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Evangelical Women Negotiating Faith in Contemporary Scotland

Gwen D. Henderson

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the
University of Glasgow for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

**February
2008**

Abstract

This thesis explores the experience of spiritual dissonance described in the spiritual life histories of twenty one Christian women associated with the evangelical Christian community in Scotland. It describes the symptoms of constriction, paralysis and impasse which some of these women report and explores the reasons for their interpretation of their symptoms as signs of spiritual sickness. It uses faith development theory to explain some aspects of these symptoms in the context of healthy transitional faithing change. It suggests however that women's reluctance to speak publicly about their experience, their habitual repression of their deep emotions and questions, their tendency to use psychological 'splitting' to conform within their faith communities and resist the fragmentation of their spiritual identity, indicate that their development has been seriously damaged by spiritual restriction in some congregations. It argues that patriarchal church culture, androcentric educational approaches and the deliberate perpetuation of dependent faithing styles militate against women's spiritual development. It demonstrates the extent to which some women's interiorisation of the patriarchal structures and values of their communities has led them to separate themselves from aspects of their relationship to self, church and God in a manner resembling the behaviour of those who have been abused. This thesis calls the evangelical church in Scotland to acknowledge and respond to this phenomenon, recognising that while some of these women are at present 'internal leavers' in the church - physically present within but emotionally detached from their congregations - they may ultimately make the decision to leave.

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby affirm that this dissertation is my own composition. It has not been submitted in any previous form for a degree. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks, and all sources of information drawn upon have been specifically acknowledged in the body of the work or in corresponding footnotes.

Gwen Henderson
February, 2008

Word Count

The text of this thesis contains approximately 100,138 words including footnotes and appendices.

Acknowledgements

The following pages represent not merely four years' study but the route-map of a journey through perilous terrain traversed by myself and my research participants. We are indebted to those who have proved faithful companions to us on this journey.

I am indebted to my supervisors: Dr. Jeff Keuss in the foothills and Dr. Heather Walton on the terrifying 'North Face', without whose painstaking and persevering encouragement I would have turned back at my very first crevasse. For hot tea, patience despite snowbound delays and 'a good strong rope' I am immensely grateful.

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Behind these daily companions stand an 'immense crowd of witnesses' from the church and Para-church families who have adopted and cared for me over many years. Thank you for cheering me on, relentlessly, from the spectator's stand and for pointing out hand-holds when it seemed there was no earthly way up the cliff.

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*'Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
Who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
They make it a place of springs;
The autumn rains also cover it with pools.
They go from strength to strength,
'Till each appears before God in Zion.'*

Psalms 84

*Gwen Henderson
Glasgow
February, 2008.*

'I remember one morning when I discovered the cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as the butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it, I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started crawling slowly out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled. The wretched butterfly tried with its whole body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath. In vain. It needed to be hatched out patiently, and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, it died in the palm of my hand.'

*An extract from Zorba the Greek
by Nikos Kazantzakis.*

*'Listen to me...you whom I have upheld
since you were conceived
and carried since your birth.
Even to your old age and grey hairs
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.*

*I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.'*

Isaiah 46:3-4.

This discourse is dedicated to the women whose voices form the core of my thesis. Were it not for their courageous speech and integrity this story could never have been told.

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Introduction

Introduction

On the 3rd of September 2007, Time magazine ran a front page article exposing a phenomenon many Christians experience but few have the courage to admit. Mother Teresa of Calcutta's sixty-six year private correspondence with her confessors was about to be published including letters which would paint, in the words of the reviewer, 'a startling portrait in self-contradiction.'¹ Teresa's frank and honest letters suggested that this woman, 'whose remarkable deeds seemed inextricably connected to her closeness to God and who was routinely observed in silent and seemingly peaceful prayer by her associates as well as the television camera, was living out a very different spiritual reality privately, an arid landscape from which the deity had disappeared.' There may be some within the Christian community who would suggest that the extreme contours of Teresa's experience question the authenticity of her faith. Others, outside the church, triumphantly proclaim her confession confirms the futile self-deception of all religion.² That Teresa herself was perplexed by her experience is undisputed; her grasp of the wider personal and theological implications of exposure equally so, given her unheeded instructions that this correspondence be destroyed. She was, the reviewer suggests, 'acutely aware of the discrepancy between her inner state and her public demeanour. "The smile," she explains, is "a mask" or "a cloak that covers everything."' Teresa wonders, he suggests, whether she is engaged in verbal deception, confiding to one confessor, "I spoke as if my heart was in love with God – tender, personal love...if you were there you would have said, 'What hypocrisy'". Given the mixed response to this anticipated publication, it is little wonder that iconic figures like Teresa, let alone ordinary Christians might recoil from revealing their spiritual struggles to an unsympathetic crowd both within and without the church. Teresa's story is one extreme example of the compulsion people of faith sometimes feel to conceal the inherently complex but often disorienting reality of Christian experience behind an acceptable 'mask'. This thesis creates space for Evangelical women in Scotland to remove the 'cloak that covers everything' and show their faces for the first time.

¹ These and other subsequent quotes from this article are quoted from Time magazine, September 3, 2007.

² Christopher Hitchens writes of Teresa, 'She was no more exempt from the realization that religion is a human fabrication than any other person, and that her attempted cure was more and more professions of faith could only have deepened the pit that she had dug for herself.' Quoted in the above Time article.

As the disquiet which arose following the publication of Mother Teresa's correspondence reveals, there is a profound lack of awareness of the real nature of women's spiritual lives. It has been claimed that despite 'female faithfulness at the core of living Christian tradition, women's faith lives have generally not been accorded significance, their stories have not been recorded, their struggles and conflicts have not been noted, their gifts and ministries have not been accorded public recognition in the literature, traditions and practices of the churches'.³ This study aims to counter that tendency by describing the faithfulness and the struggles of contemporary Christian women as they attempt to voice their experience of maturing adult discipleship in the evangelical community. The stories revealed in these pages do not claim to represent the experience of all evangelical women, but rather the hidden dimensions of a particular group of women's spiritual lives. This thesis has emerged from patiently listening to women deeply committed to professional ministry and lay service in the church but fearful of describing the changing nature of their faith in the public realm. It aims to give voice to the hidden realities which lie behind that silence and engage with the challenge it presents to the practice of adult discipleship in the Scottish church.

Memoirs of a Traveller

The questions which precipitated this research journey first arose in and around the coffee shops of Central and Eastern Europe. Having engaged for six years in student ministry in the U.K. as a regional staff worker with the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, I spent five years serving their sister organisation, the Magyar Evangéliumi Diák Szövetség, in Budapest, Hungary. As part of that role, I met regularly with expatriate women serving as leaders within the student movements of Europe under the umbrella of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. It was during times of discussion, prayer and exploration in coffee houses or women's homes that the tensions and dilemmas which form the core of this project germinated. My interest and concern were initially aroused by hearing about the struggles some women were experiencing in their Christian discipleship. To begin with some attributed their sense of spiritual disharmony to the natural frustrations and challenges

³ Slee, 2004:2.

of working in a different culture but this seemed only a partial explanation. Others gradually acknowledged that the *emotional* and *relational* dissonance⁴ which they were experiencing in relation to themselves and the church was generating a deeper intellectual or *cognitive* dissonance frequently reflected in a sense of alienation or impasse in their relationship with God and a questioning of their theology.

Gaining access to women's accounts of their struggles was not a straightforward task. Few had spoken about these issues with anyone before. Whilst frequently competent and confident in their role training students in the basics of Christian discipleship, many struggled to maintain their own rhythms of personal prayer and Bible reading, ashamed of the lack of integrity they felt this betrayed. Although actively involved in the life of their local congregations, some women reluctantly admitted feeling emotionally and relationally isolated there. This was not only due to cultural differences but to an increasing sense of disconnection from traditional forms of worship, frustration with teaching which failed to address their theological questions and disappointment regarding the superficiality of congregational relationships.

Comparing their experience with the enthusiasm of their earlier discipleship and the apparent contentment of other church members, most women internalised the blame for their experience diagnosing their symptoms as signs of spiritual sickness. Whilst some of the women realised that aspects of their spiritual impasse or dissonance clearly *did* relate to unresolved areas of personal sin or relational immaturity, others found it hard to identify the roots of their particular 'dis-ease'. Several wrestled with feelings of failure in ministry. Others observed an increasing gap developing between their ministry and their personal lives. Some feared that they were beginning to lead a double life.

Few women felt the freedom to admit their fears either to their supervisor in ministry or to fellow Christians in their local church overseas or at home. Those who tried to voice their experience found such disclosure often met with a wall of silence. Several

⁴ Dissonance is defined as 'want of concord or harmony between things' (The Oxford Shorter Dictionary), in particular the 'lack of agreement in beliefs and between beliefs and actions' (Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English).

observed a growing tendency to bury their discomfort under an increasing addiction to ministry. A minority experienced, or were moving gradually towards, burnout.

The Widening Circle

Despite the wealth of academic literature acknowledging the role of a variety of forms of dissonance⁵ in human development, very few of these resources have been made accessible to evangelical women. As a result, the women with whom I worked felt frequently isolated and disoriented by their experience with few frameworks to interpret its significance and engage with its implications for their continued growth, thus enabling them to move forward in their faith. Despite this, as patterns began to emerge from the stories I had collected on the field, my interest in the social, spiritual and theological nature of their experience grew. This was amplified when, on my return to the U.K., I began to encounter women describing similar experiences. It became clear to me that such patterns were indicative not simply of a problem peculiar to those working in a cross-cultural context but of a wider phenomenon currently unacknowledged and unaddressed in the evangelical community. Having previously reflected upon these patterns as they relate to the phenomenon of missionary attrition and its implications for theological education (Henderson, 2005), I intend in this present project to explore the wider questions this phenomenon raises regarding the practice of adult discipleship in the evangelical community and in particular its impact on the spiritual development of women.

Charting a Course through the Research Literature

No research project simply consists of gathering new data, but involves a commitment to being dialogical, critical and accountable in its analysis of past and present research. The first part of this dissertation therefore, following a detailed description of my own developing research methodology in chapter 1, will analyse the insights and omissions of the research relating to women's spiritual development. Chapter 2 will review the history of critical thought regarding the concept of Christian

⁵ I use the term 'dissonance' not to describe a fixed, clearly definable phenomenon but to refer to the distress caused by unresolved relational, emotional and cognitive 'disharmony'. While this is a normal feature of everyday human life, it is also occasionally experienced as an overwhelming and disorientating phenomenon particularly by individuals going through times of personal transition.

spirituality in general and maturing faith in particular, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of faith development theory's contribution to our understanding of women's spiritual development. Chapter 3, after a brief examination of evangelicalism (the religious tradition within which research participants were predominantly nurtured in their faith), explores the insights feminist scholarship and educational research bring to our understanding of the impact participation in conservative religious communities can have upon women's spiritual development, sharpening the focus of the present study. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which recent research into church leaving both illumines but also potentially obscures the real, ongoing impact of spiritual dissonance on adult discipleship, thus exploring the extent to which women experiencing this phenomenon may already be involved in the processes which may lead to leaving church.

The second part of my thesis is devoted to the presentation and analysis of the data collected in the 'Spiritual Life Reviews'⁶ which formed the main focus of my research. Chapters 5 to 7 attempt to faithfully represent and actively attend to women's descriptions of the symptoms which contribute to the experience of spiritual dissonance, reflecting on the impact a lack of acknowledgement of this phenomenon has had upon their identity and involvement in the evangelical church. The final conclusion summarises the major findings of my analysis considering their implications for the nurture of women's faith in the congregation and their long-term loss or retention within the evangelical community.

The Contours of Limitation

The interdisciplinary nature of this study together with the restraints involved in exploring a phenomenon only partially understood by the research participants has unavoidably limited my treatment of the rich, varied sources outlined in Part 1. Part 2 deliberately draws upon the sources with which my participants themselves were conversant thus implicitly highlighting, in some cases by omission, the gaps in as well as the substance of their frameworks for interpreting spiritual experience. My main dialogue partners were, in the first instance, deliberately determined by their

⁶ See page 21 for a description of this term.

accessibility to project participants, given my explicit intent to explore the ways in which women *themselves* are making sense of this experience.

Secondly, given this particular project's interest in the influence of gender, socialisation and theological context on spiritual growth, I have limited my dialogue partners, in Part 2, to those whose insights helpfully describe, interpret and critique these dimensions of the phenomenon under study. While the insights of Faith Development Theory, in particular, provide a discrete analytical framework for exploring the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance, both Feminist Theology, Educationalist Research and, ironically, the *gaps* in Leaver literature proved more significant dialogue partners in identifying the extent to which *context* determines faith development: a presently neglected trajectory of study in the field of Faith Development Theory.

My lack of reference to historical and, in some cases, feminist models of faith development in the second part of the thesis does not intend to suggest that resources such as Bonaventure's *Journey of the Soul into God*, Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* or St. John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul* are insignificant to this enquiry. It rather, predominantly, reflects the fact that few of the women interviewed demonstrated any awareness of or active integration of these resources within their spiritual formation. Thus while Part 1 highlights the ways in which such resources provide a provisional framework for exploring contemporary women's models of growth, my research findings demonstrate their significance precisely in their *absence* from most evangelical women's frameworks of faith. While the parameters of this present project preclude fully expanding these rich trajectories of enquiry, my findings highlight the vital importance of exploring the ways in which historical texts and contemporary Feminist models of Christian formation might be made more accessible to evangelical women as a focus of future study.

Part I

Setting the Scene

Chapter 1

Towards a Feminist Research Methodology

Introduction: On the Inadequacy of Knowledge about Women

In describing her experience of the Brethren tradition in Scotland, Beth Dickson quotes these words from John Stuart Mill's essay on 'The Subjection of Women', 'Respecting the mental characteristics of women, [the observations of medical practitioners and physiologists] are of no more worth than those of common men. It is a subject on which nothing final can be known, so long as those who alone can really know it, women themselves, have given but little testimony, and that little, mostly suborned'. She comments, 'this fitted exactly with what I had experienced in church. Women were always talked about, usually to their disadvantage, and were never allowed to speak for themselves' (Dickson, 2005:13).

While Mill's quote from the late nineteenth century highlights past deficiencies in society's understanding of women, it might be equally applied to the contemporary failure to understand women's spiritual lives. In most academic fields, knowledge of women has been based on the observations of men. This project redresses this imbalance by examining women's own accounts of their spiritual experience.

This chapter highlights the three key challenges which have shaped the construction of my feminist methodology: *the dilemma of knowing* (adequately accounting for the contextual nature of knowledge); *the challenge of exploration* (selecting methods which respectfully engage with the dimensions of women's silence) and *the pursuit of clarity* (reliably interpreting the patterning in women's experience and discerning its implications for reform in the church).

The Dilemmas of Knowing: Epistemological Concerns from a Feminist Perspective

It is impossible, in a work such as this, to do justice to the diverse questions raised by those seeking to construct new feminist epistemologies out of their research on women's experience. As is inevitable, rich veins of knowledge cut across the seam which I have chosen to mine. Despite the temptation to plunder such places now, I have marked their presence in the form of extensive footnotes thus alerting the interested reader to the areas in which they themselves might most profitably mine.

Prior to describing my method, however, it is vital that I highlight the major concerns which have shaped my approach. I explore each briefly in turn before describing the specific ways I have addressed their challenges in my research.

The Contextual Nature of Knowledge

This project both embodies and explores the dilemmas involved in reliably observing, accurately voicing and adequately interpreting the ‘reality’ of human experience. The impossibility of separating knowledge from either the cultural crucible in which it is formed or the personal location from which it is perceived presents particular problems for this task.

The subjective nature of knowledge¹ and its implicit relationship with power creates particular challenges for my research. The fact that all human knowledge is undeniably subjective, as Bosch reflects, ‘there are no brute facts, only interpreted facts’ (1991:359); implies that it is also socially constructed (Letherby, 2003:66). Durber remarks, ‘as women have begun to participate in the adventure of knowledge they have discovered that knowledge is always gained from a particular place, from particular bodies and minds and particular places within society and culture. Nothing is known just as it is’ (Durber, 2007:173). Feminist theory openly admits the impossibility of unbiased accounts which are allegedly ‘gender neutral’ in research (Harding 1993:53). The male bias in many research fields has frequently objectified and marginalised women to a passive role within the research process, as participants and researchers, as Olesen states, ‘within the framework of a science based almost entirely on written records, women are notably absent from its texts and research accounts’ (1994:222).

The androcentric frameworks which have dominated accounts of human rationality have assumed that the male is the norm, to the extent that ‘women are rendered invisible to themselves and to others’ (Slee, 2003:5), resulting in ‘a diminished and inadequate account of humanness’ (Parsons, 1997:53). De Vault comments, ‘the language and vocabulary which we use in everyday life reflects the norms of male

¹ For an overview of the shift in feminist theory from gender issues and subordination to questioning the nature of truth see Ramazonoglu and Holland, 2000:208.

experience to the extent that it makes women's experience deviant and fails to reflect the shifting boundaries of their worlds creating major problems for the self expression of women' (2002:88-9). The methodology used in research involving women has often exaggerated this problem. The hierarchical nature of the traditional, positivist research relationship, the description of the structured interview as 'a mechanical instrument of data collection', and the portrayal of the trained researcher as an 'objective tool for the extraction of information' deliberately depersonalise interviewer and interviewee thus frequently, as Oakley suggests, causing women on both sides of the research relationship to silence significant parts of themselves (1981:46).

My own research methodology attempts to avoid the 'schizophrenic situation' commonly caused by the cauterisation of the self (Mies, 1993:70) by deliberately acknowledging and directly examining the experience and emotions of the participants and the researcher, factoring in the inevitable bias involved in these perspectives to the review and interpretation process.

The '(Im)Balance' of Power

'The view from nowhere', feminist and post-structuralist scholars insist, 'is in fact always a view from somewhere and this somewhere is always the place of power...or authority' (Walton, 2007:69). The imbalance of power in the pursuit of knowledge creates problems for accessing and interpreting reality when not viewed from the perspective of the dominant or 'normative' group. While, historically, the polarisation of the sexes has tended to normalise male perspectives in society, dualistic tendencies are also frequently evident in the marginalisation of the 'deviant' in single sex groups.² This concern is of particular relevance to my research given that participants' perspectives on the spiritual life may contradict the 'normative' experience of other women in the church. The tendency to marginalise and disregard that which is *different*, features prominently in the problem of women's silence.

² For an exploration of the Western philosophical dualistic tendency to polarise the knower and the known and categorise the male with what is valuable and the female with what is not see Frankenberry and Clack in Clack, 2005:249, 252. For a contemporary analysis of the effect of dualism on deference in congregational spirituality in the English Lake District see Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:15.

Finding a Voice: the Problem of Women's Silence

The faith developmental theorist James Fowler suggests that most of our knowing and doing remains inaccessible to our consciousness and thus to our ability to communicate. This fact accounts for the 'tacit dimension' of human knowing to which Michael Polanyi refers when he suggests, 'we know more than we can tell' (Fowler, 1996: 40). One of the main factors hampering this present project's examination of spiritual dissonance is the fact that women struggle to put their experience into words. It has been said that, in a patriarchal culture, 'women's experience is often fragile: buried beneath layers of traditional interpretation' (Fischer, 1990:11). Women often struggle to experience their own 'experience' - particularly when it has occurred as the result of abuse - for then its repetition is unspeakable (Mary Daly in Zappone, 1991:12). The marginalisation of women within hegemonic structures commonly prevents them from engaging with and articulating their tacit experience. For such women, the research interview presents a daunting task. In these circumstances, disclosure is only possible in a context which empowers women to be 'heard into speech',³ supported by methods which create a sufficiently 'safe' environment for them to voice their pain.⁴

The peculiar relationship between knowledge and power in human groups creates problems for women's public self expression, making it hard for church congregations as well as social researchers to hear the female voice.⁵ In the past, women's silence and in-articulation during theological discussions or research interviews were deemed symptomatic of their inability to discuss these matters (Letherby, 2003). De Vault counters this assumption by observing that 'women's stumbling apologies for saying something that is 'not quite right' far from indicating that women are intellectually inferior or extraordinarily inarticulate suggests rather that they are attempting to talk about something which lies beyond the bounds of standard language (De Vault, 2002:89). The fear of being misunderstood for not having the 'right' answer has led many women to conceal their ambiguous experience, particularly when they have

³ Morton in Slee, 2004:55.

⁴ It is precisely this kind of 'safe environment' which the second part of this thesis symbolically provides.

⁵ On the implications of women's struggle to translate experience into speech for research interviewing techniques and the interpretation of silence see Dale Spender in De Vault, 2002:90;94.

judged that to speak the truth might jeopardise their personal relationships or lead them to be considered a problem or aberration in the church (Slee, 2004:87).⁶ This silencing of the marginalised typically creates what feminist literary theory describes as ‘mute zones’, ‘where dominant groups⁷ control the forms or structures through which consciousness can be articulated’ (Walton, 2007:70), thus making it hard for those whose experience is not considered normal to speak.⁸ Sadly, this marginalisation has often been repeated in research contexts, highlighting the importance of ‘hearing’ women ‘into speech’ which is characteristically a time-consuming but, epistemologically, a necessary commitment. Therefore, this project uses methods which honour the significance of women’s silence and ‘incoherent’ speech, in the belief that their struggle to speak may indicate, paradoxically, that they have something important to say.

The Dilemmas of Interpreting Experience: the Pursuit of a Reliable Perspective

Philip Sheldrake remarks, ‘There is no such thing as ‘pure’ experience...our contact is only with what is remembered or deemed worthy of remembering’ (Sheldrake, 1998:21). This creates problems not just for the collection of subliminal human experience but also for the interpretation of that experience once it has been elicited. The fact that human experience is historically, culturally and often also theologically conditioned is explicitly reflected in feminist and liberation theology’s praxis model of enquiry.⁹ As Slee explains, historical and social experience is the ‘first act’ of theological enquiry upon which the ‘second act’ i.e. reflection depends (Slee, 2004:6).¹⁰

⁶ For an exploration of women’s tendency to repress what they feel is dangerous to say due to the threat of abandonment or retaliation see Gilligan, 1996.

⁷ It is important to note that such ‘dominant groups’ are not necessarily male. One of the findings of this research is that the marginalisation of those who approach the spiritual life in ‘non-normative’ ways is practiced as much by ‘ordinary’ women as ‘dominant’ men.

⁸ For an explanation of this phenomenon see Elaine Showalter in Walton, 2007:70.

⁹ For an overview of the Hebraic and early Christian understanding of knowing as experiential and relational as well as conceptual - based upon the Old Testament concept of Yada: relational knowledge which comes through experience - see Brasher, 1998:78. For a rationale of experience as a legitimate source of contextually embodied knowledge of God based on an ethics of ‘character-in-community’ and the concept of ‘biographical theology’ see McClendon, 2002.

¹⁰ The inseparability of spiritual experience from contextual reflection in the process of human self-awareness as well as theological enquiry lies at the heart of the learning cycle in education as well as the pastoral and hermeneutical cycles in theology. For an exploration of these see Slee, 2004:7 and Swinton and Mowatt, 2006. For an overview of Kolb’s cyclical model of experiential learning encompassing experience, reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation see Graham et al. 2005.

