

The nature of the Eucharist is important as it is related to the role of the priesthood. If there is no transubstantiation, there is no need for a priest to perform an act of sacrifice. Priests are not needed as intermediaries to render the sacrament valid and to administer it to the laity. The Reformation was aimed against the whole concept of Church as a priestly-sacramental organism of salvation in favour of a one-to-one direct relationship between God and believer. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers challenged the hierarchical and sacerdotal view of the Church. Whilst the practical application of the belief in the priesthood of all believers varied amongst Protestant reformers it undermined the authority of the hierarchical priesthood. Generally, priests were no longer seen as mediators with God, but as evangelists preaching the word of God.

Centuries later some of these ideas found a resonance in the ideas of the 2nd Vatican Council. The 'royal priesthood' described in Vatican II documents mirrors the reformers notion of the priesthood of all believers. Despite the notion of a 'royal priesthood', Vatican II documents and

subsequent popes were careful to point to the continuing distinction between the sacramental priesthood and the laity.

Luther, Calvin and Zwingli had different ideas about the nature of Church. All subscribed to the distinction between the visible body of the Church on earth and the Church of the elect in heaven. All shared the importance of the outward and visible organisation as an aid to faith. All recognised that it was only God who could identify the elect. All condemned priesthood as a sacrament but agreed on the idea of ministry. A minister was to be only a 'functionary' and the only real difference between the clergy and the laity was one of office not estate. For Zwingli the idea of the confession of faith was fundamental to his vision of Church. Ministry was inspired by God but only performed after appointment by a congregation. Calvin believed that the minister should be 'called' by the congregation and the spirit and the principal activities preaching and administration of the sacraments. These ideas can be found today in Catholic Liberation theology where similarly the essence of Church is the congregation with its minister. With regard to the sacraments, the idea of church officials ordained by God was lost and bishops were no more preservers of apostolic succession than were the ordinary clergy. These ideas about sacraments, the role of the priesthood and the organisation of the Church were significant deviations, which threatened the power and authority of the papacy and the priesthood.

Protestant reformers placed ultimate authority in the Scriptures, whilst the Catholic Church held that ultimate authority for the teaching, organisation and rules for the Christian Church, lay in the 'Word of God' as interpreted by the Church and established by tradition. Scripture was not the sole repository of knowledge and it was only the Church itself, which could interpret authoritatively the true meaning of Scripture. The heated debates amongst Protestants about the meaning of Scriptural passages further convinced the Catholic Church that it provided the only authentic interpretation. Apostolic tradition also held revealed 'truths' which were not revealed



in Scripture. The Council of Trent (1554-1556) increased the emphasis on the authority of the Church and emphasised the roles and traditions that the Protestants had attacked as unscriptural accretions and corruptions.

The ideas of the reformers had wide-reaching religious and political consequences (Davies,1996). The emphasis on Bible-reading made a major impact on education in Protestant countries and on popular literacy. In the economic sphere, their ideas made a contribution to enterprise culture and to the rise of capitalism. In politics, they were a cause of disagreement both between states and between rival groupings within states. The ideas of the reformers dealt a fatal blow to the ideal of a united Christendom. In England, Henry VIII initiated political policies that would separate the English Church from Rome. The Act of Annates (1532) cut financial payments to Rome. The Act of Appeals (1533) curtailed Rome's ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Act of Supremacy abolished papal authority and raised the king the Supreme Head of the Church in England. The 39 Articles (1536) asserted the inviolability of the Roman Mass and of traditional doctrine and synthesised Erastianism, Lutherism, Zwinglism, Calvinism and traditional Catholic influences. In Scotland, John Knox (1513-72) established Calvinism as the established religion of Scotland, in a form known as Presbyterianism.

#### The Counter Reformation.

The Counter Reformation, or as Catholic historians see it, the second stage of a movement for Church reform, which had a continuous history from the conciliarists of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century to the Council of Trent, interacted with all the other great phenomenon of the age.

Alessandro Farnese, Pope Paul III (1534-49) saw the urgency of employing strategies that would avoid further degeneration and strengthen the Church. He commissioned the enquiry into Church reform *Consilium de Emendanda Ecclesia* (1537) patronised the Jesuits, established the Holy Office and called the Council of Trent. The Society of Jesus, the *corps d'elite* of



Catholic reform, which combined the fierce piety and military lifestyle of its founder Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), was approved by papal *Bull Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae* and operated under papal command. It was organised along military lines and aimed to convert the heathen, reconvert the lapsed and to educate the faithful. Jesuit colleges sprang up all over Europe and within decades, Jesuit missionaries appeared all over the world. The Jesuits aroused fear and resentment amongst Catholics and Protestants alike, for they often acted as if 'the end justifies the means' and were soon thought of as the Church's secret police accountable to no-one. The society was suppressed in 1773 but restored in 1814.

The Holy Office (est.1542) was the supreme court of appeal in matters of heresy. It assumed supervision of the Inquisition and in 1557 issued the first *Index*. In 1588 it became an executive department of the Roman Curia and worked alongside the Office for the Propagation of the Faith, which was charged with converting the heathen and heretics. These apparatuses of power dedicated to the conformity and durability of Catholic doctrine and tradition were instrumental in the continued subordination of women in the Church.

The Council of Trent met in three sessions, 1545-7,1551-2,1562-3 and provided the doctrinal definitions and the institutional structures which enabled the Roman Catholic Church to revive and meet the Protestant challenge. It confirmed that religious truth derived from Catholic tradition as well as from the Bible and declared that the Church alone could interpret the Scriptures. It upheld traditional views on original sin, justification and merit, and confirmed the 'real presence' in the Eucharist. It strengthened Catholic teaching of the mediation of grace through the priestly-sacramental Church. The supernatural power of the priesthood was reaffirmed as Church orders and the appointment of bishops were regularised and discipline and uniformity of the clergy was to become a reality through the establishment of seminaries in every diocese. The accentuation of the different estates of clergy and laity separated the male priests from the male and female people and accentuated the male character of the sacred. A



new catechism and the form of the Mass affected the lives of ordinary Catholics most directly, for after 1563 the same Latin Tridentine Mass could be heard in Catholic churches around the world.

Paradoxically, the General Council, so long awaited by conciliarists and through which they had intended to restrict the power of the papacy, produced oaths of loyalty, regulations and punishments, by which the entire Catholic hierarchy was subordinated to the pope. The doctrinal definitions and structural changes imposed upon the whole Church, were decided by a minority of bishops (only 237 bishops out of 500 European bishops ever voted at Trent) and the most important doctrinal issues were made by less than 72 bishops (Davies,1996). In July 1564, the pope issued a Bull that made the decisions of the Council obligatory for the whole Church.

The Counter-Reformation emphasised the discipline and collective life of the faithful. Believers were required to demonstrate an outward show of conformity. This was enforced by the hierarchy through the use of regular confession as a sign of submission and through public displays of unity, which focused on pilgrimages, ceremonies and processions. The splendour of the Baroque churches of the era was designed to induce awe and to leave nothing to the private thoughts of the congregation. The faithful were called to blind obedience.

The separation of the people from the celibate purity of the male priestly caste was emphasised. The cult of the Virgin Mary, the divine mediator with Christ, was officially adopted and the Ave Maria ('Hail Mary') was added to the order of the Mass after the Pater Noster. Patron saints, the veneration of relics and pilgrimages were retained as a part of everyday life. Belief in the supernatural continued to be reinforced by teaching about an elaborate hierarchy of saints and angels and the fear of the devil and hell.

On the surface, the Counter-Reformation was a success as Catholicism recovered much lost territory with a rigour and a dynamic, which contrasted with the decline of the previous centuries. It was a 'political success' but apparently not necessarily a total success with the ordinary people, for reformers had to spend every effort to ensure a degree of attachment to Tridentine Catholicism and their opposition to popular religion strengthened.

After Trent, the sacred became even more defined than before as a separate category with an increased emphasis on the separation of the clergy and the laity. Processions provided the people with a Tridentine spectacle in which they were observers or followers. The superiority of the celibate was re-asserted and anyone who did not hold this to be true was declared anathema.

Male religious orders and nuns were already significantly separated out and clerics including parish priests had a separate legal status. In the pre-Reformation period the parish priest was a peasant, like his congregation and it was several decades before the separation between priests and people was achieved. Following Trent there was condemnation of the blending of roles between priests and people.

The counter-offensive of Trent involved measures to 'purify' the Church, to make clear the Church's position on key issues and to define and eradicate the teachings and practices which threatened Church authority. Trent gave bishops authority and responsibility for religious teaching in an attempt to strengthen further the religious authority of the priest. Parents were not given authority to teach their children religious matters, for if husbands and wives were spiritually inferior then their potentially subversive religious teaching was likely to disregard the traditional teaching of the celibate hierarchy and undermine priestly authority. The Tridentine canons and decrees on 'domestic' and sexual matters arose from a concern to re-establish the Church and its priests as the authority in family life in the face of the Protestant attack on their authority.



In spite of the paucity of historical analysis of women during the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, it has been claimed that the Reformation improved or raised the position of women in the family and in society. This claim is based on assumptions that arise from Protestant teaching on sex and marriage, together with the woman's role as wife and mother. Certainly virginity was no longer the ideal, but the cloistered life had offered women a refuge from the world. Under Catholicism women could go into a convent, whilst remaining supervised by bishops, 'protectors' and male confessors. Under Protestantism, this option was removed. Although marriage was no longer considered a sacrament it was considered a superior state and Luther is said to have sanctioned sex as a normal healthy appetite, not sinful in marriage and not inevitably for procreation. This might lead to the assumption that the way in which women were viewed had undergone a change. This was not the case for a woman's role was strictly limited and she remained under the control of her husband in the patriarchal family. Women continued to be viewed as dangerous sexual beings in need of control and despite the acceptance that sex within marriage was for things other than procreation, women remained sexual objects to be used by men. The continued objectivisation of women is evidenced by the fact that Protestant leaders denied women any right to deny her husband's sexual advances and continued to deny women divorce. Neither Protestant nor Catholic reformers reformed patriarchy. In both branches of Christianity, women remained segregated and subordinated and patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status remained the same. There was no Reformation for women.

### The Enlightenment.

The changing view of the world, which began to emerge with the Renaissance and culminated in the Enlightenment, presented major challenges for the Church. As a consequence of Descartes' scientific analysis and Newtonian mechanics, the notion of a God who actively intervened in human history came under threat, for Newtonian mechanics presented the world



as a perfectly ordered machine, governed by mathematical laws and comprehensible by human science. Newtonian-Cartesian cosmology established the foundation of a scientific world-view, which was able to accommodate God. God had created the universe as a complex mechanical system that could be analysed mathematically. The main image of the Creator was that of divine architect, master mathematician and clock maker who had set the universe in motion then withdrew. Later evolutionary theory provided a dynamic explanation for the origin of the species and provoked a fundamental shift away from the predictable harmony of the Cartesian/Newtonian world in its recognition of nature's ceaseless change, struggle and development. In so doing, evolutionary theory impaired the revolution's compromise with the traditional Christian perspective. Darwin's theory that natural selection governed the processes of life rather than the Bible's purposeful creation, challenged not only the literal truth of the Bible but the nature or even the existence of the Christian God Himself. In so doing it challenged not only the image of a God who intervened in history but the theology, structures, institutions and doctrines which had been constructed around such a God. Darwinism made Christ's intervention in human history implausible.

There was a significant change occurring in the western mind. Scepticism rather than faith held sway (Tarnas 1996). The purpose of knowledge for the medieval mind was to better obey God's will, the purpose for modern man was to better align nature to man's will. In contrast with the medieval Christian worldview, modern man's intellectual and spiritual independence need not depend on any religious belief or institutional structure for its autonomy and self-expression. Man through reason and logic had achieved dominion over the force of nature. Man could, by his own efforts, manipulate the natural world. Increasingly sophisticated analysis and systematic efforts to extend man's intellectual and existential independence in every realm, physical, social, political, religious and scientific, would provide for human fulfilment. Cleared of traditional prejudices and superstitions the mind would be open to self-evident truth within a rational world. An autonomous human being was emerging, an individual



citizen who was responsible for his own beliefs and actions, less dependent upon an omnipotent God. Consequently, modern man was less dependent on the Church and the clergy for his personal fulfilment.

As Christianity lost much of its relevance in secular intellectual discourse, there was a need for another type of belief system. Gradually science replaced religion as pre-eminent intellectual authority, as definer and guardian of the cultural worldview. In its own way, it became as dogmatic as the religious view of the world had been previously. Human research and empirical observation replaced theological doctrine and scriptural revelation as the principle for comprehending the universe. It is fair to say that no monolithic structure of belief any longer held sway, but a more sceptical and secular spirit was emerging that would be the hallmark of the modern age. Science offered empirical, rational, concrete, measurable reality. Every individual through reason and observation had the means for attaining certain knowledge and as man transcended previous limits of knowledge, truth became recognised as evolving rather than static (Barnes,1972). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers such as Comte, Mill, Fierbach and Marx were explaining the Christian God as man's own creation (Gjertsen,1989). Politics, science and economics also pushed the modern mind to disengage itself from traditional religious belief. The religious wars, which had followed the Reformation in the name of religious absolutism, demonstrated the failure to agree on a universally valid religious truth. The Church was becoming increasingly irrelevant to modern man.

### The Catholic response to the challenges of the Enlightenment.

The Catholic response to the Reformation had been to reinforce its conservative structures, crystallise its past doctrinally and institutionally, leaving it unresponsive to change required by the modern era. The middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century found the Church under attack both from within and from without. The Prussian victory (1870-1872) over France led to the creation of a new German Empire (Hobsbawm,1995). For the first time in modern history there existed in Europe a supreme military power which owed no allegiance to Rome. To the extent that it was Christian the German Empire was Lutheran. In Italy, Garibaldi captured Rome, wrested the Papal states from the Church and effected the unification of Italy. The Church had become a non-secular power. Science, biblical scholarship, theology, philosophy and theories of evolution challenged previously held 'truths'. These events impacted upon the Church as much as the Reformation three and a half centuries earlier. The Church responded with a number of desperate defensive measures. It sought - vainly it transpired - to strengthen its position through political alliances with Catholic, or nominally Catholic powers such as the Hapsburg Empire. Within the Church, Rome responded to the challenges arising from forces from without, by using strategies of containment: centralisation, regimentation of ministerial conduct, the policies of heresy combined with the politics of piety, the creation of a distinct Catholic ghetto (pillarisation) and the accentuation of the special position of the pope, in the attempt to avoid degeneration and gain strength. On 18 July 1870 the First Vatican Council promulgated the dogma of Papal Infallibility. The pope was declared infallible in matters of faith and morals (Hasler,1981). The doctrine of papal infallibility may be seen as a response to the loss not only of temporal power, but also to the infiltration of modern ideas into the Church itself.

In view of what was considered a 'critical situation' Pius IX, in 1864, composed a *Syllabus of Condemned Errors* containing 80 propositions concerning the 'most dangerous errors of the age' (later termed 'modernism'), in an attempt to contain the problems thrown up by the Enlightenment (Baigent and Leigh,1992; Neuner and Dupuis,1983). In these propositions, the



papacy denounced unrestricted liberty of speech and the freedom of press comment, the concept of equal status for all religions, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, denounced all those who assert that the Church may not use force, condemned the notion that divine revelation is imperfect and hence subject to continual and indefinite progress, which ought to correspond to the progress of human reason, the notion that prophecies and miracles set forth in the narration of the Sacred Scriptures are poetical fictions, that the mysteries of the Christian faith are the outcome of philosophical reflections, that the books of Old and New Testaments contain mythical tales, that Jesus Christ himself is a mythical fiction. The Church refused to deviate from those beliefs and ideas, which had informed its theology, structures and institutions.

In 1903 Vatican control of Catholic doctrine was strengthened by adding the newly created Pontifical Biblical Commission to the existing forces of the Holy Office. Its role was to supervise and monitor Catholic scriptural scholarship. The official history of the Catholic Church was not to be questioned. All views other than the traditional orthodoxy were to be stifled. The Commission's function was, and still is:

‘to strive.....with all possible care that God's words.....will be shielded not only from every breath of error but even from rash opinion’ (*New Catholic Encyclopaedia* vol., xi:551).

The Commission was to safeguard the authority of the scriptures and to promote their right interpretation. In 1904, Pope Pius X wrote two encyclicals in which all scholarship that questioned the origins of early Christianity was opposed. All Catholic teachers suspected of ‘modernist tendencies’ were summarily dismissed from their posts. In July 1907, the Holy Office published a decree officially condemning ‘modernist’ attempts to question Church doctrine, papal authority and the historical veracity of biblical texts. Modernism was effectively declared a heresy and the entire movement was formally banned (Neuner and Dupuis, 1983).

Uniformity and conformity were the order of the day.



In 1909, a decree affirmed the literal and historical accuracy of the first three chapters of Genesis. Under Pope Pius X (d.1917) the *Index* grew ever longer and information and new ideas were censored. He named that which he was trying to destroy 'modernism'. Publishers, editors and authors of critical books were excommunicated (Baigent and Leigh,1992). To question the current teachings of the Church was declared anathema. The number of books on the *Index* suddenly and dramatically increased as a new, more stringent censorship was instituted. Clerical commissars monitored teaching with a doctrinal rigidity unknown since the Middle Ages. In 1910, control of ministerial conduct was formalised. The entire body of the clergy involved in pastoral work or in the teaching profession was obliged to take an oath rejecting the essential errors of modernism concerning revelation and tradition. Control of ministerial conduct extended to new recruits. Seminaries were closed. Those that were allowed to remain open were carefully monitored. Pope Pius X declared a general prohibition against reading of newspapers and journals by all seminarians and theological students (Baigent and Leigh,1992). In the seminaries, questioning of doctrine was discouraged.

'The system was designed to give answers, not to encourage questions. The teachers who had been marked and scarred by the purge, in turn would mark and scar the next generation' (Yallop,1984:15).

Even more than after Trent, the authority of the papacy was beyond question, uniformity and conformity were demanded from the clergy and dissenting theologians were censored.

Canon Law was systemised in 1917 and promulgated in seminaries. A pseudo-science of apologetics was taught to all seminarians and members of lay associations until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. In many seminaries, the *Syllabus of Errors* was by the 1930's considered as the ultimate truth. Later, under Pius XII, the policy on biblical criticism and evolution was beginning to be reversed, especially by *Divino Afflante Spiritu* for the bible, but more tacitly for evolution. Despite this, the formation of priests almost up to the 2nd Vatican Council was significantly influenced by the *Syllabus of Errors* with its anti-modernism mentality. With critical material on the *Index* and formation within a total institution, there was little for priests



to measure the truth or relevance of what they were taught. Priests formed in these seminaries were well versed in Catholic doctrine but little else. Their subsequent life style also set them apart from the world. Priests, as far as possible, distanced themselves from the world around them. They lived with other priests enclosed in their presbyteries discouraged from communicating with priests of other denominations or even becoming too involved with the people they served. They lived in a 'pseudo community' with the people for they were men set apart from all others, men of God not men of the people. From this rarefied position the priest viewed and controlled the lives of the faithful. The separation between priests and laity remained in place. The Church withdrew, crystallising its traditions and institutions in a medieval pre-Reformation form. Catholicism survived by retreating into a ghetto of its own making. It became even less relevant to those who emphasised inner union with the divine. Control of priests and people was achieved by strict censorship of information and prohibitions that classified as sinful any association with other religions. Special dispensations were required for Catholics to enter a non-Catholic church and were only granted for exceptional circumstances such as a marriage or funeral of a close relative. Despite these attempts to strengthen its position by excluding the world, the Catholic Church in line with other Christian churches across Europe, experienced signs of decline as the Church became less relevant to the modern world.

#### The impact of feminism in Western Europe.

The other most significant cultural shift in Europe has been the changing position of women in Western Europe (Anderson and Zinsser, 1990; Tarnas, 1996; Capra, 1982). It cannot be assumed that all women passively accepted the negative construction of woman in systems of patriarchy. Feminist scholarship has demonstrated that long before the emergence of modern feminism women have challenged the grid of reference placed upon them by men. Anderson and Zinsser point to the writings of educated women throughout the history of Christianity, which challenged assumptions of women's inferiority and intellectual incapacity. A few examples to



illustrate this point are Christine de Pizan (1365-c.1430), a member of the French court who insisted that women were not innately inferior to men, their inferior education and training created the illusion of inequality; the English feminist Mary Astell (1666-1731), who argued that God had given women as well as men intelligent souls and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), who reasoned the same way. Wollstonecraft argued that women either were morally accountable for their actions or were so weak that men must take total responsibility for their actions. In her '*Vindication of the Rights of Women*' (1792) Wollstonecraft went further than her predecessors. Offering a relatively democratic view of the state, she advocated free and universal primary education for both sexes. Wollstonecraft distinguished herself by demanding that political legislation be used to reverse traditions subordinating women.

As political subordination in Europe was countered by the doctrine of rights, inalienable civil liberties claimed first by small groups of men for themselves, were later claimed by feminists for women. Flora Tristan, one of Mary Wollstonecraft's French disciples, insisted on 'the right to juridical equality between men and women' as 'the only means of achieving the unity of humanity'. Maria Desraismes founded the first Society for Women's Rights in France in 1866. In the suffragette movement, Mrs Pankhurst and others took up Susan Anthony's phrase 'men, their rights and nothing more: women, their rights and nothing less'. 'Equal rights' became a slogan for feminism. Feminism constantly rejected the assumptions of women's inferiority asserting that what might be seen to be inferiority was in fact inequality created by centuries of male dominance. Calls for equality of citizenship threatened not only traditional forms of government but male power in all its forms, in family, in Church and in the state. In England by 1859, women were allowed to make wills and hold property. By 1928, women had equal voting rights with men. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were accepted as ministers of religion in some Christian churches.



In an era of change the Church embraced tradition and discouraged reform, particularly with regard to women. Although both Protestantism and Catholicism opposed feminism and despised women activists, equal rights feminism arose more easily in Protestant nations rather than Catholic ones. The Catholic Church continued to offer the traditional image of perfect womanhood, the Virgin Mary, together with traditional roles of motherhood and virginity, which was an ill-fit with notions of women's equality emerging in wider society. In Catholic nations nuns educated girls well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century inculcating them in the traditional female virtues of obedience, deference, modesty and self-sacrifice. These young women were also exposed to feminist calls for equality and to changing legislation, that reflected at least some of these calls for equality. Catholic women who rejected these traditions often had to break with the Church. Up until the mass women's movements of the 1970's, such women found themselves relatively isolated in their own cultures, especially from other women. For many Catholic women there was a safety and security to be found in the traditional roles of motherhood and virginity. Feminists, with their calls for equality, were undermining the only two resting-places for women in the Catholic Church.

The women's movement was also successful in winning for European women a measure of control over their own bodies, especially their fertility and sexuality. Churches and governments had sought to regulate sexuality throughout European history. The sexual became political, as women who pioneered contraception and abortion faced almost universal opposition. Most of the Christian churches rejected all controls over fertility except sexual abstinence. In England it was not until 1930, that the Labour government ruled that contraception advice could be given if requested. The following year the Church of England allowed contraception in certain marital situations. In the 1970's hundreds of thousands of European women marched and protested, organised and lobbied to repeal the laws which prevented them from controlling their own fertility, whether by contraception or abortion. The right of women to refuse sex challenged men's rights to control women's bodies. The Catholic



Church used its money, influence and prestige to fight against women's campaigns, but access to contraception and abortion was gradually legalised throughout Western Europe (with Ireland as an exception).

Recognition of abortion and contraception as women's rights were won for women, by women who fought to reject the European tradition that the male-dominated institutions of Church and state can control women's fertility. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Catholic Church continues to outlaw all forms of contraception apart from periodic abstinence and classifies contraception an intrinsically evil act, sinful without exception (*Veritatis Splendor*, 1993).

### Conclusion.

Chapter three has demonstrated the complex course of *descent* through the heterogeneous layers of ideas, which gave rise to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment. It has considered the ideas and practices which fragmented the unity of the Christian Church and demonstrated the heterogeneity of beliefs previously thought to be consistent. It has traced the continued existence of traditional ideas in spite of strong challenges and adverse circumstances. These significant points in European history made no difference to the position and place of women in the Catholic Church.

The Reformation was a 'moment of arising', an episode of *emergence* produced by a particular stage of forces which waged against one another and against adverse circumstances in an attempt to gain strength and avoid degeneration. The Reformation did not start with Martin Luther but was an episode produced by ideas and circumstances that had evolved over several centuries. The Renaissance with its emphasis on the new 'humanism', provided the necessary precondition for the Reformation, which marked a shift from a theocratic world view to an anthropocratic world view, and prepared the way for the Protestant emphasis on individual conscience.



As reformers distanced themselves from one another in terms of doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues schism was inevitable. Both Protestant and Catholic reformers were concerned to 'purify' religious observance and reform Church institutions. The most significant difference between them lay in the understanding of authority in the Church. For Protestants, Scripture was the ultimate authority whilst for Catholics the ultimate authority lay not just in Scripture, but in tradition as dictated by the Magisterium.

The Reformation was aimed against the whole concept of Church, as a priestly-sacramental organism of salvation, in favour of a direct relationship with God. The priesthood of all believers challenged the hierarchical sacerdotal model of Church. Protestant ideas about the sacraments and the priestly role represented significant deviations that challenged the authority of the hierarchical priesthood.

The Catholic Counter-Reformation was the second stage of a movement for Church reform, which had a continuous history from the conciliarists of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century to the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent represented a force that reacted against the challenges posed by the Reformation and strengthened the Catholic Church. Limits were imposed upon doctrinal definitions, institutional structures and traditional beliefs were upheld as the clergy and the laity were called to conformity and uniformity. The accentuation of the different estates of the clergy and the laity separated priests from people and the sacred from the profane.

Paradoxically, the long awaited general council in which conciliarists had hoped to curtail the power of the papacy, produced oaths of loyalty, regulations and punishments by which the Catholic hierarchy was subordinated to the pope. Conciliarism went into hibernation as traditional ideas were reinforced.

On the surface, the Counter-Reformation was a success, but popular attachment to Tridentine Catholicism was achieved only through social control. With an emphasis on the collective and uniform life of the community, Tridentine Catholicism focused on public demonstrations of unity reinforced by the use of regular confession as a sign of submission. The Society of Jesus, the *Corps d'elite* of Catholic reform organised along military lines with the aim to convert and to educate in 'right doctrine'. The Holy Office was established as the supreme court of appeal in matters of heresy and instituted the first *Index* (of forbidden books). The Office for the Propagation of the Faith was charged with converting the heathen and the heretic. These apparatuses of power were dedicated to the durability of Catholic doctrine and tradition. In order to re-establish the Church and its priests as the authority in the family and to ensure the continuation of traditional teaching, bishops were given the authority to teach the next generation. Hence, 'pure doctrine' would descend from generation to generation.

In contrast to claims that the Protestant Reformation improved the place of women in the Church and in society, neither the Protestant nor the Catholic reformers did or said anything that challenged patriarchy in the Church, family or state. Patriarchal ideas continued to exist and have value and no challenge was raised to traditional patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status. The gendered discourse of the Church was reflected in the gendered discourses of the reformers and in the discourses of the wider world. Sexism continued unchecked and women remained segregated and subordinated in both Catholic and Protestant churches.

During the Enlightenment, scientific discourses challenged the Church from without. A God who actively intervened in human history came under threat from Descartes scientific analysis and Newtonian mechanics. God was accommodated as the 'divine architect' who had set the universe in motion and then withdrawn. Darwin's theory of natural selection challenged not only the literal truth of the Bible but the need for such a God at all.



Science emerged as the 'new religion' and in its own way eventually became as dogmatic as the religions it supplanted. In a rapidly changing world, a significant shift regarding the nature of truth was emerging. The Church held its truths as static and unchanging, but as previous limits of knowledge were transcended, truth became recognised as evolving and changing. This presented a challenge to the traditional ideas of the Church as human research and observation replaced theological doctrine and Scriptural revelation as a principal for comprehending the universe.

The discourses of the modern world challenged traditional Catholicism and the Church reacted by attempting to reinforce its position in order to avoid degeneration. As with Trent, the Church imposed strategies of containment. The *Syllabus of Errors* denounced what it called 'the errors of the modern age' and the Church remained consistent in its beliefs and practices. Any questioning of traditional teaching was declared anathema. Uniformity and conformity were achieved by massive social control as Catholics were contained within what became known as the 'fortress Church'.

The question of why women stay in a patriarchal Church is addressed elsewhere in this thesis, but at this point it is pertinent to note that despite the exclusion of women from male history and from the annals of the Church (apart from virgin saints), women have not been silent over the centuries. Feminist research has demonstrated that some women have resisted and rejected patriarchal beliefs concerning women's temperament, role and status. What is also clear, is that if it had not been for feminists such as Mary Wolstencraft, Maria Desraimes, Emily Pankhurst and Susan Anthony, patriarchal ideas about women may have been left unchallenged. These women rejected notions of women's inferiority and called for 'equal rights' for women in line with the rights given to men. In so doing, they threatened not only traditional forms of government, but male power in all its forms, in the family, the Church and the state.

New forms of government were emerging based not on supposed divine sanction, aristocratic privilege and oppressive and arbitrary laws but on individual rights and mutually beneficial social contracts. As democratic forms of government became widespread, the monarchical Catholic Church, with its absolutist truths, was becoming seen not only as irrelevant, but also out of tune with the lives of many people in the West. In particular the Catholic Church's continuing restrictiveness in sexual matters, especially contraception, alienated many. For, as attitudes towards sexuality became more permissive and a psychoanalytically affirmed perspective emerged, the Christian ideal of asexual or anti-sexual asceticism seemed symptomatic more of cultural or personal psychosis than of eternal spiritual law. Catholic prohibitions surrounding sexual activity seemed unhealthy and restraining. In short, the tenor of the Catholic Church was no longer suited to the modern western world. The gendered discourse of the Church began to appear out of tune with the modern world, as equal rights for women were becoming accepted in the West.

As women gained a measure of equality with men during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changing ideas about women led to some Protestant churches accepting women as ministers. The equality of women presented the Catholic Church with a fundamental threat to its theology, institutions and structures. The Church reacted to women's calls for equality by discouraging reform in both Church and state. Within the Church, women were again offered Mary, Virgin and Mother, as the impossible project for their bodies. Mary, the perfect woman constructed as a consequence of the patriarchal ideas which underpinned sexual theology remained an essential element in the apparatuses of power, which the Church brought to bear on women in order to produce conformity.

Traditional female virtues of obedience, deference and self-sacrifice were inculcated into girls and young women. Young women in western liberal democracies were also exposed to discourses of the modern world, which contradicted the construction of woman in Catholic



sexual theology. Whilst the errors, false appraisals and calculations about women still existed in the traditional teaching of the Church they were continually challenged by advances in science, medicine, biology, psychology and sociology. That many women took some of these new ideas on board was evidenced by the massive disobedience against the ban on the contraceptive pill following *Humanae Vitae* (1968).

The strength of the reaction to 'modernism' in the Church indicated the existence of competing or contradictory ideas within the Church itself. Conciliarism, which had lain dormant since Trent, became a live issue, as the debate on collegiality and papal primacy at the 2nd Vatican Council demonstrated. Traces of other ideas of the Reformation, can be found in the documents of Vatican II; the 'royal priesthood' of believers, the involvement of the laity, the artificial divide between priest and people, the growing emphasis on Scripture in services and in personal spiritual development. There was also a shift away from the Mass as a spectacle, to be observed by a passive congregation, to the notion of the Mass as a community activity in which the laity played a part.

Traditional ideas about women persisted in religious discourse, despite the upheaval caused by the Reformation, Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment. These significant points in European history made little difference to the religious discourse on women in most of the Christian churches. The Catholic discourse on women continued along traditional lines and there was no change to the position and place of women in the Catholic Church. Contradictory ideas continued to exist within the Church and traces of the ideas of the Catholic reformers, the conciliarists and the Protestant reformers surfaced again at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. The Council was an attempt to make the Church more relevant to the modern world. Did this mean that traditional ideas about women would be challenged? Would traditional ideas about women continue? Would the place and position of women in the Church improve as a result of the

Council? It is Vatican II, another significant episode in the Church's history, which is addressed in chapter four.



## CHAPTER FOUR.

### Vatican II. A Reformation?

#### Introduction.

The impetus to the 2nd Vatican Council was different from that of the Council of Trent in that its intention was not to correct abuses within the Church but to make the Church more relevant to the modern world. Crucial cultural discourses and events following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War informed the discourses and events of Vatican II. The emergence of liberal Catholicism and feminism, can be located in cultural discourses: the discourse on human rights and freedom strengthened in light of Nazism, Fascism and the horrors of the Holocaust; the discourse on progress, as unparalleled prosperity swept the West; the discourses on individual conscience and human 'maturity'. These discourses challenged the authority of the state and parents, as traditional holders of power.

A major factor influencing exuberance within the Catholic Church was the dramatic growth of vocations up to the early sixties, which affected both the USA and Europe. Exuberance was also the fruit of a long period of thought suppression within Catholicism steadily coming to boiling point in the early sixties.

The traditional beliefs and practices of the Church, which had been re-enforced by the *Syllabus of Errors*, had shaped the Catholicism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the traditional teaching of the Church had not changed since the Council of Trent and had little relevance in the modern world. Mass education and exposure to critical discourses had led many Catholics to question not only Church teaching, but also the authority of the pope and the clergy. The issue of papal authority again became a live issue. Even before the 2nd Vatican Council, a minority of Cardinals began a campaign to have collegiality removed from the agenda. The pope resisted and collegiality remained on the agenda. Whilst it was evident that there were those who would

welcome devolution of power to the bishops there were also those who would resist any change to the existing power structure of the Church. The Council divided into two main camps, those who stressed traditional teaching and those who were prepared to look for other ways to make the Church more relevant in the modern world.

The apparatuses of power within the Church were by this time firmly entrenched within an efficient bureaucratic organisation. The material means of power were concentrated in the hands of the pope and the Roman Curia. The papacy together with the Roman Curia was a power instrument of the first order. The Church as a fully developed corporate authority represented an hierocratic association where power was supported by a monopoly in the bestowal or denial of sacred values. 'Rome' represented a hierarchy of superiors to which subordinates may appeal or complain in an order of rank. At the head of this organisation stood the Supreme Pontiff whose jurisdiction over matters of faith and morals had been re-enforced by Vatican I. The pope also ruled by virtue of his acquired, inherited qualities as successor of Peter. The holding of high office was associated with notions of 'duty' and 'vocation', and the pope as 'first servant of the Church' held a 'hallowed' position. This was a somewhat different situation from that which had energised reformers at the time of Trent. The special position of the pope was significant in retaining collegiality on the Council agenda and in removing other contentious issues from debate.

This chapter begins by focusing on the collegiality versus papal primacy debate. This was essentially a debate about where power should lie in the Church, that is, with the pope or with the college of bishops (which includes the pope as bishop of Rome). A shift of power from the papacy to the college of bishops would introduce a more democratic means of decision-making in the Church reflecting the democratic decision-making processes in the western world. It is suggested here, that the collegiality is a necessary precursor to women's equality in the Church.



This chapter also examines conciliar documents considered encouraging to women, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, in order to discover whether previous errors, appraisals and calculations about women had been addressed.

This chapter is concerned with the struggle between competing forces that emerged from the success of collegiality over papal primacy. The continuing power of the papacy was demonstrated in the removal of contentious issues from debate during the Council and in the decision, following the Council, to ban artificial birth control in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968). The quintessence of patriarchy is the control of reproduction. The ban on artificial birth control, together with the exhortation by John Paul II to use the ‘rhythm method’ of birth control over other forms of contraception, is seen as an attempt to restore male control of women and reproduction.

Following the Council, the strength of traditionalist forces was such that reforms were subverted and implementation hampered. Eminent theologians continued to question the totality of traditional teachings, some women continued to pressure for ordination and a plurality of beliefs and practices demonstrated the heterogeneity of the Catholic community. In the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) John Paul II declared that ‘certain fundamental truths’ were being distorted and denied and the very foundations of moral theology were being undermined by modern-day tendencies. *Veritatis Splendor* and *Letter to Women* (1995) of Pope John Paul II are examined, to discover if previous errors, appraisals and calculations, that is, ‘certain fundamental truths’ about women, had changed. Did patriarchal beliefs about women continue to exist and have a value in the official Church?

The existence of dissent suggests that the value placed on traditional sexual theology by the pope is not necessarily the value which others place on such teaching. The empirical research

will attempt to discover the relevance of the pope's teaching in the everyday lives of priests and women.

### The impetus to the 'New Pentecost'.

In the impetus towards reform, the 2nd Vatican Council was significantly different from its predecessors. It was a belated attempt to make the Church and Christianity relevant to the human race in the modern world (Buller,1981). The first Vatican Council (1870) reinforced the role of the papacy. The pope now held universal supreme authority and was considered competent to issue infallible definitions without reference to their subsequent acceptance by the Church at large (Hasler,1981). The supreme authority of the pope was in contradiction to cultural discourses on individual conscience and human 'maturity'.

In 1959, Pope John XXIII inaugurated a 'new Pentecost' for the Church, his aim was to 'let some fresh air into the Church', to promote '*aggiornamento*', that is, a 'bringing up to date'. John's idea was unwelcome by the reactionary right wing of the Roman Curia (Yallop,1984). Was there was to be a radical appraisal of the whole Church? Those who feared for orthodoxy and tradition, made a determined effort to 'contain' the 'intuition' of the pope within existing frameworks and canon law. Others were concerned that if the Church refused to understand the world and make itself understood, the modern world would continue to find the Church irrelevant.

### Collegiality v papal primacy.

Conciliarism was a key issue at the Council, for its very existence challenged papal primacy. A shift of power to the college of bishops would open the door to a more democratic Church (Bianchi and Radford Ruether,1992). Cultural discourses on human rights, freedom and democracy influenced debate. If power resides in the college of bishops rather than with the papacy alone, the whole college of bishops would engage in the decision-making process of the



Church, which would correct the emphasis of Vatican I with its monarchical concept of Church. The Bishop of Rome would be a member of the college, presiding over it, but within it, not over or against it (Hebblethwaite, 1988). The conservatives fought hard to retain the monarchical concept of Church. As will be shown later they continued this fight long after the Council and achieved a measure of success with the pontificate of John Paul II. A more democratic Church would change not only the hierarchical structures but also the status of the laity. In a monarchical Church the laity are subjects to be used (Kung, 1971), participating in the life of the Church but not in its decision-making. Only with a change in status could the laity become involved in the decision-making processes of the Church.