‘Our attempts to describe and re-describe the world for ourselves and for others’, Trevor Hart suggests, ‘...are, at their best, ‘heuristic fictions’ which, in an important sense, create what they discover and invent what they find’ (Hart, 2003:7). Indeed, Sandra Harding warns: ‘it is not necessarily the case that the most oppressed are potentially the most knowledgeable – their way of seeing might not be the most true’ (quoted in Letherby, 2003), for the stories we tell are shaped by the reason for telling them to ourselves and to others.¹¹ Experience itself is also often complicated by the power relations that underlie its accounts: ‘[telling] the truth’ in ways designed to protect the teller [from]...the censure of those who might disapprove or...the personal implications of that same ‘truth’ (Ramazonoglu and Holland, 1995:130). Narratives of experience thus regularly function to *domesticate* that reality. The partial truths resulting from such interpretations implicitly subvert the process of growth by *concealing* that which we actually need to face.¹²

The subjective nature of human experience Swinton and Mowatt suggest ‘admits the impossibility of the researcher standing outside their field of research’ (2006:59). Indeed, as Olesun observes, the fact that I myself have experienced, for myself, the phenomenon I am investigating, neither ‘guarantees [me] access to women’s lives, nor reliable interpretation of their knowledge’ (Olesun, 1994:225). In my commitment to researcher reflexivity¹³ through personal and research journaling, I have both acknowledged and deliberately attended to the bias I bring to the present project.¹⁴ As Ward helpfully puts it, ‘to see ones-self as dialogical is to attend to one’s own voice in different situations. It is to attend to questions of position and power which... permeate all relationships and which need to be owned and addressed’ (Ward, 2005:18).

My commitment to reflexivity in this research is reflected not only in the methodology I have employed, but also in the way in which the following literature

¹¹ While narrative is an indispensable, empowering tool for women previously denied a voice, the frailties of the medium are described in Chopp, 1995:19.

¹² On the problem of self-deception in autobiography and deceptive forms of self-knowledge see McClendon, 2002:165-6 and Clough in Denzin and Lincoln (eds.), 1994:225.

¹³ That is the deliberate turn towards the self described as ‘the conscious, critical evaluation of one’s own research posture, methodology and experience throughout the course of the research process’ (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006).

¹⁴ On the need for practitioners as well as researchers to ‘move into the center of the learning situation, into the center of their own doubts’ see Schon, in Graham et al., 2005.

review, spiritual life histories and research conclusions reflect the emerging, cyclical rhythms of my research experience. As Ward puts it, the goal of this kind of ‘life’ research ‘is not a sense of arrival, of ‘formation’’, but, ‘a *knowing in action by reflection upon practice*[sic]... open and willing to learn in the encounter with different people in different circumstances’ (Ward, 2005:184). It involves the refusal to ‘understand oneself as ever ‘formed’, but always open to growth...to see oneself in creative dialogue with others in the world...and be open to the (sometimes) radical otherness, or ‘alterity’ or different viewpoints’ (Ward, 2005:17). Accordingly, my research thesis invites the reader to consider the view from the key vantage points which have informed my enquiry, namely the perspectives which have critically shaped my emerging understanding of the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance and its implications. My dialogical, dimensional approach is demonstrated in the reflexive relationship which exists between the methodology and literature review chapters in part 1, and the spiritual life history and reflective chapters which form the main focus of part 2, thus providing complementary perspectives deliberately designed to inform one another cumulatively as my argument unfolds.

An Emerging Methodology

My choice of a qualitative approach was influenced by my commitment to the exploration of the ‘essence’ of an experience which has not been openly articulated before (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006:55). My research findings are thus exploratory and descriptive in nature following Geertz’s recommendation that researchers use ‘thick descriptions’¹⁵ to clarify the links which exist between a phenomenon and the cultural context within which it takes place (Geertz in Bryman, 2004:280).

Descriptive studies, it is frequently noted, are of vital importance when examining a phenomenon which has resisted previous disclosure or identification (Denscombe, 2003; Bryman, 2004). As in the case of this present project, this is particularly true when exploring a phenomenon which is either unacknowledged or, indeed, deliberately denied in its community of origin. The goal of this project is thus not the generalisation of spiritual dissonance within the evangelical Christian community, but

¹⁵ ‘Thick description’ is a term devised by Geertz to refer to rich accounts of the details of a culture which situate a phenomenon in its context as a means of establishing its significance in people’s social lives (Bryman, 2004: 544-5).

rather the provision of a detailed description of this phenomenon in the cultural contexts in which it occurs. I have adopted this approach not merely, as Bryman suggests, to honour the *significance* of these descriptions for the women whose lives are being detrimentally affected by this phenomenon (Bryman, 2004:280), but to emphatically demonstrate the ways in which the evangelical community's failure to acknowledge and respond to their plight is damaging some women's spiritual health. This study thus constitutes a limited but essential 'first step towards explanation', deliberately recording the *breadth* and contextual *complexity* of a phenomenon which will merit more focussed, detailed investigation in later explanatory studies (Punch, 2005:15).

My epistemological approach has been shaped by 'standpoint theory'¹⁶ in general, and Sandra Harding's concept of 'strong objectivity'¹⁷ in particular, as a crucial alternative to viewing reality from a single or dualist point of view. It thus facilitates a view of reality from *multiple positions* by intentionally identifying *difference* in participant accounts in order to honour the *diversity* of evangelical women as well as their varying experience of this phenomenon. Despite the strengths which a standpoint epistemology brings to this particular project, it is clear that even situated knowledge is vulnerable to its own forms of myopia. Harding herself observes, 'the standpoints of the subjugated are not innocent positions' (Harding in Letherby, 2003:42). Indeed, the primary danger of presenting a view of reality from any standpoint is the temptation to normalise that vision, thereby marginalising all other perspectives. This is not my intent.

The Challenge of Exploration

As a descriptive, rather than comparative study, this project focuses exclusively on the rich phenomenon of women's spiritual experience. It provides an in-depth

¹⁶ Standpoint epistemology was shaped by Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding in the 1980's, based on Hartsock's understanding of the Marxist concept that the oppressed see more than their oppressors (Letherby, 2003:45), and suggestion that reality might thus be more accurately and reliably perceived from a variety of standpoints which should include the oppressed as well as the oppressors.

¹⁷ Harding's concept of 'strong objectivity' has been described as the ability to hear differing perspectives on the same issue but privileging the perspective of those most affected by the current arrangement of society (Walton, 2007:70).

understanding of women's perspectives on and priorities in their maturing spiritual lives, thus seeking to identify the questions women believe demand attention but have, thus far, been neglected. While exclusively interviewing women, this study honours the *difference* represented by its female participants and their diverse congregational settings, implicitly challenging the assumption that there is one kind of woman, evangelicalism or female Christian spirituality.¹⁸ Rather, it strives to explore the 'multiplicity of axes' in women's experience, accounts and the patterning of their faith (Slee, 2004:47) honouring the difference *between* and *within*¹⁹ women in the evangelical community. It thus deliberately describes the *diversity* of evangelical women's spiritual experience, rather than creating a false 'norm' which subsequently names deviant other alternatives.

The Cost of Speech: Ethical Questions and Practical Solutions

My concern regarding the shame and silence some women associate with their experience of dissonance has inevitably shaped the design of this project. The investigation of a phenomenon which women in some traditional evangelical circles intentionally conceal demanded a sensitive approach to the investigative task.

Participation in this project potentially put these women under threat of a loss of status in their religious communities. This necessitated the protection of participants wishing, for the benefit of others, to tell their stories, but unwilling to be identified. Every effort has been made to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants by using the tested editing procedures commonly employed in feminist research. All conversations with research participants were protected by a confidentiality agreement, the details of which were included in my initial letter to prospective participants.²⁰ Women were invited to contact me personally should they be willing to take part. At the time of the first interview, each participant was invited

¹⁸ On the need to understand and acknowledge the 'wide array of difference' in denominationally specific approaches to spiritual development reflected even in those from the same religious tradition see Tate and Parker, 2007:218-226.

¹⁹ Slee acknowledges participants rarely speak with a consistent, coherent voice as 'the self in dialogue is likely to be constantly shifting and resituating itself in shifting relation, both to the other person and to its own rehearsed and re-told meanings': highlighting the importance of attending to tensions and contradictions *within* as well as *between* woman's narrative as a means of identifying those places, 'where thought and identity are in transition or crisis' (Slee, 2004:48).

²⁰ For a copy of the initial letter sent to research participants see Appendix 1.

to give their assent in writing by completing an informed consent agreement.²¹ Tapes and subsequent transcripts of the interviews were kept in a secure place. Pseudonyms were rigorously used from the transcript stage of the analysis. Given the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under exploration, as well as its potentially distressing symptoms, I offered participants the right to withdraw, without requirement of a reason, at any point in the procedure without losing face. This clause was highlighted in the confidentiality agreement signed by researcher and participant at the first interview. As is often the case with Ph.D. theses of a sensitive nature, there will be restricted access to this material for the first year of its release, during which time I will discuss with participants the best way to disseminate its findings within its constituent community.

The Pilot Interview Process

The pilot project was primarily designed to refine my research questions and assess the effectiveness of my proposed methodological approach. Secondly, it aimed to test the extent to which women felt free to discuss their experience in a group and not just an individual setting, given the potential for using focus groups as an additional means of inquiry.

Eight women were involved in pilot interviews: one triplet, one pair and four individuals, one of whom was interviewed twice, in a trio and an individual setting, as a means of exploring the combination of open-ended and semi-structured interviews.²² The pilot study experimented with a range of feminist qualitative methods as a means of assessing their effectiveness for eliciting rich data from diverse participants. I used a mixture of semi-structured and unstructured, thematic, life history and creative approaches which are described below. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and analysed to elicit the themes and questions women raised, together with the role and nature of spiritual dissonance present in their narratives.

²¹ For a copy of this agreement see Appendix 2.

²² I took part myself in the first unstructured 'triplet' interview as a means of including and critiquing my own experience prior to hearing other participants' perspectives on this phenomenon. This enabled me to share the painful experience of telling my story in public.

I tried to decrease the participants' anxiety by explaining that my project involved the collection of women's stories of their experience of '*growing pains*': symptoms which perhaps caused them pain, but which might also be indicators of spiritual growth. I used a selection of black and white postcard sized photo prints as an ice-breaker to introduce the idea of reflection on the spiritual life, a procedure I will refer to as the 'image exercise'. As this later became part of the main project I will describe its origin and construction below. Participants were invited to pick between four and six images from a selection of more than a hundred. At least two were to represent either the participant's *longings* in their relationship with God or their *ideal picture* of their relationship with God; the rest were to symbolise the *reality* of any relationship with God in the daily context of women's lives. These images included landscapes, architecture, animals and people, some were humorous, eliciting instant laughter and thus helping ease participants' anxiety. After sharing the stories which lay behind each participant's choice of images, I facilitated a semi-structured discussion of the themes the exercise had raised, stating some of my own hunches relating to spiritual dissonance towards the end of each interview. In combination with the image exercise I experimented with three other forms of interview. These were firstly a semi-structured thematic interview²³ focussed around my own emerging research questions. Secondly: an unprepared 'spiritual life history review' (which became the main interview format and will be described below). Thirdly: a *prepared* 'spiritual life history review' in which several days prior to the interview participants were invited to prepare to tell their life history in the manner of their choice.

Problems Identified by the Pilot Interviews

The unstructured image exercise was a powerful way of accessing women's tacit awareness of their relationship with God: predictably, however, it was not helpful for all participants.²⁴ Because it aided most participants to access and give voice to deep, subconscious dimensions of their relationship with God, I retained this exercise in my

²³ Structured and semi-structured interviews are a common feature of feminist research. They are frequently used to establish *common* and *conflicting* themes in a phenomenon which has not been studied in a particular context before and are particularly suitable for discussing sensitive issues in a way that values the participant's questions about the phenomenon as much as the researcher's (Oakley, 1981; Ribbens, 1989 and MacKinlay, 2001).

²⁴ The fact that some women requested copies of their chosen images for further reflection indicated that this was an exercise of considerable importance for a significant number of women.

main interview design, placing it, however, at the end rather than the beginning of the interview in order to reduce the anxiety of participants who might find it a more challenging task.

The semi-structured, thematic interviews which centred around identifying ‘growing pains’ associated with a participant’s maturing relationship to church, God and themselves were found to be too directive as an approach, producing truncated, disconnected narratives inadequate for eliciting the rich, contextual data required in pioneering, exploratory research. It thus detrimentally separated present spiritual tension from its contextualisation in a participant’s wider spiritual history which had the potential to distort the data. Participants identified and expressed the dissonance they were experiencing at church more easily than any tensions relating to their relationship with God. While it was initially unclear whether these findings reflected (1) the *absence* or *suppression* of such experience; (2) the failure of the interview setting or researcher relationship to provide a *safe place* for its expression; or (3) participants’ lack of *language* with which to describe their experience, it was clear that this particular area of investigation would require more subtle means of exploration.

Although the prepared spiritual life history produced more clearly structured insights than did the un-prepared, it tended to reinforce participants’ habitual ways of reflecting upon and re-telling their spiritual life history. In the event, while I decided to adopt a life-history approach in the main project,²⁵ I posed appropriate questions based on participants’ observations to elicit a more spontaneous narrative, in spite of some women’s (over)-familiarity with aspects of their story.²⁶

Emerging Trajectories

It is demonstrably easy, by direct questioning, to elicit stories which support the theoretical hunches reflective of the interests of the interviewer. This was an

²⁵ While a life history may be narrated in a variety of non-linear ways, most participants chose the linear approach. I stressed to all participants that I would follow their lead as the ‘experts’ in telling their story in the way which seemed most helpful to them.

²⁶ The fact that some participants had previously told their stories in the context of public ‘testimony’ meant that portions of their accounts were shaped by the didactic goals which characterise such narratives (see Brasher, 1998).

occasional flaw in my pilot interviews, noticeable when stories, removed from their life context, failed to reflect a participant's wider developmental path. It was mainly for this reason that I chose to use a life history approach. This method seemed much better suited to observing and analysing participants' contextualised awareness of their own faith development. By such means I hoped to gain insight into women's ways of understanding God's involvement in that process.

It became clear in the process of initial coding²⁷ that the issues prominent in participants' analyses of their experience were different from those I had expected to explore. While I easily found key characteristics of the dissonance associated with cognitive faith stage change, as described by James Fowler,²⁸ women themselves seemed relatively unaware of the reality of this phenomenon and had little if any vocabulary to acknowledge, articulate or consciously reflect upon that experience. Indeed, the field of faith development research represented merely one trajectory of my enquiry. I had hoped to find a wealth of 'hidden' data in women's narratives regarding the nature of their changing relationship with God. This was not the case, indeed, participants rarely referred to the changing nature of their relationship with God.

Women more frequently expressed their feelings of no longer *belonging* in church: commonly describing a sense of alienation from themselves, others and, occasionally, from God. As a result of the pilot coding, it became clear that there was an urgent need to explore women's contextual experience of the lack of *acceptance* in and *loss of spiritual bearings* at church, rather than focus exclusively upon their relationship with God. Women's growing sense of constriction within previously liberating patterns of worship and teaching, together with their practice of 'wearing masks' or living a 'double life' at church, demanded serious investigation as a central theme in their self-understanding. While these emerging themes did not negate my interest in women's awareness of and developing relationship with God, it created more realistic expectations on my part regarding the difficulty of eliciting and interpreting that data.

²⁷ Coding describes the process of breaking down data into a series of themes and categories as a means of finding common ground and generalised observations as well as contrasts and contradictions. Initial codes, which are never neutral, arose out of participant's own narrated categories, research questions and from wider academic study.

²⁸ For a description of these characteristics and a critical appraisal of Fowler's model see chapter 2.

It was patently obvious that a blend of methodological approaches was required to set women's present struggles in a historical, cultural and spiritual context, while simultaneously seeking to explore that which is unconscious or inchoate in their experience of knowing God.²⁹ A wide range of data collecting tools would be required to access and reflect upon these complex trajectories. Pilot interviews indicated that the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance was much less prominent in those under thirty years of age, a fact which largely determined the chronological parameters of my projected participant group. They also, importantly, highlighted the emotional and psychological cost involved for women breaking out of a longstanding silence, indicating the profound, though presently hidden, pastoral needs of the group these women represent within the evangelical community. Indeed participants' concern regarding the public admission of these dilemmas led me to conclude that focus groups might be more helpful in *follow-up* research than in this initial enquiry.³⁰ I decided, therefore, to focus exclusively on confidential, individual interviews as the vital first step in exploring the breadth and complexity of this phenomenon.³¹

The Main Project Construction: A Methodological Overview

As a result of the insights gained from my pilot interviews, I chose to employ a non-standardised, unstructured spiritual life history review at the core of my data collection process. This seemed the most flexible, contextual framework within which women might tell their own stories at their own pace, in their own words. By such means I sought to ensure that my *participants'* shaping of and pre-occupations within their spiritual life histories should determine the main trajectories and hermeneutical concerns of this inquiry. The life history review created a relatively un-constricted space for participants to express, and the researcher to attend, to what was unspoken, as well as what was well said, in women's narratives thus honouring

²⁹ Given the apophatic nature of women's faithing especially at times of transition this is of great importance (see Slee, 2001).

³⁰ While the option of participating in Focus groups was mentioned in my initial letter to participants as a means of providing for the possibility that this mode of enquiry, early interviews confirmed the Pilot findings that women were not yet ready to share their stories publicly.

³¹ Some women's admission of their dissonance remarkably resembled the trauma of disclosing sexual abuse: characterised by the shame of confession, the fear of not being believed and the horror of being blamed, underlining the significance of hearing and accurately describing these women's experiences.

women's silence itself a form of emancipatory 'speech'.³² Most interviews lasted between two and a half to three hours; however some exceeded four hours in length, which created a considerable transcription task, often rewarded by a yield of rich data. As women commonly became moved while telling their stories, interviews were undertaken in participants' homes where the guarantee of security outweighed the inconvenience of the interruptions which occurred.

The Spiritual Life History

I used a 'spiritual life history review' interview as a means of contextualising women's narratives of dissonance in the historical fabric of their life story and spiritual heritage thus locating my enquiry in 'concrete, historical situations' in order to gain a 'holistic overview of the context under study: its logic; arrangements; explicit and implicit rules' (Miles and Huberman, in Slee, 2004:10). This provided the opportunity to explore the connections which might exist between women's historical spiritual nurture and their present distress.

The 'life review' can be traced back to Protestant spirituality's practice of the 'examination of conscience', or 'repentance', particularly associated with the process of ageing and preparation for death, conducted in the hope of restoring relationships with God and others (Moody in MacKinlay, 2001:67). It is described by Kimble as, 'a phenomenological approach in seeking to understand the 'lived world' of a person', which 'chronicles not only a person's encounter with life but with God' (Kimble in MacKinlay, 2001:74). Based on the premise that meaning is open to review and change at different points in the lifespan, the contemporary life review is commonly used to identify the ways in which people re-examine the provisional meanings they have attached to life events when explored in the light of further growth and learning across the lifespan (Frankl 1994 in MacKinlay 2001:78).³³ Such life narratives provide fundamental insights into the way a person has been shaped by their social, cultural and theological context, for 'a life narrative is a joint product of person and environment' (Anderson and Foley, 2001:12). The life review thus provides an

³²Slee suggests that 'Prophecy can begin in the inchoate sense of nameless discomfort that many women feel and find no words to express' (Slee, 2001:35).

³³ On storytelling as a therapy used in health-related fields and life reflection as a naturally occurring phenomenon of old age see MacKinlay, 2001:67.

indispensable window through which to view the complex, intertwining factors which unconsciously shape human spirituality.

My own spiritual life history approach, in the context of this research, both reflects and revises the life review methods employed by a number of scholars in sociological, theological and medical fields. It is frequently used as a major investigative tool in faith development research (James Fowler, 1981; Nicola Slee, 2004) and employed as a psychoanalytical therapeutic tool in Elisabeth MacKinlay's recent exploration of the spirituality of ageing (2001). My own approach has been predominantly shaped by the unstructured, open-ended models used by Slee and MacKinlay, it does, however, reflect some elements of the structured approach of James Fowler.

I adopted Fowler's practice of asking participants to describe their family history at the beginning of the interview, ostensibly as a form of 'ice-breaker', but with the intent of distracting them from giving a traditional 'testimony', the very form of pre-packaged narrative beneath which I hoped to penetrate. While this was a challenging question for many participants to answer, highlighting significant gaps in their knowledge of their parent's spiritual lives, several participants commented that it alerted them to the intrigue as well as the importance of telling their story from a new perspective. My adoption of the concept of MacKinlay's '*spiritual* life review' or '*spiritual autobiography*' was similarly shaped by my interest in participants' perception of the active role of God in their life history.³⁴ Where my approach purposefully *diverged* from MacKinlay's was in the fact that it deliberately avoided the depth analysis implicit in her therapeutic model which would have required a level of professional expertise and pastoral support I was unqualified to provide.³⁵

In contrast to the prescriptive rubric of Fowler's semi-structured interview,³⁶ I used an open-ended, loosely focussed, unstructured interview technique similar to that

³⁴ On the difference between the 'life review' and the '*spiritual* life review' which invites participants to consider God's presence in their story or experience see MacKinlay, 2001:74ff.

³⁵ While MacKinlay's *therapeutic* use of the spiritual life review, to help elderly participants address their need for reconciliation with God and others, this was not the focus of my use of this technique. MacKinlay rightly warns against the misuse of a tool specifically designed for psychoanalytical purposes (2001:69).

³⁶ Fowler used the 'life interview' to 'overhear ways of shaping and interpreting meaning from [participants'] lives'. For a review of his four-stage interview process see Fowler, 1981:307-312.

described by Nicola Slee (2004:54-57). This decision reflected my intent to identify fresh patterns of uniformity and diversity in women's faith experience rather than to assign participants to pre-determined theoretical categories. I judged it potentially more revealing to allow participants to identify issues of concern in their spiritual lives independent of my assistance thus demonstrating the importance of specific themes to a particular participant by the fact that they were mentioned at all. I therefore deliberately waited for participants to raise their own questions in the following areas: their concept and experience of God; their means of understanding and addressing personal sin; their practice of prayer and bible study and their theological stance.³⁷ In order to demonstrate my commitment to 'hear into speech' participants' own interpretation of their spiritual life story, this was an important choice. It was often only when a woman became comfortable with my position of 'attentive silence' and realised that I was *not* going to control or direct her story that she began to explore areas of faith formation she later admitted had not featured in her reflections before. This interview technique clearly involved considerable time and patience during the interviewing and transcription process. While not all tangential routes yielded revolutionary findings, they helpfully identified the themes and emphases which were of significance to participants at the time of their original experience as well as providing insight into the changes in perspective which usually occur over long periods of time.