Such a shift of power would raise certain issues. Firstly, collegiality is a necessary precursor to equality for women, as devolution of power to the college of bishops would be the first step in the democratisation of the whole Church. Eventually, lay men would have a say in decision-making. A fully democratic Church would mean that women could also take part in the decision-making processes of the Church. Secondly, a more level form of Church government would not reflect the patriarchal structures and institutions of the Church, which have been legitimated by reference to 'divine law'. Catholic truth revealed only through a male celibate hierarchy would be in question, as would the authority of the pope and the male celibate priesthood. Thirdly, if women were to be included in decision-making they would have to be reconstructed as equal to men. Such a reconstruction of woman would demand a radical revision of sexual theology upon which the Church depends for its legitimacy. The collegiality versus papal primacy debate is therefore crucial to both women and priests.

From the outset, serious reform was undermined. Attempts were made by a minority (about 60 out of 2000 Council Fathers) to remove the issue of collegiality from the Council agenda. Headed by Cardinal Arcadio Larrona, the Prefect for the Congregation of Religious, this minority began a private campaign to have the question of collegiality discussed by a separate

commission. The pope resisted this and collegiality remained on the agenda. Many felt that it was time for reform and wholeheartedly embraced the idea of a Council (Yallop,1984). It was clear from the outset, that there were divisions within the Church itself, divisions that were felt at every stage of the Council and later when reforms were to be implemented. By the end of the Council the expectation that it would prove a defeat for the advocates of the 'new theology', had been resoundingly falsified (Buller,1981).

The 'conservatives' led by eminent curialists were unable to defeat the 'progressives' with regard to many conciliar documents. It was only the influence of Paul VI behind the scenes, which prevented an open split in the leadership of the Church. Paul VI the successor of John XXIII fought hard throughout the Council to hide the divisions in the Church from the gaze of the outside world. Key issues were removed from debate. Fear of 'public scandal' was an important factor in these exclusions (Poupard,1984). Issues likely to give 'public scandal' were celibacy, women's ordination and contraception (Hebblethwaite,1988). As in the early Church, such issues reflected underlying concerns for the power and authority of the male clergy, the position of women in the Church, patriarchy and the control of women and their bodies.

During the Council, a new vision of Church was emerging, in which priests and people were called to partnership as a 'royal priesthood of believers', a dynamic 'pilgrim people' journeying together to the 'kingdom of God'. A partnership between clergy and laity, however, required structural change if it was to become a reality. It was in the collegiality versus papal primacy debate that the divisions became revealed, between those who wanted this new vision of Church to become a reality and those who wanted to retain the monarchical model of Church.

Resistance to collegiality was to continue long after the Council.



### The subversion of reform.

In the years following the Council struggles between traditionalists and reformers took various forms, the subversion of collegiality, poor implementation of reforms and the return of absolutism with the pontificate of John Paul II. Underpinning these struggles was the issue of collegiality for if co-responsibility were to become a reality some power would have to be devolved from Rome to the local bishops. The Vatican II doctrine of collegiality provided the theory for this to happen, as the monarchical concept of Church emphasised in Vatican I was removed (*Lumen Gentium.ch.3*). A shift of power from the papacy to the college of bishops was resisted (Buller,1981) and structural reform which would have opened the way for a more democratic Church was undermined by a conservative rearguard (Yallop,1984). An important player in this rear guard action was John Paul II, for, with the pontificate of John Paul II, overt absolutism returned to the Church (Hebblethwaite,1988). By the Synod of 1980, co-responsibility had become a sham. The Extraordinary Synod of 1985 resulted in a revised and domesticated version of collegiality and Episcopal conferences reduced to 'purely practical arrangements' of no collegial or theological significance (Lefebvre,1976). Collegiality had become another word for submission.

### Implementation of reforms.

The implementations of reforms were largely dependent upon the evaluation of the Council by individual bishops. At a structural level hopes for a more democratic Church were lost as collegiality was subverted. The pessimistic evaluation of the Council, was that whilst the Council in itself had been a 'good thing', it had opened the way to ideas that were not in the interests of the Orthodox Church. The optimists felt that it was not the Council that had failed but they who had failed the Council. In the years following the Council, dissent crystallised around those who were pessimistic about the reforms of Vatican II and those optimistic about the reforming measures of the Council (Hebblethwaite,1988).

Implementation was also hampered by the lack of appropriate education of priests and people (Buller,1981). The English and Welsh bishops attributed much confusion over implementation to defective early catechesis. Too little had been done to educate the laity and in particular the clergy in the doctrine and insights of Vatican II. Although it was recognised that the parish clergy were a key element in any attempt to change Catholic thought and action, many clergy were still working with the teaching they had received in seminaries untouched by the Council. Diversity of expression was disturbing to some, as it contrasted with the previous relative simplicity of belief and practice. The English and Welsh bishops came to see pluralism in the Church as enriching. They recognised that there had been ‘a failure to come to terms with the role of women in the Church’ (Hebblethwaite,1986b) and a failure to implement reform. They acknowledged that where bishops and priests had been open to change, renewal had taken place, where they had not been open to change, the process of renewal was hindered.

#### Vatican documents of interest to women.

Certain conciliar documents contained a more positive view of women. The most favourable documents were: *Lumen Gentium* (The Church), *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World) and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (The Apostolate of the Laity). Churchmen labelled ‘progressives’, aware of the changing status of women in the secular world, were largely responsible for these documents. There was a change of tone in these documents, but there was also a continuing tendency to emphasise the differences between women and men.

In *Lumen Gentium* (LG) there was a new stress on the laity as full partners with the clergy and religious, in the life and mission of the Church. The traditional division of labour, clergy in sacristy and laity in the world, was accepted as artificial, even false (McBrien,1980). This represented a positive step forward as equal participation of the laity was a pre-requisite for the equality of women in the Church.



‘The chosen people of God is one - there is in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex. You are all one in Christ’ (LG).

The continuing role of women in the Church was acknowledged. Women had ‘a vital role’ to play in the universal Church. Diversity was stressed and the multiplicity of local churches acknowledged. In an effort to resist imposed uniformity National Episcopal Conferences were to be organised. There was resistance to this decentralisation of power by those preferring the centralised structure of authority, but parish and diocesan councils were later established. The laity became more involved in theology, religious education, liturgy, spiritual direction, parochial and diocesan administration with women playing their part in all of these (Laishley,1994).

Underpinning *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) is an emphasis on sameness with the modern world rather than difference. There is the positive affirmation of humanity and the world, the inter-dependence of person and society, the promoting of the common good. The Church is seen as a dynamic ‘pilgrim people’ within the historically developing human community. Such ideas contrast with previous attitudes, which reject the modern world. GS also reflects the demands of many women for equality in the world beyond the Church.

‘Where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves an equality with men before the law and in fact’ (GS, para.9).

Together with this recognition of the changing place of women in the world, is the continuing tendency to define ‘woman’s nature’ in ways that reflect patriarchal gender role assignment.

‘Women are now employed in almost every area of life. It is appropriate that they should be able to assume their full, proper role in accordance with their own nature. Everyone should acknowledge and favour the proper necessary participation of women in cultural life.....Every type of discrimination, social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated’ (GS, para.60).

These statements represent a change in the Church’s discourse on women. There remains however, the notion that the nature of woman is different from that of man. *Gaudium et Spes* also

acknowledges that where they have not yet won equality, women will claim equality with men before the law and in fact.

There remains an exclusion zone in the rhetoric of equality, that of the priesthood. Ordination of women to the priesthood would demonstrate, more clearly than anything else, women's equality with men in the Church, but it was excluded from discussion at the Council.

In *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) the laity:

‘share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ.....have their own role to play in the ministry of the whole People of God in the Church and in the world’ (AA, para.8).

‘Women are called to participate more widely in the various fields of the Church's Apostolate since, women in our times have an ever more active share in the whole life of society’ (AA, para.9).

Women, as part of this community of Church, were encouraged to play an ever more active part in the life of the Church as they did in the life of society, but all that changed was their level of participation. The second-class status of women in the Church remained the same. Whilst some women were included in the decision-making processes in some diocesan and parish organisations, decision-making generally remained dominated by men. The majority of women, excluded from the decision-making process, remained objects to be used, servants not partners.

Despite a change of tone the gendered nature of the discourse remained. A change in status would have required a new construction of woman, which could only arise from a radical revision of Catholic sexual theology. The basic model of woman was the same, she was merely wearing a slightly different dress. This ‘new dress’ was called ‘greater participation’, which leads to a presumption of equality through increased participation. Most women continued to be excluded whilst being accommodated in terms of ‘service’ to men and the Church.



Whilst it may not have been expected in the 1960's for the Vatican documents to contain inclusive language, in retrospect the absence of inclusive language in the documents highlights masculine language as the natural language of the Church. As inclusive language becomes routinised in everyday life, the masculine language of the Church is exposed as sexist.

Language is not a neutral conduit but a primary instrument of persuasion (Gibbons, Busch and Bradac,1991; Petty and Cacioppo,1986). 'Language provides a conventional resource for influencing people's attitudes and behaviour' (Ng, Sik Hung, Bradac J.J.,1993). The masculine language of the Church continues, as it has in the past, to support and sustain the belief in the masculine nature of God, the superiority of men, the legitimacy of a male dominated Church and the subordination of women.

The tone of the Vatican documents considered favourable to women, reveal contradictions between a cultural change in attitudes towards women and the masculine nature of the Church expressed through its language. Language is connected to self-identity (Edwards,1979) and the masculine language of the Church has been and continues to be part of the natural, normal, everyday expression of the identity of the Church. In the documents, it is clear that the masculine identity of the Church remained intact.

The use of inclusive language is not merely about 'including women', it demands a change in the identity of the Church. Inclusive language would challenge the belief in male superiority and the belief in the exclusively masculine nature of God, consequently the legitimacy of the all-male hierarchical priesthood and its prerogative to interpret divine law.

#### The discouragement of *Humanae Vitae*.

The development of the contraceptive pill provided a significant challenge to existing power relations between women and men both in the Church and in the intimate relationships of everyday life. The underlying issue was who was to control women and their fertility? Aware

of its controversial nature, the issue of contraception had been diverted to the 'Pontifical Commission on The Family', which John XXIII had set up in 1962. The 68 members of the Commission included theologians, legal experts, historians, sociologists, doctors, obstetricians and married couples. Despite a majority in favour of recommending artificial birth control, four dissenting theologians enabled the recommendation to 'fail' (Yallop,1984). Papal authority became a key issue. Did the encyclical *Casti Conubii*, that denounced birth control in the 1930's, retain its authority as it stood, or could a modified version of its teaching be acceptable as a 'legitimate development'? Pope Paul VI became convinced that to allow artificial birth control would undermine the authority of past popes and would question the sexual theology of the Church. He finally decided to ban artificial birth control against the recommendations of the Commission. This decision highlighted the relative strengths of the power of the papacy over that of collegiality and the attempt to maintain existing relations of power through the continued control of women and their bodies.

The attempt by Paul VI to protect papal authority and the sexual theology of the Church backfired. Catholics were driven to ask themselves crucial questions about their allegiance to the Church and the authority of the pope and to make distinctions between 'infallible' and 'non-infallible' pronouncements. In many countries, the clergy 'connived' with the laity in developing an acceptable interpretation of the ban on artificial contraception (Saunders and Stanford,1992). Rice (1990) identifies *Humanae Vitae* as a crucial turning point in the attitude of many priests, to the wisdom of the Vatican. *Humanae Vitae* had ensured that the days of a largely unreflective acceptance of papal infallibility, together with 'blind obedience' to Rome were at an end.

This questioning of authority had practical consequences as the authority of local clergy was questioned, especially with regard to issues around sexuality (Sipe,1990). Confession, as a method of control over both priests and laity, was seriously undermined. Many Catholics did



not 'confess' to using artificial methods of birth-control or declined to participate in confession at all using 'supremacy of conscience' as their ultimate guide (Sipe,1990). In matters of sexual morality, the Catholic laity began to temper the sexual theology of the Church with the reality of their own lived experience. Questions were raised concerning the nature of marriage, of divorce, contraception, abortion and institutional celibacy. Catholics were beginning to reject the narrowly defined bio-theology of Catholicism in favour of a developing socio-theology, which incorporated new knowledge, and the lived reality of everyday life.

The issue of contraception highlighted male control of women and their bodies. With the development of the contraceptive pill, women no longer at the mercy of unreliable methods of contraception, had the means to control their own fertility. In effect, the power to decide on reproduction had shifted to women themselves. This power shift continues to underpin the whole debate about contraception. It raises the question of who is to control reproduction. That the ban on contraception had more to do with the control of women and the protection of semen than it ever had to do with children, became more obvious as the Church Fathers searched for new explanations for their centuries old ban on contraception. The concern in Catholic sexual theology for the safe delivery of semen into the correct vessel was no longer an issue, for with the contraceptive pill, semen had free access to the womb. The contraceptive pill forced attention on the respective roles of ovum and sperm in reproduction. The role of ovum and sperm in reproduction, highlighted an important area of Catholic sexual theology, the status of semen, for the concern to protect 'man's seed', provided much of the impetus and the excuse for the control of sexual activity, women and their bodies. Von Baer's discovery of the ovum in 1827 should have led to a radical re-think about the sexual theology of the Church. Post Von Baer, semen, no longer the only factor in reproduction, should have lost status overnight, going from what Aquinas called 'that divine liquid' which contained the whole foetus in embryo, to that of fertiliser.



Scientific discovery had demonstrated that men and women were naturally called to equal partnership in reproduction. This significant change of emphasis in scientific discourse, from a male dominated role in reproduction to one of equal partnership, more clearly revealed the control of women and their bodies in a patriarchal Church. This natural partnership threatened a patriarchal theology rooted in biological determinism and an appeal to the 'natural law'. The discovery of the ovum should have led to an examination of a biologically determined sexual theology. This has not happened, the Church's hierarchy continues to ignore the consequences of Von Baer's discovery (Ranke-Heinemann, 1991).

#### Power and the 'Rhythm Method'.

*Gaudium et Spes* 'allowed' intercourse for the 'mutual well-being' of the married couple. It also talked of 'responsible parenthood', a euphemism for family planning. 'Responsible family planning' was condoned but only through the use of 'approved methods' of contraception, the rhythm method and/or abstinence. Attention turned to the 'rhythm method' or what the Church prefers to call 'natural family planning'. The explanation for the ban on contraception now became that of 'naturalness'. The 'rhythm method' involves periods of abstinence, intercourse takes place in the woman's infertile periods and at no other time. This is said to take note of nature's natural rhythms and is a legitimate use of a contraceptive method. All other forms of contraception are 'unnatural' therefore illicit.

At first glance the difference between the ban on the contraceptive pill and the admissibility of the 'rhythm method', lies in the hair-splitting division between means and end, but there is a significant difference between the two, which has nothing to do with 'naturalness'. With the 'rhythm method', power over reproduction remains largely with the man. If the man chooses not to co-operate, he could if so inclined, insist on his conjugal rights even using force in the process. With the 'rhythm method' (as with condoms or coitus interruptus) the ultimate power to use contraception and the choice of method is with the man. With the contraceptive pill the



power over reproduction is with the woman (Sharp,1996). Many women reacted against the hair-splitting division between preventing conception by artificial contraception and preventing contraception by the 'rhythm method'. For many women the reasons for the use of contraception in whatever form were more important than the mere mechanics used to achieve the same end. The attempt to retain control of women's reproduction failed, as many Catholic women rejected the ban.

For some Catholic women the decision to use artificial birth control in good conscience transformed them into moral agents and led to the maturing of many individual consciences (Knott,1994). The ban also forced many women to examine their religious traditions in light of their own experience and some found them wanting (Laishley,1994). Some women also resisted the continuing tendency of many churchmen to define women only by their reproductive role as mothers (National Board of Catholic Women,1991). In consequence, Church authority and control over women was seriously undermined.

Basically, nothing had changed and everything had changed. The debate on contraception had taken place within the confines of the Commission. The recommendations of the majority were ignored, hijacked by the Roman conservative old guard. An apparently reluctant and indecisive pontiff was encouraged to maintain the status quo, but nothing would be the same again. With regard to contraception, as with other areas of sexual morality, what was becoming clear to the Catholic population was the lack of knowledge, expertise, understanding, or willingness to listen by the Church celibates. Contraception and other issues of sexual morality became questions for the individual conscience. Catholics began to question issues fundamental to power and authority; celibacy, sexual theology, and the nature, role and status of women in the Church. Far from strengthening papal authority and with it patriarchal power in the Church, the decision to ban the contraceptive pill achieved exactly the opposite effect.

### Women's resistance.

A section of the female Catholic laity continued to call for equality, and in doing so implicitly rejected patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status. These Catholic lay women were supported in their efforts to achieve liberation from all forms of discrimination and oppression by many women religious (Hastings, 1991a). In the 1970's, some American nuns declared solidarity with the feminist movement. This surge of autonomy, democratisation and social involvement by some American religious orders caused conflict between the nuns and the Vatican. Many revised Constitutions were rejected by the Roman authorities and a growing number of women's communities were prepared to forego canonical status in order to retain autonomy (Laishley, 1994). They remain as autonomous religious communities, witnessing to a new-found sense of solidarity with the poor and a call to embody justice in the world. It is fair to assume that women religious might be more theologically aware than the majority of Catholic women, nevertheless where Catholic women have embraced notions of equality in the Church, a variety of groups and networks have evolved. In England and Wales, some Catholic women have pressed for radical change through women's organisations such as the St Joan's International Alliance, the Catholic Women's Network, the Association for Inclusive Language, the Catholic Women's Ordination Movement. Where women have been involved in organisations open to both women and men, some have raised issues pertinent to women. An example is the Family Committee of the Newman Association, which concerns itself with marriage, the family and gender relationships.

The restating of traditional orthodox doctrines by Rome, appears to encourage Conservative Catholic women who organise, to express assent to traditional teachings. In England, the Association of Catholic Women has a high profile in the Catholic media claiming to speak for the 'silent majority'.



Ruth Real, secretary of the Association explained in a letter on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1995 to this researcher that current membership stood at over 1300 and explained:

‘our membership is varied ranging from students, mums and professional people to great-grandmothers. They come from all walks of life. Many are well educated and articulate and others are “dear ladies in the pews” who are worried and appalled at what they see going on in the Church, which they feel strikes at the very roots of their faith’.

This appears to suggest that the majority of women ‘in the pews’ who did not speak out, held conservative views. The criterion to be one of the ‘silent majority’, appears to be the daily recitation of the Angelus. Workers for the other organisations have suggested to this researcher that the high profile and claims of this group is disproportionate to the size and constituency of its membership. Leaders of the Association of Catholic Women tend to be either influential working women or the wives of influential, often high profile Catholic men. The coverage of conservative women’s views in Catholic newspapers may indicate the level of access to such publications by influential Catholic women, but it is impossible to ascertain the level of support for such views amongst Catholic women in general.

In the absence of statistical evidence for the supporters of conservatism or equality, one measure of the strength of support for women’s equality in the Church, must be the intensity of the reaction from Rome. It is the issue of women’s ordination, which provokes the strongest response. The Catholic Church continues to deny ordination to women. In other Christian denominations, women’s ordination has been the result of changing social and cultural patterns. An understanding of equality of opportunities has found its way into most other religious groups. The Jewish Reform, Liberal and Progressive traditions have ordained women to the rabbinate since 1989. Some Christian denominations have long countenanced women’s full participation in ministry: the Unitarians since 1904, the Baptists introduced women’s ordained ministry in 1922 (though women were not fully recognised by the Church until 1975), the Methodists in 1974 (Field-Bibb,1991). In the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, women were fully ordained by 1969. The Church of Wales and the Church of Ireland ordained women



deacons in the 1980's. The Anglican Church finally ordained women to the priesthood in 1994. On a practical level 'opportunities' for women have come at a time when fewer and fewer men are coming forward for religious leadership.

As early as 1961, St Joan's International Alliance (originally the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society) requested the Vatican to consider the ordination of women priests as a basic human right. In 1975, some American Catholic women organised the first Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit at which they demanded not merely ordination but a transformed ministry. In 1976, the Pontifical Biblical Commission examined the question of women's ordination. The commission concluded that 'scriptural data are inadequate to exclude women from ordained ministry'. Response from the Vatican was swift. In the same year, the Vatican issued a decree that women were excluded from ordained ministry on the grounds that they are incapable of imaging Christ.

Pressure from many Catholic women continued and in June 1994 the pope spoke out 'definitively' about the ordination of women. In *De Sacerdotalis Ordinatione Viris Tantum Reservanda* (VT) (On Reserving Priestly Ministry to Men Alone), the pope states that the Church 'has no authority whatsoever' to ordain women. In the Catholic Church priestly ordination 'has from the beginning been reserved to men alone' (VT, para.1).

In the absence of theological explanations to exclude women, the pope offers certain 'fundamental reasons' to exclude them: Christ chose only men as Apostles, the constant practice of the Church, and the:

'living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from priesthood, is in accordance with God's plan for his Church' (VT, para.1).

In declaring his judgement is 'to be definitively held', Pope John Paul II goes as close as he is able to declaring his judgement infallible. He uses a language of centralising control and



imposed authority, by effectively insinuating the exercise of infallibility without actually invoking it. The exclusion of women from priesthood is considered a matter of faith, not of discipline (Häring, 1994). In the case of married men, it is a question of discipline, whereas in the case of women it is for the pope a divine ordinance, and therefore a matter of faith. It could be argued that it is merely a matter of biology. The pope forbids any further discussion on the matter, even though a condition for infallibility (and presumably definitive statements) is wide consultation throughout the Church.

Continuing pressure from some women suggests that women's growing awareness of equality is providing its own momentum. The Women's Ordination Conference announced a national convention in 1995 to mark the twentieth anniversary of their foundation at which Ruth Fitzpatrick the national co-ordinator commented:

'I'm not quite sure how you stop a discussion [on women's ordination] that, given the controversy surrounding it has taken up a life of its own. How do you mandate people to stop thinking?' (Häring, 1994:740).

The National Association of Catholic Women in Germany said they would not let the matter rest (*The Tablet*, 11 June 1994:749). In England and Wales the Women in the Church Committee of the Conference of Religious issued a joint statement with Catholic Women's Ordination they:

'join with all those organisations around the world who are calling for a renewed and changed priesthood of which women and men will be a part, married or single' (*The Tablet*, 11 June 1994:749).

There is now a world-wide network of women's organisations working for inclusivity in all its ministries and Church structures (*The Tablet*, 11 June 1994). It would appear that many Catholic women are no longer passive recipients of traditional orthodox truths about women's place in the Church. These women offer a point of resistance to the power of the papacy and the hierarchical priesthood, which the restating of traditional doctrines will not quell.

### The silencing of dissent.

The post-conciliar years were marked by the continuing struggles between forces of traditionalism and reform. Traditionalists thought that the Church was in a 'crisis'. They said that 'irresponsible theologians' confused the ordinary simple faithful with 'their anti-Roman speculations'. Moral theologians were, they explained, guilty of confusing Catholics on birth control, abortion and homosexuality. Traditionalists believed that dissent was no longer containable and with the administration of John Paul II, traditional strategies for containment were employed. The power of the papacy was strengthened as collegiality was subverted. A new form of confession of faith now required total assent to the non-infallible utterances of the pope a particular oath of fidelity to the Supreme Pontiff was required (Häring, 1993). The nomination of bishops and office holders was centralised and the different estates of priesthood and laity were emphasised. Eminent theologians who questioned the totality of orthodox truths were disciplined. Edward Schillebeeckx (1968) who questioned the literal truth of the resurrection and the virgin birth, was publicly accused of heresy. In *Ministry* (1981) he questioned the position of the Church on celibacy, women's ordination and the fixed and immutable doctrines of orthodoxy. He remains under surveillance (Baigent and Leigh, 1992). Kung (1971) questioned the doctrine of infallibility and criticised the pope's rigidity in morals and dogma. In 1979, Kung was pronounced unfit to teach Roman Catholic doctrine. It became apparent that the first question being asked of any theologian was not about their ability to enlighten, but whether they were orthodox in the traditionalist sense.

### Veritatis Splendor.

The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) (VS) was a 'call to discipline' to the bishops of the Church. In response to what he called a 'crisis' in the Church John Paul II declared:

'Certain fundamental truths [...] in the present circumstances risk being distorted or denied....a new situation has come about within the Christian community itself....it is no longer a matter of occasional and limited dissent, but an overall and systematic questioning of traditional moral doctrine' (VS, 4).



He said that he was 'driven' to write to the bishops of the Church in order to remind them of the very foundations of moral theology which were being undermined by modern-day tendencies.

In *Veritatis Splendor*, it becomes apparent that the 'crisis' is in fact a crisis of traditionalist authority, a crisis of patriarchy in the Church. Three major threats to traditional orthodoxy are addressed, an evolving theology, women's control of reproduction and dissent in the clergy. The pope's first concern is the notion of an evolving theology which implies that any 'truth' is only valid for its time and must be revised with advances in understanding. The pope condemns the plurality of beliefs and practices in the Catholic community reminding bishops that truth is static and unchanging. Using Aquinas as proof text, the pope teaches that the commandments contain the whole natural law. Secondly, in face of the losing battle to enforce the ban on contraception, the specific inclusion of contraception into the category of 'intrinsically evil acts', suggests that the underlying purpose of the encyclical is to endorse retrospectively *Humanae Vitae*. Intrinsically evil acts are defined as intrinsically evil always and per se, on account of their object, quite apart from the interior intention and the circumstances (VS, 71-83). Referring to Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and to contraception in particular, John Paul II states:

'No circumstance even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of the individual, of a family or of a society in general is permitted' (*Mulieris dignitatem*, 1988).

In the encyclical, the pope condemns the theories of 'consequentialism' and 'proportionalism'. Such theories acknowledge the complex reality of everyday life and allow for reasoned judgements informed by personal conscience. Consequentialism is a theory, which attempts to draw the criteria of the rightness of a given way of acting from a calculation of foreseeable consequences deriving from a given choice. Proportionalism is weighing the various values and goods being sought, focuses rather on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice with a view to the 'greater good' or 'lesser evil' actually possible in that



situation. These theories suggest that in certain circumstances contraception could be a valid choice. The pope declares:

‘It would be a very serious error to conclude that the Christian teaching is only an “ideal” which must be adapted, proportioned, graduated to the so-called possibilities of man. [Pluralism of opinions and kinds of behaviour] cannot be left to the judgement of individual subjective conscience or to the diversity of social and cultural context’ (VS,103).

The faithful must turn to the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church to protect themselves against error.

‘[The judgement of conscience] does not establish the law...it is not an infallible judge, it can make mistakes... “correct conscience” is a question of objective truth received by men. An “erroneous conscience” is a question of what man mistakenly, subjectively considers to be true’ (VS, 62-63).

‘...the Magisterium carries out important work of vigilance warning the faithful of the presence of possible errors, even merely implications, when their consciences fail to acknowledge the correctness and the truth of the moral norms which the Magisterium teaches’ (VS,110).

Thirdly, the final chapter of *Veritatis Splendor* is patently ‘disciplinary’. The bishops are reminded of the power and authority of the pope. John Paul II speaks *to* the bishops not *with* the bishops. He threatens sanctions for non-compliance with his utterances. ‘Truth’ is defined by the pope by virtue of his authority as the successor of Peter, ‘in communion cum et sub Petro’.

‘We have the duty as bishops...to ensure that the faithful are guarded from every doctrine and theory contrary to [the word of God]...to be particularly vigilant that “sound doctrine” (1 Tim 1:10) of faith and morals is taught...with regard to Catholic institutions...for pastoral care of the family or for social work, or institutions dedicated to teaching or healthcare’(VS,116).

In the encyclical, although infallibility is not explicit it is certainly implied. Non-compliance with traditional orthodox ‘truth’ will incur sanctions. The title ‘Catholic’ granted to schools, universities and other institutions will, in cases of failure to adhere to orthodox teaching, be taken away. VS is a final ‘call to order’ by the pope to the bishops and priests of the Church. This is evident from the restating of the authority of the pope and the threats of sanctions for non-compliance with the traditional orthodox interpretation of ‘truth’. The inflation of



contraception to the category of 'intrinsically evil acts', may be seen as part of a 'call to order' to Catholic women, in face of a losing battle to regain control of women and reproduction, lost with *Humanae Vitae*.

The encyclical is out of step with the plurality of beliefs and practices of ordinary Catholics. It continues unaltered the traditional gendered discourse of the patriarchal Church. Truth is static and unchanging. A pluralism of beliefs and practices is therefore unacceptable. Patriarchal images of masculinity and femininity are evident in the encyclical as are the assignment of gender roles which reinforce women's role as that of service to men and to the Church. Sexist language is used throughout the encyclical, which reflects the everyday masculine language of the patriarchal Church.

#### Letter to Women.

In 1995, John Paul II extended his message to all the women of the world in his *Letter to Women* (1995). The *Letter* appears to be an attempt by the pope to influence the secular discourse on women. Central to this discourse is the call for women's equality and their right to control their own fertility. By 1995, it was evident that persistent appeals by the pope to women, exhorting them to forego the use of artificial contraception, had been unsuccessful. Many Catholic women had ignored the 'call to order' preferring to decide about issues of fertility for themselves. They also continued their call for equality. That the letter was written at all, indicates the strength of the rising feminist secular discourse and its power to affect women in the Catholic Church.

On the eve of the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing (September 4<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> 1995), the conference secretary Gertrude Mongella was given a written message (unpublished) from the pope, which she said, contained key points from the pope's *Letter to Women*. From a feminist reading of the *Letter to Women*, the key points are as follows. First, the pope continues

with the belief that men are the norm against which women are measured as he describes woman as an anomaly, a 'mystery'. Second, there are a limited number of responses to an anomaly, indifference, opportunism, exclusion and accommodation (Douglas,1973). Third, the pope attempts to accommodate women in terms of 'service' whilst excluding them from equal status.

Aldridge (1994) argued that ostensibly the discourse on the diaconate in the Anglican Church was essentially a power struggle over the ordination of women to the priesthood. In the Anglican Church indifference to women was no longer an appropriate corporate response, that accommodation occurred by subtle classification and re-classification and exclusion by the maintenance of strong group boundaries. Opportunism implied selective welcome to anomalies, which were calculated to be advantageous. These same arguments can be applied to this letter in which accommodation, exclusion and opportunism are evident.

Women are accommodated in traditional gender roles. References to *Genesis 1.27-2.18*, reminds woman of her position as 'helper' to man. Woman's 'special genius' is service to others. This 'service' is 'in no way prejudicial to women' assures the pope. 'A certain diversity of roles.....is an expression of what is specific to being male and female'. Women are reminded that Mary is the highest expression of the 'feminine genius'. She called herself the 'handmaid of the Lord' (*Lk.1.38*)...for her, "to reign" is "to serve" her service is "to reign".

Women are excluded from priesthood, but exclusion from priesthood 'in no way detracts from the role of women' assures the pope. These role distinctions in the Church 'should not be viewed in accordance with the functionality typical in human societies'. Christ 'by his free and sovereign choice...entrusted only to men the task of being the "icon" of his countenance'.



Opportunism is evident in the selective inclusion of women supported by the theory of 'complementarity'. Woman is 'complementary' to man. She is everything man is not. 'Womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view but also from the ontological'. It follows therefore that women's traditional roles are divinely ordained.

Biological, psychological and ontological explanations for differences between the sexes are rooted in biological determinism. Biological differences between the sexes may be obvious, but it cannot be assumed that they determine different ways of being and behaving. Social differences based on biological differences are in effect inequalities justified by a belief in women's inferiority.

This *Letter to Women* highlights the continuity between traditional patriarchal beliefs and assumptions about women and the beliefs and assumptions about women in the contemporary Catholic Church. It is evident that the traditional construction of woman has not changed over two thousand years. That the pope feels driven to reinforce continually the traditional construction of woman, is some indication of the impact of women's demands for equality in Church and society. It is significant that this communication was not confined to Catholic women alone. That the pope felt the need to outline the Church's position on women at the International Women's Conference in Beijing, is a recognition of the strength of the international feminist discourse.

The selective inclusion of women provides continuity with the bio-theology of traditional orthodoxy with its stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity, which flow from the patriarchal construction of woman and of man. Thus, the pope continues unaltered the gendered discourse of the Church. The discourse is one of accommodation and exclusion. Theological justification supports the opportunistic inclusion of women as they are accommodated in terms

of service to men and to the Church. Women's participation is to be encouraged, but their status is to remain the same.

### Conclusion.

The impetus to Vatican II was different from that of the Counter-Reformation in that it was an attempt to make the Church more relevant to the modern world rather than to escape from it. As a consequence of Trent and Vatican I, the power of the papacy and the Roman Curia was of the first order. The Church was a modern corporate organisation with a bureaucracy, where power was centralised in the hands of the pope and high-ranking officials, yet the success of collegiality over papal primacy demonstrated the continued existence of the ideas of the early conciliarists and the Protestant reformers.

Vatican II did not start with John XXIII, just as the Reformation did not start with Martin Luther. John XXIII was merely the catalyst that allowed the heterogeneity of ideas, which had been repressed for decades, to be voiced. The on-going struggle between traditionalists and reformers became evident as the Council almost from its inception, split into two camps. The success of collegiality over papal primacy indicated a desire for reform at the highest levels in the Church. The command posts of power remained firmly in the hands of the traditionalists and with the pontificate of John Paul II overt absolutism returned to the Church. John Paul II employed the usual strategies for the containment of dissent, the accentuation of the special position of the pope, the demand for obedience, the restating of traditional doctrine and the politics of piety and heresy. Throughout this period, the overarching gendered discourse of the Church remained firmly in place, as public debate on contentious issues was denied.

Despite these measures, dissent was not easily contained. The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* demonstrated that dissent amongst the bishops was at such a level that drastic measures had to be taken. Dissent amongst the laity had escalated since *Humanae Vitae* and women in



particular were disobedient at a massive level, preferring to decide about the use of artificial contraception for themselves. As confession, an essential apparatus of power fell into disuse, the *disciplinary power* of the Church began to evaporate.

Some of the ideas of the Protestant Reformation had infiltrated Catholic consciousness at every level. In Vatican documents, references were made to the 'royal priesthood of believers' which opened the way for the increased participation of the laity, but did not change its status. Whilst the priest was seen as a 'fellow pilgrim' the priesthood remained a separate estate. Marriage was no longer purely for procreation and the avoidance of fornication, but for the 'mutual well-being' of the partners. Amongst the laity, the concept of individual conscience was an element in the rejection of clerical authority in matters of personal sexual morality.

The development of a form of contraception which gave women the opportunity to control their own fertility presented a challenge to existing relations of power in the Church and in the intimate relationships of everyday life. Following the Council and the subsequent ban on the use of the contraceptive pill, the debate on artificial contraception highlighted sexuality once again as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power. The shift in the balance of power at the intimate level of sexual relations undermined not only the power of individual patriarchs but patriarchal control of women and their bodies at every level.

The response of John Paul II to this threat, was the exhortation to the use of the 'rhythm method', which revealed again the patriarchal emphasis on biology and the assumption that cultural arrangements which favour male power, were merely 'co-operating with nature'. This typical patriarchal response was continued in *Veritatis Splendor* and in the *Letter to Women*. The immutability of patriarchal beliefs about the temperament, role and status of women were reinforced using a key element in the Church's apparatuses of power, Mary, as Virgin and

Mother. Any attempt to alter the temperament, role or status of women was seen as contrary to the natural order and divine revelation.

The strength of the traditionalist backlash against reforms, indicates the existence of points of resistance at every level in the Church. Catholics are asking questions about fundamental issues of sexual morality, and power and authority in the Church. The aim of the empirical research in chapters seven to nine is to discover how these tensions exist in the everyday relationships between women and priests in the contemporary English parish.

Before turning to the English Catholic Church, which is the context of that research there is a further issue worthy of consideration, that of the institution of celibacy. Institutional celibacy is an apparatus of power through which power is concentrated in the hands of an elite celibate group with strong views about women and with the power to promulgate those views. As an apparatus of power it requires investigation and is pertinent to this thesis. Institutional celibacy is also presented as part of Catholic tradition. Asceticism certainly has a long history in the Church. There have always been men and women prepared to forego sexual activity for the sake of spiritual advancement, but asceticism usually involved withdrawal from the world, a removal from the temptations of the flesh. Institutional celibacy on the other hand is an obligation to chastity, that is, sexual renunciation, whilst remaining in the world, living out one's life as a priest. Institutional celibacy is not an 'optional extra' it is a requirement of priesthood in the Catholic Church. Calls for debate on optional celibacy have been strongly resisted by the celibate elite. Why? What is the relevance of institutional celibacy for women? The next chapter will consider these issues.



## CHAPTER FIVE.

### Institutional Celibacy.

#### Introduction.

Institutional celibacy is an apparatus in which power rests in the hands of a male celibate elite. It still depends for its legitimacy in the Catholic Church, on a biologically determined sexual theology, which because of the association of sex, women and sin, elevates the celibate male to a position of spiritual purity with a privileged access to truth. It forms part of the apparatuses of power which segregate and subordinate women in the Church.

This chapter begins by establishing that institutional celibacy has not been a constant tradition in the Church neither has perpetual continence always been linked to priesthood. It moves on to examine the links between institutional celibacy, sexual theology and the inequality of women in the Church. How does the institution of celibacy depend upon a traditional bio-theology? How does the privileged access to spiritual truth, afforded to the male celibate hierarchy, obtain its legitimacy? What part does it play in attitudes to women? Feminist discourse has highlighted the patriarchal nature of the Church, but the significant part played by institutional celibacy in supporting and sustaining the gendered discourse of the Church, has not previously been explored.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the institution of celibacy is under threat from the shifting image of the clergy, sexual awareness, sexual explicitness, oral contraceptives, women's rights, the gay movement and androgyny (Sipe,1990). Here we are concerned with the shifting place of women in the world and in the Church. Women have accessed ministries and sacred spaces previously reserved for men, but there has been no structural change to support new models of priesthood and no fundamental shift of power has occurred. In the parish, power remains in the hands of the celibate priesthood but the authority of the priest in matters of sexual morality,

which declined in line with the loss of papal authority following *Humanae Vitae*, has been undermined. The celibate priest has to deal with a range of contradictory discourses on sexuality and the nature of ministry. How the priest deals with these contradictions forms part of the empirical research.

In the Church, opposition to institutional celibacy remains a live issue not least because over the past twenty years over 100,000 priests have left their ministry (Rice,1991). It has been suggested that compulsory celibacy is a factor in this exodus. In the face of what could be considered the failure of mandatory celibacy, the Church hierarchy despite the existence of anomalies in the system has refused calls for optional celibacy. With regard to those who remain, there is evidence that many priests do not maintain a celibate existence, which raises the question of how priests understand celibacy and how they deal with transgressions against celibacy. In the absence of public debate, these questions can only be answered by asking individual priests what they think about these issues.