As far as was possible, in the early stages of the interview, I observed and subsequently adopted a woman's own 'spiritual language', attempting thereafter to use her personal spiritual vocabulary when pursuing rich themes she had previously mentioned. It was only towards the end of each interview that I raised themes or questions which the woman herself had not already identified. These often originated in my reflection upon previous interviews as well as in the themes and 'hunches' which had grown naturally out of my academic reading and personal experience.³⁸

³⁷ On the importance of trying to establish a 'non-hierarchical relationship of mutuality and empathy' and the importance of drawing women out on topics they raise rather than expecting them to take the lead see Slee, 2004:56.

³⁸ For an overview of the interview schedule see Appendix 3.

Tapping the Inchoate: The Missing Piece

Nicola Slee's exploration of women's developing lives crucially identifies the hidden nature of the experience of spiritual dissonance consistently indicated by women's silence (Slee, 2004). This fact highlighted the need to employ a way of accessing data effectively inaccessible to the research participants themselves.³⁹ Given that direct reflection on potentially disturbing or ambivalent emotions might not be possible, I used a brief image exercise at the end of each interview to tap into this potentially rich seam of hidden wisdom: based upon my experience that, 'storytelling and ritualizing together provide the vehicles for reconnecting God's story with our human stories' (Anderson and Foley, 2001:ix).

I developed this image exercise from my own pastoral practice of using visual images to stimulate reflection among members of congregations, small groups and women's retreats. My attempts to adapt this model into a more adequate tool for use in research were greatly enriched by Anderson and Foley's theoretical exploration of the role of narrative and ritual in integrating divine and human stories (Anderson and Foley, 2001),⁴⁰ and Gillian Bolton's enormously helpful work on creative writing as a means of 'exploring things we don't know we knew, felt or remembered' (Bolton, 2000:16).⁴¹ By such means, following Bolton, I used imagery as a means of 'recall[ing] emotions, experiences or feelings which have been pushed away or left disregarded...in a relatively safe way' (2000:62).⁴² I designed this brief exercise to subvert the ways in which women's externalisation of internal realities often subconsciously attempts to control or domesticate difficult experiences, based upon Bolton's thesis that images are 'windows created in order to illuminate the dark passages of our text of life' (Bolton, 2000:61).

³⁹ Clearly, given the potential vulnerability of participants in this kind of enquiry, great care must be taken to ensure that a believer's personal space is not violated by the researcher (Finch in Ribbens and Edwards, 1988:14). The strength of the unstructured interview is that it leaves the choice of such disclosure in the participant's hands.

⁴⁰ See Anderson and Foley on the use of narrative and ritual to 1) elicit the divine narrative which is often muted or ignored (2001:47) 2) Weave together mythical narrative (which gives stability and hope of reconciliation or ultimate peace) and parabolic narrative (which challenges our tendency to domesticate the fault lines beneath the comfortable surfaces of our constructed worlds), Anderson and Foley, 2001:13-16.

⁴¹ On Bolton's use of creative writing, photos and images as a means of accessing what is inarticulate in women's spiritual lives see Bolton, 2000:32.

⁴² On visual exercises as a safe way of symbolising the transcendent and encouraging non-verbal participation in this kind of research see Mason, 2002:78.

While I had previously given pilot participants specific instructions regarding the selection of their images, in the main study I simply invited them to pick pictures to which they felt drawn to as expressing ‘something’ about their relationship with God, without necessarily knowing what these images might actually mean. In this way I tried to create moments when the participant managed to ‘outwit [her] own inner police system’ (Hughes in Bolton, 2000:20). This caused much surprise as participants reflected upon and began to articulate the connections between their choice of picture and their relationship with God. This open-ended exercise created considerable room not only for creativity in the reflective task but also for a deep articulation of the inner life which was frequently a surprise to participants. Indeed, as Anderson and Foley observe, ‘stories...have the power to unsettle as well as shape our lives: lives we have often tried to tame by our own narrative construction’ (2001:7). A gradually dawning and occasionally unsettling understanding routinely grew out of the initial silence and tears participants experienced as they discerned the meaning hidden behind the images they had chosen. Thus, while some women picked out one or two images with a degree of difficulty, others selected a substantial pile which they, without my direction, arranged sequentially, and in some cases dimensionally, to represent the narrative of their changing relationship with God, from their youth until the present time. As in most open interview situations, the ways in which women selected and ordered their image narratives were as significant as the pictures themselves. Indeed the silence which usually followed the ‘official’ end of the interview after this moving experience often was the source of the most revealing reflections from participants concerning their relationship with God.⁴³

Researcher Bias and the Myth of the Insider

Having raised the issue of my personal experience in the discussion above, some brief reflections are appropriate regarding my position as a researcher before introducing the other participants in my research. Oakley suggests that ‘the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewed is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship’ (Oakley, 1981:51). As a

⁴³ For a sample extract from the transcription of an Image Exercise see Appendix 4.

researcher I thus sought to adopt what Maykut and Morehouse describe as a posture of ‘indwelling’ characterised by the desire to view reality from the position of the person by sharing their experience’ (1994:26). The strength of my research standpoint as a woman who has experienced the disorientation and gradual re-orientation commonly associated with the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance is that potential participants’ knowledge of that fact increased their courage to articulate their experience. This open-ness markedly increased once women appreciated that my goal was to hear them properly rather than embark upon any misguided attempt to analyse, correct or ‘fix’ them.⁴⁴

The ‘underside’ of the value of my standpoint as a researcher who shares some aspects of these women’s experiences is that neutrality is neither possible nor appropriate in interpretive work. Therefore, rather than denying my perspective, I have sought to use it constructively in the shaping of this project. As a believer I am a strange mixture of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ in the community of faith. I was neither brought up in a church-going family, nor had I any experience of the Christian community until my mid-teens. My expectations of the experience of those brought up within the evangelical tradition from birth were thus often unrealistic and remarkably different from the reality I discovered at interview. Daughters of believing parents were much less articulate regarding their parent’s and their own relationship with God than I had expected them to be. While, at times, I found this frustrating, it was also illuminating regarding the limited profile of Christian education, reflection and discipleship in some families associated with the evangelical community. It also highlighted the realism and sensitivity with which I would need to approach participants whose vocabulary was very different from my own in their articulation of the process of maturing faith. Ironically, my research standpoint multiplied the inevitable ‘blind’ spots which I brought to this enquiry. As Hay and Nye suggest, a researcher’s location (as insider *or* outsider) ‘blinds and enlightens both to aspects of reality’ (2006). My inherent myopia as a ‘detective’ demands what Mason describes as a ‘fallibilistic’ approach to this investigation: one that is open to correction (Mason, 2002:187). It also demands a strict hermeneutic of suspicion in

⁴⁴ On the importance of properly hearing victims of trauma and abuse who have internalised the blame for their experience and need others to recognise the extent of that damage in order for the healing process to begin see Bass and Davis, 1988:33,92.

both directions on the part of my perceptive reader: from whom I hope to benefit fresh perspectives on this enquiry.

The Participants⁴⁵

I sequentially selected an expanding range of participants who would help enrich my understanding of this phenomenon in all its complexity and diversity. Participant group recruitment thus evolved over a period of twelve months: the lack of hurry was a means of guarding and expanding my commitment to honour difference in this research. Following Slee (2004), I interviewed those on the *margins* of the evangelical tradition as well as those at the *core* of church life thus representing a range of theological views to ‘take account of soundings from the liminal edge of Christian belonging’. As Slee reflects, ‘the boundary of any group or tradition is often a place of both creativity and insight where significant questions are being asked and issues wrestled with which those more bound up with the preservation of the tradition ignore at their peril’ (Slee, 2004:53; see also Ward and Wild, 1995).

Twenty-one women were interviewed in the course of this project, all of whom had lived in Scotland for the past ten years. The group included thirteen Scottish, five English, and three international women. They represented a cross-section of ages,⁴⁶ contexts and developmental stages as well as the varied perspectives of single (6), married (10), divorced (3) and widowed (2) women.

The initial interview group, which consisted of 5 women, included personal friends from a variety of evangelical traditions through whom, by means of a snowballing procedure,⁴⁷ I came into contact with other potential participants, some known and some unknown to me, who stretched my understanding of this phenomenon in new directions. To protect their anonymity, potential new participants were invited, at their own discretion, to contact me directly to initiate the recruitment procedure. The fact that the majority of participants in this project were known *to* me if not intimately

⁴⁵ See Appendix 5 for an overview of my research participant profiles.

⁴⁶ The age distribution of interviewees in the following age brackets was: [25-35]:1; [35-45]:7; [45-55]:5; [55-65]:5 and [65-75]:3.

⁴⁷ Snowballing is a widely recognised technique for accessing stigmatised groups. For an overview of its strengths and weaknesses see Ribbens and Edwards, 1988:63.

by me reflects a common feature of forms of feminist research which seek, in their initial stages, to explore a sensitive phenomenon that may only be disclosed in the context of a close, trusting relationship.⁴⁸ The rationale which lay behind my use of a snowballing procedure was gradually to expand my group of participants through a network of relationships of trust into other dimensions of the evangelical faith community and its environs. Despite my previous acquaintance with some participants, I had little or no awareness of their spiritual histories or their particular experience of spiritual dissonance prior to interview.⁴⁹ As the project database expanded, I deliberately added new participants whose *contrasting* experience might increase my understanding of this phenomenon and its impact on those who are marginalised within the evangelical community including women who suspected they might be in the process of leaving the church or who had already left.

Church Affiliation⁵⁰

The majority of women interviewed for this project had, at some point in their lives, identified themselves as being part of, or been influenced by the evangelical tradition. Both women brought up in homes of nominal faith or of no faith at all as well as those brought up in families committed to that tradition, had moved in twin directions i.e. towards as well as away from involvement in the evangelical community.

Seventeen women had attended Sunday school as children though not necessarily in an evangelical church. Four had been brought up in non church-going homes with the result that their first experience of church was through church-based youth organisations or Sunday school. Of those, two had attended Sunday school on their own: one as a result of her own initiative. Two had developed an early initial dislike of church due to being sent there as a form of child care.

⁴⁸ Of those participants involved in this project, I knew three through close personal friendship, five through previous ministry links, three through past contacts in church or para-church circles, two via overseas mission links and four through present ministry contacts. Four of the participants were entirely unknown to me prior to interview.

⁴⁹ On the steps which should be taken to reduce the controlling influence of the interviewer when interviewing colleagues or friends see Holloway and Jefferson, 2000:31. My choice of 'attentive silence' as an interview stance and my use of participant directed interviews reflects these concerns.

⁵⁰ See Appendix 6 for an overview of participants' church affiliation over a lifetime and at the time of interview.

All of the women interviewed had attended more than one church of different denominations within the evangelical tradition. Transfer of affiliation, particularly while women were in their 20s and 30s, were often linked to changes in marital status or to geography.

Education, Employment and Ministry Experience

All of my research participants had experienced and two were still involved in tertiary education: one to diploma and nineteen to degree level. Six of the women held Bachelor degrees in theology, four of whom had prior degrees in other disciplines. Three of the women were in theological training at the time of interview: one as a part-time undergraduate and two in post-graduate programmes. While there is thus a clear bias in my research group which, to some extent, represents an educational elite, this indicates my concern to explore the manifestation of this phenomenon in precisely this group of evangelical women. It was my hope that such participants would be in a strong position to articulate and reflect upon various dimensions of their spiritual formation.

In the course of their lives so far, participants had held a variety of responsible positions in the police service, social work, education, medical and related professions such as midwifery, occupational psychology, occupational therapy, counselling and business administration. Only three of the women had worked exclusively in parish or para-church ministry. Ten women had moved (in both directions) between secular and ministry employment. At the time of interview seven participants were involved in full or part-time secular work; seven in full or part-time ministry and, of the remainder, three described themselves as full-time wives and mothers; one as a part-time student, full-time wife and mother and three as retired.

Most participants were intentionally and many sacrificially involved in church life and ministry: frequently in the pastoral care and nurture of other disciples. Of the twenty-one women, thirteen had taken part in full or part-time church or para-church ministry at some point in their careers; nine were in full-time ordained or lay roles in congregations at the time of interview. Three women had at some point been or were presently married to ordained ministers. Of those who had experience in the

professional Christian ministry sphere, three women had held positions in student campus ministry; five had ministered in cross-cultural settings at home or overseas; and seven had been or still were involved in full-time church-based ministry.⁵¹

The Procedure

The Interview Process

For the original core of five participants, the interview took place in two parts consisting of an initial recorded interview which lasted from one and a half to two hours and a further, follow-up interview. At the first interview, participants were invited to tell the story of their own spiritual history in the way which seemed most natural to them. Following this interview, the tapes were transcribed, anonymised and a manuscript sent to the interviewee.⁵² The second interview, which lasted from one to two hours, allowed both participant and researcher to explore areas which had been raised but not fully explored in the first interview with the explicit goal of eliciting further insightful memories or reflections. At this second interview participants were encouraged to indicate any parts of the transcript which they felt did not properly reflect what they had wished to say and give frank feedback to the researcher regarding her more effective facilitation of future interviews. Participants then had the opportunity to indicate any parts of the text which they felt too personal to be used in any resulting written work. This second interview was similarly transcribed and sent to the interviewee for comment. Following this initial 'teething' process, the remaining participants were interviewed on one occasion only. They were then sent the ensuing transcripts and had the opportunity to respond to and expand on these via face to face, telephone or e-mail conversations.

Data Collection and Analysis

It has been observed that 'Data analysis is difficult to articulate because we are directly confronted with the subjective, interpretive nature of what we do - interpreting a respondent's words in one way when they could be interpreted in a

⁵¹ For an overview of participant's ministry involvement see Appendix 7.

⁵² For a sample of the method of transcription used see Appendix 8.

multitude of ways' (Ribbens and Edwards, 1988:122). Therefore the controlling factor which shaped my initial approach to the coding task was the desire to identify the features of dissonance my research participants themselves considered important as they tried to understand and address this phenomenon. My main goal was to record faithfully the rich complexity as well as the inherent messiness of women's spiritual experience, resisting the temptation to categorise them in terms of existing frameworks or new categories of my own. The coding practice which I employed reflects this aim. As far as possible, I attempted to code - that is categorise in order to identify - interview transcripts using the categories of interviewees' own speech thus honouring the words, metaphors and frameworks they themselves had used to describe their experience.

Before analysing the transcripts, I reviewed the initial notes I had made in my research journal immediately following each interview. In those documents I recorded the recurring themes, images, metaphors and models of growth, tensions, crises, gaps, inconsistencies and questions which struck me during each interview. I noted the moments of tension or strong emotion which had occurred during interviews as well as the varieties of silence⁵³ and kinds of laughter which had taken place.⁵⁴ After reading these reflections I read and re-read the research interview transcripts, looking for meanings which lay beneath the surface as well as those in plain view. Throughout this process I tried to hold the 'plain meaning of the text' in balance with a strong hermeneutic of suspicion, given the fact that women might be normalising, projecting or caricaturing reality in their narratives as a strategy for coping with any traumatic or abusive experience. As Anderson and Foley suggest, 'we use stories to reveal ourselves or to conceal ourselves from others....each story is not so much an exercise in objectivity or a reporting of events as it is an interpretation of them' (2001:4). Many women themselves, on receipt of their transcripts, acknowledged the extent to which their interview had recorded a particular 'moment' in their spiritual experience, one from which they had subsequently moved on. This observation alone

⁵³ On the categorisation of silences as awkward, reflective or generative see MacKinlay, 2001.

⁵⁴ Laughter frequently indicated the presence or release of emotional tension, occasionally masking the presence of more disturbing emotions. For a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between laughter and spirituality; its release as the route to an altered perspective as well as a defence mechanism and a key indicator of cognitive dissonance see MacKinlay, 2001:35ff.

highlights the metamorphosing nature of women's spiritual lives as well as the extent to which the experience of being heard had, in some cases, helped women to move on.

Each transcript was slowly analysed with the help of NVivo software,⁵⁵ using the features of that package at a basic level to identify and order the material in preparation for analysis. The aim of this coding procedure was to *retain* rather than *reduce* the information generated by the enquiry, providing a flexible framework within which to organise the data from the bottom up while identifying emerging themes and patterns (Richards, 2005).⁵⁶ Due to the overwhelming volume of rich data which I amassed I concentrated primarily on theme rather than form in my coding and analysis.⁵⁷ I used a 'voice-centred' relational method of data analysis, similar to that of Carol Gilligan (1996), which explores narratives not only in terms of their conceptual context but participants' relationship to the people around them and the broader social, structural and cultural contexts in which they live.⁵⁸ I was particularly interested in women's identification of the significant events, turning points or crises in their faith journey; their ways of imaging or understanding the process of spiritual maturation; the key people and organisations as well as the emerging questions which featured in their growth; the images and metaphors they used to describe their relationship to God; the presence and significance of 'eureka' moments of revelation or illumination; the emotions associated with tensions in their relationship to the church or God, as well as the presence of paradox and contradiction.

The process of reading and re-reading the data allowed its questions and concerns to inform my critique of the academic literature in the field, thus producing a range of themes which formed the main focus of my study: the fruit of which is explored in parts one and two. I classified the basic demographics of participants under the headings of family history, church history, para-church involvement and landmarks of faith. Further groupings of these findings led me to form an overview of participants'

⁵⁵ This is a grounded theory tool with the strengths and limitations this approach to research contains.

⁵⁶ I used Richards' categories of coding: 1) descriptive: storing information about the cases being studied; 2) topic: labelling text according to its subject matter and 3) analytical: discerning the *meaning* which lies behind the surface content of a text segment (Richards, 2005).

⁵⁷ For an overview of the main project initial coding see Appendix 9.

⁵⁸ Coding is thus described by Ribbens and Edwards as 'multiple readings of transcripts in order to elicit events, protagonists, subplots, recurrent images, words, metaphors and contradictions, cultural contexts and social structures (1988).

growth, noting the significant features of childhood spirituality, the influence of parental and church spirituality on women's models and expectation of growth, and the nature of their maturing understanding of God. Finally, in order to facilitate a broad analysis of this phenomenon, I categorised women's dissonance in terms of their perception of (a) *problems*: the factors participants' felt were hindering them in their development and (b) *solutions*: the ways women were dealing with these apparent 'barriers' to their growth.⁵⁹

As a means of representing the *complexity* and *diversity* of the data collected in this project I explored the features of women's spiritual experience in three seasons of their lives. The three chapters which constitute part two of this thesis are thus entitled: '*Where have they come from?*' - describing the factors women perceived had shaped their spiritual development in the past; '*Where are they now?*' - reviewing the nature and implications of the 'spiritual impasse' these women are experiencing in the present; and '*Where are they going?*' - assessing the means by which these women are attempting to move forward in their spiritual journeys and the resources they are drawing upon to give voice to their experience and process its implications.

The Pursuit of Clarity: Finding Patterns and Reforming Community

There are inherent difficulties in drawing generalisations from any research, given the specificity of context which is a characteristic of all qualitative research (Mason, 2002:199). The fact that women do not share 'one single, un-seamed reality' (Stanley and Wise in Letherby, 2003:45) highlights the danger of normalising findings in the form of models which inadequately account for the *diversity* of human experience, creating yet more 'mute zones'⁶⁰ which silence and marginalise others.

My decision to study a phenomenon which is not perceived as the norm in the evangelical community theoretically creates problems for transferability. As my approach is deliberately not a comparative one, in common with Nicola Slee's study of women's development, its findings can only be hypothesised to be distinctive of *some* women and would require further testing among men to ascertain the extent of

⁵⁹ For a sample of the three-fold summary I produced for each participant's transcript, outlining the themes, patterns, insights and questions raised see Appendix 10.

⁶⁰ For a definition of 'mute zones' see p.11.

such experiences as a widespread Christian phenomenon (Slee, 2004:4). While this research constitutes what Baillie describes as a ‘partial portrait’⁶¹ it is nevertheless an important one. In a phenomenon such as this, the consequences of silence far outweigh the risks of speech. As Judith Butler suggests, ‘if feminism loses its knowing subject it loses, together with that subject, its emancipatory potential’. Indeed, she asserts, ‘if we cannot speak of them and for them with authority it will be almost impossible to bring about societal change’ (Butler in Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2000:209).

The feminist movement, Isherwood suggests, envisages a transformation which involves ‘not just a change in action but in attitude....a metanoia...[that is a movement] from dualism to relationality, from separation to mutuality. These changes cannot be legislated they have to come from the heart’ (Isherwood, 1993:11). My own research intends to function as a catalyst for this kind of *metanoia* in three important respects. Firstly, it seeks to *reverse the silence* of women and men experiencing this phenomenon in the evangelical community, thus creating a ‘transformative resonance’ (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006:47) and providing a provisional framework within which evangelicals might more openly articulate and engage with spiritual dissonance in its variety of forms. Secondly, it seeks to be *emancipatory* for women in their relationship with God, providing ways for them to express and engage with the experience of impasse, abandonment or silence frequently associated with dissonance in one’s relationship with God. By such means I hope to fulfil the goal of pastoral theology not merely to seek knowledge for its own sake, but to increase our knowledge, understanding and loving engagement with God (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006). Thirdly, and finally, it seeks to enable personal and communal *phronesis*,⁶² thus acknowledging and identifying the ways in which the operation of power in the social as well as theological frameworks and structures of the evangelical tradition functions with the effect of restricting some women in their spiritual growth.

⁶¹ For a situated analysis of the implications of a partial portrait and the suspicion of totalising theories within feminism see Baillie, 2002.

⁶² Phronesis is the practical wisdom which combines theory and practice in the praxis of individuals and communities (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006).

The Projected Value of this Research

I trust that this project will contribute to the field of faith development theory and the self-awareness of the evangelical community by giving voice to experiences currently shrouded in silence and thus neither acknowledged, nor addressed as an issue of urgent pastoral attention. It seeks to clarify the reasons for women's reluctance to speak in public about this experience, highlighting not only the detrimental effect which this has on women's spiritual health, but also the features of congregational life which aggravate rather than alleviate this situation. It highlights the importance of valuing women's preference for concrete, narrative, conversational and metaphorical ways of talking about their faith, thus identifying the ways in which these might contribute towards a more positive resolution of their spiritual dissonance than is presently the case. Finally, this research aims to redress the lack of acknowledgement in faith development theory in general, and the evangelical community in particular, of the extent to which a believer's way of relating to God may change in the course of a lifetime.

Chapter 2

The Nature of Christian Spirituality and the Contours of Christian Growth

Introduction

This chapter reviews the contribution of contemporary scholarship to our understanding of the way human beings' ways of making meaning and relating to the transcendent may change as a person matures. Firstly, following a brief exploration of the origins and contemporary use of the term 'spirituality' it describes the historic Christian community's developing understanding of the nature of spiritual growth, identifying the main metaphors and models used to portray and promote spiritual health. Secondly, it assesses the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary faith development theory's contribution to our understanding of the spiritual development of women, focusing primarily on the work of James W. Fowler. Thirdly, it highlights the inadequacy of traditional heuristic models of spiritual growth to describe and interpret women's faith experience, reviewing feminist and other alternative models of growth and clarifying the insights these bring to our understanding of the nature and role of spiritual dissonance in adult discipleship.¹

An Epistemological Journey

The necessity of establishing a working definition of 'spirituality' for the purposes of this research was an essential focus in the early days of my research not only to clarify the contemporary meaning of the term but also to understand the reason for the anxiety it produced in many of my research participants. While several of them used the word naturally if imprecisely in their narratives as a 'catch-all' term to describe the general sphere of their Christian lives, their religious practices or dimensions of their faith which they struggled to express in words, I exercised extreme caution in my own use of the term.