The celibate hierarchy refuses debate and maintains control of the public discourse. The official discourse has shifted to emphasise celibacy as ‘sign and symbol’ rather than purely a discipline. What does this indicate?

#### The emergence of institutional celibacy.

Institutional celibacy has not been a constant tradition in the Church. It was not a state of perpetual continence freely chosen but a discipline imposed upon a reluctant priesthood. Indeed perpetual continence was not linked to priesthood. That there were married priests in the early Church is implicit in the ruling of the Council of Nicea (325) that there should be no marriage after the reception of an important office (Schillebeeckx,1968).



The discipline of celibacy was never extended to the Eastern Catholics, even when there was communion between East and West. Copts, Maronites and Uniat churches even today are not bound by celibacy in terms of ordination to the priesthood. It is an exclusively Roman rite practice.

There was a centuries-long resistance to the introduction of compulsory celibacy, as a requisite for priesthood. Much pressure to conform was economic. Pope Agapitus (535-536) tightened the knot between celibate practice and control of material possessions by opposing the practice of popes choosing their own successors. During the papacy of Gregory the Great, the Council of Seville (592) declared the sons of priests to be illegitimate thereby ensuring that Church property would remain within the Church. It was evident that priests continued to marry for Pope Benedict (1012-1024) with the permission of Henry II of Bamberg (demonstrating the links between Church and state), was able to prohibit the marriage and concubinage of the clergy. The institutionalisation of celibacy was a long slow painful process.

Power and authority in the Church shifted to the celibates, as celibacy became the requirement for the priesthood and those who would hold authority. In 1139, the Second Lateran Council declared priestly orders an impediment to valid marriage and vice versa. All marriages were to be severed before a man could be ordained to priesthood (Sipe,1990). This was the first time that continence and celibacy were identified as the same thing. Celibacy no longer meant non-marriage but perpetual sexual abstinence. This sexual shift transferred all power and authority in the Church into the hands of the male celibate priesthood. Institutional celibacy was the final moulding of the sacerdotal caste system. In this hierarchical system, an elite group of celibates now held power and authority in the Church and imposed their will on the majority of the priests. Barriers were set up between the hierarchy and the rest of the clergy, between the clergy and the people (Dolan,1965) but particularly, between the clergy and women.

Reform of the clergy was a significant element in the strategies of containment and purification during the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which aimed to re-enforce the hierarchical, priestly sacramental concept of Church. Adrian VI's (1522) call for discipline was led by celibate monastic orders, the Capuchins and the Jesuits. The Council of Trent introduced the regulation of ministerial conduct. Priests were 'formed', dress codes and edicts for how and where priests should live were adopted. The control of the mass of the priesthood by an elite group was supported by the introduction of institutional celibacy. Sexuality offered a dense transfer point for relations of power as this group subjected all priests to compulsory celibacy. Priests continued to be excommunicated if they were married and in the seminaries 'every attempt to waver from the path of celibacy was anathematised' (Pfliegler, 1967).

The Council of Trent heralded the beginning of the retreat from the world. Gradually the Church became a fortress within which it was safe from the contaminating ideas of the world. Inside the fortress, as priests were 'formed' within a total institution, more effective control of their sexual behaviour was possible. A pre-Enlightenment world view permeated doctrine and became embedded in the everyday experience of priesthood, consequently at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century priests formed within a total institution were influenced by an anti-modernism mentality. Almost total control of ministerial conduct was achieved through the control of information and sexual behaviour and it was during these years that the institution of celibacy took hold.

#### Links between institutional celibacy, sexual theology and women.

The discourse on institutional celibacy integrates the overarching gendered discourse of the Church, because it depends for its legitimacy, on a theological determinism, which in turn depends upon patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status.



Only men form the legitimate body of the Church whilst women are accepted as passive believers. The links between women, sex and sin in sexual theology, ensure both the continued subordination of women and the elevation of the celibate male. Privileged access to the original pure state of soul afforded to the celibate male, depends on this association. The association between sexual renunciation and access to purity of soul was evident as early as the 2nd century AD. At that time, the perfect 'Christian body' was that of the male virgin. Virginitude stood for that original state which every body and soul had once enjoyed it was:

'the physical concretisation through the untouched body of a pre-existing purity of the soul' (Brown, 1991:170).

The virgin body reflected an 'angelic' state (*Mani Codex* 81). Augustine's doctrine of original sin continued the notion of an 'angelic state' of human existence before the Fall. The purity of soul associated with the male virgin who had freely chosen a continent life, became an assumed state for all those under the discipline of celibacy. The spiritual elevation of the male celibate was assured. In practice, access to 'truth' became the prerogative of the celibate hierarchy, whose power and authority depended upon a theological determinism supported and sustained by an ideology of patriarchy.

If the spiritual authority of the celibate male depends on the continuing association between women, sex and sin, any change to traditional sexual theology would pose a challenge. A reconstruction of woman as equal with man would challenge the basis of Catholic sexual theology and clerical structures. It may be expected therefore, that there would be strong resistance on the part of the celibate hierarchy in particular, to any reform of sexual theology and to the reconstruction of woman as equal with man.

Institutional celibacy depends upon patriarchal beliefs about women. It is hardly surprising therefore that antifeminism has been endemic amongst celibates (Sipe, 1990). Antifeminism is evident in the treatment of women during the period when celibacy was becoming codified.

Women were of less value than men, objects to be used by men, then discarded. In 1081, the Synod of Melfi declared that clergy women and wives were slaves and their children illegitimate. A witch hunt for priest's women was the result. The Synod of Pavia in 1022, decreed that children of wives and concubines would become serfs. In the Synods of Valladolid (1322), Valencia (1388), Cologne (1415) and Paris (1429), women who had sexual relations with a priest were denied a Christian burial. With marriages forbidden the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries saw a rise in concubinage, which was not restricted to the lower ranks of the clergy. Clement VI (1342-1352) was accused by his contemporaries of illicit sexual relations (Kelly, 1986). John XXIII (1410-1415) was said to have seduced around 200 women during his five year reign. Both Pius II (1458-1464) and Innocent VIII (1484-1492) left a trail of illegitimate children, fathered prior to their ordinations.

Sipe (1990) suggests it is hard to overestimate the importance of antifeminism in the formation of the celibate consciousness and priestly development over two centuries when the discipline of celibacy was being solidified. Church documents describe the male virgin as 'one not defiled by woman'. The male celibate must for ever be on his guard against woman as she is a threat to his purity. In Church tradition, the only good woman is silent, sexless and subservient. It is apparent that institutional celibacy is not only linked to the oppression of women in the Church, it is the backbone of a patriarchal Church.

#### Threats to institutional celibacy.

Institutional celibacy is under threat from a changing world. Sipe (1990) argues that seven elements have critically structured the framework of celibate practice during the last 25 years: the shifting image of the clergy, sexual awareness, sexual explicitness, oral contraceptives, women's rights, the gay movement, and androgyny. Of these he considers the greatest threat to the celibate authority structure of the Church, is the shifting place of women in the world and in the Church.



There appears to be little support for women's equality in the celibate tradition. John XXIII and Paul VI endorsed the theory of women's equality, but the practical implications of such a theory are compromised because of the danger it poses to a celibate hierarchy. Sipe (1990) notes that women are permitted to participate in the Church as long as they do not hold power. Women are equal and necessary as long as they keep their place. He suggests that women's subordination runs not only through the history and culture of the Church but 'in the conscious fibre of many men and women who justify this bias as natural, that is, sanctioned by grace' (Sipe,1990:29).

Within the Church, other factors have affected the everyday lives of priests and women. The clear division between the sacred and the profane existing in the 'fortress Church', disappeared as a result of new notions of ministry, arising from Vatican II. Priests and people had to adjust to new symbols and notions of sacredness. Women accessed sacred spaces for the first time. Do notions of impurity associated with women's natural functions remain? Certainly distinctions between clergy and laity remain.

Distinctions are made between the 'common priesthood of the laity, which is also rightly called a royal priesthood' (*Mysterium ecclesiae* (ME),1973:43) and the ministerial priesthood, in which:

'the priest alone can complete the building up of the Body in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.....the same Lord, in order that the faithful might form one body in which "all the members have not the same function" (Rom. 12:4), appointed some ministers within the society of believers who by the power of Orders would be capable of offering the Sacrifice and of forgiving sins' (ME,1973:58).

The pope has stressed that the pastoral tasks of lay people may not obscure the priestly ministry, that there must be a delineation of responsibilities and a distinction between tasks. Lay people in the 'common priesthood' may in certain circumstances give the sacrament of baptism,

couples also give the sacrament of marriage to each other, but the Eucharist and the sacraments of penance and extreme unction (both of which include the forgiveness of sins), can only be performed by a priest who is 'acting in the person of Christ' (ME,1973:52). In practice, the most clearly defined function of the male celibate is that of the celebration of the Eucharist. One reason that optional celibacy is resisted, is that it would open the Eucharist to married men who presumably engage in sexual activity.

Non-celibate priests of non-Roman rites, and those of Roman rite who 'fail' also 'act in the person of Christ' and fit into the 'non-logical' framework of genealogy. Hence the importance of 'preventing scandal', which leads to keeping transgressions against celibacy quiet, and stop Roman rite people joining the minority rites, which must be kept as minorities. It matters that people retain the 'awe' of the celibate priesthood as it helps to sacralise institutional Church authority.

No fundamental shift of power has occurred. Power in the parishes remains with the celibate priesthood despite the decline of clerical authority following *Humanae Vitae*. Hornsby Smith (1991) demonstrated so clearly that the majority of English Catholics were at variance with official Church teachings on sexual matters, especially with regard to contraception, divorce and abortion. Many had effectively removed sexuality from the exclusive domain of traditional orthodox moral judgement. As Catholics became much more aware of the 'supremacy of individual conscience', confession went into decline and with it, went one of the most powerful of the Church's apparatuses of power. Once their authoritarian roles were removed, many priests found themselves in a vacuum. Exposed to the same questions of authority as the laity, some found themselves caught between a 'rock and a hard place', the 'official line' and a laity which largely refuted the authority of Rome. The scene was set for conflict or compromise. Which raises the question: how do priests manage situations where they are in conflict with official teaching?



In the past twenty years 100, 000, Catholic priests have left their ministry. That is almost a quarter of all the active priests in the world (Rice,1991). It is estimated that 42 percent of all American priests leave within twenty-five years of ordination. This translates into the exodus of half of all American priests less than sixty years of age. Spain has lost 7,000 priests out of 28,000 (Rice,1991). France expects to drop to 25,000 priests by the year 2000, from 40,000 in 1969. Michael Gaine, Professor of Sociology at Christ's and Notre Dame College Liverpool, offers statistics for Britain gleaned from the Catholic Directory over the years 1968-1987. The number of priests has dropped by 1,526 from 7,750 (secular and order priests) in 1968. It is difficult to estimate the real numbers of priests leaving in England, as the 1989 directory merely repeats the 1987 figures. That mandatory celibacy might have something to do with the exodus of priests, is revealed in the Vatican's own *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae* (1986) list, which recorded between 1963 and 1983, 46,302 dispensations for priests to marry. It is supposed that for every priest who gets a dispensation there is another who was refused or never bothered to try (*Corpus Fact Sheet*,1987).

A minority opinion in the Church lays the blame for 'crisis' in the celibate priesthood at the feet of priests themselves (Kerkhofs,1980). This opinion suggests that experts in the human sciences have also artificially accelerated the current crisis, as have irresponsible theologians and undedicated bishops. Kerkhofs suggests that the crisis is more about firstly, the lack of credibility in a Church which calls for greater participation, when at the same time also rejecting it. He considers this a result of a particular historically limited conception of the Church, which aims to maintain the status quo. Secondly, the 'ideology of sacred segregation' ensures that ministers are selected and formed apart from the people they will serve. Thirdly, the ideology that excludes women from ordination, means that women are constantly discriminated against in the congregations and the Roman synods. These ideologies frustrate the need for flexibility and diversity of ministry. With regard to opening the priesthood to women, he says:



‘To open the ministry to women would automatically do away with countless taboos. It is simpler to manipulate the meaning of tradition and as a male to force the woman to silence “in the name of Jesus Christ” ’(Kerkhofs, 1980:17).

Further, the existence of what he terms ‘machismo’, remains strong and continues the notion that a woman is of less value than a man (Kerkhofs, 1980).

A further consideration is that at the end of the century the celibate man is an object of suspicion. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, attitudes towards sexuality have become more permissive and a psychoanalytically affirmed perspective has emerged, in which the Catholic ideal of asexual or anti-sexual asceticism seems more symptomatic of cultural or personal psychosis, than of eternal spiritual law. Catholic prohibitions surrounding sexual activity seem unhealthy and restraining.

From the historical evidence, it is clear that many priests did not maintain a celibate existence. In the contemporary Church violations against celibacy continue. Sipe (1990) estimates that up to 50 percent of American priests have violated their celibacy. Over twenty-five years Sipe has come across heterosexual and homosexual transgressions against celibacy, paedophilia and other sexual compromises. Many priests do not, for example, consistently confess what might be considered a mere technical transgression of the practice of celibacy, for example masturbation. In *Shattered Vows* (1991) David Rice uncovers a catalogue of violations against celibacy which have caused great pain for the priests, women and children involved. From its inception, institutional celibacy has not always been in the interest of many priests but in the interests of those in authority over them. It is an apparatus of power, a relation of power in which some men, subordinate to other men, are forced to do what they otherwise would not have chosen to do. The power of an elite group is supported by a patriarchal Church that depends on the bio-theology of traditional orthodoxy. This elite group continues to enforce celibacy in spite of the damage it appears to cause to individual priests.



Following revelations during the United States Conference of Bishops (1993) about violations of celibacy, American bishops again asked the pope to discuss the question of celibacy. Legal proceedings taken against Catholic Priests in the United States and England have focused attention on the sexual abuse of children by priests. Concerns about mandatory celibacy have also raised issues of human rights, the lagging number of vocations, clerical alienation from the people served, and negativity towards sexuality in general. The response from the celibate hierarchy has been one of denial. John Paul II has refuted suggestions that obligatory celibacy is the cause of any such problems. In his Message for Vocations Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1993, the pope considers the ‘crisis’ of vocations is not about mandatory celibacy but due to the:

‘ambiguities of progress, the pseudo-values, the snares and deceptions which certain civilisations make shine before our eyes, the temptations of materialism and passing ideologies’.

The cause of the ‘crisis’ in the priesthood and with vocations is a questioning, a turning away from traditional orthodoxy. Obstacles to celibacy and to vocations will be overcome by fostering the ‘right conditions’ which include a return to a strict sexual morality, and an acceptance of traditional orthodox ‘truth’. Mandatory celibacy has thus become not merely an imposed discipline but a symbol of Holy Orders and of traditional orthodoxy.

John Paul II refuses to consider married priests, despite the existence of anomalies in the system and the wishes of some bishops and pressure groups, such as the Advent Group (UK), the Movement for the Ordination of Married Men (MOMM) and Priests for Equality. It was reported in *The Tablet* 14<sup>th</sup> March 1992, that Bishop Davidek of Prague is reputed to have ordained 80 married men to the priesthood by 1992 when Czechoslovakia was under communist rule. The total number of married priests in the former Soviet Union is unknown. In England, the decision by the Anglican Church to ordain women has prompted the exodus of a number of married priests from the Anglican Church. Some have sought refuge in the Catholic Church with the approval of the pope.



‘The Vatican agenda is directed towards ensuring that there should not be an acting married priesthood within the Latin Rite of the Church except by way of exception, and that with a low profile’ (MOMM *Information Bulletin* N<sup>o</sup>.14).

Most of these men are in chaplaincies with little involvement in parish life. MOMM hopes that the acceptance of married Anglican priests will eventually open the door to a Catholic married clergy.

### Celibacy as sign and symbol.

In the contemporary discourse of the Church on institutional celibacy, there is a significant shift of emphasis away from celibacy as a discipline to that of ‘sign and symbol’.

‘Celibacy is a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively or for a spiritual motive’ (Sipe,1990:58).

In *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus* (SC) (24 June,1967), Paul VI talks of celibacy as:

‘a brilliant jewel and retains its value undiminished even in our time, when mentality and structures have undergone profound change’ (SC, para.1).

He talks of the ‘golden law of sacred celibacy’ and counters all objections by offering Christ as the model and the ideal. He merges celibacy with sanctity describing it as ‘a badge to charity’, an example ‘by which man expresses his own unique greatness’ (SC, para.24).

John Paul II admitted in July 1993 (MOMM Autumn,1993) that celibacy was not a law promulgated by Christ, that the essential nature of the priesthood did not require celibacy, and that the early Church did allow married priests. He went on to say that celibacy was the most coherent way of life for Holy Orders. Denying that the celibate was holier than other men, he nevertheless continues with the notion that the male virgin is almost angelic. John Paul II said that given that a soul in Paradise would live in an asexual existence, celibacy was the ‘most similar’ way of life on earth and therefore the most ‘exemplary’. Such notions depend heavily on the truth of Genesis, the doctrine of original sin, the association between sex and sin and the presumed elevation of the celibate male. These in turn depend upon the bio-theology of



orthodoxy for their continued legitimacy. The pope's discourse provides a continuity with the notion that the male virgin is almost angelic and therefore most able to define and explain truth. Certainly it cannot be denied that celibacy freely chosen can be considered a sign or symbol. Some men and women achieve celibacy thus defined, and are a sign or symbol of self denial and dedication to others in a sexually explicit world. In stressing celibacy as a sign or symbol the Church focuses on the positive intentions of the individual, whilst omitting any debate about celibacy as a discipline. The question here is: are some men called to priesthood, but not to celibacy? Further, as the institution of celibacy is also an integral part of hierarchical power in the Church to talk of celibacy merely as sign or symbol is to leave the underlying issue of power untouched.

The pope stresses that 'the needs of priesthood' are better served by celibacy, that celibacy became a rule in the Western Church as the 'maturing of the ecclesial conscience' made it aware that celibacy best served the priesthood. The current emphasis by the pope on celibacy as a sign or symbol contains the public debate. As with the insistence that only a man can image Christ, which effectively prevents any real debate about women priests, the insistence of celibacy as a symbol of Holy Orders prevents any debate about optional celibacy.

There is no public discussion about the achievements or compromises of celibacy. In the absence of open discussion, some priests use the secrecy of the confessional to share their celibate successes and failures. Others struggle on alone some becoming embittered in the process (Rice, 1991). There is a taboo surrounding sexuality and celibacy, yet there may be much to be learned about sexuality from sexual restraint. Sipe (1990) suggests that the Catholic priesthood probably holds within its experience, specific information about human sexuality, but to ask a priest about his sexual/ celibate adjustment, is to invite secrecy, denial and mystery. Any sexual/celibate adjustment is usually a private matter. A priest's sexual/celibate life may only become visible through a scandal that comes to public attention. Further, that individual



priests may not have come to terms with their own sexuality raises the question of how celibates can therefore claim to be the 'experts on humanity' (VS,1993) and issues of sexual morality.

What is questionable is whether the celibate can claim knowledge of sexual love, or any understanding of the role of sexual activity in long term relationships. The taboo surrounding sexuality and celibacy is perpetuated by the both Official Church and individual priests.

Statements on celibacy are typically defensive and based on the assumption that priests are consistent to their vows (Niebuhr,1989).

A further issue that may contain informed debate, is the apparent lack of awareness amongst the clergy, of the ideological and theological underpinnings of celibacy. A lack of awareness is suggested by the response to a paper presented by James Francis Stafford, Archbishop of Denver at the symposium *Pastores dabo vobis* on the priestly life in Rome 1992. In his paper, Stafford crystallised the negativity towards and contamination by sex, the inferior position of women, and the superiority of virginity, and external rather than internal elements of spirituality. The report of shock and horror with which Stafford's paper was received by many delegates, suggested a level of surprise amongst the 'expert' delegates. Does this suggest a general lack of awareness amongst the clergy? These issues would have to be raised if celibacy were to be debated. If there is a general lack of awareness amongst the clergy, this would affect the level of debate.

### Conclusion.

Institutional celibacy was the final moulding of the sacerdotal caste system. As celibacy came to mean perpetual sexual abstinence rather than merely non-marriage, celibacy and continence came to mean the same thing. It was a sexual shift, which transferred all power and authority into the hands of the celibates. An elite group of celibate males held all power and authority in the Church and imposed their will on the majority of priests. Institutional celibacy is an apparatus of power, a case of *Herrschaft*, that is, a relation of domination and subordination.



Institutional celibacy is the quintessence of patriarchal control of men and their bodies. The intention of the dominant discourse is the control of the sexual body, as such, sexuality provides a dense transfer point for relations of power and presents many priests with an impossible project for their bodies.

Power is not exercised without insubordination and obstinacy and from its inception, institutional celibacy was strongly resisted by many priests and violations against celibacy have been a constant feature of institutional celibacy. This indicates that priests, despite their formation and regulation, are able under certain material and historical circumstances to act as moral agents. The grip, which the dominant discourse on celibacy has on individual priests is necessarily imperfect, for priests are neither totally socially constructed nor entirely autonomous. There is a gap between the dominant discourse on celibacy and the actual material practices of everyday life.

Institutional celibacy is an apparatus of power which relies for its legitimacy on the apparatuses of power, discourse, law and theology, within which patriarchal ideas and beliefs are supported and sustained. The claim to privileged access to truth, which underpins celibate authority, depends upon the truth of male superiority and the spiritual elevation of the celibate male, which in turn depends on the patriarchal bio-theology of traditional orthodoxy. Institutional celibacy is the backbone of the patriarchal Church and provides an insurmountable barrier to women's ordination, hence to women's equality in the Church.

Its very existence declares women's biological and spiritual inferiority to men. It is a constant reminder of the association of women with sex, sin and pollution. The link between sexual activity and pollution also raises a barrier against the admission of married men as priests. Before optional celibacy could be considered, the biological determinism of Catholic sexual theology would have to be addressed.

The overarching gendered discourse of the Church integrates the requirements of institutional celibacy and attitudes towards women. The discourse on institutional celibacy and celibacy as sign and symbol reveals the descent of patriarchal ideas about men and women and supports and sustains patriarchy in the Church. Its legitimacy depends on the continued existence of patriarchal ideas and values contained in and sustained by a biologically determined theology, which legitimates male power and the power of the ruling elite. All spiritual power and knowledge has been appropriated by an elite group who is presumed to have a privileged access to 'truth'. It follows therefore that traditional patriarchal ideas and beliefs must continue and have value. Resistance in this elite group to a revised sexual theology will be strong, optional celibacy will be resisted, as will equality for women, for these challenge the 'truth' of orthodox sexual theology. Institutional celibacy, patriarchy and sexual theology are mutually supporting and sustaining.

Contemporary strategies employed by the elite group to contain dissent are similar to those used to contain the debate on contraception. Control of public discourse is maintained as debate is denied. The discourse has been moved away from that of 'discipline' to that of 'sign and symbol' using the politics of piety with no reference to the underlying issue of power. Celibacy is spoken of as a 'vocation', a 'call' not a command, yet access to the priesthood demands celibacy even though it has been acknowledged that the essential nature of priesthood does not require celibacy.

The strength of the public discourse and the refusal to debate the issue indicates the existence of alternative discourses, points of resistance within the Church. The later empirical research will attempt to identify what ordinary English priests say about celibacy in order to discover how this 'fits' with the dominant discourse of the official Church. In the absence of a public discourse, it will be necessary to access the private discussions of priests.



## CHAPTER SIX.

### The English Catholic Church.

#### Introduction.

This chapter is concerned with the English Catholic Church, which is the context for the following fieldwork research in chapters eight, nine and ten. At this stage, it is useful to remind ourselves that all social change is rooted in history and is the product of historical conditions. The English Catholic Church must be considered in the context of recent European history, particularly in relation to the history of ideas. This thesis is particularly concerned with the concept of discourse not merely as a linguistic phenomenon, but as a means by which ideas are created and sustained through history. The ideas that emerged from significant episodes of European history, were significant in the development of the Church and remain implicated in prevailing conditions. European thought has been influenced not only by the dominant discourse of the Church, but by the ideas of Roman and medieval cultures, as well as by the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

The patriarchal beliefs and ideas of the ancient world were sustained in Catholic sexual theology and were left unchallenged by both the Reformation and the Enlightenment. They continued to exist and have value not only in the Church, but also in European society. The changing view of the world, which began with the Renaissance and culminated in the Enlightenment presented major challenges to the ideas of the Church. As previous limits of knowledge were transcended, truth became recognised as evolving and changing. This was a significant shift from the static and unchanging nature of Catholic truth. Human research and observation replaced theological doctrine and Scriptural revelation as a principle for comprehending the universe. Further, in contrast with the medieval Christian worldview, intellectual and spiritual independence need not depend on any religious belief or institutional structure for its autonomy and self-expression. An autonomous human being, an individual

citizen emerged who took responsibility for belief and action. A more sceptical and secular spirit was the hallmark of the modern age.

In addition to the ideas that arose from the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, critical discourses of liberty, justice and equality emerged, which argued for the political recognition of common human needs and by implication of common human rights. Specific needs were articulated by those who lay claim to them and expressed through resistance and a demand for recognition. The feminist movement was a case in point. Feminists lay claim to the same human rights as men and demanded equal rights for women. With regard to reproduction, feminists fought for women's right to control their own fertility, believing that women, as agents, were capable of making moral choices. Citizenship rights, property rights, marriage rights, the right to contraception and/or abortion were achieved by identifying specific common needs and establishing these through debate, dialogue and struggle in the political arena.

European thought was characterised by a plurality of beliefs and practices. In the wake of the Enlightenment an explosion of ideas in philosophy (and later in sociology), contributed to critical discourses of liberty, justice and equality. Science, medicine and biology contributed to discourses on the nature of the human being, mental and physical health and sexuality. European society was exposed to a complex array of discourses, which contained within them a multiplicity of ideas, beliefs and practices.

It is in this context that changes in the norms of Catholicity in the English Church must be considered. Alongside other Europeans, English Catholics were exposed to ideas concerning the changing nature of truth, the autonomy of the human subject, ideas of freedom, justice and equality, and a changing view of the human person and human sexuality. By the 1980's English Catholicism was characterised by a plurality of beliefs and practices (Hornsby-Smith, 1991),



which suggested that the discourses of the wider world had impinged upon their consciousness. This plurality of beliefs and practices were expressed through the ways in which Catholics responded to issues of religious authority and were particularly noticeable in the decades following the 2nd Vatican Council. Hornsby-Smith demonstrated that this plurality of beliefs and practices pointed to a hierarchy of truths in the minds of most Catholics, which were reflected in the plurality of responses to clerical, especially papal authority. A 'customary Catholicism' interpreted religious beliefs and practices in light of social experience.

In the English Catholic Church women form the majority of attenders. The question of why women remain in a patriarchal Church is considered with reference to psychological, deprivation-compensation theories, and theories which focus on women's role in the Church. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the issues arising from the review of the literature and the discourses of the Church. These issues have contributed to the research aims and objectives of this project.

#### Norms of Catholicity in the European Church.

The Catholic Church along with other religious organisations has had to adjust to dramatic changes in the world within which it works (Gannon, 1988). In societies where religion is considered irrelevant or even dysfunctional, it has become more a sub-system amongst other social systems. In Western Europe, people have become accustomed to believe and to demonstrate that they are capable of controlling their physical, psychological and social environment, yet religion has continued to play a role in reinforcing and conveying cultural identity, providing rites of passage, or links with the past (Dobbelaere, 1992).

Many people claim to hold religious beliefs which have a level of consistency across Europe (Davie, 1990). This may be due to the role of western Christianity as an agency through which a commonality of values and beliefs was created. Christian values were one formative cultural

influence at the heart of 'European' civilisation and were influential in establishing values and beliefs, which became accepted as the norm and enshrined in state institutions. Following the Enlightenment, advances in science, new political and economic systems influenced European thought and provided ways of viewing the world, which challenged the autonomous power and authority of the Catholic Church.

In the 1960's, the Church leadership recognised that the Church was no longer relevant in the modern world. The reforms of Vatican II were designed to address this, yet despite attempts by a majority of conciliar bishops to introduce collegiality, structural change was resisted and the exclusive focus and vertical nature of authority remained the 'esse' of Roman Catholicism. In contemporary Europe, the Catholic laity have asked for involvement in the decision-making processes of the Church, in line with their involvement in the decision-making processes of a liberal democracy (Bianchi and Radford Ruether, 1992). With their demands for a more democratic Church, the Catholic laity have challenged the vertical nature of power and authority in the Church.

These calls for a more democratic Church have not succeeded as the Church hierarchy has not accepted pluralism in matters of faith or its own philosophical grounding. The Church has defended pluralism and religious diversity where the state allowed its missionary work to flourish but has decried it when it was seen not to be in its own interests (Gannon, 1988). The pluralist nature of liberal democracies has presented the Church hierarchy with a dilemma. On the one hand pluralist societies allow for a religious diversity which can be advantageous to the Church, whilst on the other hand they encourage a plurality of beliefs and practices which challenge autonomous power in Church and state. The Church has taken advantage of the pluralist society, by acting as a powerful political pressure-group, attempting to influence political processes over issues concerning population control, contraception, abortion, divorce,



homosexuality and human rights, whilst it has simultaneously denied public debate on these issues to members of the Church.

In the European Church a changing core of what is essential had emerged (Martin,1978). Many Catholics did not, for example, agree with the traditional emphasis on sexual sins or with papal teaching on matters of sexual morality. An important phenomenon in contemporary Catholicism was the search for a focus for faith, friendly to religion but not to ecclesiastical authority. Suzanne Berger (1985) noted that groups such as 'Christians for Socialism' and 'Catholic Action' flourished inside the Church when the Church took a stand against injustice, but moved outside, focusing their faith in the political arena when it did not.

Evidence from the European Values Study Group (Abrams, Gerard, and Timms,1985) suggested a decline in moral orthodoxy across Europe. A shift in moral attitudes and a disregard for ecclesiastical authority was paralleled by a decline in mass attendance. This decline was particularly noticeable in the traditional Catholic heartland's of Spain and Italy. Identification with Catholicity varied across Europe, from strong in Ireland to countries where the level of practice had lowered but where identification remained strong for example, in the Netherlands. Declines that were once confined to Protestant cultures, were now evident in Catholic cultures. In terms of church attendance and moral behaviour, Catholic practice was drawing closer to that of Protestants.

#### The English Catholic Church.

Grace Davie (1990) warned that whilst the prevalent patterns of religious life, that is, relatively high levels of belief but low levels of practice, in Britain are paralleled in large parts of Western Europe, it was important to interpret religious statistics of each European country with care, noting the particularities of each national situation. In England, civil and legal rights were taken away from Catholics after the Reformation and by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic minority

had become a very small group. Despite suggestions that Catholics gave their loyalties to Rome, English Catholicism, although it had adhered to papal authority and the Latin mass, retained its Englishness (Archer,1986) and was in no way a foreign mission. From the Reformation to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholics were represented amongst the aristocracy such as the Duke of Norfolk, and Catholic landed families were still a powerful reality in the 1920's. From the 1840's Catholics of English stock had been outnumbered by Irish immigrants and by the second half of the century they constituted some 80 per cent of the Catholic population (Stanford,1993). The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, restored civil and legal rights taken away from Catholics at the time of the Reformation. With its revival, the English Catholic Church adopted the Roman model of Catholicism that suited the Irish immigrant population, but not the indigenous English (Archer,1986). The Roman model attached to Catholics a distinctly 'separate' aura. The authoritarian and hierarchical structure of the Church reinforced this siege mentality as the gaze of the bishops was fixed on Rome. Outsiders were excluded and there were strict unbending rules for those within the fortress Church (Stanford,1993). There was a strong sense of separate cultural and religious identity so much so, that Catholicism was a distinct sub-culture in British society (Coman,1977).

This separateness from the rest of the population began to break down following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The immigration of religio-ethnic groups, the impact of industrial and urban revolutions and processes of differentiation resulted in a heterogeneous Catholic population (Hornsby-Smith,1991). First generation Irish Catholics retained many of the traditional aspects of Irish Catholicism with high levels of religious practice, doctrinal and sexual orthodoxy, liturgical traditionalism, support to papal authority, awareness of religious sanctions and conformity to institutional identity (Hornsby-Smith,1987). By the second generation, there was considerable convergence to the norms of English Catholicism, assimilation to local norms, liturgical traditionalism, attitudes to priests and new styles of ministry.



Despite the influence of Irish Catholicism the English Catholic Church has tended to favour the religion appropriate to the powerful and has found its expression in a middle-class form of Catholicism (Archer,1986). The middle classes are the most clearly involved in terms of orthodoxy of belief, religious practice, organisational involvement, social and personal morality, awareness of papal authority and religious sanctions. At the same time the middle classes were the least orthodox in terms of sexual morality and had the highest proportion of non-practising Catholics (Hornsby-Smith,1987). English Catholics were assimilated into the norms of British society and there was a convergence between Catholics and the rest of the population on a range of social, moral, political and religious issues. Irrespective of class, whilst Catholics retained many aspects of a customary religion with its identifiable components of an earlier Catholic socialisation, broad ideas of personal fulfilment replaced rigid legal and social categories and prohibitions.

#### Customary Catholicism and transformations of religious authority.

Hornsby-Smith (1991) demonstrated a transformation in the beliefs of English Catholics and the ways in which they have responded to issues of religious authority over the several decades following the Vatican Council. He found that the religious beliefs of English Catholics did not comprise a neat, coherent and consistent system subject only to occasional deviations from official orthodoxy. A pluralism of beliefs and practices pointed to a hierarchy of truths in the minds of most Catholics. This plurality of beliefs was reflected in the plurality of responses to clerical, especially papal, authority. Few English Catholics conferred unqualified acceptance on the teaching of the pope. There was a heterogeneity of beliefs in terms of doctrine and morality. Hornsby-Smith identified a distinction between the official religion of the clerical leadership and the customary religion of ordinary Catholics. As the formal socialisation of English Catholics broke down a residual form of Catholicism, filtered through personal interpretative processes, emerged. The relatively little differentiation in attachment to a complex battery of beliefs in the fortress Church, gave way to a pluralism of Catholic types



which differed from each other in terms of doctrine, moral beliefs, practice and institutional involvement. This pluralism of beliefs, which emerged from 'official', through 'customary', to 'popular' Catholicism was also cross-cut by levels of religious practice.

By the 1970's and 1980's Catholics differentiated between creedal or core beliefs, non-creedal or peripheral beliefs (including papal infallibility), personal and social morality (where the leadership was seen to be lacking in credibility and legitimacy), institutional rules and regulations. Many Catholics said that they made up their own mind on an increasing range of issues. Lay compliance to ecclesiastical discipline was extremely problematic especially in areas of sexual morality. There were substantial disagreements with official teaching, as an alternative to a rule-bound, absolutist and deductive form of moral teaching was sought. A differentiation of religious beliefs and corresponding forms of legitimation of religious authority emerged and there was contestation and conflict on matters of sexual morality namely, contraception, abortion and divorce, and remarriage. The democratising forces unleashed in the post-war years, together with the theological emphasis of Vatican II, which emphasised the participatory 'people of God', held a promise of a more collaborative pattern of clergy/lay relations and a less autocratic style of leadership. Lay people, looking for more democratic forms of decision-making, were in conflict with a religious community with a divinely ordained hierarchical form of clerical authority.

Acceptance of papal authority ranged from unqualified acceptance to complete rejection. In practice, most Catholics claimed that they made up their own mind on most matters of sexual morality, using the pope's teaching as a guide to conscience. There was a strong sense that popes and priests lacked credibility as putative authorities, in those areas where the individuals themselves were the only ones capable of weighing up all the circumstances of their everyday lives realistically and pragmatically. Attitudes to clerical authority declined roughly in line with differentiation between creedal, non-creedal, social and personal moral teaching and the



disciplinary rules of the Church. Views on religious authority cross-cut different types of Catholics and was most evident in the case over contraception where the rejection of official teaching extended across the range. Rational pragmatic forms of decision-making replaced habitual forms of obedience.

Conformists accepted clerical leadership with some provisos. Accommodators took up a negotiating stance with bishops and priests. Innovators felt that rules could be bent, or that deviance was necessary for change. Transformers envisaged inevitable changes and those who contested authority opted out altogether, but it was in the area of sexual morality that the challenge to clerical authority was highlighted. Clerical authority was almost completely lost in the case of contraception and was on the way to being lost, in other areas of personal morality. The growing sense was that, in the final analysis, decisions about personal morality should be left to those concerned.

#### Why do women stay in the Church?

In Western liberal democracies, the questions must be asked: why do women not only stay in a patriarchal Church, but also predominate in it? In the English Catholic Church, women formed over half of attenders. Psychological theories, which attempt to explain why women predominate in the Church, suggest that women experienced more guilt feelings than men (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Gray, 1977; Suzidelis and Potvin, 1981). The sexual theology of the Catholic Church actively fosters guilt in women in several ways. First, it offers the impossible ideal of Mary, virgin and mother, as a role model for women. Married women who engage in sexual activity and/or become mothers fail as virgins and women who choose not to or are unable to have children fail as mothers. Second, the doctrine of original sin lays the blame for evil in the world squarely on women's shoulders. Whilst Adam and Eve were both given responsibility for the Fall, Eve representing all women was depicted as the temptress. Third, women have been associated with the body which has been associated with sex and sin,

whilst men have been associated with spirituality and goodness. It is possible therefore that Catholic women accept their need for forgiveness and may explain why women go to church.

It has been suggested that women generally have higher levels of fear than men (Gray,1977; Garai and Scheinfeld,1968) and that women are more likely than men to experience fear through their direct involvement with birth, death and sickness. When men are exposed to sickness and death during wartime, they are more likely to turn to religion (Walter,1990). If women do experience higher levels of fear than men it is possible that the Church provides comfort against anxiety and existential terror (Tillich,1952; Berger,1969). Also, as women are generally brought up to be dependent and men are brought up to be independent, it is likely that more women than men would be prepared to accept their dependency on the Church or on God (Walter,1990).

If women are more deprived materially and socially than men the Church may offer compensations. Certainly the brunt of poverty is borne by women and Church membership may offer access to charitable aid (McLeod,1981). The Church also elevates poverty into a virtue and promises rewards in the next life for the acceptance of sufferings in this. Walter (1990) considers that many women believe in an ideology of sacrifice, that women believe it is a good thing to sacrifice themselves for others. Women are brought up to sacrifice themselves for men, children, the sick and the old. The Church certainly encourages this ideology for women. The suffering Christ who sacrificed himself for others, is offered as the epitome of personal sacrifice and in Christ, many women see the perfect human being. At the same time, Jesus is the very denial of the patriarchal man. Jesus displayed more 'feminine' characteristics than 'masculine': self-sacrificing, caring, sensitive, serene. As Angela West (1983) points out, a patriarchal God who appears on earth as a male human being, proceeds to side with the poor and oppressed and gets crucified for it, has in effect given up his patriarchal power.



Church membership may also compensate for social isolation. In North America this seems to be the case (McLeod,1981), however, when women do get involved in the Church they often find themselves deprived of status and power and lack of status can be a reason for women leaving, not staying in the Church (Huber,1979). In charismatic groups, women can get more involved in services and organisation, but as Hornsby-Smith, Fulton and Norris (1991) noted, renewal and charismatic groups have always eventually come under clerical control.

Other theories focus on the role of women as homemakers. The privatisation of religion theory suggests that as women were separated from the public world of paid work and politics and men were drawn into the public world of work, religion became the province of women. Puritan drives encouraged men to worldly endeavours (Weber,1976) and women to their God-given role as wife and mother. Not all women who attend Church accept these roles, neither do they accept exclusion from participation in the public sphere.

Theories abound but there is little research on why women go to church. No one theory will supply the answer, perhaps all these theories have an element of truth in them, which can apply to different groups of women. What is clear is that women continue to form the majority of church attenders. It is also clear that although women are in the majority, positions of power in the Church are the prerogative of laymen and priests. Women do everything they are allowed to do from arranging the flowers, working in Church offices, catechising children and converts, acting as ministers of the Eucharist (Dowell and Hurcombe,1987; Field-Bibb,1991; Foster,1992). This thesis is not an enquiry into why women go the church but it does offer women an opportunity to express their own point of view about key issues in the contemporary Church. These views may throw some light onto why some stay and why others go.

## Conclusion

The transformation of authority that occurred in the English Catholic Church was evidence of the changing ideas and practices amongst ordinary English Catholics. Many English Catholics had taken on board Protestant notions of individual conscience preferring to make up their own mind on most issues using traditional teaching only as a guide to conscience. The experience of a pluralist society, in which a plurality of ideas were reflected in everyday life, is in turn reflected in a plurality of religious beliefs and practices. Since the 1970's, there was a significant shift from creedal beliefs or core beliefs to a 'customary Catholicism' distinguished by a heterogeneity of beliefs and practices. There were substantial disagreements with official teaching, many Catholics were seeking an alternative to a rule-bound, absolutist and deductive form of moral teaching. The *disciplinary power* of the Church had all but disappeared as lay compliance to ecclesiastical discipline, especially in the area of sexual morality, became problematic. Some lay people were also looking for a more democratic model of Church in which the laity played an equal part with the clergy.

This heterogeneity of beliefs in the contemporary English Church provides the backdrop to the empirical research. Stage one of the research will provide an overview of the English parish of the 1990's. Stages two and three are concerned to 'dig deeper' in order to isolate the beliefs and practices of priests and women for, although breaking new ground, Hornsby-Smith's work lacks a gender dimension which this thesis attempts to address. In the absence of public debate on key issues in the Church, attention must focus on what is being said in private. What are ordinary priests and women saying about issues of power and authority, about patriarchy, about sexual theology? Is there an identifiable private discourse amongst priests? What priests say and do is significant, for they are the front line troops who translate official dictates into practice. What might it reveal about dissent in the Church? Equally, what do Catholic women say amongst themselves? Is there a distinctive discourse amongst Catholic women? This would be significant, for Catholic women can influence the next generation. On key issues, is



there a 'fit' between the official discourse of the contemporary Church and in what priests and women say. What might their discourse reveal about dissent in the Church?

#### Summary of emergent themes.

Three themes, patriarchy, sexuality, and power and authority, emerge from the review of the literature and are woven through Catholic theology, structures and institutions. It is evident from the historical and contemporary discourses of the Church that patriarchal ideas were absorbed into Catholic teaching and tradition. These ideas, which led to the segregation and subordination of women continue to exist and have value in the contemporary Church. In the Catholic Church, patriarchy, the universal scheme for domination by birthright, which prevails in the area of sex, has been supported and sustained by a theological determinism and a theology of semen. Patriarchal ideas found a resonance in the early Orthodox Church as they provided an affinity, a 'point of coincidence' with common-sense notions of the day. Despite the fact that these ideas have been challenged by alternate discourses, they continue to exist and have value in the official discourse. Do patriarchal ideas continue to offer a 'point of coincidence' with the notions of priests and women living in a liberal democracy at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

The Church created and has maintained discourse, doctrine and institutions, apparatuses of power, which contain strategies of relations of forces supported and sustained by types of knowledge. These apparatuses are intimately connected with each other and depend for their continued legitimacy in the truth of religious knowledge constructed from the ideology of patriarchy. Patriarchal ideas about male superiority and female inferiority underpin religious knowledge about God, revelation, sin, sexuality, woman and man. In the patriarchal Church, leaders assumed, and continue to assume the right to interpret all religious meaning for the community, a prerogative that arose from beliefs about male superiority and the presumption of privileged access to truth by the celibate male. In the contemporary world, religious ideas



about women and sexuality have been challenged. The celibate male is no longer seen as an authority on sex and marriage. Transgressions against celibacy and abuses of children have also contributed to the downgrading of celibate males. Ecclesiastical authority is at an all-time low.

In the absence of a radical re-appraisal of sexual theology the errors, false appraisals and calculations about women continue to exist and have value. Catholic discourses about the female body continue to contribute to 'processes of objectivisation and constraint', and the female body continues as a thing to be used by men and by the Church. Religious inscriptions on the female body continue to link women with sex and sin and are intimately connected with the continued segregation and subordination of women within the Church. The official discourse of the Church continues to categorise and classify women in terms of patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status. Public patriarchy in the Church is evident in the continued exclusion of women from the priesthood and from the decision-making processes of the Church. Notions of women's inferiority continue in the 'unsaid' as much as in the 'said'. The roles offered to women, continue to be traditional roles of wives, mothers or virgins and Mary continues to be held out to women as the impossible project for their bodies. The traditional discourse continues to support and sustain private patriarchy in its support of the patriarchal family type, which is a relation of power based on sex.

Sexuality was and continues to be an especially dense transfer point for relations of power in the Church. Examination of the discourses of the Church has isolated techniques of power in which the body and the social institutions related to it have entered into political relations. A 'machinery of sexuality' constructed through discourse and practice reproduced acts of relations through the institutions of the Church and in the patriarchal family. The thrust of this discursive creation was control and the religious discourses of the Church were primarily directed at the social control of women and their bodies. Sexual relations of power, which favoured men, depended upon the emphasis on man and woman as logical binary opposites. Fixed subject



identities assigned masculine and feminine characteristics were considered 'natural' and 'normal'. Any attempt to alter these fixed identities was seen as 'interfering with nature' as 'unnatural' or 'perverted'. Men and women were damaged by patriarchal notions of temperament, role and status and control of men's sexual bodies in institutional celibacy and women's sexual bodies by male control of reproduction were the quintessence of patriarchy in the Church. Whilst masculinity was a positive construct and men had the possibility of acquiring positions of power for themselves, the negative construction of femininity ensured that women could not access power simply because they were women.

The objectivisation of women's bodies in sexual theology, together with the myth of man's primary role in procreation, supported sexual relations of power that favoured men. Men decided how and when intercourse would happen, assumed rights over children, and controlled women's fertility. In sexual theology women were the passive containers for men's 'seed', allowed no rights over their own bodies and few rights over the product of their wombs. In the contemporary western world, some women no longer necessarily accept religious inscriptions on the body which consign them to patriarchal ideas of temperament, role and status. Many women in the western world can also control their own fertility and in intimate relationships, relations of power have shifted in favour of women. Access to forms of birth-control that do not depend upon men's co-operation, has shifted the power over women's reproduction to women themselves.

At the ideological level, sexual politics in the Church obtained consent firstly through the socialisation of both sexes to patriarchal ideas regarding temperament, role and status, secondly, through catechetics and thirdly, through the confessional, in which the '*celibate gaze*', brought together power and knowledge and instigated a means of interior surveillance, which ensured individual regulation and control. As Catholics rely more on individual conscience and weigh the consequences of their actions for themselves, confession has fallen into disuse. The



declining use of confession reflects the decline in clerical authority, especially with regard to matters of personal sexual morality. Confession as an apparatus of control has lost its grip on the everyday lives of the faithful. It would appear that many women tend to 'make up their own mind' on matters of personal sexual morality, so do they involve priests or the teaching of the pope in their decisions?

In western society, many women are rejecting patriarchal beliefs about their temperament, role and status. Similarly, in the Church some Catholic women are rejecting categorisations and classifications that subordinate them. This rejection is most evident in the area of personal sexual morality. The contradictory messages of traditional teaching and those of a pluralist society have to be personally reconciled if women stay within the Church. Some women, who are not prepared or are unable to reconcile their experience of equality in the wider world with their experience of segregation and subordination in the Church, have left. The empirical research will attempt to discover where these contradictions lie and how women deal with them.

The power and authority of the papacy and priests most especially with regard to matters of sexual morality, have been undermined. Advances in medicine, psychology, sociology and biology challenge traditional explanations for women's inferiority, the status of semen in procreation and the benefits of certain prohibitions surrounding sexual activity in sexual theology. The traditional discourse continues unaltered, despite scientific evidence that undermines its arguments. There is dissent at every level in the Church. Those Catholic theologians and scholars who question traditional orthodoxy have been silenced. In the Catholic community, there is a plurality of beliefs and practices, a 'customary Catholicism', which has little in common with the Catholicism of the official Church. The Church hierarchy controls the public discourse and debate on contentious issues is denied, but dissent is, according to John Paul II, 'no longer containable'. How relevant therefore, is official teaching in the everyday religious lives of English priests and women?



The issues raised in the review of the traditional discourse of the Church point to the empirical research, which concentrates on what is said privately amongst priests and Catholic women, on key issues in the Catholic Church.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN.**

### **The Exploratory Study: Priests and women in the English parish.**

#### **Aims and Methodology.**

##### Introduction.

What English Catholic priests and women say about power and authority, sexual morality and the position and place of women in the Church is the focus of this research. Priests and women interact with each other within the parish, therefore the context of this research is the English parish of the 1990's. In 1992, the Bishop of Plymouth commissioned the Community Research Centre at the University of Plymouth to explore the nature of Catholicity within the 12 parishes in the Plymouth deanery. Professor George Giarchi and Geraldine Sharp conducted this research during 1992-93, on behalf of the Bishop. It was possible to collect data for this thesis from questionnaires and interviews, which indicated what was being said about issues of power and authority, about attitudes to women, the reforms of Vatican II, and matters concerning sexual morality. Permission to use this data was given by the Bishop.

The English parish was examined in the context of the English deanery. There were 12 parishes and a university chaplaincy served by 12 priests. The intention was to provide an holistic overview of parish life, which took account of the increased mobility of parishioners. Whilst some parishioners remain within the parish nearest to their home others tend to move either to another parish, or from parish to parish for different services. There are many reasons why people move from one parish to another, for example, increased mobility has enabled some parishioners to choose where they will worship. Parishioners, no longer confined to the parish in which they live, choose a parish that serves their particular needs. Some parishioners may choose one parish priest over another, preferring the more traditional relationship between themselves and the priest and a more traditional type of service. Others may prefer a more equal relationship between themselves and the priest, together with a more communal,



interactive form of service. Some parishioners, for example those who are divorced, may feel more accepted by one priest or congregation than by another. In some parishes, parishioners talents and skills may be recognised and used, whilst they are ignored in others. These are just a few of the reasons why parishioners move between parishes in an attempt to satisfy their spiritual needs. Although these parishioners may feel little loyalty to their local parish, they often exhibit a fierce loyalty to the parish of their choice.

It is too simplistic to suggest that parishioners ‘pick and choose’ a parish in the same way as they might choose their shopping. The choice of parish is often complex and appears to have more to do with a sense of ‘belonging’ rather than a ‘smorgasbord’ approach to faith. What is interesting is the fact that there is such a range of options within a deanery from which to choose. The different types of priest, the range of services and the levels of personal involvement in worship and/or parish life, demonstrates very clearly how the people and priests of the English parish are expressing the plurality of beliefs and practices, that exist within the English Catholic Church.

Priests also move between parishes, but not with the same level of choice. Priests tend to remain with a diocese for much of their priestly life and some remain within a deanery for many years. Priests are usually moved every few years, consequently priests and people go through a period of change on a regular basis. Some parishioners will follow a favourite priest from parish to parish, whilst some will change parishes, because for a variety of reasons they do not like the new parish priest. The exploratory study of an English deanery provided a more holistic view of the English parish in a way that the study of several isolated parishes could not.

### Methodology.

The general aim of this research is to trace through *descent* and *emergence* those ideas and beliefs contained in Catholic teaching and tradition, which continue to exist and have value in

the contemporary Church. More specifically, it is concerned with the contradictory beliefs and practices which exist in the English parish of the 1990's. It aims through an examination of the private discourses of priests and of women to:

1. uncover Catholic constructions of woman as revealed in its historical and contemporary discourses. In particular to identify how priests and women construct 'woman' at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century;
2. measure the salience and relevance of traditional sexual theology and contemporary teaching in the everyday lives of priests and of women. In particular to discover what priests and women are saying about issues significant for women; contraception, abortion, marriage and divorce/remarriage;
3. question the link between a traditionally formed priesthood and the customary beliefs and practices of ordinary Catholics;
4. discover how what priests and women say and do, 'fits' with traditional teaching and practice.

#### The research site.

The research site was the English Catholic parish, for it is mainly in the parish that priests and women experience the Church and its traditional teachings. To examine what priests and women said in private about traditional teaching would contribute to an understanding of the salience and relevance of traditional teaching in the day-to-day experience of parish life. The work of Hornsby-Smith (1991), which demonstrated the emergence of 'customary Catholicism' and transformations of religious authority in the 1970's and 1980's, provided a contemporary view of English Catholicism. The study of an English deanery by Giarchi and Sharp (1993) confirmed the existence of the 'customary Catholicism' identified by Hornsby-Smith in the English parish of the 1990's. It was possible to collect qualitative material contained within certain data sets in this study, as a contribution to this thesis. Due to the complexity of the research aims, the decision was taken to divide the research into three stages. The first stage



was to set what priests and women say and do, in the context of the discourses of the English parish of the 1990's. Stage two aimed to provide evidence of what priests were saying privately about power and authority, traditional teaching and matters of sexual morality. Stage three aimed to provide evidence of what Catholic women were saying about power and authority, traditional teaching and matters of sexual morality.

Stage one, the study of an English deanery, was carried out during the summer and autumn of 1992 and completed in 1993. The analysis of data sets specific to this research, was completed by the summer of 1994. This analysis concluded stage one of the research. Stage two dealt with the interviews of a representative sample of priests. Interviews were carried out between the summer of 1994 and spring 1995. Stage three dealt with the interviews with a representative sample of Catholic women. Interviews were carried out between the winter of 1994 and summer 1995. Analyses of both sets of data were completed by the spring of 1996.

The deanery study provided a backdrop to stages two and three of the research. The second stage of the research, the interviews with priests, had to be negotiated carefully due to the sensitive nature of the enquiry. In order to ensure a wide coverage of opinion interviews had to be set up with a range of priests from across the country. The age range included young, middle-aged and older priests with an average age of 49 years. Most of the priests had been born and brought up in England and there was a range of educational experience amongst the respondents. Irish priests who had been serving in English parishes for many years were also included in the sample. A wide range of opinions was necessary in order to eliminate any bias that might exist due to age, nationality or educational abilities.

Interviews were informal, to put priests at their ease and to encourage them to speak freely, and structured, in order to ensure that each priest was given the opportunity to respond to the same questions (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). In stage three, a representative sample of women

across the country were identified and interviews set up. In order to access as many women as possible it was decided that women would be invited to group interviews. The attempt to access the views of the 'woman in the pew', would preclude the use of existing Catholic women's organisations as a source of respondents.

#### Negotiating access.

Access to particular groups in the interest of sociological research needs to be carefully considered (Denzin,1978). For a woman to access all-male institutions is problematic even when historically that institution is unconcerned about notions of 'pollution' or 'sin' connected with women. There was awareness that the fact of the researcher being a woman might be enough to restrict access.

Access to the English parish was facilitated when, in the spring of 1992, the Bishop of Plymouth commissioned the Community Research Centre at the University of Plymouth to explore the nature of Catholicity within the Catholic parishes of the Plymouth deanery. The Bishop called a meeting of the clergy and the researchers, so that the aims of the study might be accepted on both sides and to familiarise the clergy with the objectives of the study. In consultation with the Bishops and his priests, it was decided that the study had to embrace the views of Catholic pupils, some students, teachers, nuns, the clergy of the Church and of other Christian denominations. The study also included the views of various local voluntary agencies regarding the Catholic Church in the deanery. The survey also included the opinion which people outside the Church had of the Catholic population.

In stage one of this research, it was possible to collect data from questionnaires and interviews in the deanery study, which indicated what was being said in the parish about issues of power and authority, attitudes to women, the reforms of Vatican II and matters concerning sexual morality. Permission to use this data was given by the Bishop. Ethical considerations



precluded the Plymouth deanery from the subsequent research into the private discourses of priests and women. Priests and women from the Plymouth deanery did consent to assisting the researcher with the pilot studies.

The researcher was encouraged to access deanery archives and the Bishop's private library was put at the researcher's disposal. Official documents of the Catholic Church were in the public domain. The reference section of the Catholic Central Library proved to be an excellent source of documentary evidence used in the review of Church documents in the preceding chapters. Only one request, for access to texts in a monastic library, was denied on the grounds that the researcher was a woman.

In stage two, the interviews with priests, it was acknowledged that access to particular groups in the interest of sociological research may require careful negotiation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Access for a woman to all-male institutions can be problematic; it was decided therefore to use the 'snowball' method of obtaining a sample, a method long accepted in sociological research (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The researcher began by using her private access to circles of priests, each of whom was approached and requested to recommend to her several other priests. The priests were also asked to choose those with differing views from themselves, as a representative sample was required. It was explained, that the research aimed to discover what priests felt about women and issues of concern to women in the Church. The enquiring priest assured prospective interviewees that absolute confidentiality would be maintained and anonymity assured.

Access to the women in stage three was less problematic. The researcher had a wide range of contacts across the country who had expressed an interest in the research. Six women, two in the North of England, two in Central England and two in Southern England agreed to invite a group of 'women from the pews' to come together for the group interviews. They were asked to

invite women with as wide-ranging views as possible, as the aim was to obtain the views of 'ordinary' Catholic women as well as the more vociferous or informed. The only problem arising from this was that women with similar views about the Church tended to come together in groups. In some groups, there was a predominance of women who said they aligned themselves with traditional teachings, while in others there was a predominance of women whose views were dissimilar to traditional teaching. The net effect was that distinct views were expressed across the groups.

### Ethical issues.

Respondents in the deanery study were aware that the Bishop wanted to measure the state of the Catholic Church in the deanery. In stages two and three of the research respondents were aware that their views were required in order to contribute to an understanding of what priests and women were saying about traditional teaching and matters of sexual morality. No pressure was brought to bear on any of the respondents to participate in the study. Absolute confidentiality and anonymity was assured. The Plymouth deanery study is in the public domain and can be referred to as such in this research. There was a keen awareness, that if the priests from the deanery study were interviewed in the sample of priests at stage two, their anonymity might be jeopardised. For this reason and to ensure a representative sample, the final sample of priests was taken from the wider Catholic community. Priests and women from the Plymouth diocese were happy to participate in the pilot study and their comments were most constructive.

### Methods.

In stage one, certain data sets were drawn from the deanery study. In that study the researchers made use of questionnaires, interviews and recorded data collected within the diocese and stored at the Bishop's official residence. Quantitative and qualitative material contained in diocesan records was collected and analysed. Over 2000 questionnaires were returned by



parishioners, neighbours, Catholic primary and secondary school pupils. Twenty in-depth interviews and twelve recorded group discussions were also analysed.

For the purposes of stage one of this research, the questionnaires to parishioners, interviews with priests and parish group interviews were relevant. Questionnaires were distributed to 1,276 parishioners drawn from the 'known' Catholic population, that is, those appearing in parish records. The 'known' Catholic population amounted to 6,388 out of an 'official estimated total' of 13,780, which derived from the numbers put forward by parish priests. There were 653 valid returns. The questionnaires were compiled after several preparatory meetings with parishioners and priests. These meetings suggested the format and content of the questionnaires.

Parishioners' views were sought on Church services, ecumenism, evangelism, parish community, social outreach, school and parish links, attracting younger people, parishioner involvement, the role of the parish priest, diocesan administration and views on changes to be made in the parishes, the diocese and the Church. Of the respondents, 40.9% were aged 60 or over, about 60% were in employment, about 14% were unemployed and 64.6% were women.

Twelve parish priests and one university chaplain were interviewed. On average, they had been ordained for 27 years. Seven were ordained before the 2nd Vatican Council. One-to-one semi-structured interviews, focused on the role and identity of the parish priest and his level of satisfaction, the spiritual needs of parishioners, views on social outreach to surrounding neighbourhood, ecumenical links with other Christian denominations, links with the schools and views of the deanery. Group interviews were carried out in twelve parishes. Representatives of all parish organisations were invited to attend. Other parishioners were also invited to attend. The interviews were designed to discover what parishioners thought of their parish and of their place within it.

### Interview techniques for stages two and three.

In stages two and three, complex phenomena were being explored. In order to cover a wide range of complex issues and attitudes, in-depth interviews were used as they were more likely to get to the core of the attitude of each respondent (Moser and Karlton, 1986; Holstein, 1995). The interviews were carefully structured beginning with general questions of a non-threatening nature and gradually moving to questions covering issues that are more sensitive. The questions allowed the respondents the freedom to respond in their own way whilst systematically covering a given set of issues. In response to the possible criticism that allowing respondents such freedom may encourage the respondent to rationalise, the truth or falsity of statements in discourse analysis is unknown. In order to counter the basic objection of the difficulty of summarising and quantifying the material, questions were thorough and systematic and were the same for each interview with the priests. In order to compare the responses of women and priests the same issues were raised in the group interviews with the women. The questionnaires and interviews were constructed within the language of the Catholic community.

### The interviews with Catholic priests.

The interviews were constructed around key points with the purpose of eliciting certain information, which would inform the research questions. In order that priests understood what was required of them it was explained that the purpose of the interview was to better understand what priests think about certain issues in the contemporary Church. In order to ensure the highest level of motivation to answer questions honestly, the initial request for interview included:

- (i) an acknowledgement of the priest's busy schedule i.e. the length of time required for the interview was given and several weeks (or even months) notice was given;
- (ii) the value of the priest's input to the research;
- (iii) an assurance that very personal details of the priest's private life were not being sought;



(iv) the interview itself began with an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

It is recognised that interviews covering such sensitive topics, demands particular skills on the part of the interviewer. The researcher has considerable interviewing experience on sensitive subjects, for example psychiatric illness and issues of sexuality. Every attempt was made to minimise interviewer bias and/ or influence. Apart from gently probing questions such as “why”? “how”? and questions for clarification such as “could you say that again in another way”?, every respondent was asked the same questions, in the same order, in the same manner. It is hoped that tone of voice, method of delivery, body language and facial expressions did not convey anything other than an unbiased, non-judgemental, but interested interviewer.

#### The questions.

Questions were structured around issues arising from the previous analysis of texts and doctrines and were designed to include key issues in the traditional discourse of the Catholic Church; the nature of God, the nature of authority, the status of women, sexual morality and celibacy. The questionnaire was designed to discover what priests were saying about these issues, through discovering how they felt about Vatican II reforms, collegiality and papal primacy, the status of women in the Church, celibacy, contraception, marriage, abortion, divorce and remarriage, relationships between women and priests, and the nature of God. The first couple of sections aimed to put the priest at ease. The sections gradually included issues that were more sensitive. The most sensitive and more personal questions were at the end of the interview. A schedule of the questions appears at Appendix 1.

The pilot study, which tested the interviewing techniques for the [later] sample of English priests, was carried out in Plymouth with several of the priests who had been involved in the deanery study. In the pilot study, one priest said that he found the intellectual nature of the questions about sensitive issues non-threatening. Another priest said that he found some of the

questions difficult to understand. The use of appropriate language was therefore considered and several research questions were adjusted to make them more understandable.

A couple of priests admitted a lack of in-depth knowledge about certain issues raised in the interview.

As a result of the pilot study, several other changes were made to the questionnaire. It was taking far too long to administer. It had not been anticipated that the priests would be prepared to go into quite as much detail with their responses. It was also found that the priests were bringing up themselves, several questions that would have been asked. In consequence, the questionnaire was shortened considerably. Several questions were rephrased in order to avoid double-barrelled questions resulting in ambiguity. Leading questions were avoided. In order to address issues of sexual morality of particular concern to women, priests were asked to consider their responses to specific scenarios. In the later interviews, priests were able to understand the questions although a couple said that they were unable to answer adequately due to their acknowledged ignorance of particular issues.

#### The sample of Catholic priests.

Of the twenty priests invited to participate, three refused. These priests were introduced to the researcher as 'traditionalists'. One of these priests continues with the Latin rite and attracts a minority of Catholics who attend regularly. One was a recently converted Anglican priest. One was a priest whose devotion to Mary was legendary. The age range of the respondents was between 36 years and 71 years. The average age was 49 years. Twelve priests were born and brought up in England, four in Ireland and one on the Continent. The length of time a priest, ranged between 9 years and 46 years with an average time of 22 years. The total 'priest years' in the sample was 381 years. Fourteen of the priests received an all-Catholic primary and secondary education. Two priests had a non-Catholic primary education and a Catholic secondary education. Only one priest received no Catholic primary or secondary education.



Three of the priests had higher education awards plus their seminary training. Fourteen priests had only seminary training. Seven of the priests had 'always wanted to be a priest'. Eight priests said there had been a particular priest in their childhood who had provided them with a role model they wished to emulate. Two priests had what they described as 'a conversion experience'.

The sample was drawn from across England. Each priest was asked to introduce the researcher to another priest by giving her the names of several priests whom they suspected held differing views from themselves. They had no knowledge of the priests finally included in the study. None knew who else had participated in the study as confidentiality and anonymity was protected throughout.

#### The interviews with Catholic women.

The decision was taken to use group interviews to collect the data on Catholic women. There were two reasons for this. First, the quality of the data collected from the group interviews in the deanery study had been impressive. Second, inviting women who did not represent any particular Catholic women's organisation to come together in groups would also be cost and time effective whilst allowing the women a rare opportunity to share their views.

The group interviews were constructed in order to discover what Catholic women were saying about issues concerning traditional sexual theology, contemporary teaching and matters of sexual morality, in particular, contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage, and institutional celibacy. Women who took part in the pilot study, were asked what issues they thought were significant in the Church today, in order to confirm that the issues raised in the review of the literature were the issues which 'ordinary' women thought important. The issues that came up mirrored those that emerged from the literature review. At the pilot stage it became apparent

that a simple “What do you think about...?” questioning approach was enough to start animated debate amongst the groups of women.

It was also clear from the pilot that the researcher would have to encourage the women to focus on one point at a time and ensure that everybody was given the opportunity to voice their opinions. To begin with, women were asked what they thought about Vatican II, this usually led to a discussion about power and authority in the Church. Women were then asked what they thought about *Humanae Vitae*, the role and status of women in the Church, institutional celibacy, and the nature of God. As was evident at the pilot stage, such a general approach obtained the same coverage of the key issues raised in the interviews with priests.

Women had views on papal and clerical authority, the teachings of the current pope, their status and role in the Church, contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage, celibacy, women priests, married men as priests, Anglican priests converting to Catholicism. These same issues had been raised with the priests. Each issue was introduced by “What do you think about...?” in order to maintain a systematic and rigorous approach. Discussions were taped and later written up. The researcher intervened in the discussions as little as possible. It was necessary on occasion to ask for clarification and very occasionally to ask a specific question of interest. Most groups needed little encouragement to talk. They seemed only too pleased to voice their opinions.

A cross-section of Catholic women was invited to take part in the study. Women were taken from the ‘known’ Catholic population. Six women from different parts of the country agreed to convene groups in their area, from as wide a range of respondents as possible. It was decided not to approach Catholic women’s organisations for respondents, as the aim was to elicit views from the ‘woman in the pew’. As it happened, some women in each group were members of various Catholic women’s organisations. What was avoided was any one organisation



dominating the responses thereby biasing the results. It was therefore possible to obtain the views of the 'ordinary' woman in the pew as well as the views of some of the more vociferous and well informed. The informal nature of the group sessions encouraged women to speak out. Most of the sessions took part in women's own homes. Many of the women said that this was the first opportunity they had had to discuss with others, how they felt about the Church.

Forty three women from the north, central and south of England took part. Groups included women who were married, widowed, divorced, single parents, or single. All except three women who had converted to Catholicism were 'cradle Catholics'. There were no women religious in the sample. It was felt that the views of women religious would be worthy of further research. There was a wide range of occupations, housewives, professional and non-professional and retired women. Women were employed (or had previously been employed) as teachers, pastoral workers, administrative workers, nurses, college lecturers, care workers and canteen workers. Table 1 shows the age range of each of the women's groups.

**Table 1. Women respondents.**

Area (Group N <sup>o</sup> )	N <sup>o</sup> of Participants	Age Range
North (1)	8	35-45
North (2)	5	37-55
Central (1)	8	24-29
Central (2)	7	32-44
South (1)	6	51-72
South (2)	9	31-54

Reflections on the methodology.

With such sensitive issues under discussion, much time was spent in considering appropriate forms of access to priests and women. The whole process was considered to have been

successful and a large amount of data had been collected on which to base a doctoral thesis. Foucault's notion of history as genealogy provided a stimulating guide to asking not only historical questions but to uncover how patriarchal ideas continue to exist and have value. The use of discourse as an analytic tool allowed for the isolation and analysis of techniques of power, which are implicated in the gendered relations of the Catholic Church.

Ethical issues were considered in the research design. The publication of the deanery study, for example, precluded the use of the participants of this study other than in the pilot study. All prospective participants were permitted the choice to participate or not. Information about the research and the interview process was given in order that each person could make an informed choice (Homan, 1991). Three priests and one or two women did refuse to participate. Neither priests nor women were 'required' to participate, but those who did, did so freely, most indicating that they were very happy to be involved. That some questions were adjusted and refined, demonstrates the on-going reflexivity of the research.

It is imperative for any researcher to be familiar with the cultural milieu, of which language is a part (Denzin, 1978). As a "cradle Catholic" the researcher shared a common membership of the Catholic Church with all of the people in the study. After the ban on artificial contraception in the 1960's, she, in common with many other Catholic women, was forced into a process of conscientisation, which had more impact on her than on the Women's Movement. Later, she was faced with the issue of divorce, which resulted in non-participation in organised religion. She maintained a personal spirituality, which was informed by her own experience. On moving to Plymouth in 1984, she became involved once more in the local Catholic Church. In the intervening 15 years, 'ordinary' Catholicism had changed. On the whole, other parishioners were accepting of a divorced and remarried woman in their midst. Most were understanding and sympathetic to her situation. There was however one problematic area, the sanction on the reception of the sacraments.



The impetus to this research began with an awareness of competing notions of Catholicity in the parish. Added to this, talk of equality between laity and clergy in the parish was not necessarily matched in practice. Levels of women's participation in particular appeared to be dependent upon the attitudes of the parish priest or the bishop. During the review of the literature, the researcher came to realise the depth and pervasiveness of patriarchy in the Church. It became increasingly more difficult for her to participate in Church services that reinforced women's inferior status. She was forced to consider her religious beliefs in light of new knowledge, and found them wanting. A period of soul-searching ended with a withdrawal from the Catholic Church. It was felt that it was the only way to retain her integrity. She refused however to be labelled a 'lapsed Catholic', which she considered a derogatory term. There had been no denial of the positive, spiritual Catholic experience, particularly the awareness of the dignity of the person. She decided therefore to label herself a 'post-Catholic' which she felt reflected her true position. The negative experiences that outweighed the positive were jettisoned. Thus, the researcher was familiar with the culture and language of the Church, and with the place of women within it. The researcher's understanding of the Catholic community and her position in it, led to a consideration of the researcher's own values and possible biases.

Whilst every effort was made to maintain objectivity at every stage of the research, it is acknowledged that no researcher can escape from influencing their own findings in some way (Denzin, 1978). The researcher was keenly aware of the possibility of bias and did everything possible to eliminate it. She is a skilled interviewer and group facilitator and is satisfied that she did everything possible to set aside her own values and biases, in order to create an atmosphere in which diverse groups of people with a range of perspectives could be totally honest.

The following chapter presents the findings of stage one of the research.

## CHAPTER EIGHT.

### Findings within the Deanery.

#### Introduction.

Deanery records within the diocese showed that Mass attendance and confessions were in serious decline. 'Social' rituals such as baptism and marriage were also in decline. In fact, all the accepted indicators of religious participation, that is, mass attendance, age, baptisms, marriages and numbers of confessions the parishes in the study showed significant decline. In the 1970's mass attenders numbered over 5000, by 1991 this number was 3561. Since the 1950's, the annual baptisms had dropped by 49.7%. Marriages had dropped by 40%. Regular mass attenders were getting older, 67.7% were over 40 years of age and 39.9% were over 60 years of age. There were an estimated 4,388 lapsed Catholics in a deanery where there has been a 14.7% drop in mass attendance between 1987 and 1991. Only about 27% of Catholics regularly made use of the sacrament of reconciliation and between 27% and 33% made their Easter duty.

It was evident that the parishes were not attracting or keeping young people. A significant number of young people had dropped out of the parish community, in line with the exit of Catholic youths everywhere in the UK (Brierley, 1991). A significant factor in the absence of young people from the life of the parish, was alienation. The 'them and us' situation identified by Finney (1991) was replicated in the case of pupils who had ceased to attend church. Catholic children of the parishes had become disenchanted by the end of secondary school. Church services were outside their 'normal' sphere of reference and social culture and it was clear that the young would not be replacing the ageing congregations.



### Power and authority in the parish.

It was evident from the responses to the questionnaires that power and authority in the deanery and in the parish remained in the hands of the clergy. The majority of parishioners indicated that a more democratic means of sharing power in the deanery and the parish would be more acceptable. It was evident that some parishioners had difficulty reconciling their notions of community leadership with the continuing power of the clergy. Their expectation of collaborative working and shared responsibility in the parish arose from the emphasis on the 'royal priesthood of believers' together with the increased levels of participation arising from Vatican II. A significant minority of parishioners also expressed their dissatisfaction with the levels of responsibility open to them in the parish. They said that whilst they were accepted as responsible, capable and skilled individuals in other areas of their lives, in the parish they had to defer to the priest. In line with their understanding of 'increased participation' and of life in a liberal democracy, a significant number of 'progressive' parishioners were asking for a change in status, an equal partnership with the clergy.

Some professional women indicated a frustration and annoyance at the subordinate roles they were expected to play in the life of the parish. They said that their talents were being wasted. Most parishioners were unclear about their level of responsibility in the Church, or in the parish. The 'co-responsibility' emphasised by Cardinal Suenens (1968) was lacking. The majority (78.9%) of parishioners were unable to answer the question as to what their parish would look like in the year 2000. The majority of women respondents noted that whilst most parishes had parish councils most remained under the control of men and the parish priest. Some women were on parish councils, but positions of authority remained the preserve of men. This was despite the female bias in parishioners prepared to work for the parish and a strong caucus of local women pressing for change. These women linked their powerless position, with the persistence of patriarchal attitudes in the men of the parish. During the parish interviews, some women put forward their views.

‘Why do women never get the important jobs? We do all the work, but at the end of the day, the men get the glory. They still think they’re better than us’.

Some women also resented the assignment of traditional gender roles with its emphasis on marriage and motherhood.

‘You would think that’s all we can do. I’m a professional person in my own right, but Father wouldn’t dream of asking for my help in parish affairs’.

There was evidence that a minority of women also held patriarchal views. They chastised those women who did not comply with the patriarchal model of marriage and motherhood.

‘I’m proud to be a wife and mother. My husband is head of our house. St. Paul said that wives should be subject to their husbands. In my view if these women did what the Holy Father said there would be fewer broken marriages and delinquent children’.

Few parishes had girl altar servers, despite the fact that the majority of female secondary pupils had expressed a desire to do so. From responses to questionnaires and remarks made at parish interviews it would appear that the issue is that of male power linked with notions of impurity and sex. Some women respondents remarked on the reservation of the priesthood to men alone, the continuing association with women and sex, and the persistence in the Church of prejudicial notions associated with menstrual blood.

In the parish interviews, it was evident that there was considerable resistance to girl altar servers by some parish priests, despite the fact that boy altar servers were in short supply. A parishioner gave an example where a priest visiting a parish where girl altar servers were usually allowed, refused to accept the only available server (a girl) and asked a man in the congregation if he would serve. A respondent in another parish when asked if there were girl servers in their parish replied.

‘Father said he won’t have girl altar servers because he said they would distract him. Perhaps it’s something to do with sex or impurity or something’.



### Dissenting issues.

With regard to changes in the Church, emphasis was placed on a change in policy regarding contraception, acceptance of divorcees at the sacraments, optional celibacy and a more active involvement in establishing justice and peace. Over 70% of those participating in interviews and questionnaires were in favour of a radical revision of sexual theology in general and of contraception in particular. The discouragement of *Humanae Vitae* remained alive and the negative sanctions on contraception were widely known.

### Vatican II reforms and levels of awareness.

The 2nd Vatican Council was a watershed in relation to fundamental changes of religious ideation and practice. It was however, concerned largely with theological and juridical principles and much less with the sociological contexts in which they would be received. In the sociological context of the parish, it was through changes in the liturgy that the parishioners experienced theological, institutional and organisational change. The 'Tridentine paradigm' (that is, pre-conciliar theological orientations) no longer received official legitimation in the years following the Council. Vatican reforms were experienced by many Catholics only through changes in the liturgy. The ineffectiveness of the socialisation of English Catholics (Buller, 1981) ensured that the theological underpinnings which supported this change were never fully understood. In those city parishes where Vatican II meant little more than the priest facing the people and the abolition of Friday abstinence, it was unsurprising that there was continued resistance to post-conciliar organisational change, with its concomitant theological underpinnings.

In a few parishes, there was evidence that Vatican II reforms had really taken hold, in others, reform was minimal and reluctant. Reform was dependent largely on the parish priest. Priests could be characterised as pre- or post-Vatican types. What was also evident was that vestiges of both ideal types existed within individual priests. Most priests had moved some way along a

continuum from pre- to post-Vatican visions of Church. Each priest had moved further on some issues than on others. Hence, it was possible to find priests who genuinely encouraged reform and those who implemented reforms selectively and/or reluctantly.