There is considerable confusion, in religious and secular circles, regarding the nature of human spirituality in general and of Christian spirituality in particular. The word 'spirituality' as it is generally used today is frequently nebulous and ill-defined. My own research participants linked the anxiety they associate with the term with the

¹ My use of the term 'discipleship' to describe women's developing experience of faith highlights the holistic, communal nature of growth in the ecclesial community where Christians function as learners and teachers within a web of discipling relationships.

disdain in which it is held in some evangelical circles: fearing the ‘smorgasbord’ of spirituality described by one commentator as, ‘a spirituality for the curious affluent, a leisure activity for the bored ... [reflecting] a society without roots in any particular understanding of philosophy or life, prayer or God’ (Runcorn, 2000:1). Runcorn somewhat wryly suggests, ‘the word [spirituality] needs a health warning on it. It is too easily narrowed down to mean the bit of us that prays, goes to church or enjoys scented candles’ (Runcorn, 2000:3).

Despite the historical Christian usage of the term explored below, spirituality is an ‘ambiguous and multivalent’ term (Shults and Sandage, 2006:15) often used to describe ‘the deepest values of people professing no coherent religious belief system’ (Sheldrake, 1998:56). Holt describes spirituality as a ‘trans-religious’ word – not tied to a single faith. He identifies three aspects of its meaning: firstly, a *dimension of the way a human being is* and relates to the transcendent, ‘[the] sum of forces, influences, beliefs, disciplines, conscious or unconscious, which posses us, determine our motives and behaviour and shape our personalities’;² secondly, a *type or style* of relating to God or the world however we conceive that to be and, thirdly, the *religious practices and techniques* which sustain and develop the spiritual life (Holt, 2005:3).

Spirituality, as it is conceived in each of these dimensions, rather than being considered a static state, is frequently regarded as an unfolding aspect of the human being’s developmental progress towards relational maturity. Ironically, spirituality is often defined as a *corollary* to institutional religion. While recent research in the UK has shown that spirituality is positively associated with love, inspiration, wholeness and mystery, religion by comparison is associated with buildings, sacred texts, rites of passage, boredom, narrow-mindedness, fanaticism, bigotry and persecution (Hay, 2006, Winter et al., 1994). Despite that fact spirituality, Wakefield suggests, is the ‘umbrella term under which many diverse features of religious experience [attempt to] deliver us from the frustration of the intellectual quest [in which] we find no end in wandering mazes lost’ (Wakefield, 2001:1). Spirituality thus, in its plethora of meanings, itself epitomises the tensions involved in the human search for meaning.

² Quoted in Wakefield, 2001:1.

The Origins of Christian Spirituality

The term 'spirituality' is not mentioned in the bible. While the Hebrew concept of 'spirit' encompasses 'the human capacity for participation in and responsiveness to the essential dynamics of the transcendent' (MacKinlay, 2001:48), the bible also speaks of the 'Spirit' or the 'spiritual' as pertaining to the person and work of the Holy Spirit within the believer and in the world as one who convicts, illumines and guides human beings.³ The historical divorce of spirituality from theology has in many ways contributed to the unhealthy tendency to divide that which should be inextricably intertwined in our knowledge of God. Craig Gardiner highlights the significance of this divide and its implications for our understanding and practice of Christian discipleship when he observes: 'Jesuit missionary expansion marked the beginning of a tendency to see mission as an outward journey into the world' while the inner journey of soul 'towards' God became 'somewhat erroneously referred to as 'spirituality'' representing an essentially damaging, dualistic separation of the 'inner' and 'outer' life (Gardiner, 2002: 172). Indeed the perceived disassociation of spirituality from the more substantially regarded academic discipline of theology has in many ways contributed to its negative regard.

The word 'spirituality' as we are familiar with it in contemporary usage was translated in the early twentieth century from French Catholic texts associated with mystical or ascetical devotion. It was originally used in the late seventeenth century as a term of reproach against Quietist writers such as Madame Guyon⁴ whose neo-platonic understanding of the spiritual life emphasised mystical interiority at the expense of doctrinal and social transformation (McGrath, 93:128). By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it became current as a way of describing prayerful piety and was adopted in the term 'spiritual theology' as a way of uniting the often opposed dimensions of ascetic and mystical theology (Collins, 2000:230). The first use of the term in English was to distinguish the clergy from the laity and also as a means of referring to things 'of the spirit' as opposed to 'the flesh'. The use of the term to refer to devotion or piety came through later Catholic writings (Jones, 1996: xxiv-xxvi; Sheldrake, 1995:42-4). Academically, spirituality has a variety of meanings within

³ Jn.16:5-15; Rom.12:1; 1 Cor.14:1.

⁴ See Guyon, 1975 on the attainment of perfection through union with Christ.

interdisciplinary and theological reflection. It ‘investigates the lived experience of Christian faith often described as the ‘spiritual life’... in their individual and corporate actualizations’ (Holder, 2005:16). The study of human as opposed to Christian spirituality, however, is not restricted to theological spheres. It is also, increasingly, an area of empirical as well as philosophical reflection.

The Concept of Universal Human Spirituality

The study of human spirituality has been greatly expanded by the work of scholars such as James Fowler and David Hay who posit the existence of a universal human spirituality: a concept which has broadened my own understanding of the relevance of the term in a variety of academic settings. Hay, a specialist in child spiritual development, following the zoologist Alister Hardy⁵ defines spirituality as an awareness of the presence of God which is biologically natural to human beings. Rebecca Nye, Hay’s research associate, describes the most fundamental feature of this spirituality as ‘relational consciousness’⁶: that is the human being’s sense of being aware of themselves as a subject and their multiple relations with self, others, the world and God. This concept has become central in my own understanding of the essentially relational character of women’s ways of knowing and developing. While Hay, in more recent research, argues for a physiological root to this propensity, personal spiritual experience, he suggests, is mediated through the social institutions of culture which provide the symbolic and linguistic tools to interpret and express this awareness (Hay, 2006:20, 22-3). Hay’s understanding of spirituality as rooted in a universal biological and psychological reality is critiqued by those who fear that the subordination of content to structure in contemporary spirituality confirms it as mere ‘practical Unitarianism’ attractive to those who are happy with a fairly undefined God’ (Sheldrake, 1998:4). Despite these reservations, Sheldrake himself admits the necessity of such broader definition of spirituality as a means of facilitating inter-faith and inter-disciplinary dialogue (Sheldrake, 1998:34).

⁵ Hardy suggested, contrary to William James and Rudolf Otto, that spiritual awareness, when not suppressed, is commonplace and not confined to rare ecstatic experiences (Hay, 2002: 174).

⁶ On ‘holistic relationality’ as the core of women’s spirituality see Anderson, Hopkins and Devor in Slee, 2004:35.

For the purpose of this thesis, and in view of the above, I have chosen to use the term ‘human spirituality’ to describe the psychological mechanisms by which human beings attempt to make sense of life. Concerned specifically with questions of identity, significance and purpose, this mindset sources the beliefs and practices which influence human behaviour, lifestyle and morality. Christian Spirituality derives its characteristics from and is bound by specific creedal beliefs regarding the answers to the questions posed by human spirituality. It is, firstly, *Trinitarian*: centred upon the concept of a personal Triune God. Christian spirituality, Sheldrake suggests, ‘is the whole of human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and within the community of believers’ (Sheldrake, 1998:35). It is, secondly, *Incarnational*: rooted in God’s indwelling of the regenerate human being by the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. It is, thirdly, fundamentally *Ecclesial*: ‘God’s Trinitarian life lived out within a community of believers’ (Sheldrake, 1998:61) and therefore essentially a corporate rather than an individual phenomenon. Christian Spirituality is thus inextricably bound to a particular theological understanding of the human relationship to the divine, the core of which involves a revolutionary regenerative change in *being* as opposed to an exchange of conceptual *content* at the point of conversion or metanoia.⁷ As Diogenes Allen has said, highlighting the crucial, long term, transformational process in which regenerate believers are involved, ‘From the beginning it has been taught that, with God’s help, conversion is followed by the effort to overcome the damage done to our human nature by sin and our own previous behaviour and attitudes...the long process of learning to control the destructive tendencies of our personality’ (Allen, 1997:8).

Metaphors and Models: Triangulation Points in the Life of Faith

It has been rightly noted that Christian spirituality is not a ‘single trans-cultural phenomenon, rather it is rooted in experiences of God that are framed by the always specific and therefore contingent histories of individuals and communities’ (Sheldrake, 1998:36). Women’s ways of knowing God today, consequently, are

⁷ Metanoia represents a two-fold God-initiated transformation which immediately effects justification (the restoration of the Christian’s moral status before God through union with Christ) and initiates the process of sanctification (the progressive transformation of fallen ways of relating to God, the self and the other through the indwelling Spirit) (2 Cor.5:17; Rom.6:5-13).

shaped not only by their own contextual experience but also by the metaphors and models of the spiritual life passed down to them from former generations. Given my interest in the source and influence of the heuristic models and interpretive strategies contemporary Scottish women use to orient themselves in the life of faith and interpret their religious experience, the following historical survey establishes a rudimentary framework within which the continuity or discontinuity of those models and strategies might be established.

Biblical Imagery: Pictures of Growth

‘Metaphor, analogy and image are amongst the most basic linguistic tools by which human beings seek to make meaning out of experience’ (Slee, 2004:66). The inability of metaphor to describe reality as it really is restrains as well as empowers human interpretation of revelation and experience (see Moran in Fowler, 1992:155). While metaphors are hermeneutically ambivalent tools of reflection, to be interpreted with great care, the subtle balance between their powers of distortion and disclosure mirrors the reality of human fallibility as we attempt to articulate transcendent experience.

The metaphors the early Christian community used to describe initiation into the life of faith encompassed diverse images of rescue,⁸ redemption⁹ and rebirth,¹⁰ forging ‘a disruption of thought and speech’ characteristic of the power of metaphor to ‘shatter not only the previous structure of our language, but also previous structures of what we call ‘reality’ (Ricouer in Graham et al., 2005:64). Biblical metaphors for the maturing life of faith not only highlight the disciplined nature of the training involved in intentional discipleship,¹¹ they also allude to the emergent, complex and frequently messy process of organic growth. Indeed, the apostle Paul describes himself as a pregnant woman birthing and nurturing his children in the faith.¹² Such biological metaphors of birth and nurture metaphorically link spiritual maturation to human

⁸ Gal.1:4; Col.1:13; 1 Th.1:10.

⁹ Gal.3:13; Col.1:14; 1 Pet.1:18.

¹⁰ Jn.1:13, 3:7; 1 Pet.1:3, 23; for a more detailed overview of the following metaphors see Hoh, 2005:9.

¹¹ Ac.20:24; Php.3:13-14; 2 Tim.4:7-8; Php.2:25; 1 Cor.9:27; 2 Tim.2:4

¹² Gal.4:19.

development,¹³ while agricultural metaphors of germination and growth¹⁴ speak not only of the fecundity of God's ecclesial life on earth but also admit the frustration of developmental retardation¹⁵ and distortion.¹⁶

Metaphors of pilgrimage and ascent,¹⁷ walking,¹⁸ journeying¹⁹ and travelling home, particularly to Zion and the Promised Land, abound in biblical literature. While metaphors of the Christian life as adventure, battle and conquest focus specifically on the positive pursuit of a destination or cause as an integral part of Christian spirituality, the reality of Exodus wandering and feelings of spiritual abandonment which feature in many contemporary women's accounts of faith,²⁰ are recorded as an integral part of the historical experience of the people of God.²¹

Metaphors and Maps in the Emerging Traditions

As the early church expanded and matured, it began to produce texts designed to encourage and orient Christians in their spiritual development. As interest in the interior life²² developed, it became as important to discourage unhealthy approaches to ascetic, contemplative spirituality as to nurture maturing faith. Spiritual development was conceived predominantly in terms of a journey or ascent. Bonaventure (1217–74), perhaps the most famous pioneer of the 'journey of the soul into God', described a Threefold Way of purgation, illumination and perfection,²³ highlighting the particular dimensions of dissonance which are a natural consequence of the believer's battle to overcome sin and love one's neighbour as oneself.

¹³ 1 Pet.1:22-2:3.

¹⁴ Col.1:6-12

¹⁵ Heb.5:12-14.

¹⁶ Jn.15:5-8.

¹⁷ Ps.84:5; Ps.24:3.

¹⁸ Deut.30:15-16; 1 Sam.8:3; Ps.23:4; Jer.6:16; Jn.8:12, 12:35; 1Jn.2:6.

¹⁹ Num.33:2; Dt.1:33, 2:7; Jos.24:17.

²⁰ Slee, 2004:81-107; see also Ruether, 1985 and Winter et al., 1994.

²¹ Num.32:13; 2 Sam.15:20; Ps107:40; Zec.10:2; Jdg.6:13; Is.54:7; Mt.27:46 (Samra, 2003:226).

²² This term describes a form of contemplative spirituality which focused on the interior dimensions of union with Christ and the transformation of affections and actions (Collins, 2000:238).

²³ The Threefold Way consisted of the *Active life* or 'Praktike' involving repentance/conversion, the redirection of passions/emotions and cultivation of the love of neighbour and the *Contemplative life* or 'Theoretike' consisting of two elements, the 'Physike' - the indirect contemplation of God through scripture, human nature and the physical world and 'Theoria' (also known as 'Mystical Theology') - direct or 'infused' contemplation of God through reflection on the doctrine, liturgy and the life of the community of faith (Sheldrake, 1998:36).

Augustine and later St. John of the Cross thus described maturing faith as a ‘journey of inwardness’ as they came to know themselves and their God more intimately through this process. St. John’s *Dark Night of the Soul* was one of the first texts to locate the experience of spiritual darkness in the healthy context of the believer’s increasingly intimate union with God.²⁴ Teresa of Avila’s unusual depiction of the spiritual life of prayer as a cyclical journey of penetration to the heart of an ‘interior castle’ where God dwells at the core of the believer represented an intriguing alternative to the traditional, linear model common in her time. Teresa’s heuristic model, in common with the imagery preferred by contemporary women, proposed a highly *relational* metaphor of growth, which she describes as frequently erratic in nature: moving back and forth between levels of varying intimacy in its pursuit of unbroken union with God. Using an alternative metaphor for the life of prayer as changing methods of divine *irrigation*, she highlights the reality of immobility, aridity, despair, and even divine abandonment in the context of *maturing* rather than defective prayer thus explicitly encouraging women religious to view such experiences as a reforming dimension of the process of spiritual growth rather than a source of shame.²⁵

The ancient image of a ladder was commonly used to represent progress in a believer’s union with God, so much so that, by end of the twelfth century, the Carthusian Guigo II had turned the practice of ‘Lectio Divina’²⁶ into a structured, four-stage analysis of the spiritual life. ‘*The Ladder*’ thus not only detailed consecutive and distinct practices of reading and prayer but also graded them from ‘beginners’ to ‘elect’ (Sheldrake, 1998:42). The growing practice of methodological prayer from the thirteenth century onwards resulted in the emergence of systemic, cumulative, hierarchical models of spiritual development and devotion. Spirituality itself, whilst becoming increasingly associated with particular practices aimed at cultivating the interior life became increasingly dissociated from theology.²⁷ It thus

²⁴ St. John uses his ‘Night of the Senses’ to metaphorically describe God’s inaccessibility to the believer through formerly satisfying spiritual practices of bible reading, worship and prayer which often, he suggests, precedes a deeper intimacy with God (Holder, 2005:215; Jones, 1986:159-84).

²⁵ Cohen, J.M. (trans.), 1957, *The Life of St. Teresa of Avila by Herself*, London: Penguin, Ch.11-21.

²⁶ Lectio Divina is a form of contemplative reading aimed at facilitating the believer’s dialogue with God in contrast to a more rational, analytical approach to exploring biblical texts.

²⁷ On the impact of the historic division between love and knowledge see Sheldrake, 1998, McIntosh, 1999 and Gardiner, 2002.

increasingly moved to the margins of theology and culture, developing its own specialised language, frequently viewed with suspicion by those who preferred to describe faith in terms of propositional truth (Sheldrake, 1998:43). This, Gardiner observes, shaped spirituality into ‘an increasingly interiorised, individualised, privatised commodity’ confined to the individual’s mystical union with God (Gardiner, 2002).

Classical models of faith as a spiritual ‘journey’ were the product of their own cultural context, reflecting the neo-platonic dualism of their time. Development conceived as discrete, linear, sequential ‘stages of ascent’, moving deliberately away from ‘the flesh’ towards a more rational, disembodied spirituality²⁸ exacerbated by the cultural polarisation of ‘active’ and ‘contemplative’ forms of spirituality,²⁹ created a false elite within the Christian community which has left its legacy in the church today (Allen 1997:10). Potentially systemic approaches to the spiritual life were viewed with suspicion by Protestants at the time of the Reformation as reflecting models of ‘self-sanctification’ to which they were theologically and morally averse (Sheldrake, 1998:46). Catholic spiritual writings at that time, therefore, were maligned for their evolutionary rather than transformational approach to the spiritual life, a distinction which reflected their correspondingly different ontology of the human soul. In view of these tensions, following Ward (2005) and Williams (1979), I have chosen to use the term spiritual ‘transformation’ rather than ‘spiritual formation’ to emphasise the pivotal role of divine intervention as well as human effort in the spiritual development process.³⁰

Reformation piety, in response to the concerns above, was shaped by ‘divine monergism’, that is the understanding that God alone initiates and accomplishes everything in the work of salvation. This understanding crucially shaped the way in which Protestant authors subsequently pictured the life of faith. While perpetuating journeying metaphors, allegorical works such as Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the

²⁸ The reluctance to engage with sexuality and embodiment in theology in general and church life in particular is an issue widely discussed in feminist circles - see Isherwood (1998); Prokes (1996) and Althaus-Reid (2004).

²⁹ See Shults and Sandage, 2006:20-35; Sheldrake, 1998:188-189, Turner 1995.

³⁰ My adoption of the term ‘transformation’ does not intend to negate the vital role of ‘formation’ in Christian growth but, following Grannell (1985) seeks to acknowledge the paradoxical relation which exists between the two.

contemporary *Hinds Feet on High Places*³¹ often deliberately reversed the dynamic of the Three-fold Way: describing salvation in terms of God's *descent*³² to seek lost people rather than their *ascent* towards the divine light (Sheldrake, 1998:46). What is of particular interest in the aforementioned texts is their realistic portrayal of the perplexing reality of the journey of faith, highlighting what has been described as 'the drama of negotiations with a God who in turn comforts and withdraws' and the 'dialectic of assurance and desperation' which perforates the journey (Graham, 2005:59-60). The presence and absence of God, the presence and absence of hope and the deep questioning at the heart of human existence have thus informed faith journeys for generations. The next section of this chapter describes and critiques one contemporary scholarly attempt to provide a heuristic model to account for the ways in which human beings interpret their experience of life in diverse and evolving ways in the course of a human lifespan.

Faith Development Theory and the Adult Faith Journey: The Birth of a New Language

Rowan Williams has said that 'Christian faith has its beginnings in an experience of profound contradictoriness, an experience which so questioned the religious categories of its time that the resulting organization of religious language was a centuries long task...a task which every generation has to undertake again' (Williams, 2002:1). If it is indeed true that human generations cyclically face the task of re-contextualising the human experience of 'profound contradictoriness', James Fowler might be described as the first native speaker of an albeit imperfect language which located key aspects of the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance in the context of healthy cognitive faith development, rather than its demise. The centrality of the critique of Fowler in feminist models of women's spiritual growth; together with the potential of his model to expand my own understanding of the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance, has led me to use his model and its feminist alternatives as key dialogue partners in this enquiry.

³¹ Hurnard, 1992.

³² Biblical precedence for this divine condescension can be found in Ps.18; Eze.34; Lk.15.

Fowler has been described as bringing a pioneering constructive-developmental perspective³³ to our understanding of spiritual growth (Parks, 2000:44). His heuristic model of 'Stages of Faith' integrates the features of several other developmental models namely Piaget's four stage genetic epistemology,³⁴ Erikson's bi-polar, psychosocial, eight stage model of personality and development³⁵ and Kohlberg's moral development theory.³⁶ Instead of analysing *what* people believed, Fowler's model attempted to describe *how* people held those beliefs and the ways in which those operational strategies changed developmentally through the human life cycle. His work thus represented 'a move away from the analysis of the content of religious concepts towards an analysis of the activity and processes of thinking itself' (Fowler, 1992:132). Fowler's definition of faith thus deliberately separated the *content* of faith (i.e. its beliefs and values) from the psychological factors facilitating the *operation* of that faith within the personality (i.e. the cognitive, affective and social dimensions of interpreting meaning) which change through the natural process of human development, (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992).³⁷

'Faith' Fowler suggests, 'is that knowing or construing by which persons or communities recognise themselves as related to the ultimate conditions of their existence...it fixes on the relatedness of a person or community to power(s), boundaries (such as death or finitude), and source(s) of being, value and meaning which impinge on life in a manner not subject to personal control. In theological language: faith is the knowing or construing by which persons apprehend themselves as related to the Transcendent' (Astley, 1992: 4).³⁸ While some are happy to use the

³³ Structural Stage Theory is one among many developmental theories including Lifespan Theory - emphasising the cultural/social shaping of developmental crises, Relational Psychodynamic Theory - highlighting the role of relationship in identity formation and Dialectical theories - which address the way power relationships shape epistemological development (Slee, 2004:17-27).

³⁴ Piaget describes 4 stages of cognitive development: pre-conceptual, intuitive, concrete-operational and formal-operational which are held to be invariant and hierarchical.

³⁵ Erikson's stages describe dimensions of relating that are variously resolved as part of the developmental task and which determine progress to the next stage of development. They are 1) trust vs. mistrust; 2) autonomy vs. shame; 3) initiative vs. guilt; 4) industry vs. inferiority; 5) identity vs. role diffusion; 6) intimacy vs. isolation; 7) generativity vs. stagnation; 8) ego integrity vs. despair.

³⁶ Kohlberg constructed a six-type schema to describe the development of moral reasoning: 1) punishment and obedience, 2) instrumental-relativist, 3) interpersonal concordance, 4) law and order, 5) social-contract and 6) universal-ethical principle (Moroney, 2006: 361-2).

³⁷ It is important to acknowledge that Fowler, following Wilfred Canwell Smith, locates the cognitive operations of faith in the context of 'a commitment of trust and loyalty' to the transcendent thus acknowledging the relational dimensions of this process (1995:11).