Much conflict focused on changes to the liturgy. Two competing sets of attitudes to the liturgy were evident. First, traditionalists embraced a hierarchical system and a sacerdotal model of ministry which excluded women from any sacramental function and which consigned the laity to passive roles in liturgical celebration. Second, the progressives who embraced notions of a 'royal priesthood' of believers and co-responsibility, which actively involved the laity in the liturgy. The belief in the special nature of priesthood, reflected in the sacerdotal model, was evident in a majority of parishioners whether traditional or progressive. There were certain functions that only a priest could perform, namely to celebrate the Eucharist, give absolution and provide the last rites of the Church.

The parish was a place of contradictions and priests, unable to resolve conflict between competing sets of ideas concerning practice, fell back to the position of 'Father knows best' that is, the role of *Pater Familias*. In conflict situations, even the more progressive clergy adopted the role of *Pater Familias*. These men had adopted the theology of Vatican II, emphasised the participation of the laity, adopted participatory liturgies which included both men and women, saw themselves as 'pilgrims' alongside the laity and in need of their understanding and support, and stressed the value of community. Such clergy were non-condemnatory in issues of personal sexual morality emphasising the liberation of God's unconditional love. Some were also aware of the harm done to women by patriarchal authoritarian structures, nevertheless their ultimate authority in practice was patriarchal.



## Conclusion.

This stage of the research covered twelve parishes in the Plymouth deanery and was the most comprehensive study of English Catholic parishes to date. It provided a snapshot of the English deanery in the 1990's. There was evidence of decline, which replicated indicators of decline in the European Catholic parish. The socialisation of the laity following Vatican II had not been effective. For the majority of the laity, their knowledge of Vatican II reforms was experiential, focusing on changes to the liturgy and levels of participation. Changing practice together with poor socialisation, had led to conflicts between priests and laity, which generally focused on changes to the liturgy. The findings of Hornsby-Smith (1991) of a pluralism of beliefs and practices which point to a hierarchy of truths in the minds of English Catholics, remained relevant. There was evidence of a range of beliefs that were rarely uncomplicated, consistent, or theologically coherent, which were characterised by contradictions, ambiguity, ambivalence and incoherence.

In the context of the parish, the issue of power and authority remained an evergreen issue. Notions of a more democratic Church had filtered through to the parish in two ways. Firstly, through parishioner's experience of liberal democracy and secondly, through the debate on collegiality at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. Whilst there was little evidence of an awareness of the theological underpinnings of the collegiality debate there was an expectation of a more democratic Church in the making. This was seen as a threat by what appeared to be a vocal minority in favour of a monarchical concept of Church.

There was evidence that patriarchal beliefs about women and the nature of Church continued to exist, have value and contributed to the contradictions of parish life. Women, accommodated in terms of 'service', were 'allowed' to participate. Their 'right' to participate could be denied by a parish priest. Confusion arose from the presumed equality of higher levels of participation. Notions of woman as an 'occasion of sin' were also evident. The nature of women's

participation was such, that it challenged previous notions of male superiority and the reservation of sacred spaces for men alone. Some priests and women found this unacceptable. On the other hand, there were indications that some women were prepared to challenge the reservation of the priesthood to men alone and had rejected traditional roles, which segregated and subordinated them. The challenge to papal authority in matters of sexuality was implicit in the continued resistance to the ban on contraception, the acceptance of divorcees at the sacraments, and the desire to debate optional celibacy.

It cannot be assumed that the findings in this deanery are indicative of the whole of the English Catholic Church. As this was an exploratory study, there remains much of interest to be followed up at another time. Findings in the deanery study certainly point to the 'customary Catholicism' described by Hornsby-Smith (1991). Conflicting ideas exist and focus around issues of power and authority, sexual morality and the position of women in the Church. These issues reflected the issues arising from the review of the literature and provided the basis of the subsequent interviews with priests and Catholic women.

This snapshot of an English deanery provides the context for the next two chapters, in which the private discussions of priests and women will be investigated.



## CHAPTER NINE.

### The Private Discourse of English Priests.

#### Introduction.

Discourse is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but the means by which ideas are created and sustained. The use of discourse as an analytic tool, has allowed for the isolation and analysis of techniques of power, which are implicated in the ways in which the female body and the social institutions related to it, have entered into political relations. Patriarchal ideas about temperament, role and status have been absorbed into the theological discourses of the Church. These discourses have produced discursive practices, which have served to subordinate women. Where there is power there is resistance and it is in the parish, in the everyday relations between priests and women that this resistance can be located.

The grip that a dominant discourse has on an individual is imperfect, therefore it is to be expected that there will be a gap between the dominant discourse of the Church and the actual material experiences, of the everyday lives of priests and women. Priests and women who remain in the Church somehow manage the contradictions between the dominant discourse of the Church and the critical discourses of liberty, justice and equality in the wider world. What are priests and women saying? Does what they say point to new ideas for the Church?

Do patriarchal beliefs about women, which arose from lowly human factors contingent upon surrounding circumstances, continue to exist and have value for priests and women? Have priests and women been affected by the feminist discourses of the wider world? What do priests and women say about temperament, role and status? Do priests expect to tell women what to do with their bodies and do women accept that control? What do they say about issues of power and authority, about institutional celibacy, about physical and sexual abuse, about marriage, divorce, contraception and abortion? The aims of this stage of the research, were to discover

what ordinary English priests and women were saying about these issues and to identify how what priests and women say and do, 'fits' with the dominant discourse of the Church.

The attempt to make the Church more relevant to the modern world at the 2nd Vatican Council opened up debate in the Church. What emerged was a plurality of beliefs and an expectation of a more democratic Church, in line with the experience of those living within western liberal democracies. Following *Humanae Vitae*, many Catholics asked themselves questions about clerical authority in matters of sexual morality, which led to the maturation of some individual consciences. Many Catholics, especially women, began to decide for themselves about issues such as divorce, contraception and abortion. As the barriers between priests and people began to come down it seemed that a more democratic Church was possible. Following the Council the command posts of power remained in the hands of a powerful traditional orthodox elite, a period of retrenchment followed and with the administration of John Paul II overt absolutism returned to the Church. The strength of traditionalist reaction, to challenges to its power and authority, indicated the existence of alternative discourses within the Church as dissenting theologians and teachers were disciplined and forbidden the public arena. There was evidence of a plurality of ideas, which challenged the static, immutable truths of traditional orthodoxy.

In England by the 1980's, a 'customary Catholicism' was distinguished by a plurality of beliefs and practices, no longer subject to effective control by the religious leadership. In the 1990's, the deanery study suggested that debate is still on-going at parish level. So how successful have the strategies for containment been with regard to priests? In public, priests demonstrate solidarity with the pope. Does what priests say privately support this public image, or do they say something different in private from what they espouse in public? What do priests say privately about power and authority, sexual theology and women? In short is there a significant identifiable private discourse common to English priests.



### An overview of the findings.

Most of the priests in the study, indicated a lack of in-depth knowledge about theology in general and sexual theology in particular. Why was there such an emphasis on sexual sins, they asked. Why could married men not be priests? Why not optional celibacy? Why not women priests? They understood the rules and the sanctions but few displayed any knowledge of Church history, biblical scholarship or sexual theology.

The majority of priests whilst acknowledging that the use of exclusive language might have an adverse effect on women queried whether it was that important. Few priests were prepared to address the problem. Apart from a few priests, the masculine nature of God was dominant. All of the priests had been affected to a greater or lesser degree by the reforms of Vatican II and younger priests had known nothing other than the post-Vatican II Church. This was not to say they were any better informed about the Council than the older priests. There was no correlation between younger age and progressiveness. In fact, the most progressive priest in the sample was the oldest respondent (71 years).

As in the deanery study there was evidence of both traditional and modern beliefs and attitudes in all of the priests. Priests with more traditional views had accepted the reforms of the Council in a spirit of obedience. The more liberal minded priests were more enthusiastic about reform. Consequently, all of the priests had to a greater or lesser degree, adopted at least some of the reforms of Vatican II. Those priests who could be described mainly as 'traditional' had in fact become part of transition and change albeit reluctantly. These priests, formed before the Council, were socialised into the virtues of obedience, docility and loyalty, they represented a 'sacred figure' separate from the laity. The lack of appropriate re-training and implementation of reforms had made the transition to a new vision of Church difficult. They expressed feelings of disquiet about changes, concerned that basic Catholic doctrine was threatened by the plurality

of beliefs and practices which had entered the Church. Their mission was directed by a need to preserve and protect the faith.

In the deanery study, it was evident that thirty years after the Vatican Council English Catholics had not been effectively socialised. The majority of the priests in the study said that parish priests had not been properly informed of the theological underpinnings of the Council. It was evident from the responses, that the theological and juridical principles became separated from the social context in which they were to be received. For most of the priests, Council reform in the parishes focused on the experiential, that is, the liturgy and greater lay participation. In the absence of theoretical underpinnings, most of the priests had problems in explaining why changes in practice were necessary.

One of the key issues at the Council, that of collegiality and papal primacy, was understood basically in terms of a shift of power from the papacy to the college of bishops. In only a few priests was there any demonstrable awareness of the implications of a shift of power for Church organisation and institutions. None linked the issue to hopes for women's equality in the Church.

The high visibility of the current papacy had ensured mass media coverage of papal pronouncements and few of the priests had read more about papal statements than they found in the press. They, as the rest of the world, had heard and understood the sanctions, the emphasis on contraception and sexual sins, and the refusal to debate optional celibacy, a married priesthood or women priests.

Several priests declared themselves too busy with their pastoral work to read all that came out of Rome. The majority either said or implied, that they took little notice of what the pope said any more, operating with 'only half an eye on Rome', interpreting and re-interpreting rules and



papal pronouncements, to accommodate the complexity of the everyday experiences of people's lives.

As in the deanery study, the majority of the priests emphasised their pastoral role. There was evidence of a shift from the sacred and mediatorial paradigm of priesthood, to the competing, quasi-democratic secular paradigms, the stress on the sacralisation of the priesthood set apart from the world, replaced by a stress on priesthood as a co-responsible ministry of service. Most said that the priest was not 'set apart' but leader and servant of the parishioners who shared in the 'royal priesthood of believers'. His relationship with parishioners was one of friendliness and service. The majority of priests talked of growth, renewal and the development of community in both the parish and the wider community, as a consequence of the Council. The following related aspects were relevant.

#### The nature of God.

Notions of God continued to be influenced by the traditional masculine image of God. Four priests said they were unable to describe God. There was in the remainder a definite sense that God was a man. The way in which these priests talked about the nature of God reflected the changing representations of God since Vatican II but masculine images still dominated. None talked of God in terms of 'Judge' but described God as a 'Loving Father', 'Shepherd', 'Friend' or 'Servant' that they felt reflected Christ in the New Testament. This image of the Christ God appropriate to a post-Vatican pilgrim Church reflected a shift of emphasis from a hierarchical God to a God for the community of believers.

Several priests recognised that the male image of God remained embedded in liturgy and language, structures and power.

'The male image of God remains in the way we present God to the people, talk to the people. The bishop and the priest, the relationship between them and the people'.

These priests recognised the link between power and the nature of God.

‘If the clergy are dogmatic, then God is a judge. If the people are openly received and with friendship, then they see God as loving. I do not think priests realise the power they have’.

‘Yes, it’s a trap. The primary source is scripture which is mainly Judaic. It’s filled with male images, it’s foundational. What do you do? I’m conscious of the problem’.

‘Some women must feel discriminated against. The male sex is extended to God. It must be excluding’.

A few priests recognised that the exclusively masculine nature of God might also present a problem for men.

‘The Church talks of God as “he” not “it”. The male image of God is right through from the Almighty. The first image is one of power. Men identify with this, with the Supreme Man. Man is next in power to God. Men have to be powerful and strong, not in touch with their emotions, not loving and caring’.

The majority of the priests felt that the image of a male God might affect women adversely. Of these about a half were clear about the issue, the other half felt it had an adverse effect but were not sure what that might be.

The male God remained the dominant image of God amongst the priests. There was however an awareness that the use of exclusive language to describe God may have a detrimental affect on women. Several priests also acknowledged that the image of God as ‘All Powerful’ man, could be damaging to men. There was a reluctance to address the issue.

#### The use of sexist language.

Several priests themselves brought up the issue of inclusive language in the context of the nature of God. There was an awareness that a male God and the use of non-inclusive language were significant and most of the priests said the use of inclusive language was important but not that important. Apart from two priests, there was a reluctance to address the issue of language.

A few priests expressed a sense of irritation with women who ‘keep on about it’.



‘I only began to understand that a male image of God might affect some women when the Church began to change the language of the liturgy. We started saying “for us all” instead of “for us men”’.

‘Surely women can interpret the language to include themselves. Man is a generic term’.

‘I’m concerned that it [the use of inclusive language] could go too far making a nonsense of the meaning’.

There was a dilemma concerning language. On the one hand, priests clearly accepted that the use of non-inclusive language might be a problem. There was a conflict between the language used in everyday life and the everyday masculine language of the Church. The priests appeared caught between an experience of cultural change in which inclusive language was becoming routinised and the language and liturgy of the Church in which masculine language was routine.

#### Priests’ personal relationships with women.

All of the priests except one, currently or previously had important relationships with women.

The priests recognised the value of these relationships for their own well being and for their pastoral care of women. These relationships were in the main hidden from public view.

‘Priests cannot begin to understand women unless they are in dialogue with them at some intimate level. You have to keep quiet because nobody would believe that it could be at a platonic level. We say little because its easier not to, there is always the risk of scandal’.

Implicit in the responses was a link between women and sex that the priests were keen to avoid, stressing the supportive nature of friendship with women, but were concerned about how the laity would view any priests/woman relationship.

‘I have women friends I always have. I think priests should have friends of both sexes if they are to be full human beings, otherwise they become impoverished. I find women put a different viewpoint from men. They bring a judgement, men do not’.

‘My closest friend is a woman. There is no sexual relationship’.

‘Some relationships help him to remain sane a better all round priest’.

Almost instinctively some of the priests turned to women in times of crisis, personal distress or loneliness.

‘Sometimes a priest is so worn down and if they are offered relatively disinterested support, love, even sex, then they take it. The relationship of care and support is important. Such a relationship can be affirming and supportive, it may help him to continue in his ministry’.

‘It was to a woman that I went after I lost my father’.

The majority of the priests acknowledged their need for meaningful relationships with women.

The dilemma was how to be friends with women whilst old notions of women, sex and sin remained.

#### Persistence and change in patriarchal views of women.

Stereotypical images of women rooted in biological determinism persisted in the midst of changing perceptions of women.

‘Men and women are different in many ways. Biologically, in strength, men are physically stronger than women, but women are mentally stronger. I did not used to think that but over the past few years I have come to realise this’.

‘Women are different but complementary. That is I mean they are better at nurturing and have intuition which men do not have’.

What was notable from the responses was the continuing tendency by the priests to define women as mothers and nurturers.

‘Women do this [mothering] so well, the bonding and so on. Virginity will always have a valid place in the Christian community.....I must say I admire women’s ability to be long suffering. They express the beauty of suffering altruistically’.

Most of the priests felt that motherhood would always have a special place. There was however an awareness of the changing roles of women in society and in the Church.

‘When I look around I see women in positions of importance, as politicians, doctors, lecturers and so on. Women have much to offer’.

There was a shift away from old notions of women’s intellectual inferiority. The counsel of women was sought out and valued.

‘If I want to talk about the important things in life I go to a woman’.



### Mariology.

Several priests recognised the difficulty some women have with Mary, Virgin and Mother as a role model.

‘There is a problem with offering Our Lady as mother and virgin. This does not tie up with the experiences of women’.

‘Single women are left out and many single women have devoted their lives to the Church and to others, but so little is said about the vocation of single women’.

Most of the priests were aware that the changing roles of women in society, did not fit neatly with the Church’s model of ‘perfect womanhood’. They acknowledged the value of women in society and in their personal lives. As individuals, women were respected and their advice often sought out. What was less clear was whether the priests felt all women were like those that they knew or whether they thought that these women were exceptions to the rule. There was a sense that a woman’s primary role was that of motherhood, but there was no denial of women’s ability to adopt roles previously reserved for men.

### Changing practice.

A shift in the ways in which priests viewed women was evident in the increasing participation of women in the parish. At an experiential level the priests in the study were aware of and encouraged women’s work in the Church, but some continued to talk about women being ‘allowed’ to do things in the Church previously denied them.

‘Women now do anything, big or little as they are allowed’.

In the parish, women’s participation tended to remain associated with motherhood and the nurturing role.

‘Women are of course important on the domestic scene in families and in communities. It seems most of the voluntary work is done by women, the catechising, the admin., the caring the hospitality’.

## Status.

All of the priests felt that they encouraged women to do all that men did in the parish and expressed this participation as equality for women in the Church. Women's status at the parish level was now equal and resistance to equality was from 'one vociferous man' or 'from other women'.

'Women do everything men do except get ordained'.

On reflection, most of the priests did note the discrepancy between participation and status.

'Women are not representative in the decision-making in parish and diocese. There are more women than there used to be but when you consider the numbers of women, they are not representative'.

All of the priests accepted that at the institutional level of Church, women were second class citizens.

'They were [second class citizens] in the past but now bishops and priests see women on an equal footing. They were second class at one time but much has been done to redress the balance'

'Yes women are second class because they have no access to decision-making'.

## Vatican II.

Most felt that the Vatican Council had an 'enormous effect on women'.

'The common priesthood of believers is the foundation of the involvement of the laity'.

Most felt that women now had a voice, but acknowledged that progress towards equality was slow for women. A minority suggested that there was a different understanding of women now, from in the past.

'If the Council had been happening today it would have been different women's issues would be high up the agenda'.

Expressing their concern that women might be making too much fuss about their status in the Church, more than half of the priests revealed their underlying concerns associated with the nature of God.



‘My problem is that I am conscious of female concerns but I think they can also give people a complex. I wonder if some women are as trapped as is made out at times. Take the reading on Paul. Are we really saying that women cannot adapt this message which was spoken to a male audience at a particular cultural time into including them’?

‘In the past they were treated as [second class] for example at baptism, they had to be ‘purified’ which I think was demeaning. I think it came from the idea that the woman was unclean because of childbirth from the Old Testament. That was probably why they were not allowed on the sanctuary. Not today. Women are not treated as second class citizens by most priests and bishops, they see women on an equal footing. The fact that they are not ordained means that some women see themselves as second class citizens. God as a male, and the language probably helps. But the wrong use of inclusive language to the opposite extreme is damaging. I will change man to people, but in my view praying to our mother in heaven is extremist and silly. It does not do the cause of women any good, it does more harm especially to other women’.

### Feminism.

Several priests felt that it was women themselves, who perpetuated oppression.

‘Women themselves have ingrained it into other women’.

A few priests took a different stance.

‘In the Church women are bound to be oppressed because men will not allow themselves to acknowledge the feminine in their own natures to emerge. It is still the masculine side which dominates therefore women will continue to be oppressed’.

More than half of the priests appeared unable to consider women separately from ‘the laity’ preferring to refer to the participation of the laity rather than that of women. When asked if the Vatican Council had anything to say to women most felt that whilst the Council had not spoken directly to women it had an ‘enormous effect on women’. What was striking was the belief amongst the priests, that women in their parishes were now treated equally with men.

### Women priests.

All of the priests recognised that women did much of the pastoral work in the parish. The majority of priests said they were prepared to accept women as co-pastors and wanted to enter into a dialogue about women's ordination.

'There is nothing contrary in scripture to women priests. My instinct is it's OK'.

'We should not shut the door as John Paul has done. Are we to be the only bastion of male chauvinism left?'

About a quarter of the priests were aware that the issue would demand some consideration of existing theology. What was not clear was whether the rest fully appreciated the theological implications of ordaining women.

'I'm not clear about the issue. I need more time to understand what's going on'.

That there would be some dissent in the Church was a concern, and was borne out by the fact that three priests refused to consider the issue.

'I follow the pope. The gift is reserved for men'.

The majority said that the ordination of women, as the married priesthood, would demand a new look at priesthood. Only one suggested that it would require a wholesale revision of sexual theology.

### Pollution.

When asked if notions of 'pollution' were still around in the Church all of the priests took this to mean pollution of sacred spaces by women. In about half of the priests it was linked to contamination by blood as evidenced by references to 'women's periods', and childbirth.

'Do you mean periods?'

The majority felt that if notions of pollution were still around they were amongst the laity rather than the priests.

'Where women ministers of the Eucharist are concerned some members of the laity will not receive communion from them. They will get in Father's queue rather than Sister's'.



Two priests said that beliefs about pollution from blood or sexual activity were still at the heart of the Church.

‘Yes these ideas are at the heart of the Church. I was amazed at how long John Paul II held out over girl altar servers’.

#### The priests discourse on contraception.

The majority of priests saw the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which banned the use of artificial contraceptives, as a watershed for Catholicism in this century.

‘It disrupted the community. There was of course the issue of authority and again the perceptions of the community outside the Church. It began to highlight the conflict of sexuality itself’.

Three priests were concerned that the decision had been an abuse of papal power.

‘I was sad the commission was over-ruled. It did a lot of harm to the Church’.

A few priests felt that there were positive outcomes despite the exodus.

‘Debate opened up. The question of sins, sexual sins, more clearly revealed something we had never really thought about, the emphasis on sexual sins’.

Four priests gave an apologia for *Humanae Vitae*.

‘There is much positive stuff in it. The major hang-ups are with the media rather than the majority of Catholics. In my experience, the priest in the confessional does not get the impression that contraception is a major preoccupation for Catholics. The mass exodus is media hype’.

More than half of the priests admitted that they thought the teaching on contraception was either wrong, or were not able to articulate their views clearly.

‘No I cannot explain’.

‘I’ve never been happy trying to do so’.

Of the remainder, the key theme was that artificial contraception was ‘unnatural’.

‘Outside interference with the act is wrong. With the pill there is no actual interference with the act but there is a frustration with the object of the act’.

What was clear in the study, was that notions of ‘naturalness’ were linked to biological determinism, which underpins Catholic sexual theology.

‘There are ontological truths. We have to relate means to ends. The natural result of sexual intercourse is usually a child. To frustrate this act is contrary to nature’.

About half of the priests said that the 'rhythm method' of birth control was natural and other forms of contraception were not.

'I prefer the term "natural family planning". This clues to the natural rhythms. It's listening to nature's rhythm. It's pro-active, the other methods are intervening'.

Several priests felt that the Church had interfered enough in people's sexual lives and it was time they stopped.

'What do we celibates know about it'?

What was evident was that for priests and women in the pastoral setting, issues of contraception and abortion were not clear-cut. The rules could not always be applied. The majority of the priests did not think contraception was an intrinsic moral evil without exception.

'I do not think contraception is wrong in every situation'.

The majority of the priests felt that women should make up their own mind about contraception.

Two priests pointed out that if a woman were to approach them for advice it might indicate that she was feeling guilty and at the same time distressed. In this case, they would do what they could to assuage feelings of guilt. A couple of priests did not have the same measure of understanding, appearing more concerned to salve their own consciences.

'She comes to me as a priest. I have to state the Church's teaching, but she has to make up her own mind'.

This minority might have been motivated by a belief in the supremacy of conscience, or may have been reluctant to relinquish control of women's reproduction to women themselves, for whilst acknowledging that conscience played an important role, these priests did infer that childbearing was a woman's duty.

'I would ask how many children she already had. If she says four, I would shut up. If she said two I would ask her if she could be more generous with God'.



Pre-Vatican attitudes concerning the use of women's bodies to contain men's lust were evident in these priests. In their case this use of women's bodies was legitimate in order to protect 'the marriage bond'.

'In the last resort to save the marriage, I would tell her to co-operate with her husband. The marriage bond must come first'.

One priest said that the sexual theology of the Church was flawed, therefore teachings on contraception and issues of sexuality, were in need of revision.

'Sexual theology has developed by deduction, a pie in the sky notion of human sexuality and what sex is for. In this century, the new understandings from psychology, sociology and biology must help us to reconstruct our sexual theology through dialogue with the people'.

Most of the priests gave the impression that the use and type of contraception was for women to decide, which indicated a move away from notions of male celibate control over women and their bodies. It was evident that the majority of the priests were not comfortable with the Church's teaching on contraception.

### Abortion.

When it came to abortion whilst all of the priests expressed concern for the life of the unborn, but most said it must be the woman's decision.

'My whole instinct is to protect the growing life in the womb. What is the degree of risk? This is difficult. At the end of the day, the woman decides'.

For a few priests the woman came more sharply into focus when asked what they would say to a woman who faced the possibility of her own death if she continued with a pregnancy.

'This is a rare occurrence. It must be her decision. I would probably say it was a choice between two evils her death or the death of the child. Who is to say which life is the more important? We talk in the Church of justifiable homicide, perhaps this would be a case in point'.

'My mind says that the sanctity of human life is primary. But this is where I realise being a woman can be hellish. It is her right to make the decision. I feel it is she who is pregnant not me the decision must be hers'.

Three implied that the woman's word might be suspect.

'I would need to know more about the medical acts'.

'I would attempt to ascertain the truth'.

'Can this happen these days?'

There was evidence of a move away from the need to control women's bodies regarding contraception and abortion. Was this an acceptance that women should control their own bodies? Were priests merely relieving themselves of the responsibility and/or consequences of making decisions on behalf of women? Whatever the motivation, all of the priests found it difficult to simply apply the rule.

#### The nature of marriage.

The Vatican Council moved towards a theology of marriage which laid stress on the human persons existentially involved in marriage and the family, rather than on the former tendency to concentrate on the biological side of human nature (Buller, 1981). The Constitution of the Church in the *World Today*, spoke of 'fellowship', 'intimate union' and 'mutual self-giving'.

The concept of 'nature' had moved away from the biological to the concept of the person. This change in attitude was reflected in the way the priests talked of unity and partnership in marriage. Decisions about contraception in particular should be a mature decision of the couple. For most of the priests, marriage demanded equality between the partners, however a couple of priests still saw this as an unequal partnership, which reflected the patriarchal family type.

'The man is the head of the house, in the sense of Paul. But this is in the sense of love. Someone has to lead, it is not supportive, not good for the children if mother says one thing and father another. Someone has to decide'.

The majority of the priests felt that no husband had the right to control his wife. In the event that professional help did not resolve a difficult situation, they would advise legal separation. In certain circumstances, they would even suggest a legal divorce.



Procreation was considered an integral part of marriage.

‘In a valid Catholic marriage there must be intention, fidelity lifelong and an openness to children’.

A couple of priests suggested that the use of contraception in marriage could lead to selfishness. They suggested that the use of contraception might encourage some men to use women for their own sexual gratification.

‘[Marriage and sex] is not just a question of satisfying sexual urges. It’s about using each other for their own selfishness’.

#### Divorced and remarried Catholics.

None of the priests talked of ‘living in sin’, concerning divorced and remarried Catholics, they talked instead of ‘irregular union’. A majority said they would give the sacraments to divorced and remarried Catholics. Three of these indicated that they would need some sort of proof that the person was a good practising Catholic before they would give the sacraments. A minority said they would not give the sacraments as there were rules that forbade it. For the majority who said they would give the sacraments to divorced and remarried Catholics, there were two major concerns about the reception of the sacraments.

‘The problem is that when the word gets around that Father has given the sacraments to one person there are requests from others’.

‘There is always the risk of scandal. The laity might not understand. We cannot be seen to be condoning it’.

At issue was the difference between what the priest was prepared to do in private and what he must be seen to be doing in public. These priests said that there should be a dialogue in the Church about divorce, divorce and remarriage and the reception of the sacraments to those already divorced and remarried.

## Celibacy.

In the Roman Catholic Church, celibacy is understood to mean:

‘An absolute chastity, even of thought and desire. The purpose of celibacy is to attain complete freedom to devote oneself to the work of the kingdom of God. The meaning of the vow is virginity as a way of life’  
(Pfliegler, 1967:13).

All of the priests talked of celibacy in some of the following terms, ‘giving testimony and witness’, ‘freedom from the relations of marriage to be available to others’, ‘to be free for God’, ‘a marriage to the community’ ‘service to other people for the sake of the Kingdom’. Celibacy was thus a validation of their beliefs. The overall picture was one of confusion. There was no single, clear operational definition of celibacy common to all the priests. There were different emphases; law and discipline or a spiritual ideal.

‘It’s only a Church law it can be changed’.

‘It’s not being married’.

‘It’s a bloody bind’.

Several priests made a distinction between the law of celibacy and the ideal of chastity.

‘Chastity is a virtue not given to everyone, celibacy is not getting married’.

‘Celibacy enables the priest to do the job, chastity is a gift’.

There are two similarities between the law and the ideal of celibacy. The law of celibacy remains operative regardless of the practice, and the priest must work to make the law an ideal one. Canon law is clear.

‘Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence.....and therefore are obliged to observe celibacy, which is a special gift of God’ (Canon 277).

Celibacy does not therefore simply denote an unmarried status, canon law obliges chastity. This obligation was unequivocal for two priests. Celibacy meant ‘total abstinence’ from sexual activity.

‘Sex is restricted to marriage we therefore cannot indulge in sexual activity without sin’.



For another two, celibacy meant 'periodic abstinence'. Celibacy was not being married it did not necessarily mean total abstinence.

'If one has sex this does not mean you are no longer celibate we are only human'.

Celibacy linked to chastity was seen by most of the priests as a gift, a charism not given to all. Some talked of the vocations of priesthood and of chastity. The vocation of chastity could not be assumed with the vocation to priesthood. For a few priests priesthood was considered a vocation and celibacy a process, an achievement. A couple suggested that the grace to accept celibacy came later in the priestly life for some.

There was a level of confusion concerning choice, vocation and gift. A choice was made to become a priest thereby the rule of celibacy was part of the package. What was not clear to the priests was how one might have a vocation to priesthood without the gift of chastity and yet make a free choice for celibacy knowing it would include an expectation of chastity, yet all of the priests talked of 'choice' of the celibate state.

A quarter of the priests noted that celibacy could also be a distinct and meaningful life-form unrestricted to the priesthood.

'Celibacy is a single state the same as any other in society'.

Three priests were no longer sure what celibacy might mean.

'I am not sure whether abstinence and celibacy are the same'.

'I'm not sure anymore'.

'Celibacy is not what it was, it is out of fashion. It has fallen to the level of discipline'.

What was noticeable amongst those priests who saw celibacy in terms of relationship to God and with the people, was a sense of joy in their ministry. They spoke of their celibate lives not as an absence of something but a voyage of discovery about themselves and the whole of humanity. Those priests who saw celibacy as a rule to be obeyed were also highly motivated by

notions of community and were men of high spiritual ideals. They felt that their vocation to priesthood was not necessarily linked to celibacy. There was an impression given, that the energy expended on keeping the rule could be better used to the benefit of the community.

#### Transgressions against celibacy.

All but one priest in the survey confirmed, either directly or indirectly, that they knew of transgressions against celibacy amongst their fellow priests. Such priests were treated with compassion and a measure of understanding.

‘We are amazingly tolerant as we are to non-priests. We are all human beings’.

‘I am sure that some priests go through priesthood solely because of their long term relationship with a woman’.

Several priests stressed the humanity of the priest.

‘We have to consider the strength of the urge. Some are tempted and do not escape unscathed’.

Some felt that part of the problem was enforced celibacy.

‘In the Church celibacy is legislated, but you cannot legislate a gift. To enforce celibacy does not allow the priest to breathe’.

#### Homosexual transgressions against celibacy.

There appeared to be a presumption that the majority of Catholic priests were heterosexual in orientation and that heterosexual ‘temptations’ posed the greatest threat to celibacy. The majority of priests in the study were less comfortable talking about homosexual transgressions against celibacy than heterosexual transgressions. There was not the same level of compassion, understanding or support for those priests who had engaged in homosexual relationships.

Several priests were keenly aware that Catholic priests were representative of men in the wider population.

‘The clergy contain a cross-section of the male population. The faithful, unfaithful, homosexual, bi-sexual, heterosexual and abusers. To deny that is to deny reality’.



Several priests appeared to make an association made between homosexuality and paedophilia.

‘I’m a little less tolerant myself towards homosexuality, perhaps it’s not their fault. I accept that there might be an orientation but not the flaunting. We have to consider child abuse. If they are outside the norm, we must bring healing’.

Some of the priests revealed deep-rooted if not conscious patriarchal assumptions of male superiority and distinction between the sexes.

‘If they’re gay it’s considered worse than going with a woman’.

‘It is more acceptable if a woman is involved because that is natural. Other transgressions are unnatural’.

There were a couple of priests who felt that any sexual encounter was a failure to keep to a vow, therefore homosexual activity was the same as heterosexual activity. Here the emphasis was on the act, isolated from its developmental or relationship issues.

### Vulnerability.

Over recent years, scandals concerning priests and their sexual activities had highlighted the discrepancy between the law of celibacy and the practice. Of most concern was the sexual abuse of children by priests. Without exception, the priests said that they found child abuse by priests extremely distressing. This they found harder to understand than either heterosexual or homosexual transgressions against celibacy.

‘Child abuse is something else. Priests find this difficult to understand. There is a sense of being let down. There is concern for the children, the betrayal of trust put in the priest by children and parents. There is much pain in the community concerning this’.

There was a keen sense of vulnerability amongst the priests. All said that their position of trust had been compromised by the actions of a few priests.

‘We are vulnerable, attacked by the media, misunderstood. There is little understanding of the type of life we have adopted, but we cannot understand the abuses’.

For some priests the only way they could deal with the problem was through denial.

‘Perhaps there is a denial which affords us some protection’.

Only one priest denied any knowledge of sexual activity amongst priests.

‘This [all sexual transgressions concerning priests] is mostly media hype. I have not known any priests who have transgressed against celibacy in all the time I have been a priest’.

What was clear was that priests who abused children and who used their position of trust as a cover for their sexual activity, represented a formidable challenge to priestly status, identity and institutional celibacy.

### Priests and priesthood.

The majority of priests had accepted the need for a changing ministry. None of the priests was against the idea of married priests. Most felt that there should be a choice of a celibate or married priesthood. Celibacy was a Church law that could be changed.

‘I have no problem with the idea of married men as priests. There should be a choice’.

‘I have nothing against it, it may come, it is only a law of the Church’.

The priests felt that to talk of a married priesthood was to raise the question of what priesthood was.

‘For me it’s about leadership and vision. Priesthood is about being chosen, men, women, gay, heterosexual, clever, slow whatever. It’s the choice of person as leader that is important’.

Several felt that the Church may be forced into change.

‘If there are no celibate priests coming forward the Church may have to change’.

There were two positions taken on Catholic priests who had left and married. The majority concern was the injustice of not allowing them back whilst accepting Anglican married priests.

‘What about the men who left to get married and continue as Catholics with their families. Where is the justice for them?’

The minority view was:

‘They broke the rules so it cannot apply to them’.



### Married Anglican priests.

The majority of the priests welcomed Anglican priests, but with certain reservations. A majority concern was that some might harbour pre-Vatican II attitudes.

‘My only reservation is that many have pre-Vatican attitudes and if they are given influence they could well set us back. Some have a hard time absorbing the post-Vatican II ethos’.

A second majority concern was for those Catholic priests who had left to marry.

‘I feel disturbed. What about the men who left to get married’?

All of the priests considered motive.

‘I am concerned about their real motives. I’m alarmed that there may be more misogynists in active ministry. I’m also angry at the oppressive signal it sends to those priests who have left because of celibacy. These men have been marginalised’.

Several priests remarked on the practical problems of not only a married Anglican clergy but a married priesthood *per se*.

‘How do we support them financially? Will the people accept it’?

On the positive side some priests felt the entry of Anglican clergy and their families would act as a catalyst which would ‘open the door’ to a Catholic married priesthood .

‘Can the rule of celibacy be upheld if there are exceptions’?

The majority of the priests felt that there must be dialogue not only concerning celibacy and a married priesthood, but also about the nature of priesthood itself.

### Priests and obedience to authority.

Whilst stressing the supremacy of the individual conscience all but two of the priests talked of obedience firstly as obedience to the bishop. They expressed an understanding of the need for organisational obedience, but imposed conditions on obedience.

‘Nowadays we expect the bishop to consult with us where we or our congregation are affected’.

Several priests expressed their dissatisfaction with the leadership of the current pontiff.

‘I have no sense of obedience to this pontiff’.

All talked of supremacy of conscience. When in doubt most said they asked themselves what Christ would do in similar circumstances.

‘Supremacy of conscience requires a spiritual maturity if it to be effective and sure. It’s only after months of therapy addressing myself as a person that I have been able to achieve such maturity. I am comfortable in my own space’.

‘It is about discernment’.

This said, at the end of the day the majority of priests said they ‘would do what the bishop asked’. The majority admitted they experienced certain dilemmas concerning obedience. These were mainly concerned with the experience of their everyday pastoral role. There was often a conflict between theory and practice, between the ideal and the reality of people’s lives. Thus, there were dilemmas when it came to implementation of ‘the rules’ in the pastoral setting.

‘I accept the Church’s teaching, but it is an ideal and at times, people cannot live up to this. There is duty to conscience and the will of God’.

‘Roman law can be widely interpreted, there is usually a way around something’.

### Rule breaking.

There was evidence that the majority of priests broke the ‘rules’ when it came to dealing with matters of sexual morality, in the context of their everyday pastoral care. Doctrine provided the ‘ideal’ which informed practice. Apart from one priest, who said he followed the rules, all the other priests admitted rule breaking.

‘There has always been a distinction between principle and practice, we must accept that people will deviate from the rule. I preach the party line in public but privately I accept deviations’.

‘The question is how well do priests know and understand the rules’?

‘Black and white rules in the pastoral situation is almost impossible. The human situation is such that the rules are ‘ideals’, guidelines for action. Every eventuality cannot be covered by the rules’.

‘I have no dilemmas in the pastoral setting because I set the rules to one side as I attempt to help a person to discover where they are on their spiritual journey, identify relevant issues irrespective of the rules’.

‘Respect for Petrine authority is on the ebb, we cannot move backwards in pastoral practice’.



The most problematic areas for the application of the rule in the pastoral setting were to do with human sexuality. Concern was also expressed about the leadership style adopted by John Paul

II. Several priests talked of ‘retrenchment’ and a return to absolutism.

‘I’m concerned about the power of the papacy if it is used in its own right. The present pope is forceful, he promotes his own visions of Church. I find his style of leadership, of concern. Where is the vision of Vatican II? More seems to come from the pope acting on his own behalf’.

‘Collegiality was about making the role of the pope more human, presiding with the college of bishops, not over it, this was the principle. But this pope makes unilateral decisions. Where was the debate about women priests for example?’

‘This pope is his own man. His cultural experiences colour the way he sees the Church. *Veritatis Splendor* is the product of the pope’s own cultural, political and religious beliefs, not an infallible statement’.

#### Collegiality v papal primacy.

Three priests were able to explain collegiality in depth. The remainder said that it was about the pope and the bishops working together. There was total agreement that it was the way forward.

‘The theology is in its infancy and the idea has not yet worked its way through the system’.

Several priests recognised that attempts at collegiality since the Council had been thwarted due to the retrenchment of the present administration.

‘Dialogue has fallen into disuse, collegiality, I wait for it to happen’.

A minority of priests saw things differently.

‘Both have their place, but the pope has the duty to protect the truth therefore the pope must guide the bishops to the truth. The pope has the final say’.

#### Positive and negative consequences of the Council.

There was a sense of frustration amongst those priests who were optimistic for collegiality in the post-Conciliar Church, but all of the priests felt there were other positive consequences of the Council.

‘There is now an openness not previously experienced in the Church’.

‘There is a new enthusiasm in both priests and people journeying together, a pilgrim people towards the Kingdom of God’.

Two priests saw these positive consequences as negative. The new openness ‘had opened the floodgates’, everybody had something to say, there was no clear message anymore, ‘a loss of unity’. Whilst the involvement of the laity was welcomed, they were there to ‘assist the priest’, the distinction between clergy and laity remained in place. Whilst the rhetoric of a ‘pilgrim people journeying together’ remained, there was a distinct feeling that these priests would remain ‘set apart’, leading their people to the Promised Land.

On the negative side priests talked of confusion, polarisation and frustration. There was confusion about the theology of Vatican II reforms such as collegiality, the role of priest and recent retrenchment. Concern was expressed about the increasing polarisation between traditionalists and progressives in the Church.

‘Ways must be found to bring all members of the Church together’.

Progressive priests expressed frustration at the lack of education about Vatican II for both priests and laity.

‘The documents are excellent but the new thinking was not supported by training. There is little understanding of vision’.

This led to confusion. There were fears that recent retrenchment meant a return to a pre-Vatican position. There was in the majority no desire to return to the ‘fortress Church’, the only way was forward from Vatican II. One priest said that a revision of the Church’s sexual morality was needed, if it was to be remotely relevant to the modern world.

‘We are witnessing the death rattle of the Catholic Church’.

Several priests felt that in practice the reforms of the Council had been at a superficial rather than at a fundamental level. One priest was convinced that if the Church was to take on board the changed image of God, collegiality, and a pilgrim people, there was a real need for new symbols.

‘People have moved on. Past symbols have become irrelevant. The Church has to look for new symbols, which have a relevance in people’s lives’.



In-depth knowledge of conciliar documents was poor. Most of the priests considered the key issues at Council to be those which directly impinged on their practice, firstly changes in the liturgy then the participation of the laity. Changes had been hard to accept. There was a difference between those who wholeheartedly embraced the Council, and those who did not. The enthusiasts were eager to implement reform whereas the minority did so reluctantly in a spirit of obedience to the bishop.

### Conclusion.

The majority of priests were more aware of the rules and negative sanctions associated with traditional teaching than the underpinning theology. There was a definite sense of unease, at the thought of an increasing use of inclusive language. Few priests made the connections between the use of sexist language, the nature of God, and power and authority in the Church.

All of the priests had adopted some of the reforms of the Council. There was evidence of uncertainty in most of the priests, which was expected in a time of transition. This uncertainty had been exacerbated by a lack of appropriate training and/or re-training.

Obedience to traditional orthodoxy was evident in their obedience to the bishop. There was an overwhelming belief in the supremacy of conscience even when this flew in the face of traditional teachings. There was also a sense of marking time, waiting for a change of pontiff. The majority of the priests focused their attention on their parish with half an eye on Rome.

They emphasised the pastoral nature of their ministry and bent the rules in order to minister to the needs of the people they served. It was clear, that what the priests in the study say in public and what they would say in private, were two different things. The majority of the priests had

problems applying the 'rules' constructed around traditional sexual theology with their experience of women in a liberal democracy.

Whilst there had been changes in the way in which priests in the study viewed women there were traces of patriarchal attitudes in all of the priests. It was evident that most of the priests in the study had difficulty in reconciling their changing view of women in society with the construction of woman in traditional sexual theology. It was in the practical everyday application of the rules that these difficulties emerged.

The priests themselves questioned doctrines, institutions and practices that excluded or controlled women. They had difficulty in applying the letter of the law preferring to relinquish control of women's bodies to women themselves. In practice these priests were especially confused about contraception and celibacy unable to reconcile explanations of the ban on contraception and the discipline of celibacy to their own lived experiences. Most of the priests had also moved towards notions of partnership in marriage, which indicated their awareness of the new discourse on marriage.

The majority of priests in the study were distancing themselves from traditional sexual theology as they questioned the emphasis on sexual sins. In practice, priests used the principle of greater/lesser evil, consequentialism and proportionalism accepting that individual circumstances played a vital role in the culpability and gravity of sin. This was particularly noticeable with reference to contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage. They were not convinced that contraception was an intrinsic moral evil without exception. Whilst their primary concern in abortion was the life of the unborn child there was agreement as there was with contraception that the final decision must lay with the woman.



In *Veritatis Splendor*, the pope reminded the bishops that ‘consequentialism’ and ‘proportionalism’ would not be tolerated, that contraception was ‘intrinsically evil without exception’ and threatened sanctions for those who refused to adhere to traditional teaching. The evidence is that the priests in this study however, were implicitly applying these concepts in their everyday pastoral care of women. They accepted that many women would consider ‘consequence’ and ‘proportion’ as part of the complexity of individual circumstance. They found it difficult to acknowledge that contraception is ‘intrinsically evil without exception’. In the pastoral setting, rules derived from absolute ‘truth’ were used for the spiritual and moral guidance of priests and people. An informed conscience took account of the ideal, together with the circumstances and experiences of the individual. Conscience was supreme. When in doubt the priests were inclined to ask, “what would Christ do if he were here?” not “what does the Holy Father say?”

The inconsistency, incoherence and ambiguity of traditional teaching was problematic. This was particularly marked regarding celibacy and contraception. The shifting discourse in both of these cases only served to confuse the priests in this study and they found it difficult to explain to themselves or to others, the Church’s teaching on institutional celibacy or the ban on contraception. With regard to celibacy, there was no clear operational definition common to all of the priests. With contraception the priests talked of ‘responsible parenthood’ and at the same time of prohibition.

There was a general resistance to centralised authority, official teaching was accepted with provisos and with an eye to the practical considerations. A change in teaching was considered necessary if the Church was to grow and be meaningful in the everyday lives of the people. In the area of sexual morality in particular, the priests demonstrated substantial disagreement with official teaching searching in their pastoral care for a less rule-bound, absolutist, deductive approach.

What was striking was the similarity of the findings with those of Hornsby-Smith (1991) when he described the ‘customary Catholicism’ of English Catholics. There was evidence of a plurality of beliefs and practices in line with the beliefs and practices of the ‘customary Catholicism’ of the laity. There was a similarity between the range of beliefs differentially acknowledged by different types of lay Catholics, with those of the priests in this study. The relative uniformity of beliefs amongst priests in the fortress Church emerged as a more pluralistic set of beliefs in the contemporary parish. This was most evident in the area of non-creedal beliefs, for example, papal infallibility and official teaching on moral issues. Few of the priests conferred unqualified legitimacy to the teaching of the current pope. Traditional teaching was filtered through personal interpretative processes. These priests tended to use official teaching as a guide to personal conscience not as absolute truth. This was in common with the propensity by lay English Catholics to differentiate between religious matters, and moral and regulatory or disciplinary issues, where the individual in the human context, familiar only to them, has the legitimate authority in the last analysis to make up their own mind. The priests generally accepted women’s right to be responsible for their own actions, as autonomous reasoning human beings. This was out of tune with patriarchal notions of women, which underpin sexual theology and traditional teaching. The priests’ discourse can be summarised as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Comparison between the Priest’s & Pope’s Discourse.**

	Majority of Priests’ Discourse	Pope’s Discourse
Papal Authority	Collegial	Absolute
Rules	Guideline	Absolute
Truth	Evolving	Static
Optional celibacy	Yes	No
Contraception	Depends on circumstances.	No
Abortion	No, but depends on circumstances	No
Divorce/remarriage	Needs addressing	No
Women priests	Yes	No



There were significant differences between the official discourse of John Paul II and the private discourse of English priests. With regard to power and authority, John Paul II supported traditional truths and the power of the papacy. The majority of priests in this study talked of the evolving nature of truth and stressed collegiality over papal primacy. On matters of sexual morality the pope reinforced the absolute truths of sexual theology whilst the priests took consequence and proportion into account using official teaching only as a guide to action. The priests also preferred optional celibacy to institutional celibacy. Whilst this sample of English priests talked of women in ways which indicated their growing acceptance of the equality of women in the western world the pope continued to define and explain women in patriarchal terms.

These contrasting positions can be summarised as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Summary of contrasting positions of the Priests and Pope.**

	Priests	Pope
Power and Authority	Collegiality	Papal primacy
	Evolving truth	Static truth
Sexual theology	Optional celibacy	Institutional celibacy
	Consequentialism/ proportionalism	Absolutism
Construction of Woman	Acceptance of reconstruction of woman in the western world	Patriarchal construction of woman

In line with Hornsby-Smith's finding that the outlook of the English Catholic laity is 'this-worldly', pragmatic and moving towards the legitimacy of individual conscience, the majority of priests in this study were 'this worldly' and pragmatic, preferring to leave final decisions about sexual morality to individual conscience. The private discourse of these priests,

suggested the existence of a distinct discourse amongst English Catholic priests which supports an emerging 'customary priesthood', that was more responsive and relevant to the modern world and to the needs of the 'customary Catholicism' of the English laity. As such, it would offer a point of resistance to the power of traditional orthodoxy.



## CHAPTER TEN.

### **The Discourse of Catholic Women.**

#### Introduction.

In the deanery study, the 'customary Catholicism' of English Catholics was evident. In the last chapter there was evidence to suggest that a 'customary priesthood' was emerging, which served the customary Catholicism of English Catholics. A pluralism of beliefs and practices existed amongst the priests in the study, which challenged traditional orthodoxy. In the deanery study the issues raised by respondents were closely aligned with the issues that emerged from the review of traditional discourse. These issues, were power and authority, matters of sexual morality especially contraception, divorce and remarriage, and abortion, institutional celibacy, and the status and role of women in the Church. This part of the research was designed to hear what ordinary women rather than the 'Catholic laity' were saying about such issues. What women are saying is crucial to the Church, for women form the greater part 54% (Nation-wide Initiative in Evangelism, 1980) of the laity and women socialise the next generation (Logan, 1988).

In order to align the interviews with women, with those of the priests, a question on Anglican priests converting to Catholicism was added to the issues identified above. It was not necessary to ask a specific question about papal authority in matters of sexual morality as women raised the issue themselves. All of the participants were given the opportunity to voice their opinions.

#### An overview of the findings.

A minority of Catholic women were as knowledgeable about Catholic doctrine, as the best informed priests in the study. The majority were questioning issues of traditional sexual morality and the place of women in the Catholic Church. Some women felt that the sexual theology of the Church had something to do with the way in which the Church viewed women, but were unable to explain why this might be. It was interesting to see women discussing the

issues together and slowly coming to a consensus in the groups. Generally, the women interviewed were not well informed about the theological underpinnings of Vatican II. Their understanding of the Vatican Council was through their experiences of changes in the liturgy and increased levels of participation.

Many women talked of patriarchy in the structures and institutions of the Church. In all of the groups some women raised the issue of men's superiority in family and in society. A few women explained the belief in male superiority, as a significant factor in the position and place of women in the Church. The majority of women were questioning the structures and institutions of a patriarchal Church. Most women questioned their inferior place in the Church, as compared to their relative equality in other areas of their lives.

Women's access to the sacred spaces previously reserved for men had led some women into questioning mode. Why had access to the holy been reserved for men? The vision of Vatican II of a 'royal priesthood of believers', in which previous divisions of labour were now meaningless, suggested to these women that they were now equal with men in the Church. Why was it, they asked, that men still retained most of the positions of power in the parish and in the institutional Church?

Many of the women in the study said that they felt unsettled and uneasy about the state of the contemporary Church. For those women who had embraced the ideas of Vatican II change was frustratingly slow. They said that recent retrenchment by a traditionalist pope had halted change and the hope was that the next pope would be more liberal. In the minority who said that they 'looked to Rome' for reassurance and teaching and abided 'absolutely' by the rules, the state of disquiet was more marked. They talked of the loss of unity, the Latin mass, and the strict division between priests and people. They expressed anger and sadness. They said they feared



for the future of the Church and praised the current pope's stand on sexual morality. They said they loved the Church and were fearful that what was so precious to them was being lost.

Other women in the groups had dealt with change in several ways. Some said that they had informed themselves about the teachings of Vatican II and had taken the opportunities for greater participation in the Church seriously. They had become more involved in the everyday life of the parish. These women interpreted participation as a sign of equality.

In all of the groups there was evidence that the majority of the women were re-interpreting their religious traditions in light of their own experience and relying on their own conscience. Many talked of traditional teaching as 'an ideal' which informed conscience. Two groups each had one woman who had left the Church but wanted to be involved in the discussions.

From the women who participated, several women had examined recent papal documents. Six women said that they had read *Veritatis Splendor*. In every group at least two women had read the pope's 'Letter to Women'. Overall, knowledge of papal documents tended to be superficial. The majority of the women said that they had been exposed to papal statements through the Catholic press and the media. All of the women were clear about the sanctions on contraception, divorce, abortion, optional celibacy and women's ordination. Apart from a minority who said they 'followed Rome', most women said that they took little notice of what the pope said. They felt he could offer ideals or guidelines which should be taken into account when making decisions but life was complex, nothing was that clear cut. The following factors are relevant.

#### Women's perceptions of themselves and their place in the Church.

The majority of women in the study were adamant that whilst there were obvious biological differences between the sexes, most women, given the opportunity, were able to do everything

that men could do. This subject raised much discussion. What was interesting was the consensus between traditional, progressive and others, that women were equal with men in their everyday lives. The most traditional women said that they considered themselves equal with their husbands and in one group they went on to express how easy it was to 'manipulate' men in order to get their own way.

Yet, when it came to the Church these same women most clearly exhibited the ability to hold contradictory beliefs about how they viewed themselves in their private lives and their role in the Church.

'Motherhood is on a par with priesthood. On it depends the future of the Church, good Christian families can save the Church and the world'.

'Most women are in charge, the men think they are. They are more stupid than us, we manipulate them'.

#### Women and equality in the parish.

The priests in the study felt that they offered equality in their parishes. Many of the women saw things somewhat differently. They said that their participation was dependent on the attitude of the parish priest. It was the priest's attitude towards women that encouraged some women to stay or leave the parish.

'I have changed parishes because the new priest did not have the same open attitude to women as his predecessor and I'm not prepared to put up with it'.

'I find that the energy I use in interpreting sexist language and battling for some recognition in the parish is better used elsewhere where I am appreciated and my gifts are used for the benefit of the community'.

A few women said that women would never achieve equality in the Church. These women said that both laymen and priests are reluctant to give up existing power. Even those men who talked of equality in their parishes sometimes resorted to ridicule to put women down.

'Women will never be equal in the Church. For this to happen men would have to relinquish their power. They are resisting, holding on to power. They do not want women invading their space'.



### Ordination of women.

The majority of women felt that the ordination of women was only a matter of time. They disagreed on the time-scale, but not the principle. Most were concerned that there would be a period of discord in the Church as they had witnessed in the Anglican Church.

‘Women priests? Yes, perhaps not in my lifetime’.

‘At the moment the Holy Father says no to women priests but if the Holy Father were to say yes, well so be it’.

A minority clung to the sacerdotal model of priesthood in which women’s role was to service the priests.

‘It’s about obedience for women. Women followed Jesus, they did the washing and got the food, they collected the money. They were Martha’s. We are proud to be Martha’s. Priests need someone to look after them’.

‘The Holy Father has spoken. There can be no women priests’.

### Notions of pollution.

As women discussed women’s exclusion from the priesthood it became evident that, as far as some of the women were concerned, notions of pollution were still around in the Catholic Church.

‘It was not until years after being “churched” that I understood the significance of “churching”, I was so angry when I found out it’s about blood and uncleanness. It says we are deeply flawed as women’.

‘Yes, we have periods therefore we cannot be priests’.

‘No, it’s because it’s reserved for men. If you can’t pee like Jesus, you can’t be like Jesus’.

What was interesting was that the majority of women said that ideas of pollution had largely gone from the laity but remained with the priests. The priests on the other hand said that ideas of pollution had largely gone from the priests but remained with the laity. It seems fair to say therefore that notions of pollution linked to women sex and menstrual blood remained in the Catholic Church.

### The women and Mariology.

For the women interviewed the problem with Mariology was the promotion of virginity and motherhood in the same woman. The roles on offer to women were motherhood or virginity.

‘There is no talk of Mary as a woman like any other. This demotes motherhood as none of us are virgins’.

A few women felt that Mary had been elevated to the level of Christ.

‘It is a scandal this talk of Mary as ‘co-redemptress’ with Jesus. Jesus is the redeemer. He is the way to heaven. What is this talk of Mary as co-redeemer? It helps to promote the virginal ideal’.

### Inclusive language.

A minority of the women said that the use of inclusive language was ‘a load of tripe’, and ‘feminism gone mad’. The majority demonstrated a growing awareness of the use of sexist language in the Church. Over half of the women indicated that this was a crucial issue.

‘I can no longer continue to read some of the readings at Mass because of the constant reference to men, male, brother, him and so on’.

‘It provides for an authoritarian Church. What’s in it for us’?

‘I can cope with the gospels, the epistles most of the time but I have to keep changing the words including myself. I’m always looking over a man’s shoulder’.

‘I was so angry that the English bishops felt they had to ask Rome about the translation of the catechism. They wanted inclusive language I think, but of course permission was refused’.

Others were becoming more aware, as the following conversation shows.

‘It can be taken to silly lengths, but I must say that when I read morning prayer I am struck by the numbers of ‘brothers’, ‘men’ and ‘brethren’.

‘Yes, but you wouldn’t have been once, not ten or fifteen years ago’.

‘Well, I find it irritating now when I read morning prayer. I suppose it’s not unthinking now’.

‘I think it’s an unnecessary change. I don’t have a problem’.

‘Some people get upset. Isn’t that reason enough for change’?

‘Why do they get upset, it may be silly or old fashioned but that’s not reason enough to get upset. There are far more important things to worry about’.



## Marriage and divorce.

In every group some women raised the issue of the changing nature of marriage and the family. Many women had experience of divorce, either their own or someone in their family. They acknowledged that people were living longer so marriage for life meant perhaps forty or fifty years, more than it did a century ago. People changed, circumstances changed. Overall, the women expressed sympathy and concern for those who have been divorced. The majority felt that there was no reason why divorced people should not be allowed the sacraments.

‘It’s the only mistake which is never forgiven’.

‘I do not think that the majority of Catholics consider reception of the sacraments by a remarried person a scandal. But obviously we must all collude in this’.

‘You cannot receive the sacrament unless you are abstaining from sex if you are divorced. They think it’s unclean. Of course it’s women really who are unclean not men’.

‘There is an hypocrisy around the family. There can be a very thin veneer of respectability, which covers a multitude of sins. Should we be supporting this veneer, this pretence or should we be seeing the family in other ways’?

‘If there was no divorce women would just have to put up with the same old things they’ve had to put up with for centuries. Contraception, abortion, divorce, anything that could be liberating for women is stamped on’.

The majority of women talked of ‘double standards’ in the Church, regarding divorce and annulment.

‘Times have changed. Divorce is part of society. What’s the big deal? Priests can leave, but lay people cannot be freed from their vows. These are double standards’.

‘It’s ironic that if one marries in a Register Office it is considered a non-marriage, but marriage is given to each other’.

‘Annulment is an absolute game, a game to please priests and canon lawyers. The real scandals are these ‘annulments’.

‘The Church contradicts itself so much I wonder anybody believes anything anymore. The whole thing is a pot-mess’.

## Contraception.

Contraception initiated the most animated discussion in all of the groups. The majority view was that women should make up their own minds. The emphasis was on personal conscience, although a decision to use contraception might contravene Church teaching. One group suggested that all Catholics should be able to put their viewpoint in a referendum.

‘It’s nobody else’s business’.

‘It’s a problem to sort out with your own conscience’.

‘Celibates know nothing, they have no understanding of the reality of poverty, of stress and so on’.

‘There is a denial that people are using contraception, but that is the reality, people make their own minds up. We talk about responsible parenthood. But it’s not the same as the pope means. How can you have responsible parenthood without the means to space your family’?

Some women said that they very angry with the pope’s continuing emphasis on contraception.

‘I think what this pope is doing is criminal. He can do what he likes in the Eastern Block but to go to the Third World condemning contraception how dare he’.

‘The world needs a policy for birth control linked to a policy for sharing the world’s resources more fairly. He should spend more time talking about poverty caused by greed. There are worse sins than contraception’.

‘If he says contraception is an intrinsic evil, I would say that in relation to HIV and AIDS for him to refuse the use of condoms is an intrinsic moral evil. To pass that disease on is an evil. He is blinkered at best, evil at worst’.

The majority of women made little distinction between forms of contraception as the objective was the same, to prevent conception.

‘Contraception is contraception. At the end of the day it’s avoiding having a baby’.

The majority of women were not impressed by arguments about ‘naturalness’ and contraceptive methods.

‘The usual excuse is that it’s not natural, but using umbrellas is not natural either, shall we ban those? The contraceptive pill is a development like penicillin, it’s a medical advance which has liberated women’.



‘The rhythm method is about abstaining from intercourse, this surely is not natural. Are we trying to deny the strength of our natural drive to reproduce the species? No, the rhythm method is about stopping us from enjoying ourselves in the process’.

‘I think that the pope saying contraception is evil says more about the pope and his attitudes to women than it does about morality or sin. What does he know? How dare he pontificate over women. He’s not concerned with women but with what the last pope said on contraception. He’s not big enough to say the last one got it wrong’.

‘He talks of it as wrong but it is wrong in my opinion to expose women to too many pregnancies. It’s not the men who face illness and death it’s the women’.

‘It is a responsible thing for a couple to do. All this nonsense about using one method over another, the reason is important not the method, the Church always says it’s intention to sin that crucial. These are just dual standards again’.

Some women said that the pope’s underlying message was that women should continue to be subordinate to men.

‘I get the message that women must accept their lot in life. God will take care of things, we don’t get anything we cannot cope with, life is not a bed of roses. A woman’s duty is to serve God, lead a Christian life and bring up the children’.

‘I get the feeling from the pope that the man should have the last say. The woman should respect the man and heed his views’.

‘It’s old hat, even if a woman’s health or life is in danger you still have to follow the rules. This is what the pope is saying’.

Most of the women knew of at least one priest who did not agree with the ban on contraception.

Some women thought that these priests should stand up and be counted.

‘The pope is old-fashioned and the priests should say this. The moderate priests are probably going with the times but they cannot openly move forward in case they are reprimanded. Perhaps they should’.

In the discussions about the rhythm method of contraception, one woman made an interesting point.

‘The pope talks about the ‘contraceptive mentality’ in the Church, people deciding not to have children therefore are selfish. But I see this ‘contraceptive mentality’ differently. It seems to me that the pope and the rest are hooked into contraception in such a way as it clouds everything else they do. Take the rhythm method as an example, anything which is difficult, messy and unreliable for contraception instead of the pill is applauded. But the ends are the same, the attempt to distinguish between means of contraception and ends, is a load of nonsense’.

### The Rhythm Method.

The majority of the women dismissed the pope's suggestion that to use the 'rhythm method' enhanced marital harmony.

'What would he know about marital harmony?'

The minority view was that contraception was wrong. The thinking behind this is best illustrated by the following conversation in one group, which was composed predominantly of women who said they 'followed the teachings of the Holy Father'.

'It's definitely wrong'.

'It is wrong we must trust in God. God taught this, successive popes have taught this, it is almost infallible because the popes have always upheld it'.

'Sex for pleasure is a sin, it's self-indulgence, not for procreation'.

'Mind you we are taught that we must keep marriages together, that is the most important. We have to stay together no matter what'.

'If the partner is a non-Catholic, it might be difficult. The woman may have to agree with the husband in order to keep the marriage together'.

'My view has changed. If I had my time over again I would abide by the Church's teaching'.

'Is this because you are past childbearing now?'

'No, I think it's right, it's God's Divine providence working through'.

'Was your husband a Catholic?'

'Yes, but when he worked away from home I had to use contraception because, well, he worked away from home'.

'If the husband will not agree the wife is not at fault'.

'The reason for contraception is that it's a part of God's plan. God provided us with a natural method. This is not a coincidence'.

'The pill is a drug it is dangerous and it can cause abortion. IUD works through abortion. I cannot agree to this. The natural method is as reliable as the pill'.

'Only if the husband agrees.....and some women get pregnant'.

'That's because they have not been taught properly how to use it'.



‘There is no disadvantage to health and it enhances the health and well-being of the relationship. I know this from what I have read’.

‘Well, after my second child I could not face another pregnancy, no way, it was contraception for me. I was full of dread.....of fear’.

One of the things revealed in this conversation, was that although these women were saying that contraception was wrong, they had all used some form of contraception. One had successfully used the ‘rhythm method’, another had used artificial contraception because her husband had worked away from home and expected sex when he came home. One admitted that she had used contraception because she was frightened of another pregnancy. All of these women had indicated that the official teaching of the pope should be followed without question.

#### Abortion.

There was a consensus that abortion was wrong. The majority of women did accept that the decision for abortion must lie with the woman herself. The majority of women were trying to understand the problems which women faced with abortion and some felt that the Church could do more.

‘I think it’s much like contraception in that the woman has to make her own choice. I do not agree with abortion being used as a contraception’.

What follows are remarks made in one group where there were three members of the pro-life group ‘Life’.

‘I feel sorry for them. I’m a counsellor for Life. Even the ones who do have abortions and don’t seem to mind do’.

‘The Church could offer more support to women. The priest could more openly support organisations like Life. There was only one member of the clergy at the local Life AGM and he was an Anglican’.

‘The family support is important. There have been several girls in our parish who have got pregnant and their families have been wonderful’.

‘Yes, in my experience the families are marvellous. Not so many women are thrown out today’.

‘Women aren’t allowed to grieve over an abortion as they are say over a miscarriage. Nobody wants to face abortion, they don’t want to talk about it. It’s a very lonely thing I think’.

‘There are assumptions made about Life and other organisations that they have no sympathy for the women, but they have empathy. Many are not helped after the abortion because people don’t want to think about it’.

(Facilitator) ‘Does the woman have any rights over her body’?

‘The baby is not part of the woman’s body. From conception, it is separate and unique. From the first cell, it contains its own identity in its genetic formation. It is an individual’.

(Facilitator) ‘When is the foetus ensouled’?

‘From the moment of conception, from the first cell there is an identity. You cannot have a human person without soul and identity’.

These women felt that the father should be involved in the decision-making.

‘I think it is wrong that the husband has no say over his child the woman can just go and get an abortion without regard for what he wants. These men also need counselling’.

Some women saw things a little differently.

‘I get cross about the continual going on about contraception and the rights of the unborn when the pope says very little about the rights and quality of life of those already living. When it comes to abortion most of the people doing the talking have no personal experience of it’.

‘I think it is wrong to kill a life, but I’m ‘dispensable’. Why am I of less value’?

‘I wonder if the men would go on about it half as much if they were faced with ill-health or death’.

### The nature of priesthood.

The majority view was that the nature of priesthood was changing and there had been a change from the sacerdotal model of priesthood, to one that emphasised pastoral care. Alongside this, the sacred space had been extended to include the laity. Some women were participating in roles previously reserved for priests and the men of the parish. Some women were therefore questioning the nature of priesthood itself and some were linking traditional priesthood to old ideas about women.

‘Celibacy, women’s ordination, married priests all demand a new look at priesthood. The problem is that attitudes to women would have to change first’.



‘Generally the attitude towards women is still one of suspicion. They have a distorted image of women. Some of these young men are inadequate individuals. They go to seminary as boys, perhaps because their mother wanted it. They get a boost at seminary, they come out thinking they are great. They have a status they wouldn’t get elsewhere’.

‘The system needs changing. Women should be considered before married priests. But before anything gets done the issue of celibacy must be addressed’.

### Celibacy.

The majority view was that celibacy should be optional. It was felt that married priests would bring an understanding of women and married life, which celibate priests cannot.

‘How can you help or begin to judge others sexual lives if you have no experience yourself’?

‘I think married priests would be an advantage to the Church. They would be able to share some for the concerns of married people. Those who chose celibacy because it was right for them would make a stronger statement’.

‘I think celibacy should be optional as we lose a lot of good priests because of this. Of course, it’s probably easier to control single men. It’s not easy to move families around’.

A minority view was that celibacy was necessary for priesthood.

‘Celibacy is absolutely necessary to priesthood. They have to dedicate themselves to the priesthood. Mind you, I asked our priest to say more than one Mass on Sunday and he said he did not have time’.

‘No I think it would change fundamentally their relationship to the parishioners. Look at the C of E, they treat their ministers like people doing any other job’.

### Transgressions against celibacy.

Women who were more traditional tended, as did the most traditional priests, to deny that celibacy might be a problem. Women were cast in the age-old role of temptress.

‘That priests have affairs and have had affairs is nothing new. The women tempt the priests. Priests are vulnerable they are easily taken in’.

‘This [optional celibacy] would not solve the problems of illicit sex look at married clergy elsewhere they have adulterous affairs’.

Some women in favour of optional celibacy tended to link child abuse by clergy, to enforced celibacy and immature individuals who should not have been accepted for priesthood in the first place. The minority of traditional women in the study accepted that there was a problem but were convinced that much of it was media hype.

‘It’s very sad. But the media seize upon, focus upon this, it is a distorted view of the priesthood. They are in a position of trust. It’s sad for the perpetrator too, they are also victims’.

‘It makes the pastoral work of the rest of the priests even more difficult’.

### Married Anglican clergy.

The majority view was that if they came with the right intentions they would be welcomed, as any other converts. Much concern was expressed about their motives. One group was particularly angry.

‘How dare the hierarchy take a decision about these men without consulting the laity. Some of these men do not like women and we should have at least been consulted about them coming across’.

‘I think they are hypocrites. They do not agree with women priests so they come over to us’.

‘They changed the rules at the Reformation now they want to pick and choose. They just don’t want women priests’.

Some women noted the difficulties of exceptions to the rule of celibacy.

‘Strange how they can be married and Catholic priests cannot. How can they work side by side’?

‘They are an exception, it is not a precedent. They did not realise when they were ordained and then got married, or got married before they would convert to Catholicism so it’s OK for them as..... I really am getting muddled up’.

In one group this debate went around in circles, as the women found it increasingly difficult to explain to themselves, why a man from another Church should be an exception to the rules of celibacy in the Catholic Church. Eventually they sought refuge in one woman who explained that celibacy was a matter of authority.

‘I think it’s heroic to give up everything, deprive their families and so on. They have come to see the Anglican Church has changed. The high Church used to be more Catholic than us. This section feel themselves to be Catholic, they



even pray for the pope. The decision to ordain women was really a side issue, the real issue was authority’.

The more traditional minority welcomed them stressing their recognition of the authority of the pope, but one woman felt annoyed at what she considered ‘the cover story’ for Anglican priests coming across.

‘I have the feeling that many Anglicans come across because they cannot stand women. In fact, I know of one Anglican parish priest who made no secret, of the fact that he could not stand women. Others think the Church is like the high Church of England all bells and smells. They have a shock coming to them. Vatican II did not happen for them’.

‘This stuff about authority is nonsense. It’s a political smokescreen, a game which we are asked to join in which will hide the truth. It insults my intelligence’.

#### Women and conscience.

The majority of women emphasised the importance of making up their own minds on issues of sexual morality.

‘Conscience is supreme. Priests say it must be informed, but by whom’?

‘People don’t go to confession anymore. They have their conscience’.

‘They want you to feel guilty. If someone feels guilty you’ve got them, you can control them. The Church is not offering anything to young people. There is no happiness in any of it. Life is difficult, but you deserve it. There is always a measure of guilt in everything. It’s about mass-control. I make up my own mind’.

‘It’s not just doing what you want but reviewing what you want in the light of scripture and authority. You have to be free to choose otherwise you are not free then it’s not a sin’.

A minority of women linked an informed conscience to traditional orthodoxy. There was evidence of contradictory views being expressed at the same time.

‘In the sixties, we turned our backs on family values. Young people now are only concerned with self gratification. But we have made them what they are. They have no sense of commitment to their parents’ values. They have no self-control, they are selfish. It’s because they have no conscience. Our conscience is formed by the Church. To condone sin is to share in it’.

## Women and the Pope.

The majority of the women reported that they took little notice of this pope.

‘The pope has no bearing on my life whatsoever’.

‘He babbles on about contraception and the pill, but I take no notice. I’m not interested in what he has to say’.

‘He’s an old-fashioned sort of man. He wants to keep the old ways’.

Few women acknowledged any in-depth understanding of recent papal statements of concern to women. All of the women had heard of *Veritatis Splendor* and said they did not have to read it to know it was another ‘no’ to contraception.

Even less had heard of, or seen the pope’s recent letter to women. What was interesting about the reactions to the letter, was that whilst it was not surprising that women who were more theologically aware and espoused feminism would not be happy about it, the most traditional women were concerned that the pope had made concessions to feminism.

‘We were not happy with the letter. We translated it from a female perspective and sent it back to Rome. We don’t expect to hear anymore’.

‘We were not happy with the letter. How dare he think he should write to women like this. Where is the Letter to Men? Women are still considered different with different roles and gifts’.

‘It was a good letter, but could be taken wrongly. The pope implied that priests should not look down on us. Other women could take that to mean that they should have more power in the Church’.

‘The pope spoke well of us. Some of these [feminist] women are demeaning priests, making them redundant’.

‘The Holy Father suggests that women should be involved in the priests’ conferences. But, these [feminist] women are not the voice of the Church. They are even in seminaries now. Priests should be taught by priests’.

‘I love the Holy Father, but I do not agree with everything he says and does’.



### Women and priests.

It was unlikely that many of the women would in fact consult priests about issues of sexual morality for they said that priests still made them feel uncomfortable.

‘Priests do not feel comfortable with women as they do with men. Some women do not feel relaxed with priests. Perhaps it’s the uniform? There is this ‘holier than thou’ attitude with some of them. I wonder if women just feel guilty. They usually get the blame if the family goes wrong’.

‘Some priests still manage to make you feel inferior, or that you are a temptress or something. It’s about sex I suppose’.

‘No, I would not go to priest for advice. What does he know about me, about women? I probably know more about men than he’ll ever know about women. But then, I don’t go around making out I’m the expert on men’s problems do I?’

### Women’s awareness of Vatican II.

The majority of the women said they did not really understand why there had been so many changes since Vatican II. A minority of women were aware that the Council signalled an ending of the old ways and a move to a period of transition. What was evident was that few of the women understood the mission of the Church encompassed in the vision of Vatican II.

‘We are still working it through, it needs more time. We have a vision, which overturned the defensive mentality of the Council of Trent when we were a citadel and held the truth in its entirety and had to defend it. Now we need to know what to defend, and defend it’.

Overall, the women were poorly informed about Vatican II documents considered favourable to women. Those who were well informed were anxious about speaking out as they felt that some other women and priests would brand them as ‘feminists’ or ‘troublemakers’. What was evident was a polarisation between those women who want to move forward and those who want to go back to the old days.

‘I know very little about Vatican II really’.

‘I don’t think it had anything to do with women’.

‘Vatican II was OK, but it went too far. There is no sacredness anymore, we have lost unity’.

‘Sometimes I’m afraid to speak out because other women will see me as a troublemaker’.

‘Vatican II was the start of women thinking for themselves. But it was only after the *‘Do Not Be Afraid’* report that I felt I could come into the open on some things’.

‘Feminist is used by some women and priests as a derogatory term. Why should I have to defend being feminist?’

Those women who were feminist in their everyday lives and applied feminist principles to the Church said that they found such attitudes very difficult to accept. They spoke about women who did not hold their views in gentle terms trying to understand why they held the views they did.

‘The Church is a late-starter in equality for women. It remains way behind society and it must be difficult for some women to understand. We have to talk about these things with other women and with the hierarchy’.

#### Feelings of uncertainty.

In a minority of women, there was evidence of a sense of loss, anger and sadness reminiscent of the emotions usually associated with bereavement. They admitted a lack of understanding about the need for change, which suggested a failure in the management of the changes of Vatican II in England.

‘It was good in itself but it’s gone too far’.

‘We have lost the best, the reverence for the Blessed Sacrament’.

‘The Latin is gone, that was what made the Church universal, the language. You could go anywhere in the world and join in the Mass. Not anymore’.

During interviews with these women, it was a sense of sadness that came across more strongly than other emotions. There was anger, expressed as grumbling or outright fury, at decisions made by the English hierarchy. There was also an anxiety that the ‘one true Church’ would be lost. In the majority and in the minority of women there were varying levels of disquiet. The more liberal minded women when, for example, talking about women’s participation in the Church would make remarks such as:

‘The old days are gone, we will not go back to doing as we are told’.



For these women there were feelings of frustration that change was not clearly understood and was therefore a barrier to moving forward. A minority of the women described themselves as 'helpers' to priests, as wives and mothers. They said that they felt supported in this by the pope himself.

'Our role is as wife and mother to service the priests, the Holy Father has made this clear'.

This support from the Holy Father helped them to cope with feelings of uncertainty. The endings of the pre-Vatican II Church had not been defined or marked. There was instead a dribble of information together with changing practices which, in the absence of an understanding of the underpinning theory, appeared for some to be change for change sake and for others, as a reluctance to take on board the vision of Vatican II. The result is discord.

#### Changes in the liturgy.

In the deanery study, discord manifested itself in the changing practices associated with liturgy. In the group interviews, there was an apparent grieving for the old liturgies, rites and rituals, which the minority felt were the tangible demonstrations of their beliefs and commitment.

'My husband converted and was appalled to discover that the Catholic Church was more low church than the C of E'.

'Yes, we are a low church, we are expected now to focus on the other people not on God'.

'We should kneel at the altar-rails before God. I never understood why they took the altar-rails away'.

'No, the worst thing that affected reverence for the Blessed Sacrament was when they had communion in the hand'.

'All the sacraments have been devalued'.

Recent efforts by the English bishops to move towards a new vision of Church were resisted by this minority. The current pope was seen as the defender of the old faith. These women emphasised the need for obedience to the pope rather than obedience to the English bishops. Discord was thus reinforced.