³⁸ See also Stokes, 1982 and Hart, 2003:8.

word ‘faith’ as a verb rather than a noun in the way Fowler describes, others make a distinction between the content and the operation of faith by referring to the latter in terms of the process of ‘faithing’, that is the gradually emerging psychological mechanism by which human beings give structure and form to their ‘spirituality’. Following Slee (2004), Westerhoff (1976) and Loder (1998) I have chosen to adopt this verbal form as a way of distinctively describing the maturing, dynamic, multi-dimensional processes by which women interpret and live out their faith (Slee, 2004:61-2).

In an attempt to illustrate the complex nature of human faithing, Fowler’s model describes the mechanism by which human ‘ways of thinking, forms of authority and patterns of belonging may be recast’ as a person matures (Parks, 2000: xii) reflecting the dynamic, constantly changing nature of human ‘imaginal life’ (Fowler, 1995:34).³⁹ Fowler seeks at each stage of his developmental model to account for evolving forms of *logic* (thinking and reasoning); *perspective taking* (the ability to see another point of view); *moral judgement* (ways of making decisions); *world coherence* (the construction of a coherent world view); *boundaries of social awareness* (ways of relating to those who are different); *symbolic function* (the ability to understand and use symbolism and *locus of authority* (patterns of relating to those in power), (Fowler, 1995). The stages Fowler proposes are as follows (age indicators appear in brackets):

- 0) Primal Faith (1-4)⁴⁰
- 1) Intuitive-Projective Faith (3/4-7/8)⁴¹
- 2) Mythic Literal Faith (6/7-11/12)⁴²
- 3) Synthetic Conventional Faith (11/12-17/18)⁴³

³⁹ For an overview of Fowler’s concept of the ‘imaginal life’ and how the reciprocal relationship between the imaged ultimate environment and everyday life shaped developmental change see Fowler, 1995:24-34.

⁴⁰ A pre-linguistic disposition of trust and loyalty: dependent on healthy relationships with primary caregivers.

⁴¹ This ‘Chaotic’ or ‘Impressionistic’ faith stage is characterised by a fantasy-filled construction of reality where images of God are anthropomorphic, uninhibited by yet undeveloped logical thought.

⁴² At this stage identity is established through the literalistic interpretation and internalisation of the community’s beliefs, moral rules, observances and attitudes. The self is embedded in its needs, wishes and interests.

⁴³ Many adults faith stabilises here – this stage is often described as ‘conforming faith’ due to its dependence upon group approval.

- 4) Individuative-Reflective Faith (from 17 to mid 30's - 40's)⁴⁴
- 5) Conjunctive or Paradoxical-consolodative Faith (rare before mid-life)⁴⁵
- 6) Universalising (very rare if at all)⁴⁶

The Strengths of Fowler's Cognitive Structural Approach

The impact of Fowler's faith development theory in the 1980's was profound in that it described the key characteristics of a variety of developmental faithing 'stages', and the disorienting experience of transition between those stages in a way which resonated with a wide group of people. While, as is demonstrated below, there was widespread criticism of his work, Fowler's heuristic model made three main contributions to our understanding of the human faithing process which are pertinent to this present project.

Firstly, his model provided a provisional language with which to describe frequently institutionally silenced dimensions of the faithing process. While there are inherent problems with the cognitive-structural 'language' Fowler proposed it represented the first step in the process of articulating and critically reflecting upon the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance within the context of the loss and subsequent restoration of equilibrium which characterises cognitive faith stage change. His model thus potentially deepened the dialogical integrity of both intra-faith and inter-faith dialogue, establishing common ground on which wide-ranging engagement with the developmental difficulties of faithing stage change could take place.

Secondly, Fowler's stage theory suggested that change and diversity rather than static uniformity not only characterises *healthy* adult faithing but also present a profound challenge to existing models of adult discipleship and pastoral care which fail to acknowledge or engage with these dimensions of spiritual development. The provision of appropriate support and processing space to help believers engage responsibly with the tendency to question structures of power, styles of leadership and

⁴⁴ Transition to this stage involves demythologizing, critically reflecting upon, re-evaluating and re-internalising personally owned interpretation of beliefs, moral rules, observances and attitudes usually accompanied by the self-conscious construction of a coherent world-view.

⁴⁵ This stage admits and integrates paradoxical tensions inherent in the nature of truth. It seeks to integrate what became fragmented and polarised in stages 3 and 4.

⁴⁶ This is the most obscure of Fowler's stages, involving a de-centring from self in sacrificial love.

theological frameworks during faithing stage change is a vastly overlooked pastoral task which, as my own research demonstrates over twenty years later, remains a source of considerable distress for believers negotiating such thresholds today.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly for this study, Fowler's research identifies cognitive aspects of the 'dis-ease and dis-equilibration' (Fowler, 1996:71) described by my own research participants as a common feature of the disorientation which accompanies human faithing change, as former interpretive frameworks prove inadequate to account for new experience. Fowler explains, 'development results from efforts to restore balance between subject and environment when some factor of maturation or environmental change has disturbed a previous equilibrium. Growth and development in faith also result from life crises, challenges and kinds of disruptions that theologians call revelation. Each of these brings disequilibrium and requires changes in our ways of seeing and being in faith' (Fowler, 1995:100-101). The experience of disequilibrium, Fowler suggests, particularly occurs when adults move between stage three's 'conformist' *Synthetic Conventional* faith and stage four's 'critically responsible' *Individuative-Reflective* faith which, if ever, only occurs in mid-life. Many adult believers, particularly in conservative religious communities, prefer a Synthetic Conventional way of holding their faith, that is, a style of faith which is profoundly shaped by the judgement and expectations of significant others in the faith community. This faith stage typically has its rise and ascendancy in adolescence, but for many adults becomes a permanent place of equilibrium (1995:182). Fowler describes this stage as *synthetic* in that it lacks analysis and *dependent* in that it sees no need to construct its own faith stance, habitually accepting the implicit norms of the faith community without question (MacKinlay, 2001:120). When this way of 'holding' faith becomes inadequate as a means of making sense of lived reality, frequently following periods of disillusionment or critical reflection, it integrates into a new form of knowing in which Individuative-Reflective Faith may emerge as the dominant faithing approach.

This form of faithing, unlike the previous stages, evidences new ways of reflecting upon and engaging with lived human experience. It is characterised, firstly, by a relocation of authority to the integral self rather than the previously unquestioned

external authority;⁴⁷ secondly, by a more dialectical, critically discerning approach to one's own inherited value systems frequently accompanied by an increasing openness to other's world views and opinions and, thirdly, by the ability to engage with the paradoxical nature of truth and selfhood. Fowler's contextualisation of the experience of 'cognitive dissonance'⁴⁸ in the normal processes of psychological transition highlights the indispensable role of doubt and questioning in the negotiation of spiritual developmental change. He identifies the temptation to retreat from the pain of forging new ways of thinking as a major reason the majority of adults retain a former faith stage rather than face the risks of 'forward' movement. Fowler's model thus acknowledges, and provides a provisional framework for articulating and interpreting, the experience of darkness, disorientation and alienation which occasionally characterises some believer's experience of spiritual growth.⁴⁹

The Critical Response

Despite the undoubted insight of Fowler's approach, his heuristic model has drawn widespread criticism for its tendency to both domesticate the reality of growth and deny the active intervention of God or the reality of sin in the spiritual growth process.⁵⁰ Fowler's deliberate polarisation of structure and content to create a scale which operates *across* world views drew a negative response from conservative scholars concerned by his portrayal of orthodox Christian faith as a mechanism for *understanding* human existence rather than a *modification* of that existence itself (Dykstra, 1986:57, Avery, 1990, Osmer, 1990).⁵¹ Fowler's model has been criticised not only for reducing relational interiority to a cognitive system but for his 'unquestioned adoption of the structural-developmental 'logic of development' which

⁴⁷ This 'relocation of authority' is not to be interpreted in terms of usurping, abandoning or supplanting previous sources of authority (although this is clearly a possibility), rather, it marks the beginning of the self's new relationship to authority which involves discrimination rather than unthinking obedience.

⁴⁸ I use this term to describe the cognitive discord, disorientation and alienation experienced when loss of equilibrium causes an established framework of meaning to fall apart.

⁴⁹ The phenomena of doubt, questioning, anger towards God or the loss of the presence of God are a feature of historic Christianity both in biblical (c.f. Elijah, Job, Jeremiah) and classical Christian literature (c.f. *The Dark Night of the Soul*).

⁵⁰ Fowler's model, Loder suggests, 'diminishes recognition of the reality of sin and leads to an understanding of the pattern of grace as a naturalistic, evolutionary process that focuses on the increasing differentiation and reinterpretation of structural competencies' (Astley, 1992: 139). Loder's own model of spiritual transformation describes the emergence of new ways of relating sourced by the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit in human development (Loder, 1998: xii; Ivy, 1999).

⁵¹ On the indispensability of content see Parks, 2000.

places cognitive development not only as a central theme in his theory but also as the motor of religious development '⁵²(Streib, 2001:144; see also Stokes, 1982:18). As Streib suggests, while Fowler's model illuminates formerly obscured elements of maturing adult faith, his framework provides only limited scope for interpreting the broader dimensions of that experience.

As well as the philosophical and theological difficulties cited above, the androcentric bias of both Fowler's methodological approach and his heuristic model,⁵³ feminist scholars suggest, ultimately undermines its adequacy as a tool to articulate and interpret women's developmental journeys. The contextual nature of the language which Fowler created to give voice to faithing change contributes, they suggest, to its 'failure to adequately account for the spiritual growth of women' (Glaz and Stevenson Moessner, 1991:11; see also Slee, 2004:15-16), a criticism which could be applied not only to Fowler's model but also to the historical approaches which have normalised male experience of and approaches to the spiritual life. Slee rightly asserts that rites of passage mostly described by men⁵⁴ cannot be 'applied uncritically to female development...for...they are almost all, to a lesser or greater degree, gender-blind, inattentive to women's experiences and lives' (Slee, 2004:15). Indeed, women's experience has, on occasion, been systematically excluded from the results of academic research as a problematic 'aberration' rather than a complimentary, corrective contribution to research conducted within an androcentric frame of referenced (Slee, 2004:44). These concerns raise huge critical questions for the study of female spiritual growth, highlighting the extent to which previous studies have misunderstood and thus misrepresented women's spirituality. The remainder of this chapter outlines these concerns and reviews the ways in which feminist scholarship attempts to find more adequate perspectives from which to view, interpret and account for the complex nature and rich variety of women's faith experience.

⁵² While Fowler's original model seems to omit God as an active player in development, he later proposes twin trajectories in human and spiritual growth. These are 'nature' – describing the spiritual development which is parallel to cognitive, moral, psychological and ego development and 'grace' – describing growth facilitated by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit (Fowler, 2000:58).

⁵³ The failure of a linear, sequential, invariant, hierarchical model to account for the re-capitulatory contours of women's experience, are explored in detail below.

⁵⁴ That is by Erikson (Psychosocial Development); Piaget (Cognitive Development); Kohlberg (Moral Development) and Fowler (Faith Development).

A Feminist Perspective: Women's Ways of Knowing God

Feminist scholarship has produced a variety of critical appraisals of faith development theory which helpfully inform this present research. These identify a range of concerns and questions which have condensed and sharpened the focus of my enquiry. In this section I review these critical themes and clarify the ways in which they expose the weakness of traditional heuristic models of spiritual growth, paving the way for a brief survey of alternative feminist models.

Androcentricity, Imperialism and the Limitations of a 'Tongue'

The inevitable bias of research conducted predominantly by men using male participants is reflected in the inadequacy of faith development models to account for the wide variety of human Christian experience. Models such as Fowler's which have brought insight and relief to a vast number of believers ironically have the potential to become as much tools of oppression as of liberation within the Christian community. Indeed David Hay (2006) incisively critiques the normalisation of forms of male spirituality which potentially dismiss the different order of spirituality exhibited by children, women and people with special needs.⁵⁵ While Fowler has significantly created a new framework for the articulation and interpretation of spiritual dissonance in the context of faithing change, the cognitive bias in his approach, and the androcentric bias implicit in the heuristic 'language' he uses present significant problems for those who speak a different 'mother tongue'. Robert Kegan comments, 'We had better check whether what may appear to be an 'objective' theory is not in reality a tool of a captive or 'ruling' group (such as white people, men, Westerners) who use the theory to preserve their advantaged position' (Slee, 2004: 16; 44). John Hull suggests therefore that such theories 'must arouse a hermeneutic of suspicion of those who study it with the interests of the powerless in mind' (cited in Fowler, 1992: 219-222).

⁵⁵ Androcentric models such as Fowler's tend to categorise women's faith as immature while normalising white, male, American cultural patterns of development (Slee, 2004:17). Indeed it is suggested that the cognitive structural approach which makes adult faith stages dependent upon abstract thought relegates many adults, especially those who prefer concrete practical over abstract theoretical learning to an adolescent category (Jardine and Viljoen 1992).

The Relational Nature of Women's Spirituality

As outlined in the previous chapter,⁵⁶ Feminist theology is acutely aware of the dangers of attempting to redress the power-imbalance described above by advocating a dualistic, universal male or female spirituality. Feminist scholarship stresses however the vital importance of identifying the unique ways in which women's undervalued approach to knowing the world directly affects their ways of knowing God: a fact which frequently contributes to their sense of alienation within the Christian community.

Connected Knowing and its Implications for Women's Spirituality

On the spectrum of human relating, it has been suggested that more women than men define themselves in terms of their relationships and connections to others (Belenky et al., 1997:8; Slee, 2004:9). Katherine Zappone suggests that for women, in contrast to men, *relationship* rather than *self* is the basic unit of spirituality and the fundamental hermeneutic by which they connect to 'lived' reality (Zappone, 1991:12; Slee, 2004:136). The goal of maturity for women, in contrast to the individuating process natural for men, she suggests, is to establish new kinds of relationship characterised by interdependence (Zappone, 1991:25). Indeed Nicola Slee suggests that, for women, relationality should be defined not as a *phase*, but rather as 'a *fundamental epistemology* which underlies and undergirds the whole of a woman's spiritual journey' (Slee, 2004:160 [italics mine]). Slee's identification of relationality as a fundamental hermeneutic in women's faith development both compliments and reinforces Rebecca Nye's definition of spirituality as 'relational consciousness', a propensity which is often more highly developed in women than in men as a result of the ways in which women are socialised. As Slee confirms, women's epistemological perspectives are not solely the result of the developmental processes. Rather they are influenced by a variety of factors which potentially adversely influence women's personal and spiritual growth (Slee, 2004:25). This fact raises key questions in my own research regarding the extent to which women's extreme experiences of relational dissonance in the congregation, frequently leading to their resistance to

⁵⁶ See pp.14-15.

faithing change due to its relational risks, might be directly related to their habit of defining themselves in terms of their relationships.

Women's tendency to form their identity through *connection* to others rather than through *differentiation* also has profound implications for the way they understand and articulate their knowledge and experience of God. The forms of 'connected knowing' (that is, learning by participation in, and through, dialogue and reflecting) which Belenky and her colleagues describe commonly practiced by women differ considerably from the 'separate knowing' preferred by men (who develop their critical reflective awareness by *separating* themselves from emotional involvement with the knowing). Women's preference for connected knowing however has frequently proved detrimental to their spiritual development. Not only have women been systematically discriminated against by assessment tools which elevate cognitive over affective knowing,⁵⁷ they are also often impeded in their learning due to educational frameworks which reinforce the same unacknowledged bias, a potentially contributing factor to spiritual dissonance which I examine at length in chapter 3.

The Ethic of Care and Developmental Immaturity

The priority that women give to knowing themselves and the world through relationships of care and connection can in some circumstances lead to developmental stagnation rather than growth. Carol Gilligan suggests that women's traditional servant role in many cultures, prioritising the care of others over care for herself, has led many women to attend to the needs and well being of others to the detriment of, or indeed as a substitute for, their own personal growth (Glaz & Stevenson Moessner, 2000:15). Frequently socialised from their early years into an ethic of self-denial, many women, she suggests, have uncritically accepted the call to sacrifice prior to establishing the self, a move which she suggests is as self-destructive as a self-constructive spirituality. Women, her research has shown, often interpret and make decisions in their world based upon an *ethic of care and responsibility* rather than the

⁵⁷ As recently as 2002 James Fowler himself revised stage 4 of his theory to include the concept of 'relational knowing' which, until that time, had been excluded from his model which implicitly elevated separation and autonomy over relationality (Slee, 2004:32).

process of individuation and separation endorsed by stage theory.⁵⁸ While evangelical women sometimes vehemently resist this analysis due to the strong ethic of care and self-sacrifice inherent in an evangelical world view, my research illustrates the extent to which the neglect of self-care may indeed be a key contributing factor to evangelical women's experience of spiritual dissonance.

The Lure of Living Falsely: Women's Ways of Sinning

Marcia Westcott vitally underscores the developmental implications of the darker side of women's ethic of care and responsibility. She suggests that for some women, albeit subconsciously, 'the purpose of such behaviour is to do, care and be for others in order to win approval, help and affection (the psychological equivalent to works righteousness)', she continues, 'dependence masquerades as responsibility for others. Self-deceptive patterns of being...put at risk the possibility of both feminine heroism and conversion: one is tempted to live falsely' (Glaz & Stevenson Moessner, 1991: 53). Shultz and Sandage expose the potentially spiritually and psychologically damaging nature of this apparently benign behaviour when they cite Thomas Merton and Donald Winnicott's understanding of sin as 'a commitment to a false self that masks authentic identity...prioritizing impression management and social face-saving over deeper self-acceptance and authentic relatedness...a selling out on oneself because of the anxiety of social rejection' (Shultz and Sandage, 2006:232). This kind of self-protective behaviour, their research suggests, tends to perpetuate dependent forms of faithing, a thesis which my own research implicitly tests.

The temptation to live falsely as a means of maintaining social approval frequently leads women to wear masks in order to secure acceptance. This frequently habitual tendency, Hess (1996) suggests, not only jeopardises the possibility of true conversion but also demands that we revise traditional understandings of sin which fail to account for women's fallen ways of relating. Hess asserts that pride based anthropologies of human sin, such as that of Reinhold Niebuhr, which represent sin as 'self-assertion, self-centredness, and pride speaks out of and to the experience of powerful men' (Hess, 1996:69). Woman's sin, she suggests, is better described in terms of Susan

⁵⁸ For Gilligan's criticism of Kohlberg for classing women as developmentally immature due to their high moral imperative to care for others see Wolski, 1986:17.

Nelson Dunfee's definition of the 'sin of hiding', evidenced by an often endemic 'lack of self, self-abnegation and irresponsibility' (p.69). This is not to suggest that women are immune from the sins of self-assertion, self-centredness and pride common to all human beings but rather that there is a need to identify the forms of relational sin to which women with a strong ethic of care are prone. Dunfee suggests furthermore that, 'by encouraging woman to confess the wrong sin, and by failing to judge her in her actual sin, Christianity has both added to woman's guilt and failed to call her into her full humanity' (Dunfee in Hess, 1996:69). Stage theory's tendency to elevate self-denial and separation, and conservative Christianity's tendency to collude with rather than expose women's ways of hiding, are in danger of doing precisely that.

The Path to Maturity: A New Way of Travelling

Given the above, one of the essential tasks facing women in their adult discipleship is to re-connect with their true selves rather than perpetuate false ways of being and relating, frequently symbolised in women's narratives by the reference to wearing masks. Indeed, Grey suggests that, rather than stripping away the false self, a woman's experience of the 'via purgativa' often births new forms of identity. Mid life for some women thus frequently constitutes the *beginning* of the search for identity rather than its resolution (Grey, 1991:25). While the developmental task for men may indeed involve 'separation', it appears that women more urgently need to achieve a *new equilibrium*, or re-connection, in their identity between their unacknowledged developmental needs and their primary role as care-givers for others at home or within the wider community.

The Problem of Linearity: From Progress to Process

Women's path to this kind of integrated, responsible, inter-dependent maturity has frequently been hampered by the inadequacy of linear, sequential, hierarchical models of spiritual growth to describe or explain the messy, episodic, re-capitulatory nature of their faith experience during such times of developmental change (Grey 1991:63; Liebert in Stevenson-Moessner, 2000:5). Both traditional Christian and contemporary developmental heuristic models assume that stages of development are *invariant* and *universal* across gender, class and cultural divides (Slee, 2004:16). They thus

frequently fail to make sense of the disorientation, paralysis and apparent *regression* integral to many women's accounts of their experience (Slee 2004:96-8). Indeed, as Kenneth Leech highlights, apparent regression in the spiritual life is almost invariably interpreted as 'descent' and thus a *deviation* from, rather than an essential dimension of, the spiritual transformation process (Leech, 1994:145-6).

In a significant intervention at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Nicola Slee's (2004) exploration of women's faith development in the U.K. represents a unique attempt to redress the imbalance between linear, hierarchical, invariant models of faith development which stress *progress* as normative in spiritual growth, and the messy, episodic, unstructured, apparently *regressive* nature of some women's experience. Slee's approach deliberately resists the temptation to construct a 'domesticating' model of faith. While Fowler's stage model deliberately created distinct, artificially fixed 'categories' of faith which standardised and 'normalised' faithing change, Slee's approach deliberately describes the metaphorical patterning of women's faith *across* the spectrum of Fowlers stages, reflecting the multi-dimensional, re-capitulatory nature of women's faithing styles. Her work thus draws upon the strengths of Fowler's analytical approach whilst creating a more flexible, complimentary framework within which the uniquely blended nature of women's faithing patterns might effectively be described rather than intrinsically distorted or mis-categorised by analysis within a constricting, linear framework. By describing the varied, integrative, interchangeable strategies women use to process and organise their experience of faith, Slee's approach not only honours the diverse dimensions of spiritual dissonance symbolised by women's narratives of paralysis, impasse and regression, it deliberately also explores the means by which women's accounts reflect their ways of negotiating the journey from relational *alienation* (from oneself, others and/or God, frequently common during faithing change) through a variety of *awakenings* (to new faithing approaches) to the re-establishment of new forms of healthy *relationality* (or ways of reconnecting to the self, others and God). My own research approach has been considerably enriched and clarified by Slee's rich, multi-layered accounts of the variety of different *processes* (ways of *articulating* and interpreting spiritual experience) and *patterns* (ways of *negotiating* changing experience) women use to move forward, rather than remain 'stuck', in the faithing process. What is significant in her contribution is not just her demonstration of the

variety of faithing strategies⁵⁹ which women use, but also their practice of *combining* faithing strategies as a major hallmark of the developmental process. Slee's integrative approach has thus significantly informed my own emerging understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of women's tendency to blend faithing strategies as a way of negotiating the disorienting experience of spiritual dissonance.

New Maps and Metaphors: Women's Ways of Imaging Spiritual Growth

Ursula Le Guin has said, 'When we women offer our experience as truth, all maps change. There are new mountains' (Slee, 2004:15). The vast array of provisional maps which feminist reflection has produced in recent years illustrates women's appreciation of the complex nature of their spiritual growth, as well as the impossibility of providing a definitive chart of the spiritual journey. The models and approaches described below reflect some of the tools women are sharing in their attempt to explore and critique the experience of maturing adult discipleship.