## Conclusion.

In this study, the women's discourse supported the findings of Hornsby-Smith (1991) when he described 'customary Catholicism'. There was a range of beliefs differentially acknowledged by different women. Only a minority conferred unqualified legitimacy to the teachings of the pope. Most of the women differentiated between articles of faith and moral, regulatory or disciplinary matters taking to themselves the legitimate authority in the final analysis to make up their own mind, in particular about matters concerning women and their bodies.

The majority of women in this study were in agreement on key issues in the Church, which indicated the existence of an identifiable 'women's discourse' in the Church. This discourse was in conflict with traditional orthodoxy. The women were questioning the assemblage of beliefs, doctrines, institutions and practices that excluded them from full and equal participation in the Church. Even the minority who said that they took their lead from the Holy Father showed signs of distancing themselves from the traditional patriarchal construction of women. All of the women saw themselves as equal to men and the majority resented the fact that they were still not treated equally in the parishes.

The majority of the women in the study saw themselves as reasoning, autonomous individuals, able to take responsibility for their own decisions and had turned to conscience as their ultimate guide. The power and authority of the celibate male was resented and resisted. It was felt that male celibates knew little about women, or matters that intimately concerned women.

Consequently, the authority of the parish priest in matters of sexual morality was undermined. Few women would rarely, if ever, seek advice from the priest in matters of sexual morality preferring to make up their own minds as responsible mature Catholics. The current pope was largely ignored as was his persistent exhortation not to use contraception. Some of the women felt that he wanted them to return to the days when they were 'good little wives and mothers'.



Whilst all of the women agreed that motherhood was an important task, it should not be the only option open to women. Some women were also concerned that the emphasis on motherhood excluded many women for whom motherhood was not an option or a choice. Many of the women interviewed said that they made up their own minds on matters of sexual morality reinterpreting their religious beliefs in light of their social experience. As they did so there was evidence of an emerging socio-theology, which was more meaningful for women than the bio-theology of traditional orthodoxy.

The majority of the women were in favour of optional celibacy. It was considered that whilst celibacy for some men was a charism for others it was a burden. Some women felt that transgressions against celibacy were inevitable as some men were called to priesthood, but not to celibacy. They suggested that the enforcement of mandatory celibacy was partly to blame for incidents of child-abuse, as presumed celibacy gave sexually inadequate men a hiding place. These men were then able to abuse the trust placed in priests. Some women also felt that a married priesthood would be enriching and provide priests with an intimate knowledge of marriage and relationships, which were otherwise lacking.

There was much concern about the anomaly that married Anglican priests presented. Some women were convinced that many of these men had left the Anglican Church because they wanted to maintain traditional orthodox views of women. Much concern was expressed about Catholic priests who had been forced to leave in order to get married, whilst Anglicans could 'just come over'.

Most of the women said that the ordination of women was something that would happen but not yet. A minority of the women felt that the issue of priestly celibacy and the nature of priesthood had to be resolved before the question of women's ordination could be properly discussed.

Some women said another obstacle was the persistence of notions of pollution connected with

menstrual blood and childbirth. Others expressed their concern that assumptions of male superiority were evident in some priests.

The majority of women expressed resistance to traditional orthodox teaching on contraception, divorce and abortion. Teaching on contraception was almost summarily dismissed, not least, because most of the women felt that celibate men knew nothing about women, married life or childbearing. The majority of women in the groups said that the permissibility of the 'rhythm method' over the use of artificial means of contraception was seen as a nonsense as the object was the same, that is, to prevent conception. These women felt that the reasons for contraception were more important than the means, to achieve the same end. All of the women had accepted that divorce was now a part of life and most had experience of divorce either in their own families or amongst their friends.

All of the women felt that divorced people should be welcome in the Church and some felt that they should be allowed the sacraments. Some said that divorce was the one sin that was never forgiven and there are sins such as male pride and greed that are much more serious.

With regard to abortion, all of the women expressed concern for both mother and child. They spoke of abortion in terms of what it meant for the individual woman, grounding their comments in their own lived experience rather than from a theological or conceptual level. The distress to the mother was of great concern and whilst there was a consensus that the life of the unborn child was precious, the majority accepted that there were occasions when a woman made a decision for abortion, because she felt it was most appropriate, considering her circumstances.

Some women said that Church teaching on matters of sexual morality would have to change if it was to be meaningful in the everyday lives of Catholic women. That the majority of women in



the study were ‘this-worldly’, was reflected in their desire for the teaching on sexual morality to change, to an approach that took into account circumstances and consequences, rather than the rule-bound, absolutist, deductive approach of traditional orthodoxy.

As depicted in Table 4, the women’s discourse revealed a distancing from traditional orthodoxy.

**Table 4. Comparison between the Pope’s and Women’s discourse.**

	Pope’s Discourse	Majority of Women’s Discourse
Papal Authority	Absolute	Conscience supreme
Rules	Absolute	Guideline
Truth	Static	Evolving
Optional celibacy	No	Yes
Contraception	No	Yes
Abortion	No	Depends on circumstances
Divorce/remarriage	No	Yes
Women priests	No	Yes

There were significant differences between the official discourse of John Paul II and the discourse of the English Catholic women in this study. Whilst John Paul II insisted on the static nature of truth, the women talked of an evolving truth in tune with their lived experience. The majority of the women resisted clerical authority preferring to rely on supremacy of conscience using official teaching only as a guide to action. In matters of sexual morality, most of the women resisted the control of churchmen in reproduction. Consequentialism and proportionalism were taken into account when deciding action. The majority of the women rejected the notion of absolutes when considering contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage, and celibacy. Finally, all of the women were constructing themselves as equal to men and were challenging implicitly or explicitly the negative construction of woman in the patriarchal Church.

These contrasting positions can be summarised as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Summary of contrasting positions of the Women and the Pope.**

	Pope	Women
Power & Authority	Papal primacy	Individual conscience
Sexual theology	Static truth Male control Absolutism Institutional celibacy	Evolving truth Women's control of reproduction Consequentialism/proportionalism Optional celibacy
Construction of woman	Patriarchal construction of woman	Woman constructed equal with men

There was evidence of a distinct discourse amongst Catholic women, which supported the 'customary Catholicism' of English Catholics. Further, this discourse was more in line with the private discourse of the priests than it was with the official discourse of the current pope. As shown in Table 6, it is apparent that as the priests and women in this study distance themselves from traditional orthodoxy they come closer together.

**Table 6. Comparison between the Pope's, Priests' and Women's discourses**

	Pope's Discourse	Majority of Priests' Discourse	Majority of Women's Discourse
Papal Authority	Absolute	Collegial	Conscience supreme
Rules	Absolute	Guideline	Guideline
Truth	Static	Evolving	Evolving
Optional celibacy	No	Yes	Yes
Contraception	No	Depends on circumstances	Yes
Abortion	No	No, but depends on circumstances	Depends on circumstances
Divorce/remarriage	No	Needs addressing	Yes
Women priests	No	Yes	Yes



## Summary.

The analyses are based on the doctrinal discourses of the Catholic Church and a representative sample of English priests and women. The ideas and beliefs the world within which Christianity grew up, is derived from primary sources of Greek philosophy and medicine and Judaism. The traditional orthodox discourse is derived from primary sources using Church documents, doctrinal statements, papal encyclicals and references from the Old and New Testaments. The salience and relevance of traditional teaching, the continued existence and value of patriarchal ideas, what priests and women think about issues of sexual morality and the implications of all these, is derived from the private narratives of priests and women, accessed through the use of semi-structured interviews. The consequences of contradictory ideas and practices are examined in the parish community. It is here that conflict is evident. Conflict between different understandings of Church and implicitly different understandings of woman indicate a gap between the dominant discourse of the Church and that of priests and women.

The study of the Plymouth deanery is the most comprehensive study of the English parish to date. The study of twelve parishes in the Plymouth deanery included a questionnaire survey of 653 parishioners, 568 neighbours, 618 junior school pupils and 657 senior school pupils.

Interviews were carried out with 13 parish priests (and chaplains), 29 women religious, 13 groups of parishioners, 8 ministers from other denominations and 10 representatives of major voluntary agencies. This study of an English deanery yielded the data sets used in this research and provided the context of the empirical research.

The findings from this research are relevant on a number of levels of analysis. Firstly, the analysis contributes to an understanding of the ways in which patriarchal ideas continue to influence Catholic discourse. Secondly, it provides detailed case study information of the emergence of an alternative discourse in the contemporary English parish. Thirdly, it contributes to a body of data and theory on the gendered discourse of the Catholic Church.

Fourthly, the conclusions drawn provide an original perspective on the nature of dissent in the Catholic Church. In addition, the following conclusions may also be drawn from this research.

First, the evidence from this study suggests that some priests are re-constructing 'woman' in line with their everyday experience of living in a western liberal democracy. The majority of priests interviewed recognised women's accomplishments in the public sphere and most felt that women were able to make responsible decisions in matters of sexual morality. It was evident that this re-construction has by no means been total, as some priests felt that to talk of woman as 'complementary' to man was quite acceptable. When asked, they were unable to explain exactly what 'complementarity' meant. The reconstruction of woman appeared to be a result of the experiential not the theoretical. What was clear was that the traditional Catholic construction of woman no longer fits the lived reality of some priests' experiences of women in a liberal democracy.

Second, in their everyday lives many women were constructing themselves on equal terms with men. Many Catholic women contribute to public life and recognise their ability to make responsible decisions about matters of sexual morality. In the study, many women resented male celibate interference in reproduction, preferring to decide on contraception and abortion for themselves. Whilst acknowledging the important role of motherhood, some women resisted gender role assignment in the Church and were demanding equal status with men. Whilst all of the women accepted the biological imperative to childbearing their emphasis on partnership in marriage included joint responsibilities for child rearing. Some women felt that patriarchal attitudes and notions of pollution were alive in the Church and contributed to the resistance to women's equality. Some women in the sample said that they were unable to continue in a Church, which they regarded as patriarchal and had left.



Third, in this study the priests' private discourse reveals a conflict between Catholic sexual theology and the implementation of that theology in practice. The priests questioned sexual theology when they questioned compulsory celibacy and asked for debate on optional celibacy. Priests in the sample were confused about definitions of celibacy and could provide no clear operational definition. The priests appeared to interpret the rules on celibacy in light of their personal definition. In their private dealings with women, the majority of priests in the study said that they 'break the rules' by re-interpreting teachings on the ban on artificial contraception, divorce and re-marriage to make them meaningful, using the principles of 'consequentialism' and 'proportionalism', or preferring to leave decisions about sexual morality to women themselves. In their everyday experience of women, the priests recognised that women no longer accept the authority of men who are celibate in matters of sexual morality and reported that they were beginning to recognise women's independence and spiritual maturity. Clerical control of women and their bodies is breaking down for it relies on the co-operation of women themselves.

Fourth, as the majority of women in the study construct an alternative identity for 'woman' which is different from traditional orthodoxy, they are distancing themselves from traditional sexual theology. Those women who questioned the assemblage of beliefs, doctrines, institutions and practices that exclude them have taken to themselves the authority to decide what to do with their bodies. Even those women who said that they followed traditional teaching and accepted the authority of the pope in matters of sexual morality, were reconstructing themselves as equal to men and some admitted to having used contraception. Most women said that marriage was a partnership between equals with shared responsibilities.

The construction of an alternative identity, which is more appropriate to the reality of women's lives, challenges assumptions of male superiority which underpin patriarchy in the Church. As it does so, this alternative construction of 'woman' challenges the patriarchal structures and institutions of the Church and the exclusive male prerogative to spiritual and moral authority.

Fifth, both priests and women recognised supremacy of individual conscience. The majority of the priests accepted the complexity of everyday life and the uniqueness of individual circumstances. Individual conscience was a crucial factor in decision-making. The majority of women in the study said that they turned to conscience as their ultimate guide and few women would approach the parish priest for advice about matters of sexual morality.

Sixth, most priests and some women in the study confused the increased participation of women with equality. Most of the priests said that women could now do everything they were 'allowed' to do. Some women said that they were now able to 'much more' in the Church than before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. A minority of priests and women linked equality with women's ordination.

Seventh, most women said that they were more aware of the masculine language of the Church than they had been in the past. Some women said that the use of sexist language reinforced women's inferior position in the Church. Others who said that the use of inclusive language was 'a nonsense' said that they were becoming more aware of the use of masculine language in the Church. The continued use of sexist language was considered by some women to be indicative of their subordinate position in the Church. They made a connection between the exclusion of women from the language of the Church and the exclusion of women from the discussion of issues that affected them. Most women in the study expected to be consulted on issues of sexual morality which were of particular significance to women, considering themselves the experts in such matters. Even those women who said that male power in the



Church was divinely ordained, expected to be consulted about issues at diocesan and parochial levels.

Eighth, the private discourse of the priests in this study is significantly different from the public discourse of the official Church. As shown in Table 2, the private discourse of the priests reveals a distancing from traditional orthodoxy on major issues in the contemporary Church. The priests said that in private they 'break the rules' using official teaching as an 'ideal', a guide to action. In public, the priests continue to present the 'ideal' and as such they support and sustain traditional teaching, but their private discourse and practice is in conflict with traditional teaching.

Ninth, in this study the women's discourse revealed a similar distancing from traditional orthodoxy and, as shown in Table 6, the private discourse of these priests is more in line with the private discourse of the women, than it is with the public discourse of the official Church. As the priests and women distanced themselves from traditional teaching, they came closer together.

This research provides evidence of the emergence of a distinct discourse emerging in the English parish, which represents a point of resistance to traditional teaching. In this study, both the priests and the women's discourses question the salience and relevance of traditional teaching particularly in matters of sexual morality. These discourses have much in common and both challenge the traditional ideas and sexual theology. Both recognise the primacy of individual conscience using traditional teaching as an 'ideal', a guide to action. Each takes into account the complexities of human relations and applies consequentialism and proportionalism to matters of sexual morality. Both indicate that women should have the right to decide what happens to their bodies. Both are open to the idea of a married priesthood, optional celibacy

and ordination for women. These women and priests recognised the need for a revision of the Church's teaching on divorce, remarriage and reception of the sacraments.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN.

### Discussion.

#### Introduction.

This chapter begins with a consideration of the appropriateness of the tools used to uncover and conceptualise certain historical phenomena, that have influenced the construction and development of the structures, teachings and practices of the Catholic Church, which have subordinated women. The fundamental underpinning concept in this thesis is that of patriarchy, that is, the domination by birthright that prevails in the area of sexuality. It has been shown, that in the Church there exists, both historically and currently, a system of sexual relations displaying *Herrschaft*, a case of dominance and subordination.

The chapter then moves to a discussion of the contradictions and tensions in the contemporary English Catholic parish. It concludes with the suggestion that an emancipatory project of Church is necessary if women are to achieve equality in the Church.

#### **The conceptual framework.**

##### Genealogy.

Genealogy, as *descent* and *emergence* has proved a stimulating guide to asking historical questions and conceptualising historical phenomena. As a form of critique, it has been used as a guide by which, this thesis has explored how patriarchal ideas and beliefs became established in the Church and how they continue to exist and have value in the contemporary Church. It has been shown that patriarchal ideas and beliefs, most particularly those concerned with biology and biological processes were significant in the development of Catholic theology, structures and institutions. The search for *descent* has questioned what was previously considered to be the 'truth' about women. It has demonstrated that those beliefs about women, which arose from

lowly human factors contingent on surrounding circumstances, continue to exist and have value in the Church.

The use of *emergence*, that is, current episodes produced through a particular stage of forces, rather than a final term of historical development, informed the examination of significant moments in the history of the Church without presuming an historical contingency. Thus, Catholic reform movements of the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the 2nd Vatican Council and the contemporary Church have been considered in terms of episodes resulting from competing or contradictory ideas, beliefs and practices. The examination of Church history as genealogy, has also highlighted the heterogeneity of ideas which have always existed within in the Church, but often ignored by officialdom if they do not concur with ecclesial discourse.

#### Discourse.

The use of discourse as an analytic tool has allowed for the isolation and analysis of techniques of power, which are implicated in the ways in which the female body and the social institutions related to it have entered into political relations. The dominant discourse in the Church has not been merely a linguistic phenomenon, but the means by which ideas were created, sustained and continued. Patriarchal ideas about gender, role and status were absorbed into the theological discourses of the Church. These discourses produced discursive practices, which subordinated women. The overarching gendered discourse of the Church has served to legitimise the exclusion of women from full participation. The inscriptions on women's bodies have objectivised women as things to be used by men and by the Church. Dividing practices have ensured the continued objectivisation of women.



An examination of the gendered discourse of the Church has enabled us to get behind the beliefs and practices and exposes the ideas that have informed them. As an apparatus of power, the dominant discourse of the Church integrates the discourses on sexuality, doctrine, institutional celibacy, ordination and the position and place of women in the Church. Where there is power there is resistance and alternative discourses have challenged and continue to challenge the dominant discourse. Significant episodes in the history of the Church have been the result of the challenges posed by alternative discourses where these have been used both as a weapon and as a defence. Equally, in the contemporary Church, challenges to the dominant discourse arise at every level and the suggestion of an alternative discourse emerging in the English parish, poses a significant challenge to the dominant discourse.

This research has demonstrated that the grip that the dominant discourse of the Church has on some English Catholic priests and women is imperfect. A *disturbance* points to a gap between the dominant discourse and the actual material experiences of everyday lives of some priests and women. A *contradictory consciousness* points to the internalisation of contradictions, which these priests and women experience as conflict or minimally as discomfort, demonstrated as both compliance and resistance within the same process. The empirical research located the general areas in which these contradictions are manifest as: papal and clerical power and authority, especially with regard to matters of personal sexual morality; sexual theology, particularly with regard to the position and place of women in the Church; and institutional celibacy.

### Sexuality.

In this thesis, the notion of sexuality as discourse and social practice, is in direct opposition to the sexual essentialism of the dominant Catholic discourse, in which sexuality is perceived of as an unruly power, biological in nature and in need of restraint. It has been shown, that within the Church women and men have been defined, their personalities fixed, their role and status

established, through a discourse on sexuality as biology and instinct, which has masked the heterogeneous nature of sexuality, under a single notion of sex as a basic human drive, which requires regulation.

An examination of the Church's discourse on sexuality has uncovered how the bodies of women and men have been invested by knowledge and power, and how this has influenced the development of a sexual theology. It has revealed the biological determinism of Catholic theology and the continued existence of biological explanations to justify the segregation and subordination of women in the Church. It has shown that Catholic sexual theology follows traditional discourses on sexuality that place great emphasis on what is 'natural' and 'normal'. A 'machinery of sexuality' has reproduced acts of relations through a discourse of sexuality, which aimed to control the sexual body, in particular the female body and reproduction.

Sexuality is seen here as an 'especially dense transfer point for relations of power', for in a 'history of bodies', that which is most material and vital in them has been invested by knowledge and power. Sexual theology is an apparatus of power, which damages women and men.

The control of women and reproduction is the quintessence of patriarchy in the Church. Male power is supported and sustained by myths, initiation rites and symbolism. The significance of the phallus as a symbol of male power has long been understood. What has not previously been fully considered is the importance of semen in supporting notions of male superiority and power. An examination of Greek medical and philosophical discourses revealed semen as the 'missing link', which explained in biological terms male intellectual and physical superiority. Thus, semen emerged as the symbol of masculinity and male power.



The centrality of semen in Catholic sexual theology is evident in the writings of Thomas Aquinas who elevated semen to a 'divine liquid'. It was believed that semen contained the whole foetus in embryo and had therefore to be protected. These beliefs, contained within the discourse on sexuality led to discursive practice. The sex act was increasingly hedged in with sanctions and prohibitions. Aquinas insisted that semen must be delivered in a 'proper manner' (the "missionary position"), into the 'correct vessel' (the womb), and for the 'right reason' (procreation). Any sexual act whereby semen was 'spilt on the ground' (masturbation or coitus interruptus), deposited in the 'wrong vessel' (same-sex sex, oral or anal sex) or used for the 'wrong reason' (an act of adultery or for personal pleasure), was considered the most heinous of sins, worse than incest or rape (where at least the condition of the correct vessel was satisfied). The primacy of semen was a discursive creation, which led to the emphasis and centrality of 'sexual sins' that lies at the heart of Catholic sexual theology. Catholic sexual theology is a theology of semen. It is hardly surprising therefore that the sexual act, male control of women and reproduction, and sexual 'sins', assumed the greatest importance in Catholic sexual theology.

Discursive practice reinforced the objectivisation of women in the 'unsaid' as much as in the 'said'. A concern for semen, together with a fear of women and sex, underpinned the control of women and their bodies. Church fathers attempted to control women and reproduction through taboos and prohibitions. Women, edged out of the public life of the Church, were hedged into the private sphere as wives and mothers or into convents controlled by men. Women were denied any rights over their own bodies and contraceptive and abortive practices were condemned as seriously sinful. Women's role was to co-operate with nature in the act of procreation, therefore, in any act of intercourse a woman must always be open to the reception of semen. Women were merely vessels for men's 'seed'. The patriarchal belief in the primacy of semen in reproduction helped to legitimise male control of reproduction and a sexual theology, which aimed to control women and reproduction.

## Patriarchy.

The fundamental underpinning concept in this thesis is that of patriarchy, that is, the domination by birthright that prevails in the area of sex. In the Church, there exists both historically and currently a system of sexual relations, a case of *Herrschaft*, a case of dominance and subordination. Traditionally, all positions of power in the Church have been held by men, and women have been defined as passive believers. Stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity continue to be presented as natural and divinely ordained, and sex-role assignment is merely co-operating with God and nature .

The legitimacy for patriarchy in the Church continues to rest on biology, that is, in the biological differences between women and men and in the presumed temperamental, intellectual and efficacious characteristics which arise from these. Doctrines and institutions are underpinned by a theological determinism, which supports male supremacy in both the public and private spheres. Catholic theology is a bio-theology, which is supported and sustained by discourse, structures and institutions that depend for their legitimacy on the presumed biological superiority of men. Patriarchy is continued from generation to generation, by the perpetuation of those apparatuses of power, that ensure the continued exclusion of women both through the 'said' and the 'unsaid'.

This bio-theology also allows for the domination of some men by others. Leaders presume a privileged access to truth, claim the right to explain the meaning of human existence and the interpretation of meaning for the whole community. Alternative explanations are denied debate as the 'expert' narrative is so confined that other narratives are effectively excluded, for if alternative narratives were articulated the dominant narrative would be in danger of becoming one narrative amongst many. Leaders sustain their power through exclusive rituals, which provide for male leaders control of other men and all women and children.



Patriarchy as a governing ideology in the Church is damaging to men as well as to women. It prevents both men and women from developing and experiencing their full humanity as it produces conformity and controls its subjects. Mutually exclusive and contradictory qualities of categories of masculinity and femininity consign male and female personalities to only half their human potential. In the Church women and men, consigned as they are as bi-polar opposites, are prevented from developing their full spiritual potential. Whilst men have been damaged by patriarchy in the Church they do at least have the possibility to reach a position of power themselves. Most women, on the other hand, are denied such a possibility simply because they are women. The Church has hedged women in with taboos and rituals, which have served to exclude them from full participation in the Church. Women's social and political contributions to the Church have been either downplayed or eliminated. Systems of communication, meaning and spiritual property, have been controlled and handed down by men and women's spirituality has been denied or ignored. Strategies of exclusion and segregation maintain the *status quo*. The use of exclusive language, creation stories and the association of women with sex and sin, reinforces the biological and spiritual inferiority of women. All of these support the continued exclusion of women from full participation in the Church. Women's exclusion from the priesthood from interpretation and from the everyday language of the Church communicates women's inferiority in the 'unsaid' and in the 'said' and perpetuates male domination in the Church.

#### Contradictions and tensions in the English parish.

It is evident that an ideology of patriarchy permeates the theology, structures and institutions of the Catholic Church. Patriarchal ideas continue to underpin issues of reproduction, contraception, the ordination of women, marriage and divorce, institutional celibacy, the nature of God, and power and authority in the Church, therefore the issue of women's equality in the Church is bound up with that of patriarchy. Further, it is the lack of 'fit' between the patriarchal



discourse of the Church and the critical discourses of the world that give rise to many of the contradictions and tensions in the contemporary Church.

Critical discourses on sexuality, justice, liberty and equality, contain within them ideas that are in contradiction to patriarchal discourses that define woman as inferior to man. Ideas about basic human rights contained within these discourses should extend to all human beings regardless of class, sex, race or other forms of social domination. Many priests and women in the English Church have been affected by these discourses and it is the contradictions between these discourses and the patriarchal discourse of the Church, which gives rise to the contradictions and tensions in the parish.

This study has shown that there is a gap between the dominant discourse of the Church and the actual reality of the everyday lives of some priests and women, which is manifest as a 'disturbance', a lack of 'fit'. There is no 'point of coincidence' between the dominant discourse and the discourses of the *Lebenswelt*, as there was between the Orthodox discourse of the early Church and the patriarchal discourse of the world. Contradictory ideas exist at every level in the Church. There exists a plurality of beliefs and practices, which represent a 'disturbance' of massive proportions. There is a crisis of ideas amongst bishops, theologians and ordinary priests and laity. This crisis of ideas underpins the crisis that John Paul II identified. It is a crisis of patriarchy in the Church, which threatens the sexual theology, organisation and institutions of the patriarchal Church. Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council forces have struggled against each other at every level in the Church and this research has demonstrated that this is not a struggle between equals. The adversaries do not belong to a common space, it is a struggle in a 'non-place'. It was from the bottom-up, from the people themselves, that 'customary Catholicism' arose and the evidence of this study, suggests that priests appear to be following the people, with a 'customary priesthood' designed to minister to the needs of 'customary Catholicism'. In this 'non-place' the ideas of the people, expressed through discourse, are



creating a 'socio-theology of the people', which provides a significant point of resistance to the patriarchal Church. Some bishops, theologians, priests and women operate in this 'non-place' and no charismatic leaders have arisen at the interstices. If charismatic leaders were to emerge would the Church reform or split?

As many priests take on board the social characteristics of life in a pluralist society, other discourses impinge and there can never be a perfect 'fit' between traditional teachings and their social reality. There appears to be little salience or relevance in the official discourse for the everyday interactions between priests and women. In order to deal with the contradictions that arise the priest in this study employed a range of modes of resistance and avoidance. Within the *internal forum* (under the *sigillum* of confession) some priests avoid telling women what to do with regard to contraception and abortion and they re-interpret the 'rules' using reason, social experience and conscience rather than traditional teaching alone. There is evidence that some priests do not 'listen' to the dominant discourse and explain it away as 'an ideal' or as a 'guide to action'. When it comes to ultimate decision-making, on many issues these priests tend to ask 'what would Christ do?', not 'what does the pope say'. It would appear that at the pastoral level many priests attempt to synthesise the ideas contained within the critical discourses of the world with the traditional teachings of the Church. This attempt at synthesis mirrors the ways in which the laity have tried to reconcile Church teachings with the lived reality of their everyday lives. In the English Church, a 'customary priesthood' appears to be emerging, which services the 'customary Catholicism' of English Catholics .

The discourse on sexuality, confession, the power and authority of the clergy, and institutional celibacy, key apparatuses of power, have lost their grip on the people. Many errors, false appraisals and calculations contained within sexual theology, which provided legitimacy for these apparatuses, have been exposed through advances in biology, medicine, psychology, sociology, biblical scholarship and feminist critiques. Confession has largely fallen into disuse



and with its decline one of the most powerful elements in the exercise of *disciplinary power* in the Church has evaporated (Foucault, 1981). For example, although the Church continues to forbid sex before marriage many couples who come to ‘marriage preparation sessions’ are already partners. For them marriage is a celebration of a reality. In one way or another, there is disobedience on a massive scale and most especially in the area of personal sexual morality. The traditional discourse on sexuality no longer holds the power it once had, as the ‘knowledge’ which underpinned it has been greatly discredited, consequently the authority of the celibate hierarchy and of the priest in matters of sexual morality has often been undermined. Some priests find it difficult to explain traditional teachings on sexuality to women for whom they hold little meaning. Many women reject patriarchal and religious inscriptions on their bodies, which are ultimately connected to their segregation and subordination. Patriarchal inscriptions that objectify women, together with religious inscriptions that associate women with sex and sin, are fundamental to the position and place of women in the Church and contribute to the contradictions and tensions that characterise the contemporary English parish.

Male domination is no longer acceptable to many women in the Church and some women who totally reject male domination leave the Church. Whilst there have been episodes in the history of the Church, when traditional teaching has been challenged both from within the Church and from without, fundamental beliefs about women continued to exist through the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter Reformation, the Enlightenment and the 2nd Vatican Council. Despite the increased participation of women since the 2nd Vatican Council women remain second class citizens in the Church. Notions of women’s inferiority continue to exist in the ‘said’ and in the ‘unsaid’. The dominant discourse continues to use patriarchal ideas about temperament, role and status, and male domination of the structures and institutions of the Church support and sustain the notion of women’s inferiority. The continued exclusion of women from the priesthood together with the masculine language of the Church clearly demonstrates the subordinate position of women in the Catholic Church.



Although there was no reformation for women, at least at the time of the Reformation, certain ideas arising from the Catholic and Protestant reformers, were to have an impact on women, most particularly collegiality, which is a necessary pre-condition for the equality of women in the Church. The notion of the 'priesthood of believers', supremacy of conscience, marriage not merely for procreation but for the mutual well-being of the couple, and a personal relationship with God, were the precursors to an emerging theology of the people. In this theology of the people, the notion of the supremacy of conscience implies that the individual can through reason make appropriate moral choices. Many women are able to make reasoned moral choices concerning their bodies. The notion of the 'priesthood of believers', allowed for the increased participation of the laity, in which women accessed 'sacred spaces' for the first time on the basis of their common baptism. The inclusion of the mutual well-being of the couple into the Church's discourse on sexuality indicated that a synthesis between the sexual discourses of the world with that of the Church was possible. As the discovery of the ovum swept away the myth that semen was the primary agent in procreation, it more clearly revealed the control of women and their bodies in the patriarchal Church. These changing ideas heralded the possibility of a process of change, which would eventually result in the equality of women in the Church.

In the parish, there is a struggle between those ideas that contain within them possibilities for change and those traditional ideas that resist change. Patriarchal ideas hold great value for traditionalists, whilst progressives place great value on the ideas of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. Traditional ideas about gender, role and status, compete with notions of equality arising from Vatican reforms. Conflicting ideas give rise to contradictory ideas about the nature of Church. The laity are bewildered, for the notion of the 'priesthood of believers' gives an impression of citizenship whilst at the same time the superior status of the sacramental priesthood is re-enforced. This apparent contradiction gives rise to conflicting ideas in the parish concerning the participation of the laity. What is the role of the priesthood? Are the laity subjects or citizens of

the Church? Some regard themselves as shareholders, who support the parish financially through the payment of their collection dues or covenants (Giarchi and Sharp,1993). At a practical level, without the payees where would the Church be? Contradictions also arise from the wider issue of where power should lie in the Church. At a structural level, the command posts of power remain in the hands of an elite, despite the success of collegiality at the 2nd Vatican Council. For those priests who attempt to put in place a more collective form of leadership in the parish, the autocratic and bureaucratic style of leadership at the macro level contradicts what they are trying to do locally. The Vatican II notion of co-responsibility of priests and people has been forgotten (Suenens,1968).

At parish level, contradictions give rise to conflict at both the collective and the individual level. At the collective level, conflict in the parish is expressed most clearly over disputes and disagreements over the liturgy. At the individual level, many priests and women internalise contradictions arising from the conflict between traditional teaching and their lived experience. For those priests and women who remain in the Church, the internalisation of contradictions are experienced as conflict or minimally as discomfort as compliance and resistance becomes part of the same process.

There are other factors that contribute to the contradictions and tensions of parish life, for example, in the parish power remains in the hands of men, even though most parishes rely on women for the day-to day running of the parish. A few priests in the study laughingly suggested that it was the women 'who run the parish', however, decision-making generally remained in the hands of the parish priest and/or the men of the parish. The structures and organisation of the average parish are often sex-specific, sexist, and out of tune with the modern world.



Sensationalised reports in the media and in the press about priests who have transgressed against celibacy, most particularly, scandals concerning active paedophilia amongst certain clergy, has severely damaged the celibate image. This shattering of the myth that all celibate priests were faithful to the obligation to celibacy, contributed to the contradictions and tensions in the parish. For not only has the knowledge and authority of the papacy and the celibate male, on matters of personal sexual morality been called into question by English Catholics, as in the wider society, the celibate male has become a cause for suspicion. Catholic parents are no different from other parents, who would possibly question the wisdom of allowing their child to be alone with a priest. The trust that used to exist between priests and parents, has been compromised by that minority of priests who have abused not only women, young people and children, but also the office of priesthood and celibacy itself.

Institutional celibacy is the backbone of patriarchy in the Church. 'Failed' priests weaken institutional celibacy and are part of the collapsing edifice of patriarchy in the Church. At the structural level, the institution of celibacy sets some men up to fail, for some are called to priesthood but not to celibacy. This is especially the case for the secular clergy who do not make a vow of chastity as religious do. For many secular priests institutional celibacy is not a nurturing, sustaining and enhancing experience, rather, it is a 'poisoned chalice', which is destructive and controlling. Institutional celibacy may also provide a safe hiding place for those men who use their positions, of trust and the presumption of moral integrity, as a cover for their sexual activity. The actions of these men present a formidable challenge to institutional celibacy.

#### An emancipatory project for the Church.

Shea (1986) has argued that the key agenda items for feminists in the Church are:

'the role of women in ministry, their ordination to the priesthood, the celibacy of the clergy, and the male monopoly of leadership. Some have suggested that sex is, at the bottom, the issue that clogs up our Catholic calendar. Fear of women and perhaps hatred of them may well be just what we have to work out of the Catholic system (Shea M,1986:589).



Fundamentally, this thesis has been about the position and place of women in the Church, therefore this discussion is concerned with the prospect of women's equality in a patriarchal Church. As has been noted earlier, the question of women's equality in the Church is bound up with fundamental beliefs and ideas of patriarchy, and a sexual theology that is intricately implicated with these ideas. The increased participation of women in the Church is not a gradual, incremental process that will inevitably lead to the equality of women in the Church. Women's equality will not be achieved on a piecemeal basis. If women are to attain equality in the Church, new and innovative ways must be found to address the range of issues that currently underpin women's inequality in the Church. There can be no significant move forward in the emancipation of women in the Church, until and unless the question of sexism is addressed. This would require a comprehensive examination of the structures, institutions, sexual theology, and screening procedures for priesthood within the Church.

Women will not achieve equality in the Church without an emancipatory project of Church. Women's equality in the Church depends not merely on women themselves, but on the awareness and co-operation of the whole Church. What are the possibilities for increased awareness and co-operation in the Church? Resistance to women's equality is evident at all levels in the Church, but most especially with the hierarchical elite. What might persuade those in positions of power to engage with an emancipatory project of Church?

Firstly, the equality of women is a cause that cannot be turned back. This has been recognised at the theoretical level in certain Vatican II documents. As early as 1963 in the encyclical

*Pacem in Terris* the Church acknowledged that:

‘Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not be treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting the human person both in domestic and public life’.



The 2nd Vatican Council also had some prescience for the groundswell for women's rights when it stated in *Gaudium et Spes*:

'...for in truth, it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honoured. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to chose a husband, to embrace a state of life or to acquire and education or cultural benefits equal to those recognised for men'.

Women who experience equality with men in their everyday lives tend to expect a similar level of equality in the Church. Many women resent second class status in the Church and no longer consent to being treated a things to be used by men or by the Church. Women who have acquired a critical consciousness are most unlikely to return to a subservient position. If the Church wishes to retain such women, it will have to address the issue of sexism in the Church.

Secondly, if the Church cannot or will not emancipate women, many women will find the Church increasingly irrelevant in their lives and seek spiritual fulfilment elsewhere. The majority of women will never again be satisfied with a particular 'place' in the world, or in a Church, which is normatively male. This should be a cause for concern for women form the majority of attenders and it is generally women who nurture the faith in the next generation. The prospect of alienating women, especially younger women, is not in the present or future interests of the Church.

Thirdly, according to Church teaching:

'the Christian faithful have the right and "even at times a duty" to make known their opinions to bishops and other Christian faithful on matters which pertain to the good of the Church' (Granfield,1987).

The hierarchy has a duty to listen to the *sensus fidelium* (the sense of the faithful) and to theologians by reason of their scholarly competence. At the theological level, 'any theology that is not a lived theology is no theology at all' (Chittister and Marty,1983) and pronouncements that ignore theological scholarship and the *sensus fidelium*, have little hope of enduring moral force or effective, intellectual (or faith) assent. Further, a measure of the



efficacy of Church doctrine is linked to the level of its reception by priests and people. If the people reject doctrine, its efficacy is called into question.

Finally, new ways have to be found to unite a disunited Church. The questioning of official teaching and practice has reached, in the Pope John Paul II's own words, 'a crisis' stage, which traditional strategies for containment can no longer control.

There is evidence of emancipatory potential in the dominant discourse of the Church, but there is little evidence of support for women's equality in the celibate tradition.

'Whilst John XXIII and Paul VI strongly endorsed the theory of women's equality, women still await the practical implications of such a theory, not least because of the peril it bodes to a celibate male hierarchy' (Sipe, 1990:29).

There is also evidence that some Church leaders are concerned about the inbuilt sexism of the Church. In 1988, the American Conference of Bishops concluded in their conference report:

'women have suffered from profound as well as petty discrimination because of an attitude of male dominance which, in any form, is alien to the Christian understanding of the function of authority'.

The emancipatory potential in both the dominant discourse and some Church leaders exists however, sexist teachings remain and the reality is that women cannot have power:

'St Paul, wrote, "In Christ there is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female. We are all one" (Galatians 3:28). This is a beautiful idea, limited only by one factor: sex. Women cannot have *power*. Women are equal, necessary, one in Christ, if they keep their *place*. The idea that the place of women is subordinate to men runs deep not only in the history and culture of the Church, but in the conscious fibre of many men and women who justify this bias as natural (sanctioned by grace)' (Sipe, 1990:29).

The existence of contradictions within the dominant discourse needs to be addressed. The injustices that result from an ideology of patriarchy have to be acknowledged by the whole Church. There will be no equality for women unless there is a collective response. Currently, there exists an individual response, which contributes to conflict in the Church. Women and sympathetic priests acting alone cannot achieve equality in the Church. Women's equality



depends upon a willingness on the part of the whole Church to participate in an emancipatory project.

What are the possibilities of a such a project in a Church that epitomises the contradiction between domination and emancipation? As the Church continues to be characterised by dogmatism, control and repression, it may be argued that all that can be done is to theorise about it. The findings in this study suggest that an emancipatory project would receive a sympathetic hearing by many women and priests. The questioning that is occurring in the English parish, and indeed amongst some Church leaders, is in contradiction to the dominant discourse. The dissent and resistance implicit in these contradictions needs to be acknowledged. The challenge for the whole Church is to find a way to reconcile diversity and dissent with solidarity and equality. It is therefore suggested that the Church needs an emancipatory project of Church, which through a process of *self-reflection*, takes up dissent and diversity and transforms it into the creation of change. In this process, the injustices that result from an ideology of patriarchy would form the focal point.

The possibility of mass struggle for the emancipation of women is unlikely, not least because of the failure of similar forms of mass politics in the recent past. Where such collective forms of resistance have occurred we have seen the rise of bureaucratic party structures which continued to dominate women and other ethnic and cultural groups. Mass revolt does not necessarily improve a situation, it merely shifts the power of domination from one place or group to another. If an emancipatory project of Church were to be adopted it would have to involve the whole Church and would need to be developed from a moral critique from within. This internal critique would direct its attention to that side of the Church that is implicated in domination and contrast this with critical discourses of liberty, justice and equality.

This study has demonstrated that this critique has already commenced at the individual level in some of the priests and women of the English parish. The resistance to the dominant discourse at the individual level could be taken up and changed into a force for change. Also, a conception of the subject as a 'resistant moral agent', provides one means by which such an emancipatory project of Church could be constructed. Such a project emphasises the contradictions in the contemporary Church, which are evidenced by the multiplicity of challenges to its moral, political and cultural authority. The emancipatory project, rooted in the possibilities emerging under present conditions, would have to acknowledge diversity and emphasise *process*, using discursive signposts to assist in the pursuit of justice and equality. This would provide a process, which stimulates ideas and opens the way to innovative and diverse ways of meeting spiritual needs of the community, as people become involved in furthering their own needs and the needs of the Church as a whole. An emancipatory project of Church cannot be based in absolutism and a system of domination operating in the interests of one sex over another, or in the defence of special 'expert' powers by an elite group.

The emancipatory project would be a process by which resistance is transformed into the creation of change. In such a process, it would be acknowledged that a critical questioning about the Church, its teachings, and its changing forms of beliefs and practices would result. The process would arise from the contradictions and critiques of the present; it would not be a clearing away of the past and starting again. Fresh principles and practices would be required, which built on existing emancipatory potential. In this respect the emerging principles and practices, which are beginning to sediment themselves into the consciousness of priests and women are 'possibilities' for the development of such change.

The dominant discourse, despite its dependence on patriarchal beliefs and ideas, does contain contradictions, which point to the possibility of emancipatory potential in the Church. For example, collegiality, the notion of the 'royal priesthood of believers', and the increasing levels



of lay participation all contain emancipatory potential. If this emancipatory potential is to be realised, the existence of a *contradictory consciousness* would have to be acknowledged. We may still find that those discourses, which we choose to oppose absolutely in the name of emancipation, remain embedded in the consciousness of those seeking emancipation and in those opposed to it. A commitment to fight patriarchy must therefore involve not only external forms of patriarchy, but that patriarchy which is internalised.

The development of reflective knowledge is at the heart of the emancipatory project (Leonard, 1997) as it offers the opportunity for individuals and groups to reflect on dominant ideologies, which constrain them and limit their freedom. A project of emancipation might be seen as securing freedom from 'self-imposed' restraints. Emancipation based on self-reflection (at individual and collective levels) is the central purpose and this self-reflection is grounded in specific historical situations, from which there can be no escape. It is recognised that the Church and its people have been affected not only by the ideology of patriarchy, but by the critical discourses of the wider world. Under changed historical conditions, economic, cultural and social, and a willingness to acquire a reflective ability, self-reflection becomes a possibility.

The process of self-reflection refers not only to the individual subject, but is also seen as a collective exercise. An internal critique of the dominant discourse demands a substantial degree of collective self-reflection. It is a political process by which the Church would identify the conflict produced by its own internal contradictions. It is a process that would enable the Church to recognise that its ideas, even though expressing resistance, are still reflections of the social order from which they spring. This process of self-reflection would also enable those who pressure for change and those opposed to change to recognise traces of dominant discourses embedded in their own narratives. Self-reflection allows us to acknowledge that our own political beliefs and commitments are to be seen not as absolute truth, but as insurgent

critical discourses, bearing the indelible traces of their particular historical and critical origins. Thus, it opens up the way to a more open communication with significant political others. A high level of self-reflection, individual and collective, is a necessary precondition for the development of solidarity on the foundations of diversity. The difficulty of disengaging and distancing oneself in order to be objective must be acknowledged both at the individual and at the collective level.

The process of self-reflection, not only helps in the struggle against 'self-imposed' constraints, but also provides a positive defence against dogma. The ideology of patriarchy is deeply embedded in our culture and in the Church, which is located within it. Even rethinking the idea of democracy as an element of further emancipation, requires reflection on how deeply embedded within the discourse of democracy are the bourgeoisie and patriarchal assumptions about representations, leadership, majority rule, dissent and diversity.

The emancipatory project pursues the idea that the discourses of the Church contain within them an emancipatory potential and is able to move from *difference* to *solidarity*. The obligation to acknowledge and even celebrate differences would be a fundamental ethical assumption of the emancipatory project. For this assumes that the individual subject resists in diverse ways cultural inscriptions upon the body and personality and it is through resistance to the *doctrinal gaze* that difference is articulated. The priests and women in this study recognised the validity of the Church as a means of salvation, but this did not prevent many of them from making moral judgements and acting upon them regardless of the consequences. In the English parish, new approaches to beliefs and practice have already begun to focus on supporting this resistance.

The acknowledgement and celebration of differences require a space for debate. Church teaching contains within it the emancipatory potential for debate. There is a moral responsibility on the part of the hierarchy, to draw back from the expression of a particular



narrative, which becomes so confined, that other narratives are effectively excluded. The Christian faithful, as an integral part of the Church, have the right to make known their opinions to bishops and to other Christian faithful on matters, which pertain to the good of the Church. The *Magisterium*, or teaching authority of the Church, belongs to the pope and his bishops by reason of their office, and to theologians by reason of their scholarly competence. There is also the validating function of the Christian community, which is, the *sensus fidelium*, the actual belief of Christians throughout the centuries. This sense of the faithful is one of the norms of theological truth (McBrien, 1980:68-72).

The recognition of the diversity between these groups is central to both the expansion of debate and to change. It would underpin the process of emancipation, which attempts to counteract the dominance of one narrative by emphasising a joint narrative about the Church, its teachings and practices. It is inevitable that expressions of diversity will involve intense struggles between differences, not least because any political struggle towards a new emancipatory Church will be subject to debate and argument, often expressed in terms of differences in class, gender, race, sexuality and other sources of social identity and experiences of domination. Higher levels of self-reflection, at both the individual and collective level, are a necessary precondition for the development of solidarity built on the foundations of diversity.

There is of course a danger in an unrestrained emphasis on differences in that it can lead to cultural exclusions, marginalisation, and labelling or intense individualism. On the other hand, the danger of an unreflecting solidarity is that domination and homogenisation becomes a practice legitimated by a discourse of mutual interdependence. Whilst it recognises differences and cultural diversity, an alternative practice is one that engages in a discourse on the *similarities* between subjects. It is these *similarities* that offer what Leonard (1997) calls a 'potential solidarity' between members of the Church. A discourse on *similarities* confronts the problems arising from notions of Church, doctrine and practices, which may be embedded in



common experiences of class, gender and race. An acknowledgement and acceptance of *similarities* and *differences*, would prepare the way for an emphasis on a *commonality*, solidarity and interdependence, that enables subjects to express resistance to domination and offers the possibility of participatory and collective resistance in the pursuit of change. There is a tension between the diversity, solidarity and mutual interdependence, which is not likely to be easily overcome in a process of emancipation. There is a necessary tension, a possibly unsolvable contradiction between certain moral interpretations that must continually be balanced against one another, which requires vigilance.

This study has demonstrated that in the English parish there is a micro-politics of resistance to the exercise of discursive and institutional power. The differences that exist here are a microcosm of the differences that exist in the wider Church. At the micro and the macro level, the anger of many women emerges as a moral protest against injustice, as they refer to critical discourses of justice, liberty and equality. At the individual level, many women attempt to integrate these discourses with the contradictory discourse of the Church. Some priests also attempt a synthesis, between the discourse of the Church and the critical discourses of the wider world. At a practical level in the parish, that part of the Church closest to the people, many priests have developed individual mechanisms in order to relate to the diverse needs of the people they serve. Such micro-political resistance poses problems of diversity and individualism, a loss of solidarity and interdependence. An emancipatory project, which emphasised process, recognised and accepted diversity, would harness the emancipatory potential existing in the parish and the Church as a whole thereby offering the possibility to change diversity into the creation of change.

In conclusion, the question of women's equality in the Church is bound up with patriarchy, sexual theology, clerical power and celibacy and there can be no significant move towards the emancipation of women in the Church, unless and until the injustices bound up with these, are



addressed. There is a significant difference between increased participation and equal status. The increased participation of women is not a gradual, incremental process that will lead ultimately to equality for women. One priest in the study claimed that 'women are "allowed" to do "almost anything" in the Church today'. Women's participation generally continues along traditional gender roles and women are denied ordination. The opening up of the priesthood to women, would demonstrate most clearly the equality of women in the Church. As long as women are excluded from priesthood on the grounds of sex, there can be no equality for women in the Church. Women will continue to be excluded from priesthood as long as the institution of celibacy remains, for ultimately, its legitimacy depends upon patriarchal ideas and beliefs, the masculine nature of God, a theology of semen and the continued association between women, sex and sin. There can be no equality for women until patriarchy, sexual theology, clerical power and institutional celibacy are addressed. The increased participation of women merely clouds the issue, as it presumes an equality that does not exist.

The equality of women is a cause that cannot be turned back, either in the world or in the Church. It is an issue that the Church cannot ignore. Indeed, several popes have recognised that women will no longer accept different treatment from men. Women continue to await the practical implications of such acknowledgements. The continued alienation of many women is not in the best interests of the Church, for women form the majority of attenders and generally teach the faith to the next generation. How much longer will those women who remain continue to accept their second class status? Who will teach the next generation if young women, in particular, are alienated from the Church?

On the most basic grounds, of self-interest and preservation, the Church has to address the position and place of women in the Church. Church leaders also have a duty to listen to women, for women, as the majority of attenders, actually form a majority in the *sensus fidelium*. It has been noted not only by many women, but also by some Church leaders themselves, that

women continue to suffer from profound discrimination, directly and indirectly, because of the inbuilt sexism of the Church.

If women are to achieve equality in the Church, its inherent sexism will have to be addressed. Increased levels of participation cannot disguise the fact that women are still denied priesthood on the grounds that they 'cannot image Christ', that is, because they are not men. Nothing short of fundamental change will address the issue of sexism in the Catholic Church. It has been suggested here that an emancipatory project of Church would provide an opportunity for a process of change. Such a project would have to acknowledge and celebrate differences and diversity. It would need to identify the emancipatory potential already existing in the Church, and create space for debate. The struggles involved in a process of change would need to be acknowledged and accepted before the Church could move towards the emphasis of *similarities* rather than *differences*. This process could lead to a new experience of *solidarity* and *interdependence* in which women were accepted as full members of the Church.

An emancipatory project involves a process of self-reflection and critique (Leonard, 1997). Even the consideration of an emancipatory project requires a level of self-reflection. There are signs that a process of self-reflection has already begun, which offers the hope that an emancipatory project, which takes up resistance and transforms it into change, is a distinct possibility. These signs of self-reflection are rooted in possibilities emerging from the diversity arising from the contradictions and critiques of the present. If these possibilities are to be developed there is a need to shift from a discourse that emphasises differences to one that emphasises similarities. Such a discourse would take up the potential solidarity between members of the Church and prepare the way for an emphasis on *commonality*, solidarity and interdependence.



The inherent difficulties of the emancipatory project itself cannot be ignored. There is a tension between the diversity, solidarity and mutual interdependence, which is not likely to be easily overcome in a process of emancipation. The emphasis must therefore be on *process*, for the solution to these problems lies in the development of the self-reflective process at both the individual and collective levels. Individual and/or organisational change is a slow process, for it requires an understanding of which values underpin beliefs and practices, and of how these beliefs have been influenced by a range of discourses. The process of self-reflection must also allow time for individuals and organisations to understand and accept how their beliefs and practices have been formed both consciously and unconsciously. It can be a painful process, by which some beliefs and practices are jettisoned and others are taken on board. For some individuals and organisations, this becomes a positive and freeing experience. For others, it is a process that leaves them feeling bereft, therefore a process of individual and collective self-reflection must be carefully prepared and understood.

What is the chance of an emancipatory project of Church for the sexually oppressed? There is little hope of such a project arising at the highest level in the Church, whilst the current administration continues. Yet, whilst the current pontiff would be averse to such a project, there are signs that some other Church leaders may be more accepting, for some have already raised the issue of sexism. The greatest hope for such a project lies in the beliefs and practices of those ordinary priests and women who have already questioned the dominant discourse of the Church, using signposts from discourses of liberty, justice, equality and sexuality. It could be argued that the process of emancipation has already begun in the English parish. Perhaps the question is not whether the official Church will instigate an emancipatory project, but will it come alongside the ordinary priests and people? The beliefs and practices of the ordinary faithful cannot be turned back; they can only move on from where they are. The fact is, that the Church is no longer unified in either beliefs or practices and the insistence that every discourse other than the traditional orthodox discourse is wrong, is not a solution.



How the Church handles the current situation will determine the future of the Catholic Church. It is the opinion of this author, that unless sexism is addressed, the future of the Catholic Church, certainly in the western world is precarious. How the Church treats women, will determine how many women stay or go, and the position and place of women in the Church will decide the future of the western Church. For if a significant number of women within the Church believe that the Church is sexist, oppressive, mistaken and irrelevant, they are unlikely to raise their children to believe something different.

#### Directions for Research.

In the English Church it would appear that a 'customary priesthood' serves a 'customary Catholicism' and both come into conflict with traditional teaching, for in practice each 'break the rules', as they interpret ideals in light of their social experience. The existence of a 'customary priesthood' requires further research. Research also needs to question how priests and women deal with rule breaking and to ask what the implications are for the future of the Catholic Church in England.

The narrative accounts of priests and women in this study, provide different and distinct interpretations of the official discourse, which reflect their social experience. Research needs to take account of the differences and similarities between the gendered discourse of the official Church and the alternative discourses of priests and women, for they reflect the different worlds of the official Church, of priests and of women. The priests' world encompasses the public official world of the Church and the private world of the priest, which is generally hidden from most people. In this study, the priests' discourse suggests an inherent conflict between these worlds, for it has been shown that what priests say in public may not coincide with what they say in private. Whilst it is possible that this disjuncture is not new, and that there has always been a gap between the official discourse of the Church and that of the priests, this thesis



reveals the nature of the differences between the discourses. Research needs to examine the differences and similarities between the public and private face of the Catholic priesthood and to discover whether others are aware of the private discourse of English priests. Are women for example, aware of the similarities between their discourse and that of the priests on key issues in the contemporary Church?

If the beliefs and practices of priests and of women are to be more completely understood, the components of the official discourse and the discourses of priests and women identified in this research, need further investigation and analysis. It is only through critical analysis that the relationships between the official Church and its priests, between the official Church and women and between priests and women can be understood.

The use of discourse as a theoretical approach in this thesis, has proved useful to the feminist project, which attempts to explore the gendered nature of Catholic sexual theology and how religious interpretations of the body have been instrumental in religious control of women and their bodies. The part played by the gendered nature of Catholic discourse has not previously been given sufficient attention when considering the creation of Catholic sexual norms. The sociology of religion has taken patriarchy into account when analysing women's place in the Church, but more attention should be paid not only to the gendered discourse of the official Church, but to the alternative discourses of priests and women.

Research suggests several reasons why women stay in a patriarchal Church. There is also a need to examine how other discourses, such as those of liberty, justice and equality, have affected Catholic women. In this study, the women's discourse suggests that many Catholic women expect their experience of equality in their lives outside the Church, to be reflected within it. How do those women who remain in the Church manage the contradictions between various discourses? What part if any, did other discourses have on those women who have left?

Finally, research could contribute to an emancipatory project by uncovering those places within the Church where the 'possibilities' for an emancipatory project are most favourable.



## APPENDIX ONE

### Interviews with Priests

#### Section 1. General 'you' questions. Designed to:-

- i) Establish his personal response to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council.
- ii) Identify possible areas of conflict.
- iii) Discover whether the priest recognised the encouragement to women of some Vatican documents.

#### Section 2. More personal 'you' factors. Designed to establish:-

- i) What priests are saying about authority in the Church.
- ii) How the priest understands obedience.

#### Section 3. Focuses in on women in the Church. Attempts to:-

- i) Discover what priests think about Humanae Vitae and what consequences stem from it.
- ii) Establish through questions on role assignment and status whether or not the priest views women in the Church, as equal with men in the Church.

#### Section 4. Personal opinions on the nature of priestly celibacy and ordination. Designed to discover:-

- i) What priests are saying about celibacy; whether priests make a distinction between celibacy and continence. To discover what priests think about transgressions against celibacy.
- ii) Whether notions of defilement through sexual activity remain.
- iii) Whether priests believe 'maleness' is necessary for priesthood.

#### Section 5. More personal and challenging questions, focusing on issues of sexual morality concerning women. This section attempts through the use of vignettes:

- i) To discover what priests say in specific situations concerning women and issues of sexuality.
- ii) To discover whether or not priests attempt to mitigate the effect of official Church policy, when dealing with women and sexual morality in the pastoral setting.
- iii) To discover whether or not priests re-interpret official policies on sexual morality in certain circumstances, of particular interest to women.

#### Section 6. The first part is designed:

- i) To discover whether the priest has any experience of women; mother, sisters, friends.
- ii) Discover what motivated him to become a priest.
- iii) Discover how he understands the nature of God and the impact of this on his vision of Church.
- iv) To discover if women have played an important part in his priesthood.

The second part:

- i) Offers the opportunity for the priest to raise any other pertinent issues.
- ii) Thanks the priest for his co-operation.

**Questions**

Section 1:

1. Why do you think John XXIII called the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council?
2. What were your reactions to the calling of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council? (for those old enough) or
3. What do you feel about the calling of the Council? (for younger priests)
4. What do you consider were the key issues at the Council?
5. What do you think are the consequences of the Vatican Council in the Church?
6. Is there anything in the reforms of the Council which you find difficult to accept?
7. Did the Vatican Council have anything to say to women?

Section 2:

8. Collegiality and papal primacy were key issues at the Council what do you think about these?
9. In Veritatis Splendor, the pope calls the bishops and presumably all of the clergy to obedience. How do you understand obedience?
10. Do you have any dilemmas concerning obedience?

Section 3:

11. Just after the Council, in Humanae Vitae, Paul VI banned artificial contraception. What do you feel are the consequences of that decision?
12. What roles do women play in the Church?
13. What roles should women play in the Church?
14. What roles do men play in the Church?
15. What roles should men play in the Church?
16. Some would say that women are 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens in the Church when compared to men. What do you think about this?
17. What changes have you noticed in the lives of women generally?



18. The traditional roles offered to women by the Church have been those of mother, virgin and martyr. Do you think these still apply?

Section 4:

19. What do you think about ordaining married men as priests?
20. What do you think about the Anglican priests coming across with their wives and families?
21. What do you think about ordaining women as priests?
22. Do you think old ideas of 'pollution' and 'defilement' remain?
23. How do you understand celibacy?
24. Is celibacy the same as continence (total abstinence)?
25. If a priest has not been totally continent how is this viewed by other priests?
26. Is the reaction the same in the case of homosexual or heterosexual transgression?
27. Are men and women different?

Section 5:

28. In your everyday work, what would you say to a woman who came to you and said that she already had several children? She had tried to get her husband to use the rhythm method of birth control but he refused to cooperate and she felt that she could not cope with another pregnancy.
29. Is there a difference between the rhythm method and other forms of contraception?
30. Can you explain the 'wrongness' of contraception?
31. What would you say to a woman who came to you after being beaten by her husband? She says she cannot continue in the marriage and asks you what she should do.
32. Would you consider a husband has the right to control his wife?
33. Can you imagine a scenario where you would advise a woman to get divorced?
34. What would you say to a woman who came to you for advice because she is pregnant but has been told that this pregnancy will endanger her life?
35. Where women are concerned, are there any situations or circumstances that make you feel uncomfortable?
36. In the pastoral setting, it may be difficult to always apply the 'rules' in particular circumstances. Are there any circumstances in which you find this difficult?
37. Do you talk with other priests about this?

Section 6. First Part:

38. How old are you?
39. Where were you born and brought up?
40. What about your family. . . . mum and dad, brothers and sisters?
41. Which schools did you go to?
42. What about further education?
43. Why did you decide to become a priest?
44. How long have you been a priest?
45. What image of God do you have?
46. How is this image reflected in the Church?
47. How do you think the idea of a male God affects women?
48. Can you describe your model woman?

Section 6. Second Part:

49. Is there anything else you would like to say?
50. Thank you for your co-operation. May I assure you once again that all you have said will be treated in absolute confidence.



## **Group Interviews with Women.**

### **Section 1. Questions about Vatican II. Designed to:**

- i) To discover how much the women knew about the Vatican reforms.
- ii) To discover what women said about the implementation of reforms.
- iii) To discover how the reforms had affected women in the Church.

### **Section 2. Questions about recent papal encyclicals pertinent to women in order to:**

- i) To discover how relevant papal pronouncements were for women in matters of sexual morality.
- ii) To discover what women said about the pope's view of women and the allocation of roles in the Church.
- iii) To discover what roles women said they should play in the Church.
- iv) To discover if women considered themselves 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens in the Church.
- v) To discover what women said about the use of inclusive language.

### **Section 3. Questions about priesthood designed to:**

- i) To discover what women thought of married men as priests.
- ii) To discover what women thought of the acceptance by the Church of married Anglican priests.
- iii) To discover what women said about the ordination of women.
- iv) To discover what women said about institutional celibacy.

### **Section 4. Questions concerning issues of sexual morality:**

- i) To discover what women said about contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage.
- ii) To discover whether women went to priests for advice on matters of personal sexual morality.

## **Questions**

### **Section 1.**

1. What did you think about Vatican II?
2. What do you think are the consequences of the Vatican Council in the Church?
3. Are there any reforms that you find difficult to accept?
4. What do you think has been the consequences of the Council for women in the Church?

### **Section 2.**

5. How do you know about what the pope teaches?
6. Have you read the pope's Letter to Women?
7. Do you normally read encyclicals?

8. What do you know about the encyclical Veritatis Splendor?
9. What do you think is the Church's view of women?
10. Some women say that they are 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens in the Church, what do you say about this statement?
11. What roles do you think women should play in the Church?
12. What do you think about the use of inclusive language in the liturgy?
13. Do you think the language used in the Church is important?

### Section 3.

14. What do you think about the Church having married men as priests?
15. What do you think about Anglican priests who have 'come over' with their wives and children?
16. What do you think about the ordination of women?
17. What do you think about celibacy?

### Section 4.

18. What do you have to say about the Church's teaching on contraception?
19. Is there a difference between using the pill and any other form of contraception?
20. What do you think about the permissibility of the 'rhythm method'?
21. What are your views on abortion?
22. What are your views on the Church's teaching on divorce?
23. Do you think divorced and re-married people should have access to the sacraments?
24. Would you go to a priest for help if you were concerned about using contraception?
25. Would you go if you were faced with an abortion?
26. Would you go if you were facing a divorce?
27. Would you go if you were divorced and considering re-marriage?
28. Why would you go/not go?
29. Thank you for your co-operation in this research.



## APPENDIX TWO.

Sharp G. (1996). 'The Changing Nature of the Marriage Contract'. *Theology and Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality*. No.4. March 1996.

Two factors directly concerned with women are of particular significance for the future of patriarchy in the Catholic Church. First, the changing nature of the marriage contract. Second women's control of reproduction.

In Western liberal democracies, changes in the nature of the marriage contract are emerging. With the increasing demand for a partnership of equals with shared responsibilities, the traditional marriage contract is being replaced by a more democratic marriage contract. The marriage contract is changing from one of unequal power relations in which men hold power over women, to one of equal power relations with an equal distribution of power. The changing nature of interpersonal relations is resulting in a significant shift of power in marriage and in the family.

These changes involve a shift of power, which is not without repercussions. Giddens (1990)[1] suggests that it is women who have initiated this change. As women and sex became freed from the needs of reproduction, the relations around the sexual act assumed a greater importance. In the private sphere, women are looking for quality relationships, a transformation of intimacy, manifest by the transactional negotiation of personal ties and joint responsibilities by equals. These demands by women for equality in the private sphere are fully compatible with their experiences of democracy in the public sphere. Giddens suggests that this transformation of intimacy, this shift to democracy in the private sphere, might be a subversive influence on modern institutions. One such institution is the Catholic Church.

Changes in the nature of the marriage contract changes, the nature of the family. The patriarchal family is the basic building block of a patriarchal Church, a microcosm of the Church's patriarchal theology, structures and institutions. A contract of equal partnership between couples changes the nature of this basic building block of Church. A partnership between equals ultimately requires a new theology and sexual morality in which women are equal partners with men. Many Catholic women are demanding relationships with men and with the Church, which are based not on power relations but on a partnership of equals; a relationship of care and concern; a democracy not just the right to free and equal self-development but also an equal distribution of power. Such demands require wholesale revision of existing ideologies and theologies in which women are subordinate to men.



The changing nature of the marriage contract profoundly affects patriarchal power. Marriage and the patriarchal family have been vehicles for the control of women and their sexuality. In the Church this control has been supported by an ideology of patriarchy, justified by a patriarchal theology. There is however a dilemma. Marriage is the only sacrament where the Church has no part to play in the sacramental contract. No priest need be present. The sacrament is validly conferred by the spouses upon each other. Church control of marriage and the family has necessarily been from outside the contract. If couples choose to change their contract with each other, there is little the Church can do about it. How therefore can a patriarchal Church retain control of marriage, the family and women?

Historically the Church has attempted to control the nature of the contract externally by: defining the terms and conditions for married people; the introduction of 'forbidden times' for marriage; the exclusion of certain groups and the control of sexual activity within marriage. As these external controls break down and couples decide for themselves the nature of their contract, clerical control of marriage is lost.

In order to retain control of marriage and the family thereby diffusing the threat to patriarchal power women must be controlled. Women must remain subordinate to men in the family and in the Church. Women must continue to be defined by men in light of their sexual relations with men, as wives, mothers or virgins. In patriarchal ideology and theology the justification for such control has been the assumption of male superiority.

On closer inspection, one of the biological arguments supporting this theory, the fantasy surrounding semen[2], has played a key role in the Church's theology. Semen was believed to be the most important factor in conception. The male 'seed' contained the whole foetus in embryo[3]. A woman's function was simply to act as an incubator for the man's child. Semen not only explained the ability to initiate new life but the biological superiority of the male. Semen 'made men - men' strong in thought and deed. The lack of 'vital spirit' (semen) in women made them 'more soft, more liquid....altogether more formless than men'[4]. The possession of semen gave men all the biological, social, political and cultural advantages from which women were 'naturally' excluded. Men were of more value than women, were more intelligent, more active. It was natural therefore that men should control women.

In the Middle Ages these notions from the Ancient World were absorbed by Church Fathers as Aristotelian philosophy and incorporated into Christian theology.



Thomas Aquinas, (whose doctrine of the 'natural law' is adhered to by the present pope) when talking of semen, starts with the principle that every active element creates something like itself. 'The energy in semen aims of itself to produce something equally as perfect, namely another man'[5]. In unfavourable circumstances a woman, that is a 'misbegotten man', is born. Woman is a mistake, 'a defect that does not correspond to nature's first intention'[6] 'originating in some defect'[7]. Thus Aquinas confirmed that women were of less value than men.

The need to control women and reproduction is enshrined in patriarchal theology. The emergence of a marriage contract between equals, together with the consequent demise of the patriarchal family, threatens the very basis of patriarchal beliefs and arrangements in the Catholic Church.

### **The Control of Reproduction**

The second significant factor concerning patriarchy in the Church is who controls reproduction? Who is to control women and their bodies? With the introduction of the contraceptive pill, women no longer at the mercy of unreliable methods of contraception, had the means to control their own fertility. The power to decide on reproduction had shifted to women themselves.

The 'rhythm method' or what the Church calls 'natural family planning' had been permissible since the 1930's. At first glance the difference between the (later) ban on the contraceptive pill and the admissibility of the rhythm method lay in the hair splitting division between means and end. But there is a significant difference between the two. With the rhythm method, power over reproduction still lays largely with the man. If the man chooses not to cooperate he could, if so inclined, insist on his conjugal rights and even use force in the process. With the rhythm method, condoms or coitus interruptus, the ultimate power to use contraception and the choice of method is with the man. With the contraceptive pill regardless of the type of marriage contract, the power over reproduction is with the woman.

In *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI banned artificial contraception. In his attempt to protect papal authority the pope seriously undermined the Church's control of women's sexuality and Church authority in the lives of married people. *Humanae Vitae* forced Catholics to make distinctions between 'infallible' and 'non-infallible' pronouncements by the Church[8].



Catholic women and men were driven to ask themselves crucial questions about their allegiance to the Church and the authority of the pope in such matters[9]. The days of a largely unreflective acceptance of papal infallibility, together with 'blind obedience' to Rome were at an end.

The attempt to retain control of women's sexuality failed, as many Catholic women rejected the ban. For many Catholic women the decision to use artificial birth control in good conscience, transformed them into moral agents which led to the maturing of many individual consciences[10]. The ban also forced women to examine their religious traditions in light of their own experience and many found them wanting[11]. Women also resisted the continuing tendency of many Churchmen to define women only by their reproductive role as mothers[12]. In consequence, Church authority and control over marriage and women was seriously undermined, as was Confession, as a method of control over both priests and laity.

Many Catholics did not 'confess' to using artificial methods of birth-control or declined to participate in confession at all, using 'supremacy of conscience' as their ultimate guide[13]. In matters of sexual morality the Catholic laity began to temper the sexual theology of the Church with the reality of their own lived experience.

### **The Significance of the Discovery of the Ovum**

The contraceptive pill focused attention on the respective roles of ovum and sperm in reproduction. In so doing, it highlighted an important area of the Church's sexual theology... the status of semen. Von Baer's discovery of the ovum in 1827 should have led to a radical re-think about the Church's sexual theology, with its biological roots in the fantasy surrounding semen. No longer the only factor in reproduction, semen lost status overnight, going from what Aquinas called 'that divine liquid' which contained the whole foetus in embryo, to that of fertiliser.

Post-Von Baer women could no longer be denied their equal part in reproduction could no longer be considered a mere vessel for men's seed. Men and women were naturally called to equal partnership in reproduction. This significant change of emphasis from a male dominated role in reproduction to one of equal partnership, more clearly revealed the control of women and their bodies in a patriarchal Church. This natural partnership threatened a patriarchal theology rooted in biological determinism and an appeal to the 'natural law'. The Church's hierarchy continues to ignore the consequences of Von Baer's discovery[14].



The changing nature of the marriage contract, women's control of their own reproduction and partnership in reproduction, call for changes in the patriarchal theology, structures and institutions of the Catholic Church. Despite the promise of Vatican II such fundamental changes have been resisted.

### **The Subversion of Collegiality and Co-responsibility**

The Second Vatican Council was a serious attempt to make the Church more relevant in the world. Women were encouraged by documents such as *Lumen Gentium*[15] with its concept of communal equality; *Gaudium et Spes*[16] with the Church a dynamic pilgrim people; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*[17] where women were called to participate more widely in the Church's Apostolate. All that changed in the years following the council was the level of participation of women, not their status.

Any change in the status of women is linked to changes in the status of the laity as a whole, for women are the majority in the laity. The clergy/ laity divide ensured the exclusion of the laity from decision-making[18]. The Vatican documents went some way to removing the barriers between clergy and laity, but if there was to be a change in the status of lay participation some power would have to be devolved from Rome to the local bishops. The Vatican II doctrine of collegiality provided the theory for this to happen. The monarchical concept of Church emphasised in Vatican I was removed[19]. As with many organisations, theory is one thing implementation another. Following the Council this shift of power to the college of bishops was resisted[20], serious reform was undermined by a conservative rearguard[21].

### **Patriarchy in the Church of John Paul II**

A key player in this rear guard action has been John Paul II. For, with the pontificate of John Paul II, overt absolutism returned to the Church[22]. By the Synod of 1980, co-responsibility had become a sham[23]. The Extraordinary Synod of 1985 resulted in a revised and domesticated version of collegiality, Episcopal conferences reduced to 'purely practical arrangements' of no collegial or theological significance[24]. Collegiality had become just another word for submission[25]. By 1993 in *Veritatis Splendor*[26], (a letter to the bishops who perhaps thought themselves part of the episcopate) the pope demands obedience, total assent and submission to all papal utterances[27].

John Paul II's answer to the loss of authority and control is to return to a monarchical concept of Church; re-affirm women's subordinate position and to regain control of women and reproduction. In short to confirm patriarchy in the Church. Women's subordinate position to



men, is clear to see in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. The pope reaffirms traditional depictions of women's 'natural' or 'divinely mandated' roles of mother, virgin and martyr. Definitions of human sexual nature and gender roles based on the natural law are distorted, subject as they are to specific historical and cultural perspectives. They do not correspond to the reality and value of women's own lives. An appeal to the natural law reveals a desire to maintain existing arrangements in the Church, which favour men and from which women are 'naturally' excluded. The emphasis on the natural law of Aquinas together with a condemnation of contraception exposes a patriarchal mind set 'trapped in a Post-renaissance morality' [28].

### **Control of reproduction**

The concentration on contraception has been one of the most notable features of this administration. The pope has spoken on contraception at every opportunity in every place. The whole world knows the pope's views. Contraception is, says the pope, an 'intrinsic evil' without exception [29]. Harder to hear is the condemnation of the continued oppression of women in many parts of the world; the dire plight of so many children world-wide; the abandonment of millions of babies, especially girls in certain countries where girls are valued less than boys [30]. These issues concerning living children are not so much 'crowded out' by religious conservatism [31] more 'drowned out' all together.

Despite the increasing volume concerning contraception, many women continue to decide about contraception for themselves. In face of a losing battle against the contraceptive pill, the pope has turned his attention to the rhythm method. This method of contraception was abhorred by Augustine one of the greatest Fathers of the Church. He was convinced that it turned men into 'pimps', 'whoremongers' and 'adulterers' [32]. John Paul II on the other hand tries to persuade women that it is a recipe for marital harmony. In *Familiaris Consortio*, he asserts that salvation and marital happiness is essentially based on practising the right method of contraception. Peace and harmony will be maintained in the family if family size is controlled by the rhythm method rather than any other [33]. The Church's main concern is not for marital harmony but male power. Its sexual theology has been a theology of semen which has concerned itself with the possession of semen (linked to the assumption of male superiority); a concern for the protection of semen (a factor in the ban on masturbation, coitus interruptus and other forms of contraception); the control of all sexual activity involving semen to ensure its delivery to the right vessel (woman) in the proper manner, and for the right reasons. This theology of semen is rooted in the Ancient fantasies surrounding semen. In light of current knowledge about the respective roles of ovum and sperm, this theology is seriously undermined. To continue with this discredited theology is to sacrifice 'truth' to the ideology of patriarchy.



If patriarchy is to be retained in the Church women must continue to accept the control of men in reproduction, in marriage, in the Church. Male power over women and their reproduction, which was lost with *Humanae Vitae*, must be regained. The rhythm method, so hated by Augustine, is the only route left to maintaining some male control over female sexuality. The pope has asked theologians to ‘elaborate and probe more deeply into the difference at once anthropological and moral between contraception and recourse to the rhythm method’ [34]. The difference is not theological but political. With the pill, power shifts to women themselves. With the rhythm method, power remains with men.

### **Control of the discourse on women**

In *Veritatis Splendor*, the pope reaffirmed women’s subordinate position to men and in the Catholic Church. On the eve of the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing the pope attempts to control not only the discourse in the Church but also the international secular discourse on women through imposing a grid of definition [35] on what it is to be woman. Mrs Gertrude Mongella, the general secretary of the conference was given a written message ‘which stated some of the basic points of the Church’s teaching with regard to women’s issues’ [36]. Themes from the document provided the basis for the pope’s “Letter to Women”(1995). In the letter it is clear that women are an anomaly, a “mystery”, different from the norm that is man. The limited repertoire of responses (indifference, opportunism, exclusion and accommodation) to anomaly [37] can be successfully applied to this letter. That this letter is written at all is a sign that the centuries-long indifference to women can no longer be maintained. Persistent pressure from the women’s movement in general and the Catholic Women’s Movement within the Church has forced women’s contribution to society and the Church to be acknowledged. Women are knocking loud on the doors of the Vatican demanding to be heard. The dilemma facing the pope is how to accommodate women and at the same time exclude them.

As the Church cannot be seen to be opportunistic, theological legitimation must support the selective inclusion of women. With references to Gen. 1:27-2:18, the pope reminds women of their position as ‘helper’ to man [38]. Woman’s special ‘genius’ is service to others. “Service” is ‘in no way prejudicial to women’ [39] assures the pope. ‘A certain diversity of roles....is an expression of what is specific to being male and female’ [40]. Women are reminded that ‘Mary is the highest expression of the “feminine genius”....she called herself the “handmaid of the Lord” (Lk.1:38)....‘For her, “to reign” is “to serve”! Her service is “to reign”[41]. In the wake of Vatican II, women are included in the ‘royal priesthood of believers’ but remain excluded from priestly ministry. Exclusion from priesthood ‘in no way detracts from the role of women’



[42] assures the pope. These role distinctions in the Church 'should not be viewed in accordance with the functionality typical in human societies' [43] Christ, 'by his free and sovereign choice....entrusted only to men the task of being the "icon" of his countenance'. Thus the rhetoric of women's accommodation is that of 'service'. A patriarchal theology provides the theological legitimation for exclusion. Women's participation is to be encouraged but their status is to remain the same.

The theological legitimation of exclusion is supported by the reductionist theory of 'complementarity'. Woman is 'complementary' to man. She is everything man is not. 'Womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view but also from the ontological' [44]. Biological, psychological and ontological explanations for differences between the sexes are rooted in biological determinism. Biological differences between the sexes are obvious but that they determine different ways of being and behaving is not proven. Social differences based on biological differences are in effect inequalities justified by a belief in the superiority of the male of the species.

The pope's attempt to reconcile the rhetoric of exclusion to social processes of accommodation reveals yet again a patriarchal mindset that presumes to explain and define women through their relations with men. It is another brick in the wall of the Vatican fortifications designed to repel women and protect the status quo. If women are to be controlled the pope must control the discourse. The traditional patriarchal view of women must be accepted as 'truth' as 'knowledge' not only in the Church but world-wide.



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