Expanding the Boundaries

The attempt to provide a rich alternative to linear, sequential models of faith has led to a plethora of complementary models of growth within feminist developmental theory. Grey explains, 'The feminist journey is as much about diving deep, spiralling, moving inwards, as it is about moving upwards and forward. A movement which seeks to recover and reclaim, must seek alternative symbols and images' (Slee, 2004:38). Feminist attempts to experiment with new ways of imaging the process of growth have primarily sought to define women's experience not in terms of *progress* via a form of 'ascent-through-individuation', but rather as an organic *process* of 'expansion-in-relation' which honours 'women's preferred styles of learning as part of a process that is open to nurture and expansion from outside' (Slee, 2004:169).

⁵⁹ Slee identifies 6 'faithing strategies' commonly used by women which are 1) conversational (making sense of their experience by talking), 2) metaphoric (using symbol to explain what might otherwise appear inchoate or insignificant), 3) narrative (constructing a verbal account which gives shape and meaning to their spiritual experience: this was the primary and fundamental mode for most women), 4) personalised (relationships with exemplars or mentors), 5) conceptual (abstract, conceptual forms of talking about faith: the least preferred among women) and 6) apophatic (the wordless contemplation of a spiritual reality or experience which cannot yet be openly expressed).

Traditional horizontal, diagonal, pyramidal or ladder-like images of passage which endorsed forward and ascending progression as the epitome of authentic spiritual growth have thus been replaced with new heuristic images.

'Leaving' Home: From Brick Walls to a Permeable Membrane

Sharon Parks notes the need, 'not for an alternative to the developmental-journey image but for the recognition of the necessary relationship of the metaphors of home *and* journey, dwelling *and* pilgrimage' at the core of a relational spirituality (Parks in Fowler (ed.), 1992:112). Parks metaphorically compares the emotional dissonance and relational re-orientation involved in the process of leaving home to the relational dissonance believers experience during faithing change. Her reflections have incisively informed my own understanding of the profound dissonance my research participants describe experiencing due to their changing understanding of their relationship to evangelicalism as their spiritual 'home'. Parks explains, 'growth of the self can be understood as transformation of the boundaries that have defined home'. While growth is not necessarily always a matter of actually *leaving* home, Parks describes it as the process of changing our idea of what 'home' symbolises. The change from seeing home as a place beyond which it is inherently unsafe to travel, to envisioning home as a launch pad for new kinds of exploration, symbolises the paradigm shift many of my research participants seem to be experiencing. Parks defines this new sense of home in relational terms as 'a familiar centre surrounded by a permeable membrane that makes it possible both to sustain and enlarge our sense of self and other, self and world' (Parks, 2000:51-2).

While the impetus to journey beyond the security of one's 'home' has historically been described in linear terms, feminist scholars use a variety of linguistic as well as visual models to symbolise growth as a paradoxical union of dwelling and pilgrimage. Several scholars reflect this dimensional, expansive, integrative understanding of development in their preference for the language of *styles* rather than stages of faith as a way of highlighting the complex relational as well as structural elements of faithing change (Chodorow in Parks, 2000; Westerhoff, 1976; Streib, 2001; Hagberg and

Guelich, 2005).⁶⁰ Streib develops this trajectory further by describing the developmental task metaphorically in terms of the *integration of styles* of faith rather than a progression through pre-determined, standardised stages, a model which more adequately describes my own research participants' practice of blending styles of faith appropriate to the vastly different worlds in which they move and roles they have to play in their church and para-church communities. Furthermore Streib's use of this metaphor, highlights the necessity not only of assimilating one's *own* changing faithing styles in the course of the human lifespan; but also appropriately accommodating and adapting to the preferred faithing styles of *others* in the Christian community, so that the body of Christ might function coherently as a whole. Maturity thus, for Streib, is evidenced by a believer's willingness to discern, respect, and adapt to faithing style *differences* within the Christian community in response to the biblical mandate to pursue the love of neighbour as oneself (Streib, 2001).

Feminist scholars have tried to represent the individual and corporate dimensions of the expanding, accommodating faith Streib describes in a variety of ways. Sheehy compares the individual experience of faithing transition to that of a shell-fish shedding its shell.⁶¹ Sharon Parks reflects the ecclesial as well as individual challenge of maturing faith in her metaphorical depiction of growth as *relational expansion* represented by a series of expanding concentric circles (Parks, 2000; Westerhoff, 1976⁶²; Cunningham and Egan, 1996). Shults and Sandage (2006), following their mentor James Loder, use the image of a three-dimensional expanding sphere to represent human growth in terms of *dimensions* rather than stages, where growth represents a liminal movement of spiritual seeking or questioning beyond the believer's 'comfort zone', initiating an increasingly penetrative relationship with the self, others and God.

⁶⁰ The concept of faithing *styles* offers a more flexible way of conceptualising women's *expanding* and *integrative* approaches to negotiating spiritual dissonance and faithing change. Their practice of *blending* faithing styles as a way of negotiating the complex dissonance of spiritual growth is common. There are, however, inherent problems in this approach: a topic I discuss in chapter 4.

⁶¹ Note the similarity between Sheehy's metaphor (quoted in full on p.236) and my participants' personal metaphors of expansive growth, p.238ff.

⁶² While Westerhoff's model based upon the growth rings of a tree reflects Fowler's stages, its core values of *integration* and *expansion* emphasise the importance of increased engagement with that which is different rather than the drive towards individuation or ascension (Westerhoff, 2000:88).

Other heuristic models attempt to represent the multi-dimensional, re-capitulatory, unpredictable nature of maturing faith through different kinds of rising, falling and intertwining movements, as in a revolving wheel (Hagberg & Guelich, 2005),⁶³ a wave (Streib),⁶⁴ a dance (Maria Harris, Chodorow),⁶⁵ a 'controlled fall' (Kegan),⁶⁶ a meticulously interwoven tapestry (Christine Neuger), a spiral (Fowler,⁶⁷ Byrne,⁶⁸ Conn⁶⁹) and the double helix (Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, 2000) symbolic of the varied, often unpredictable reality, of essentially undomesticated spiritual growth. While models and metaphors undoubtedly help give voice to the rich experience of growth, and help orient diverse travellers in unpredictable varied terrain, they are inevitably limited in their ability to normalise or explain disorientation and darkness. Given the prominence of this experience in my research participants' accounts, in the final section of this chapter I explore the ways in which the historic faith community has sought to make sense of these experiences and the ways in which contemporary scholarship illuminates that reality.

Darkness, Paralysis and Apophatic Faithing: Impasse and Alienation

Darkness and spiritual alienation, paralysis and regression have been a recurring feature of historical Christianity, from the recorded experience of biblical protagonists, to the Dark Nights of the Senses and the Spirit described by St. John of

⁶³ This model supports the concept of *blending* as people move freely between faithing styles but have one or two 'home stages' where they spend more time. All 'stages' or 'styles' are soteriologically and relationally equidistant from God and can be blended in a variety of ways.

⁶⁴ Streib's Wave metaphor seeks to address the danger that stage theories create a false sense of control in the midst of disorienting growth, encouraging participants 'bypass the real task' of identifying 'the challenge to change or transform the way we relate to self, God and others' (Bruning in Stokes, 1982:18).

⁶⁵ The dance of self, Chodorow suggests, more suitably describes women's development as it integrates their two great yearnings for differentiation, autonomy and agency – on the one hand - and relation, belonging and communion on the other. (Chodorow in Parks, 2000:49). Harris describes it as, '...a more organic and human series of steps than the ladder and the staircase' as the dance 'can go backward or forward...incorporate one another...involve turn and re-turn...move down as well as up, out as well as in, and be sometimes partnered, sometimes solitary' (Harris 1988 in Slee, 2004:39).

⁶⁶ Robert Kegan likens the spiritual walk to a 'controlled fall', alternating between times of provisional balance and coming unbalanced before finding a recovered balance in a new place. (Fowler, 1988:101)

⁶⁷ While Fowler himself posits a 4-dimensional spiral of growth which integrates expansion and recapitulation in the course of healing and new growth, his systemic, cognitive emphasis fails to adequately acknowledge the unexpected regression as well as forward movement which characterises women's growth, resembling an expanding organic network rather than a linear path (Fowler, 1995:274-6; 288-291).

⁶⁸ Byrne suggests, 'a spiral or circular model is one that keeps going back on itself in order to feed from earlier insights and to deepen them. It sees development not as progress but as process' (1995:66-67)

⁶⁹ Conn compares development to a spiral which charts the human impulse between attachment and individuation, integration and differentiation (Conn, 1986:88-101).

the Cross. These, together with paralysis, impasse and regression frequently feature in contemporary women's accounts of the faithing experience of 'getting stuck in a rut, going nowhere' and occasionally 'feeling trapped in a double life' (Slee, 2004:89-96).

It is, sadly, many women's experience that they are rarely seriously heard when they describe these kinds of phenomena, as Slee reflects, 'whatever its origins, the experiencing of oneself and one's faith as fragmented, disconnected, unreal, paralysed, broken, alienated, abused or even dead, seems to represent a major developmental challenge for women in a patriarchal culture'. She adds that, 'while some of the women [interviewed for her thesis] had resolved the crisis during early or middle adulthood...other women seemed to be locked more or less securely into this developmental cul-de-sac and unable to make their way out of it' (Slee, 2004:106).⁷⁰

Both Slee (2004) and Belenky (1997) directly link women's experience of fragmentation, constriction and paralysis to the nature of women's nurture and socialisation in a patriarchal culture. Indeed, they suggest that, as women become aware of the ways in which patriarchal contexts have distorted their faith lives, new consciousness often demands the re-conceptualisation of past understandings of self, God and the other. Slee suggests that women's growing awareness of the constriction and limitations of their nurturing environment is often a key factor in their transition from dependent to responsible faithing styles: 'moving from a state of dependency, passivity and unknowing to a state of heightened awareness, initiative and empowerment' (Slee, 2004:37). Indeed, the influence which a woman's social, cultural, political and spiritual environment has upon her spiritual development is a key issue in this present enquiry, particularly given that patriarchy in the church is a topic many evangelical women find hard to address as it is rarely openly acknowledged. While the restrictions which an androcentric environment places upon women's learning and relational styles are profound they represent just one of a

⁷⁰ While Slee explicitly connects this phenomenon to the experiencing of living in a patriarchal culture, it is unclear the extent to which women's ability to engage with these difficulties is made more difficult by being placed in a patriarchal environment and/or the extent to which these difficulties are actually sourced by that cultural context itself: a question my own research explores.

variety of sources of the pressure which contribute to the complex phenomenon of spiritual dissonance.⁷¹

Spiritual Impasse and Thresholds of Transformation

Various attempts have been made to understand the change that happens when ‘the stories we are living get stuck’ (Fowler, 1988:105). Fowler himself describes the experience in terms of a ‘symbolic death’; a loss or change of identity equivalent to ‘sensing a stranger dwell within’; the ‘loss of bearings, maps and charts to the extent that even our will feels blocked, unable to chart a forward course’ (Fowler, 1988:92,107). The phenomena of disorientation and disintegration feature in a number of heuristic models where they often mark thresholds of *transformation* rather than *disintegration*. Such thresholds are variously metaphorically described as ‘the void’ (Loder, 1998), ‘THE WALL’[sic] (Hagberg & Guelich, 2005), ‘loss of self’ (Carol Christ, 1995), ‘deep sleep’, (Sue Monk Kidd, 2006), the ‘neutral zone’ (William Bridges, in Fowler, 1988), ‘alienation’ – (Slee, 2004) and ‘shipwreck’ (Parks, 1986). Sharon Parks acknowledges the trauma implicit in developmental crises which cause Christians to question their *identity* and not just their experience as believers, trauma which symbolises not merely the leaving of, but the destruction of, one’s spiritual home. She explains, ‘when we undergo the shipwreck of meaning at the level of faith, we feel threatened at the very core of our existence’ (Parks, 1986:24).

When frameworks of meaning repeatedly collapse in the course of healthy, expanding growth, this often results not simply in immobility and paralysis but in a loss of the sense of the presence and love of God. Recurring disillusionment and questioning, introspection and withdrawal is frequently compounded by repressed anger and frustration towards God and others. Hagberg and Guelich describe this experience in the language of purgation, suggesting that it is in such seasons that false images of God and of the self are exposed ‘as we name and address addictions and wounds on the route to a place of profound healing’ (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:93). It is during

⁷¹ On the influence of women’s inferior social status on the character and meaning of their spiritual journey and their social experience of the developmental process see Zappone, 1991:1; Moltmann-Wendel and Moltmann, 1991:ix; Belenky et al, 1997).

such times that both deconstructive and reconstructive work is required. It would appear, however, from the accounts of women's experience, that neither the church nor our contemporary culture knows how to equip women for this task. As my own research demonstrates, women's disappointment at being offered remedies to *ease* their discomfort rather than help them to *engage* with the learning opportunities such 'growing pains' affords leads to profound frustration. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, many women internalise the blame for their experience. The tendency to divorce one's emotional problems from one's current social, historical and economic contexts (a practice common in many contemporary therapeutic models) has been shown to retard growth (Fischer, 1990:15; Glaz & Stevenson-Moessner, 1992:54; Stokes, 1982:27). The crucial dilemma facing evangelical women in this regard is that the reluctance of the evangelical community to explore the ways in which its subculture may contribute to emotional internalisation merely reinforces the practice.

Frameworks of Understanding

Fowler describes faith stage transition as an experience of disrupted equilibrium (Slee, 2004: 164) frequently characterised by the experience of cognitive dissonance and entry into what he describes as the 'neutral zone' - a cognitive 'holding pattern' which helps the believer endure the gap which often exists between the deconstruction of one faith stage and the emergence of a new one. Women's experience of paralysis, paradox, dividedness and apophatic faithing, however, frequently parallels the passage towards a critically owned faith, but is rarely exclusively accounted for by that transition (Slee, 2001; 2004:164). That many women navigate this passage without the experience of trauma and darkness is testimony to that fact.⁷² The complex relationship which exists between a woman's development and her context frequently potentially masks the multi-dimensional nature of faithing change, often obscured or dangerously over simplified by a singular heuristic approach. As Slee observes, 'developmental models *per se*, and cognitive developmental theories in particular, focus upon progress and movement' to such an extent that they inevitably 'sideline or ignore the reality of paralysis, impasse, lack of movement, even

⁷² It is important to stress that developmental crises frequently occur in the context of what might be described as a 'ground shift' rather than a natural disaster. Some women fear they may not be growing unless they have a 'crisis'. This is clearly not the case.

regression, which [some women] testif[y] to so powerfully' (Slee, 2004:167). The models, inspired by the mystic tradition, which acknowledge the relational as well as cognitive dissonance associated with 'the dark night of the soul', she suggests, are therefore far more helpful.

The Dark Night, Liminal Space and Relational Transformation

The phenomenon of the 'dark night' and the concept of 'liminal space' have more recently been used to relocate the experience of darkness, paralysis and apparent regression in the context of healthy, Christian growth.⁷³ These metaphors potentially provide a framework within which the active role of God the Spirit in the process of spiritual growth is more fully explored.

Constance Fitzgerald importantly insists that, unlike a station on a linear train track, the 'night' is not a singular 'event' through which the believer passes at one point in their lifetime, but rather the symbolic metaphor for 'the affective education carried out by the Holy Spirit in a lifetime'⁷⁴ (Fitzgerald in Conn, 1986:291). Indeed Kenneth Leech says of the dark night, '[it] is not a phase, still less is it a pathological feature of the Christian life: it is a symbol of the entire process of movement towards God. Those who enter the night never leave it, though the night changes' (Leech, 1994:155). Interpretations such as these attempt to redress the essential misunderstanding that, 'one gets through it and moves on to some permanent state of realized union and spiritual ecstasy' (May, 2005:9). Gerald May adds, by way of explanation, 'John himself may be partly responsible for this confusion; some of his commentary is very linear indeed' (May, 2005:9). Hagberg and Guelich, acutely aware of the dangers of misinterpretation, insist that the 'dark night' and their own metaphor for it - 'The Wall' - is not a unique experience, but a place of wrestling where volitional and relational dissonances meet in a head-on collision: 'our will meeting God's will face to face' (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:114, 125; see also May,

⁷³ For an exploration of impasse and paralysis in relation to women's resonance with the concept of 'the dark night of the soul' see Fitzgerald in Conn, 1986:287ff. The phenomenon of the 'dark night' allows for the reality that spiritual darkness can be caused by personal indiscipline and deliberate sin underlying the need for pastoral discernment in identifying the nature of the symptoms experienced.

⁷⁴ Indeed there are *two* 'nights' of different order described by St. John: that of the *senses* and the *spirit* the latter of which has been described as 'the upwelling of the indwelling Spirit, the living water, making more room for herself' (Holder (ed.), 2005:216).

2005). Not only, however, is 'THE WALL',⁷⁵ a place of wrestling, it is also a place of *reconnection* with God.

Fitzgerald describes the transformation involved in what she sees as essentially a purgative, *re-orientation of being* as a 'movement from desire that is possessive, entangled, complex, selfish, and unfree [sic] to a desire that is fulfilled with union with Jesus Christ and others'. In this process, she explains, 'desire is not suppressed or destroyed but gradually transferred, purified, transformed, set on fire', a process by which 'the struggles and ambiguities of human desire' are brought towards 'integration and personal wholeness' (Fitzgerald in Conn, 1986:291). She describes the 'night's' movement from twilight to midnight to dawn in terms of a fundamental change in orientation, symbolising the challenge 'to make the passage from loving and serving and 'being with' the other because of the pleasure and joy; to loving and serving regardless of the cost' (Fitzgerald, 1986:291). It is in the context of this vital re-calibration of human desire and will that Fitzgerald situates the breakdown of divine-human communication as a 'sign of growth or development in our relationship with God', rather than a 'sign of death' (Fitzgerald, 1986:291). This new, re-oriented, apophatic way of being, she suggests, is inherently different from former cataphatic approaches to knowing God: vitally critiquing formerly sufficient but now inadequate images of God and of the self (Fitzgerald, 1986:294). The loss of performance-based, self-reassuring forms of discipleship, she suggests, gives birth to a new way of relating to God in which yielding replaces striving as the main source of transformation.

Transforming the Margins: Questing and Questioning

The concept of 'liminal space' is frequently used to describe the 'no-man's land' which lies between old and new ways of being in relationship. Drawn from the Latin *limen* meaning 'threshold', the term was originally employed by anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner to describe a period of transition in rites of passage metaphorically compared to death, being in the womb, invisibility and darkness

⁷⁵ While Hagberg and Guelich describe the wall as a physical barrier made of stones, it is perhaps more helpful to imagine it in terms of the psychological 'wall' experienced by long distance runners who paradoxically must persevere through pain and resistance to release the new energy which propels them in the next section of the race.

(Turner, 1969:95). They based their understanding on the work of Anold van Gennep,⁷⁶ who observed that rites of passage or transition were frequently marked by three phases: *separation* or detachment from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, *limen* or margin – an ambiguous state outside all familiar lines of classification and *aggregation* – the return to a stable place within the social structure (Turner, 1978:2).

F. LeRon Shults and Steven Sandage use the concept of liminality to redress a common misunderstanding of the ‘dark night’. They explain, ‘dark nights of the soul are not always rooted in personal sin or moral compromise....in fact...dark nights of spiritual questioning can sometimes result from developmental transitions and having the personal courage and integrity to enter liminal space.’ (Shults and Sandage, 2006:233). ‘Questioning and questing’, they suggest, ‘can lead to or emerge from episodes of spiritual darkness’ citing C. Daniel Batson’s definition of a quest as involving ‘a willingness to face existential dilemmas, to doubt one’s faith, and to remain open to new understandings about religion (Shults and Sandage, 2006:23-234).’ They describe spiritual growth accordingly in terms of a liminal movement of spiritual seeking, rather than the deliberate avoidance of the questions which naturally emerge at times of faithing change. Reinforcing Fitzgerald’s understanding of the ‘dark night’, they describe this liminal movement as the psychological equivalent of the apophatic approach to God. They explain, ‘in the Christian tradition contemplative spiritual writers have described a transformation process that parallels the social-scientific models of spiritual seeking, questing, liminality, adaptive regression and differentiation of self’ (Shults and Sandage, 2006:235). They use a psychoanalytic term, ‘adaptive regression’ (Fauteaux, 1997), to describe the paradoxical reality ‘that development does not always move in a linear fashion towards greater complexity’ (Shultz and Sandage, 2006:235). Progress of this kind often presents as a form of regression involving ‘a return to more archaic states of self-other relating’ (Shults and Sandage, 2006:235). What Shults and Sandage suggest, in fact, is that ‘regression’ occasionally represents the birth of a new epistemological stance from which believers more readily admit that they know less,

⁷⁶ Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957), a French folklorist and ethnographer, examined the transitions involved in ancient, tribal, male initiation rituals ancient and tribal societies in order to discover the ways in which men grew ‘to accommodate themselves to unprecedented, even antithetical conditions’ (Turner, 1978:2).

less certainly, and can live with that fact. Liminal transitions on this understanding 'purgatively strip off masks of false selfhood and re-form illuminative identity in deeper integrative wholeness' (Shults and Sandage, 2006:235).

From First to Second Order Transformation

The removal of masks in the context of spiritual transformation frequently symbolises the believer's location at the cusp of potentially new forms of personal and intellectual vulnerability in their relationship with God and others. Here, often for the first time, it becomes possible for the believer to relinquish formerly defensive, dependent ways of being in order to engage with the paradoxical nature of truth and relational diversity in a new way. Shults and Sandage crucially identify the dilemma facing believers at precisely this threshold of liminal change. Christians, they suggest, are faced with a choice. They may either choose to adopt a strategy of 'first order' change which allows them to conserve their current coping mechanisms and maintain their present faithing style. First order change of this level simply involves an *exchange of behaviour*. Or, alternatively, they may choose to step over the limen into the realm of 'second order' change which, as Shults and Sandage suggest, involves a *change of being* - that is a 'complex systemic transformation that changes coping strategies and ways of relating to a system altogether, precipitating the pursuit of new goals or new pathways towards those goals (Shults and Sandage, 2006:234). Fitzgerald, Shults and Sandage argue that the so called 'dark nights' and 'liminal spaces' of Christian growth constitute an environment in which 'second order transformation' may potentially occur. The change of *being* rather than *behaviour* which they describe is frequently referred to in the metaphors of death and resurrection women commonly use to describe mid-life experience in terms of entering a cave, a womb, a cocoon, a desert, a tunnel, a black hole or the dark soil from which an apparently dormant seed bursts forth into new life (Rupp, 2004:30-31). Transformational experiences are thus, as these images suggest, essentially *hermeneutical* in nature - that is they lead to new forms of interpretation by which new ways of knowing and relating are born (Shults and Sandage, 2006:20). As Nicola Slee suggests, these experiences are frequently the prelude to 'an awakening in which the powers of being are revealed and there is grounding in a new sense of self and a new orientation to the world' (Slee, 2004:82).

As Shults and Sandage suggest, Christian spiritual growth thus reflects the complex contours of profound ontological change, transforming human ways of relating to the self, the other and to God. It is towards this increasing understanding and practice of 'love of God and love of neighbour' that Christian discipleship tends. What they suggest, furthermore, is that the key to forward movement in that process is the freedom to question and doubt. 'Questing', they suggest, 'is the epistemological search that potentially transforms developmental ontology, the willingness to not know in the hope of coming to know more deeply and intimately. In Biblical terms, questing is asking, seeking, and knocking.' (Shults and Sandage, 2006:235). Despite Shults and Sandage's evident enthusiasm to promote this understanding of growth within the evangelical community, as my own research demonstrates, growing, questing, questioning evangelical women who 'ask, seek and knock' at church often find that the door is closed. While, for some women, this initiates a new journey of discovery outside the evangelical community, for others such experience merely defines the boundaries within which they become restricted in their growth.

Conclusion

This chapter began by demonstrating that, while there are many differing opinions regarding the nature of Christian spirituality, there appears to be a consensus that it is a developing rather than a static entity. It illustrated the limited resources available to help women describe and engage with the complex phenomenon of spiritual dissonance due to the limitations of heuristic models in which forward movement and static uniformity commonly characterise growth. By establishing the need for alternative, dialogical models of the spiritual life and describing a variety of feminist metaphorical approaches to exteriorising the interior life, I have established a context for my own investigation of evangelical women's awareness and use of heuristic models in their developing discipleship. Having described the ways in which some women's ethic of care and tendency towards hiding may contribute to their experience of developmental impasse, I have also established the importance of assessing the extent to which a woman's environment may play a key role in that phenomenon. The following chapter thus reviews research findings regarding contemporary educational and feminist scholars' assessment of the ways in which the social

constitution and educational practices of conservative religious communities might directly contribute to some women's experience of spiritual dissonance.

Chapter 3

Conservatism, Women and Adult Learning in the Congregation

Introduction

This chapter sets the scene for my own exploration of the extent to which women's experience of, and ability to resolve, spiritual dissonance may be inherently shaped by their social and spiritual context. A considerable body of research exists regarding the influence of conservative religious communities on women's faith formation. As this has been conducted predominantly by feminist and educational scholars in the U.S.A., its findings reflect that social and political environment. This chapter summarises that research, highlighting the ways in which it both illumines and obscures the key issues of concern specific to a Scottish study of women's spiritual development.

Evangelical Unity and the Taxonomy of Silence

There are inherent difficulties in speaking about women and conservatism. This is partly due to the fact that research in this field has frequently been undertaken with a feminist agenda, provoking conversations hampered by the stereotyping of feminists by conservatives and vice versa.¹ The hostility which exists between these groups is often due to caricatures on either side which fail to recognise the complex range of 'feminisms'² and 'conservativisms' often subsumed under single, amorphous categories (Manning 1999:35). Evangelical women, standing at the confluence of these two conflicting streams, consequently find themselves in a precarious position. This was recently encapsulated in the words of evangelical women scholars in the United States who collectively confessed, 'the regular maps do not work: the either-or of the culture wars paradigm is not accurate to our experience. Neither pure feminist theory nor standard evangelical assumptions and practices quite resonate with our beliefs and experiences. Often we find ourselves in the middle negotiating both worlds, caught in the hostilities between them, yet persuaded that both have rich resources we cannot abandon' (Creegan and Pohl, 2005:14). This chapter explores that disorientation and aims to set it in its historical and cultural context.

¹ For an overview of stereotypes of feminism within evangelicalism see Storkey E., (1990:113-119)

² Manning (1999:39) identifies three waves of feminism characterised by the 1830's-40's focus on suffrage; the 1960's political activism centred upon discrimination, education and abortion and a third wave which addressed previously neglected dimensions of discrimination due to class, and gender.

Christel Manning suggests that ‘women who live in a context shaped both by feminism and orthodoxy often face questions of identity and practice much more complex than either scholars, secular feminists or conservative religious leaders acknowledge’ (Manning, 1999:60). Fran Porter highlights the widespread evangelical reluctance in the U.K. to engage publicly with these questions at all, a phenomenon which contributed directly to some of my research participant’s reluctance to speak about gender inequality issues and will in all likelihood create obstacles to the wider dissemination of this research. Porter explains, ‘evangelicalism tends not to give overt attention to gender...when the subject does occur they frequently treat the matter as an ‘issue’ facing Christians’, along with subjects such as spiritual gifts, baptism and ecumenism (Porter, 2002:5). There is an unspoken assumption that to raise the question of gender is to be troublesome. As Alister McGrath comments, ‘to take a position on [women in the church] is seen as a threat to evangelical unity’ (McGrath, 1994). Critiquing this cultural ‘taboo’ Porter asserts ironically that, ‘however laudable this approach is generally for an evangelical spirituality... mainstream evangelical opinion sets ‘the women question’ as something outside its core identity’ a move which, while promoted as ‘essential’ for the preservation of evangelical unity, explicitly embodies this community’s persistent disregard for and theologically maintained marginalisation of women (Porter, 2002:7).

Because the word ‘feminist’ is most often used as a term of disdain by both men and women in evangelical circles, women instinctively distance themselves from it, fearful of being perceived as ‘negative’ or condemned by association with a ‘liberal’ feminist social agenda (Porter, 2002:8). Porter thus highlights the irony of a situation which effectively implies that ‘if women do raise the question of their inclusion they are... [often perceived to be] creating conflict while what they are actually doing is revealing a situation of conflict that already exists’ (Porter, 2002:62). Her analysis cuts to the heart of the dilemma central to my own research.

In order to provide a historical context for my participant’s reluctance to admit their experience of gender discrimination, this chapter begins by briefly reviewing the history of evangelicalism and its spectrum of positions on the role of women. It explicitly considers the ways in which evangelicalism’s diverse expression in the

U.K. creates a complex relational matrix for women's speech on this topic, frequently denying them 'permission' to admit the extent to which gender discrimination may contribute directly to their feelings of dissonance.

Conservatism and Evangelicalism: A Brief History

Conservatism – a term frequently applied to certain forms of Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity - is a complex phenomenon. It has been defined as 'the tendency to preserve or keep intact and unchanged',³ characterised particularly in some fundamentalist forms of Christianity by a literalist interpretation of sacred texts, adherence to strict moral codes and a restrictive view of the role of women.

Evangelicalism, as a historical movement, while reflecting aspects of this description is a far from homogenous group particularly in the U.K. The word evangelical is derived from the Greek noun 'euangelion': glad tidings, good or joyful news, and the verb 'euangelizomai': to announce good tidings or to proclaim as a source of good news.⁴ Although often regarded as a modern phenomenon, McGrath suggests that 'the attitudes towards the personal appropriation of salvation and the spiritual importance of the reading of Scripture which would now be called 'evangelical' emerged from Italian Benedictine monasteries during the late fifteenth century' (McGrath, 1994:11). Later used to describe Lutheran attempts to re-establish the primacy of Scripture in the church, by the seventeenth century the term evangelical had been commuted to 'protestant' and collectively applied to other Reformed congregations whose 'protest' was increasingly perceived as a destructive, destabilising force within the church (McGrath, 1994:12-13).

It is not a straightforward task to define British evangelicalism which emerged in the 1730s, championed by a variety of denominational leaders in the non-conformist church such as Wesley, Wilberforce and Shaftsbury in their campaign for social reform. Despite many shared emphases, evangelical churches display a great deal of *diversity* in their theologies of conversion and ecclesiastical government. As an umbrella term, therefore, it is an identity claimed by a wide range of co-existing

³ Shorter Oxford Dictionary

⁴ The brief history of Evangelicalism which follows is summarised from the article of the same name in Elwell, 1984.

schools of thought in the U.K. representing liberal, centrist, moderate, conservative and fundamentalist concerns.⁵ As a loose term, therefore, evangelicalism theoretically unites both rigid separatists and ecumenists; secessionists and Pentecostals (Bebbington, 1992:251). The movement as a whole is united by history and conviction on a number of counts. David Bebbington identifies four key hallmarks: *Conversionism* – faith based on a personal relationship with God rather than theological orthodoxy or good works, *Activism* – the desire for the conversion of others and a transformed society, *Biblicism* – a high view of scripture and its indispensable role in conviction, conversion and spiritual transformation, and *Crucicentrism* – the indispensability of the cross and substitutionary atonement (Bebbington, 1992:2).⁶

Following the eighteenth century revivals in Wales, England and Scotland, evangelical numbers swelled, their teaching programmes propelling men and women into mission at home and abroad (Bebbington 1992:ix). From the 1870s onwards, Evangelicalism in the UK was deeply influenced by the holiness movement⁷ and Romanticism⁸ widely disseminated via the Keswick Conference Movement, begun in 1875, which emphasised reformation of the heart, imagination and emotions as well as the mind, a holistic emphasis sometimes lacking in some streams of contemporary evangelicalism.

The impact of the First World War, the rise of theological liberalism⁹ and the post-war decline in church attendance drew conservative Christians into a variety of groupings around conservative ‘fundamentalist’ or liberal ‘modernist’ poles. A variety of ‘creed based coalitions’ of fundamentalists in the States called for a return

⁵ For other taxonomies of evangelicalism see Gabriel Fackre on the distinctions between six varieties of American evangelicalism: Fundamentalists, Old Evangelicals, New Evangelicals, Justice and Peace Evangelicals, Charismatic Evangelicals and Ecumenical Evangelicals see McGrath 1994:112.

⁶ McGrath, similarly identifies a cluster of 6 ‘controlling convictions’ in evangelicalism: the supreme authority of Scripture, Christ as incarnate God and saviour, the Lordship of the Holy Spirit, the need for personal salvation, the priority of evangelism and the importance of Christian community for spiritual nourishment (McGrath 1994:51).

⁷ Advocates of holiness teaching urged that Christians should aim for a second, decisive experience beyond conversion after which believers would have victory over sin (Bebbington, 1992:151-2)

⁸ Bebbington observes that many of the leitmotifs normally found in Romantic thought such as a stress on the power of the individual will, a limited doctrine of sin and an ethical relativism were present in holiness teaching (1992: 168-9).

⁹ On the impact of fundamentalist concerns regarding the scientific concept of evolution and gender role change see Brasher, 1998:22.

to biblical literalism and withdrawal from the secular world (Grenz, 1993, McGrath, 1994:19), treating with suspicion denominations employing ‘modernist’ hermeneutical tools, a concern which to this day in the U.K. restricts congregational engagement with non-evangelical hermeneutics (McGrath, 1994:24).

Following the Second World War, however, so called ‘neo evangelicals’ in the States rose in reaction against forms of conservatism which promoted a narrow, anti-intellectual separatism. The term ‘evangelical’ was adopted by this new breed of conservative Christians to distinguish themselves from fundamentalist literalists and separatists. Similarly, in the U.K., the emerging post-war desire to engage with contemporary scholarship and culture led to creative dialogue between previously alienated denominational groups (Baillie, 2002; McGrath, 1994:29), a trend which culminated in 1967 in John Stott’s opposition to Martyn Lloyd Jones’ call for evangelicals to separate from their churches (McGrath, 1994:35; Bebbington, 1992:267).

Evangelicalism as Cultural and Social Phenomenon

While it is important for the purposes of my analysis to acknowledge the theological tensions which exist within evangelicalism, the *contextual* and *relational* nature of women’s spirituality demands that I also consider its contours as a *cultural* and *social*, not simply a religious phenomenon.¹⁰ Women’s experience of dissonance as a phenomenon that combines feelings of disjointedness in a *variety* of dimensions frequently reflects their unconscious engagement with the social as well as theological tensions implicit in British evangelicalism. This creates complex relational dilemmas for women involved in mixed allegiance with a variety of church and para-church groups in the U.K., necessitating they change themselves in order to fit in with the expectations of qualitatively different forms of evangelicalism frequently operating within qualitatively different models of women’s ministry. Indeed, McGrath refers to the pressures involved in relating *across* a British evangelicalism ‘shaped by the

¹⁰ Discussion of class inequality within British evangelicalism is almost as ‘taboo’ as the issue of gender and thus rarely addressed at congregational level. For an analysis of the social distinctions between fundamentalism and evangelicalism see France and McGrath in Ward, 1996:4. For a review of the cultural and generational tensions evidenced in the U.S.A. between ‘Pragmatic’ and ‘Younger’ evangelicals see Webber, 2004.

social forces of shifting alliances between individuals and groups' described in the 1990's by Wells as the shift from a 'confessional identity' to an 'organizational *fraternity*'¹¹ [italics mine] and Ward as an emerging 'evangelical tribalism' (Cray et al., 1997:20). While 'tribal' tensions are less prominent in Scottish Evangelicalism, the negotiation of appropriate relationships across these frontiers is frequently an arduous task for women who work at a high level within that community. This often profoundly, and at times detrimentally, shapes their own necessarily *adaptive* 'evangelical' identity, a topic which we shall explore in some depth in chapter 4.

Women and Evangelicalism

It is often difficult to conduct research conversations with evangelical women about their role and relationships at church due to their sensitivity to the fact that they are frequently caricatured as the passive, colluding victims of conservative religion (Brasher, 1998:3). Historically this has not always been the case as is attested to by women's pioneering ministry in a variety of spheres of domestic and foreign mission. In the nineteenth century women's involvement at church increased rather than decreased in the U.K., establishing Sunday Schools, Women's Auxiliaries and Temperance movements in both foreign and domestic mission (Brown, 2001). Women were particularly drawn to movements which emphasised emotion and experience, such as the Quakers, the Methodists and Moravians, as opposed to those which promoted tradition and formality. Many appreciated the spiritual equality of such groups and the chance therefore to minister in a variety of settings (Baillie, 2002), indeed, this constitutes one of the attractions of evangelicalism to many women today.

The reinforcement of role restrictions within Fundamentalism in the 1920s and 30s in the States, openly reflecting conservative concerns regarding feminism and expanding women's rights, led to increasing polarisation in these discussions on both sides of the

¹¹ Wells distinguishes between three main centres of evangelicalism since the war: *confessional* (which predominated on both sides of the Atlantic from the 1940's-1970's and which unity was based on shared doctrinal unity), *transconfessional* (a form of evangelicalism which considers missional strategy rather than doctrinal uniformity as its basis for identity and unification) and *charismatic* evangelicalism (which reflects a similar shift from a *confessional* to an *organisationally* based identity), (Wells quoted by Ward in Cray et al., 1997:27).

Atlantic¹² (Ruether, 1985, Manning, 1999 and Storkey, 1990). Conservatism's restriction of women to the care of children and the home led feminist critics to see women's attraction to conservative religion in a negative light. The tendency to focus on the issue of women's ordination, in such debates, pre-occupied churches with the question of women's *leadership* to such an extent, that questions regarding women's *discipleship* in patriarchal environments were, and still are, largely compromised or ignored. Elaine Storkey asserts, '[the] narrow vision of what it means to be a woman...this distorted picture of Christian womanhood, and the unquestioned 'rightness' of traditional roles, has many women in its grip, and prevents them from getting within a mile of growing into maturity and knowing real freedom in Christ' (Storkey, 1990:119).

In the 1940s, evangelicals such as Dorothy Sayers began to express concern regarding the place of women within conservative culture, and by the 1950s feminist scholars began exploring the contextual dimensions of specific prohibitive texts. Second wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s saw Catholic scholars such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza join the social and theological hermeneutical task of widening the lens through which women view their lives in the congregation. The founding of the Evangelical Women's Caucus in 1974,¹³ and the birth of evangelical feminism in the U.S.A. and the U.K. at that time, not only endorsed women's ordination while advocating that more complex forms of relational sin than patriarchy alone lay at the root of gender discrimination. Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni (an Inter-Varsity worker) in the States, and later Mary Evans, Elaine Storkey and Anne Atkins (among others) in the U.K. exposed the inherent inconsistency of an evangelical position which allowed for women to teach, evangelise and lead teams in para-church settings in the U.K. or on overseas mission while prohibiting them from such involvement in church at home.¹⁴

¹² As well as promoting the nuclear family as the main structuring unit in society, conservative religion advocated women's confinement to tasks at home, hoping that the re-deployment of women from the labour force would lessen unemployment, raise wages and increase job opportunities for men (Manning, 1999:4).

¹³ The gender egalitarian position is currently maintained by an offshoot of the Evangelical Women's Caucus following a disagreement over gay and lesbian rights: Christians for Biblical Equality (Gallagher, 2003:56-7).

¹⁴ For an overview of the role of culture in the process of gender socialisation, the image of God rooted in relationality not rationality, and redemption as a reversal of the hierarchy imposed by the fall rather than its promotion as a timeless universal see Gallagher, 2003:45.

The egalitarianism promoted by evangelical feminists, however, was rejected by many conservatives on the grounds of its incompatibility with the biblical inerrancy inherent in their high view of scripture. Susan Foh (1979) and James Hurley (1981) posited a gender hierarchy ordained by God at creation, a view subsequently endorsed by a surge in family literature penned by gender essentialists such as Elisabeth Elliot, Tim la Haye and James Dobson. This ‘complementarian’ position was later institutionalised in the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1987), which cast itself as the defender of biblical orthodoxy against cultural relativism and gender androgyny (Gallagher, 2003:51; Manning, 1999:51). Although, since the 1980s and 90s, the vocabulary of headship and submission has been modified and in some cases replaced by the language of complementary interdependence and servant leadership, some conservative communities today explicitly prohibit women from exercising their leadership and teaching skills in mixed groups (Gallagher, 2003:53; Baillie, 2002:46).¹⁵

Religion in Scotland

While research from the United States regarding women and evangelicalism identifies a variety of questions common to women in other contexts, it only partially illuminates the social and theological challenges facing women in the U.K.. The sociologist Callum Brown has described British church culture as a ‘highly feminised environment’ due to the fact that women have dominated church membership and attendance there for the last three centuries (Brown, 2001:156-7).¹⁶ While in the 1800s ‘coercive religion’, Brown suggests, embodied a form of spirituality where ‘masculinity lay at the core of representations of piety whilst femininity...was constructed as a religious problematic’ (Brown, 2001:58), subsequent Christian piety, he observes, advocated a specific kind of reforming domestic femininity as a foil to the societal dis-ease attributed to the ills of men (Brown, 2001:195).¹⁷ The ‘death’ of pious femininity, since the 1960s, thus influenced falling female attendance at church

¹⁵ For a recently published example of the complimentary position see Grudem, 2004, and Piper and Grudem, 1991.

¹⁶ For some current concerns regarding the influence of Church as a ‘feminised environment’ on the spiritual nurture of boys and men today see McCloughry, 1992; Pryce, 1996; Rohr and Martos, 1996 and Murrow, 2005.

¹⁷ On evangelical sources for discourses on female piety, the feminisation of angels and the reforming rhetoric of the ‘angel in the home’ in the eighteenth century see Brown, 2001:58-87;179.

from that time (Brown, 2001:179). Despite that general decline, surveys confirmed women as substantially more committed to the church than men (Brown, 1997:197; 2006:69-73). However, the gradual feminisation of evangelical conversion had the ironic effect of alienating *women* from the church (Brown, 1997:198). While 71% of the converts at the Billy Graham Mission in the 1950's were women and young girls, by the early 1960s female church membership was in the severe decline Brown describes as the 'bingo crisis' - a shift which confirms the historical decline in women's dependence upon the church as their source of personal identity or, indeed, their primary sustaining community (Brown, 1997:202).

Despite the sharp decline in female church attendance, women began to be allocated salaried roles as deaconesses and evangelists, initially in the Congregational Church. By 1986 women accounted for around 12% of the clergy in the Church of Scotland and by 1996 this had risen to 15%. However, despite the increase in ordained women in Scotland and the rise of biblical feminism in some evangelical circles, there is still widespread disapproval of women in ministry in some spheres of Scottish evangelicalism.¹⁸ Indeed, my own research demonstrates the reality of 'glass ceilings',¹⁹ in church and para-church groups which, while theoretically advocating gender equality, subtly restrict women's participation in ministry. Within the broad spectrum of evangelicalism in Scotland therefore congregations range from those where non-ordained women teach, preach and dispense bread and wine during communion services to those where women must be silent during open, participatory communion services and in prayer meetings during which men alone are permitted to speak.

Distraction from the Journey: The Ordination Debate

The common problem in conversations regarding the issue of gender in the church is that they tend to gravitate towards the question of women's ordination. This often

¹⁸ For an overview of the complementarian position as presented by a group of evangelical Church of Scotland ministers see McGowan A.T.B., Hamilton I, White C.P and Young D.A., (undated 1990's) *Women Elders in the Kirk?* Fearn: Christian Focus.

¹⁹ It would be a mistake to assume that 'glass ceilings' are always imposed on women from the outside or the result of internalised patriarchy. As highlighted by the last chapter, women's developmental resistance to taking responsibility for themselves and their gifts can often result in 'glass ceilings' which are internally imposed.

dangerously diverts evangelical Christians from addressing the painful dilemmas facing female disciples in congregations where the models of Christian maturity endorsed promote androcentric norms. Despite the range of books on sale in the U.K. Christian bookshops relating to the role of women, there are relatively few that adequately address women's experience of faithing change.²⁰ Discipleship programmes which focus on the development of biblical knowledge, personal discipline and evangelistic skills rarely, if ever, directly address the physical, psychological or intellectual dimensions of maturing faith, nor do they provide ways of helping women process their conflicting emotions or the rites of passage through life.

'Many of the existing theological, psychological and educational models of spiritual maturity which have shaped the church's praxis', Nicola Slee suggests, 'are more or less androcentric in nature, predicated upon the experience of boys and men and, to greater or lesser extent, impervious to the particular struggles and gifts of women' (Slee, 2004:3). In *Captivating Heart*, Stasi Eldredge observes that 'There seems to be a growing number of books on the *masculine* journey²¹ – rites of passage, initiations and the like – many of them helpful. But there has been precious little wisdom offered on the path to becoming a woman. Oh we know the *expectations* that have been laid upon us by our families, our churches, and our cultures. There are reams of materials on what you *ought* to do to be a good woman. But that is not the same thing as knowing what the journey toward becoming a woman involves, or even what the goal really should be' (Eldredge, 2005:5). She asserts, 'The church has not been a big help here. No, that's not quite honest enough. The church has been part of the problem. Its message to women has been primarily "you are here to serve. That's why God created you: to serve - in the nursery, in the kitchen, on the various committees, in your home, in your community".' (Eldredge, 2005:6). She thus identifies the crucial feminist concern that women's socialisation within the Christian

²⁰ Authors who do address these questions such as Anderson and Hopkins, 1992; Bons-Storm, 1996; Christ, 1995; Conn, 1986; Fischer, 1990; Glaz and Stevenson-Moessner, 1991; Kidd, 2006; Ward and Wild, 1995; Winter, Limmis and Stokes, 1994, and Zappone, 1991 are rarely stocked in evangelical bookshops due to a mixture of lack of demand and the perception that they represent theological positions which explicitly question a conservative biblical hermeneutic or may lead women in potentially 'unhelpful' spiritual or theological directions.

²¹ For contemporary insights on male spirituality, initiation rites and their links with the language of ascent and the Dark Night of the Soul see Rohr and Martos, 1996 and Rohr, 2004.

community frequently prevents them from maturing in their own developmental journey.²²

While it is easy to blame the lack of attention to women's faith journeys on the androcentric bias of conservative congregations, this is a simplistic analysis. The factors which contribute to the empowerment and constriction of adult learning in congregations are remarkably diverse. The remainder of this chapter identifies the ways in which the concerns of educational and feminist scholarship have shaped my own grasp of that diversity and equipped me to listen more effectively to the silence as well as the speech of participants' narratives. It firstly reviews and assesses the validity of U.S. and U.K. educational research findings which suggest that the pedagogical practices of conservative communities restrict faithing change among their Christian disciples, in some cases pro-actively *socialising* believers against developing inter-dependent faithing styles. Secondly, it explores the feminist critique of the strategies evangelical women use to positively pursue growth in gender restrictive conservative Christian environments, establishing the extent to which this critique raises questions for my own exploration of the impact of church and para-church discipleship in the U.K. on British women's spiritual development.

Adult Learning in the Congregation: an Educational Perspective

Recent research in the U.S.A. and the U.K. suggests that approaches to congregational nurture commonly practiced in conservative congregations tend to resist rather than promote faithing change. 'There is', John Hull suggests, '[an] implicit set of values within much orthodox Christian theology which has the effect of lowering an expectation that learning, change and growth will take place' (Hull, 1991:vii). The lack of variety in accepted forms of adult faithing, Hull suggests frequently socializes adults into a 'perpetual childhood' which 'inhibits adult learning' (1991:9). The phenomenon of congregational loss connected to critical transition times in human spirituality sadly appears to support this view. This is a topic I discuss in greater depth in chapter 4.

²² For an assessment of the problematic nature of the adult maturing process for women socialised against reaching that goal in faith communities where transitional altruism has been normalised and the concept of inner authority regarded with deep suspicion see Glaz and Stevenson-Moessner, 1991:52.

‘Adolescent’ Faith and the Question of Certainty: On Normalising Dependency

While a considerably body of research demonstrates that conservative faith communities frequently attract and keep those with a preference for dependent faithing styles, the findings of Fowler (1988; 2000), Hull (1991) and others (Ward, 2005, Hagberg and Guelich, 2005, Hay, 2006 and Stackhouse, 1993) further confirm that some forms of conservative religion implicitly socialise believers *against* developing the faithing styles of Stage 4 and beyond.²³ Dave Ward (1996), reflecting on the loss of young adults from evangelical churches in the UK, links post-adolescent congregational loss to the phenomenon Stackhouse describes as ‘the perpetual adolescence of evangelicalism’,²⁴ that is the perpetuation of faithing styles which encourage the unquestioning acceptance of presented ‘truth’ over reflective, responsible, critical engagement.

David Hay’s research into childhood spiritual development develops this thesis by suggesting that one of the main factors relating to the perpetuation of dependent faithing styles in British society are the didactic styles predominantly employed in British Christian education. He explains, ‘the most important educational tactic is to ensure that pupils are presented with a crystal clear and dogmatic statement of the major elements of the deposit of faith. Once they know the faith, it is believed, they will be able to stick to it’. Hay asserts, ‘I do not believe this is an effective way of nurturing a mature faith’, continuing, ‘a confident faith emerges, not in isolation, but in the process of pondering the realities of secular and multicultural Britain as they impinge on one’s religious life....one moves towards a mature understanding of and commitment to the wisdom of Christian doctrine through reflection on praxis’ (Hay, 2002:172).²⁵ The ways in which biblical truth is preserved and presented in

²³ This failure to engage with faithing change at a congregational has led to the observation that conservative congregations predominantly work with people whose faith style preferences resemble Fowlers stages 1-3 with the highest number of people being in stage 2. Congregations which ‘normalise’ at or around Fowler’s Stage 3 tend to struggle to relate to the faith styles of those travelling beyond that style of faith, particularly those facing the crisis Hagberg and Guelich describe as ‘The Wall’. Such believers’ critical questioning frequently threatens the core beliefs and interpretive frameworks of the Stage 3 community (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:187). The tendency to shame people at ‘the Wall’ often contributes to the fact that such believers feel marginalised within and some ultimately leave those congregations (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:206).

²⁴ For the full article see Stackhouse, 1993.

²⁵ See also Groome T., *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1980.

evangelical churches predominantly promote a didactic rather than a dialogical model of Christian education. While a didactic approach is arguably more suitable for nurturing the faith of those whose cognitive skills cannot yet facilitate critical reflection, the above research suggest that non-dialogical approaches to learning, when normalised in an adult congregation, militate against the emergence of more critically reflective, personally owned faithing styles.

The Threat of Apostasy and the Fear of Questioning

It is possible to identify, however, the clear theological and pastoral reasoning which lies behind conservative evangelicalism's perpetuation of apparently 'controlling' rather than 'empowering' educational approaches. Evangelicalism's unswerving commitment to biblical truth – and hence its emphasis on the importance of theological clarity and certainty – is partly sourced by its institutional fear of the 'liberalism' evangelical leaders judge jeopardises the salvation of those to whom an inadequate 'gospel' message is preached.²⁶ Young (2004), Taylor (1992) and McGrath (1994) suggest that the need for a coherent apologetic during the Enlightenment marked the historic beginning of the overemphasis on reason which characterises the apologetic approaches of some forms of evangelicalism to this day. The *soteriological* implications of heresy within a traditional theological framework have thus directly contributed to evangelicalism's traditionally paternalistic approach to Christian education. Indeed, its tendency to cast itself in the role of 'defender of orthodoxy'²⁷ has frequently made its leaders suspicious of dialogical approaches which might potentially disturb younger or unreflective believers (Astley in Francis and Katz, 2000: 254, see also Melchert, 1978, Hull, 1985, Watson, 1987 and Astley, 1994). Evangelicalism's passionate orthodoxy, linked to an almost exclusively rational form of theological discourse,²⁸ thus has frequently marginalised those who understand and express their faith in different ways, a factor which has, albeit

²⁶ On the role of sound doctrine to combat heresy see 2 Tim.4:2-5; Eph.4:14-15.

²⁷ '[The] relative isolation of evangelicalism from many other traditions in the Church...has often meant that it regards itself as the true way, with a crusading zeal in relation to the rest of the Church to root out heresy and convert all to a thoroughgoing evangelicalism' (Gillett, 1993:1).

²⁸ By outlawing emotion and imagination rather than engaging with scripture as a narrative of love, McGrath asserts, evangelicalism has turned away from the more intuitive ways of engaging with scripture acknowledged in older Pietist and Puritan models (McGrath, 1995:19 see also Bebbington, 1992:165-7).

unconsciously, clearly and significantly contributed to the institutional belittling and in some cases silencing of women's dialogical and inherently relational rather than rational faithing styles.

The Problem of Certainty

Young (2004) reinforces this critique by identifying the extent to which the over-emphasis on certainty, which frequently accompanies the concern to preserve theological orthodoxy, deliberately marginalises the paradoxical and indeed frequently *apophatic* ways of knowing, which commonly characterise women's faithing styles in general, and the styles employed by adults facing faithing stage transition in particular.²⁹ He states, 'the assertion of a false certainty in Christian religion can make it the enemy of genuine faith and the growth to psychological maturity of its adherents' (Young, 2004:151). Hull (1991), Taylor (1992), Young (2004), Le Cornu (2006), Elias (2006) and Burns (2006) uniformly suggest that the preference for proclaiming uniform, unchanging theological *certainty* over socialising congregations into the lifelong process of *hermeneutical questioning* frequently reflects an institutional ignorance of, or resistance to, the diverse forms and pastoral demands of maturing faith. Indeed, Shults and Sandage express considerable concern regarding the widespread tendency in some circles to interpret the move from certainty to doubt as *necessarily* indicative of spiritual *decline* (2006:21), consequently suppressing the admission of doubt and its appropriate pastoral and theological care in the congregation.³⁰ Turner similarly suggests that Church leaders, unaware of the contours of faith development and justifiably fearful of the impact of theological dissonance in congregations where it has been previously rendered invisible through suppression, frequently restrict emerging varieties of maturing faithing styles by interpreting its common features as forms of 'radical deviancy' (Turner, 1978:2,3). These scholarly observations cumulatively paint an overwhelmingly discouraging picture of the evangelical congregation as an appropriate environment within which to voice and healthily negotiate the complex

²⁹ Fowler himself notes the 'paralysing passivity' and 'cynical withdrawal' which results when believers' emerging paradoxical understanding of truth is unacknowledged or un-affirmed (Fowler, 1995:198).

³⁰ For an account of the detrimental pastoral implications of the 'demonisation' of doubt as sin characteristic in some Christian circles see Jamieson, 2003:70.

contours of faithing change in general and the dynamics of unresolved spiritual dissonance in particular.

Congregational Power and the Banking Approach to Christian Education

While the fear of congregational disapproval frequently restrains women's admission of spiritual dissonance, the structurally hierarchical 'banking approach' to Christian education which institutionally elevates the 'received knowledge' of those who teach over those who learn (Belenky, 1997) further entrenches women in their silence. The 'banking approach' was so named by Paulo Freire, an educator working with oppressed peasants in Brazil. It describes the process whereby education constitutes the act of 'depositing' information into the student (Flescher, 2006). It is frequently embedded within institutional power structures which conduct information in one direction, thus only requiring passive, compliant learners who espouse the teacher's way of thinking. This practice of learning by receiving and adopting the opinions of authority figures - frequently by listening to a talk or sermon - consequently renders congregations dependent on their leaders as their source of knowledge. Faithing styles within conservative congregations are therefore often inextricably linked to the preferred faithing styles of their leaders.³¹

The Banking approach which predominates and indeed is preferred by many evangelical congregations has been demonstrated to overlook the needs of those marginalised by its learning strategies. The emphasis on reason implicit in this approach frequently neglects intuitive ways of knowing, inevitably locating learning in the rational capacities of individuals while ignoring 'the imaginal, affective, aesthetic and social-communal situating of learning' (Yorks and Kasl, Dirk, Lave and Wenger in Mercer, 2006).³² Furthermore, as Brasher's research findings demonstrate, it encourages a body-mind split at congregational events which discourages displays of emotion or experience by an almost exclusive focus upon 'Christian ideas and the

³¹ Hagberg and Guelich (2005) and Richter and Francis (1998) suggest that the faithing styles of some congregations reflect the dependent faithing styles of its ministers due to the fact that many church leaders' faithing styles settle at Stage 3 or 4 as they have not yet learned to question deeply.

³² On alternative learning styles, cycles and spirals see Green (1990), Ballard and Pritchard (1996) and Kolb's cycle of action and reflection (1984). On the rejection of the visual and symbolic due to medieval abuses which led to the Reformation preference for abstract ideas see Demarest (1998:385) and Lovelace (1979:345).

biblical grounds for accepting them' (Brasher, 1998:101). 'Banking' approaches to Christian learning thus tend to reinforce a dualistic approach to Christian spirituality which fails to facilitate women's inherently integrative, relational approach to knowing themselves, the world and their God.

While it should be emphasised that other learning contexts in the congregation clearly provide alternative forums for more dialogical theological conversations, women's reported experience in such groups - sadly endorsed by my own research findings - confirms that the presence of men in such groups, and the consequent tendency to defer to cognitive over other faithing styles, frequently reinforces the 'glass ceilings' which limit women's levels of sharing (Slee, 2004:173-5). Such environments which prove at times inherently hostile to the expression of women's inarticulately expressed theological concerns, often fail to provide an adequately non-judgemental setting for the voicing of women's presently hidden experience. The unspoken relations of power implicitly endorsed by hierarchical educational and sociological frameworks in the church are thus more often suited to the maintenance of silence and the appearance of uniformity rather than the facilitation of congregational faithing change.

The Spirituality of Control and the Alienation of Women

The 'banking' approach to Christian education in many ways embodies a spirituality of control rather than empowerment in the congregation. John Hull importantly identifies the need for leaders in conservative congregations to *relinquish* forms of controlling power over adult learners in order to facilitate personally owned rather than passively inherited faith among its members. He observes, 'The question of the sponsoring environment'³³ becomes critical in religious development when we consider the transition from stage 4 to stage 5³⁴....an institution which sponsors its members beyond this stage confronts the loss of its own absolute authority' (Hull,

³³ On the determining power of the learning or 'sponsoring environment' to facilitate or retard human developmental transition when issues of power are unaddressed (given women's restricted access to learning resources, leadership training and pastoral formation within the evangelical community) see Fowler, 1988; Hull, 1991 and Ward, 2005.

³⁴ Hull here refers to Kegan's stage shift from the Institutional to the Inter-individual self (Kegan, 1982). The equivalent in Fowler's stages is from stage 3 (Synthetic-Conventional Faith) to stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective Faith).

1991:184). Hull's comments provide a crucial *institutional* corollary to Park's aforementioned specifically *personal* metaphor of women's growth as 'the transformation of the boundaries which define home' (Parks, 2000:51). Hull significantly highlights the fact that such change demands re-orientation in the 'home' environment's relationship to the believer as much as the believer's re-negotiation of their relationship with 'home'. Current research clearly demonstrates that the tensions involved in re-negotiating this relationship are considerable, frequently resulting, as I demonstrate in chapter 4, in the loss of believers from congregations. The complex theological and relational negotiations involved in the metaphorical shift from seeing 'home' as a place within which theological and social borders are sharply defined to seeing home as a 'familiar centre surrounded by a permeable [theological and relational] membrane' (Parks, 2000) implicitly challenge an evangelical identity based upon sharp soteriological and social distinctions between who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the community. Indeed, as the following chapter demonstrates, this creates considerable anxiety and confusion within the faith community, a reality which neither present educational nor feminist critiques of the evangelical community adequately acknowledge, the implications of which my own research intends to explore.³⁵ As Gillett suggests, 'explanation, definition and prescription about what is biblical and what is not' (Gillett, 1993:9) has tended to short-circuit growth which is not simply concerned with increase in propositional knowledge but the expansion of openness towards God, the self and the other.³⁶ It tends to expand the dimensions of discipleship which are based on deepening *knowledge* rather than deepening *relational encounter*, a practice, Hay suggests, directly contributes to the 'obliteration of relational consciousness' (Hay, 2002:179), the very phenomenon which constitutes the core of female spirituality.³⁷

³⁵ James Fowler links the tensions involved in establishing a new relationship within the faith community with the Stage 5 (Conjunctive Faith) developmental challenge of finding a new equilibrium between conflicting loyalties to 1) the 'present order' of its faith community (as expressed in its theology, groupings and procedures) 2) the believer's emerging awareness of the paradoxical nature of faith and 3) the need to preserve rather than compromise the authentic self in the resolution of these loyalties (Fowler, 1995:200). These complex, relational dynamics cause considerable dilemmas for women as I shall explore in chapter 4.

³⁶ See Hay on the 'obliteration' of 'relational consciousness', due to an overemphasis on intellectualism and individualism in Christian education in Hay, 2002:179.

³⁷ This is perhaps most acutely revealed in the individualisation of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation in the protestant tradition which regularly talks about sin but rarely provides creative rituals or symbolic ways to express these core transformational re-orientations relationally at church.

Negotiating New Boundary Lines: From Separate to Connected Knowing

The institutional changes which would be required to adequately honour and accommodate relational faithing approaches more conducive to female nurture would demand not simply the revision of the exclusive boundaries of evangelical identity but the revision of its traditionally 'top-down' teaching approach which frequently alienates women in the learning process. Farley suggests that, while this kind of pedagogy 'requir[es] learning from the proclaimer...who struggles with texts, doctrines and the problems of interpretation and application', it deliberately 'withholds ordered learning from the process of faith itself' thus reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge and power in the congregation (Farley in Elias, 2006). Given the fact that more men than women are granted teaching roles in conservative congregations, it is unsurprising to note that this approach promotes, as the congregational norm, ways of understanding and articulating theology which reflect the preferences and learning styles more often preferred by men (Glaz & Stevenson-Moessner, 1991:33; Brasher, 1998:118).³⁸

Women's realisation that the questions they see arising from any given text being expounded during the Sunday service are infrequently those actually raised in the sermon, coupled with the experience of having their questions discounted or disregarded in theological debate, frequently re-entrenches women in a silence Freire ironically terms symbolic of the 'castration of curiosity' (Freire in Hess, 1996:75). Due to the fact that, 'theology has been constructed and transmitted from a male-based perspective', Hess suggests that 'questions and creative assertions from the margins of women's experience...are often either dismissed as trivial or too quickly denounced as heretical' (Hess, 1996:75). The assumption that the sermon provides an adequate context for spiritual transformation thus reflects the priority given to separate, rather than connected knowledge, in the church.

The tendency to lead through the display of intellectual power is frequently didactically reinforced by the provision of comprehensive answers, rather than the promotion of responsible questioning, as the main pedagogical technique of the

³⁸ On preaching as a male gendered cultural form associated with strong voices, rhetoric and didactic form of pedagogy and the pulpit as a space defined by the male presence see Durber, 2007.

sermon.³⁹ Congregational teaching thus often deliberately avoids critical engagement with theologies and perspectives from outside the evangelical community as Hess observes, ‘questioning is not especially encouraged in presentational teaching styles; when questions do arise, they are answered from within the parameters of the system presented’ (Hess, 1996). While this practice to some extent is encouraged by the perceived congregational demand for a particular style of expository preaching, it also reflects the well-intentioned aim of pastors to avoid the kind of ‘controversial’ thinking they fear may lead undiscerning believers into heresy or apostasy.⁴⁰ Hess pertinently comments, ‘While there is nothing wrong with the systematic presentation of tradition and beliefs...there is something drastically wrong...with approaches to learning that do not foster the type of questioning and depth conversation that is necessary for growth in theological maturity’ (Hess, 1996). This level of congregational ‘protection’ frequently means that the theology preached in Sunday services is almost exclusively self-referential, tending to reinforce, rather than critique, congregational and indeed wider evangelical norms. Such approaches, while promoting a clear, uniformly understood evangelicalism hardly contribute to equipping congregations to think deeply or engage profoundly outside their own bounded set. The cumulative effect of the above factors, combined with women’s tendency to choose silence in contexts where speech risks relationship, frequently contributes to women’s disempowerment and their containment within dependent faithing styles in conservative religious environments.

Reversing the Tide: Women’s Faith Transformation in the Congregation

While the research described above focussed my understanding of the educational factors which might contribute to my own participants’ intellectual and relational dissonance, it failed to address adequately my questions regarding the ways in which women actively pursue spiritual development within conservative communities. The final section of this chapter examines the complex relationship which exists between the public ‘silencing’ of women institutionally within the church and the private,

³⁹ On the suspicion of questioning in conservative congregations see Jamieson, 2004:45.

⁴⁰ On the relationship between these protectionist tendencies and the sociological nature of such groups as ‘bounded’ sets see Heibert, 1994:112-115 and chapter 4, p.125. Such tendencies in congregational leadership reflect a degree of realism regarding human self-deception and sin but a distinct undervaluing of the influence of the indwelling Spirit (Jamieson, 2004; Smith, 2003).

frequently ‘invisible’ environments within which they are ‘heard into speech’, contexts where deliberately relational, dialogical faith formation actually takes place in congregations.

Following some initial comments regarding the environmental factors which retard women’s journeys from silence to speech, I review the range of feminist research which explores the ways Christian women attempt to negotiate lives of integrity in a matrix of ‘multiple worlds’ which often make contradictory demands on them according to their diverse models and codes of behaviour. I also assess the implications of the feminist analysis of women’s ways of negotiating their own spiritual growth in conservative congregations, exploring the relevance of findings sourced predominantly in the U.S.A. for research conducted in a British environment.

Voices from the Margins: Women’s Journeys from Silence to Speech

Nicola Slee asserts that, ‘alienation and voicelessness is still a pervasive experience for many adult women’ furthermore, she suggests, ‘for women who belong to the church, the church itself may be one of the chief sources of their alienation and paralysis’ (Slee, 2004:850).⁴¹ Beth Dickson, describing her experience of Scottish Brethrenism, confirms the extent to which the gender oppression implicit in that environment deliberately *eliminated* the voice of women from her own congregation, she recalls ‘women were always talked about, usually to their disadvantage, and were never allowed to speak for themselves’ (Dickson, 2005:13). In profoundly conservative congregations, as my own research will shortly demonstrate, young girls are deliberately socialised not to ask hard questions. In later life, the fear of being marginalised or, in some circles, actually physically expelled from the community leads maturing women to repress or deny their inner questions and thoughts, a pattern which, habitually practiced, ultimately denies women access to themselves. Many women accept and internalise this oppression, considering their self-denial part and parcel of the sacrificial life of faith. Indeed, by such means, Glaz and Stevenson-Moessner suggest, women are socialised *against* reaching the goal of female

⁴¹ Slee cites the alienation of protestant and catholic women in a study conducted in the U.S.A. by Miriam Therese Winter (see Winter et al., 1995).

developmental maturity when transitional altruism is normalised as the ultimate goal of Christian faith (Glaz & Stevenson-Moessner, 1991:52, see also Grey, 1991:26-27).

Christian Altruism and the Stagnation of the Self

Young succinctly highlights the detrimental consequences of an over-developed altruistic spirituality for women's faith development when he comments, 'the call...for each of us to take up our cross and follow [Christ], has given rise to forms of spirituality and education that...are psychologically damaging to believers. Very often the faithful have been encouraged to sacrifice themselves before they have developed sufficient of their own mature identity to have a self to sacrifice. In many different ways the cross has been used as a justification for the repression of genuine emotional growth and self-confidence in both children and adults' (Young, 2004:1).⁴² These aspects of evangelical spirituality and education, ironically, lead directly to the developmental cul-de-sacs in which some women become 'stuck' in dependent, activity-oriented 'adult' discipleship.⁴³

Thoughtful evangelical women, however, clearly desire that their private and personal patterns of reflective questioning and theological revision might become publicly acknowledged in their faith communities as features of women's spiritual *development* rather than evidence of their theological *deviancy*. Beth Dickson writes, 'A Christian life doesn't somehow sustain a conversion moment as a lifelong present. Life continues and what seemed like cast iron answers in your twenties often change and mutate in subsequent decades. This is not decline or falling away from the truth. This is normal. It is to be expected; it is growth...Grown up people need a grown-up faith which allows them to interact with God and Scripture and their circumstances in a way which does no violence to their mind, emotions and will' (Dickson, 2005:90). Women indeed, as Beth Dickson suggests, face fundamental hermeneutical questions regarding appropriate ways of negotiating their spiritual growth in worlds which, at

⁴² On the tendency of altruistic spirituality to cause women to bury their own desires while responding to the needs and desires of others commonly resulting in anxiety and depression see Conn, 1986:3, 10.

⁴³ Gilligan suggests women's development moves through 3 phases of care: from *narcissism* (perceived as egotistic), through *altruism* (often modelled on a suffering God and equated with care for others, self-depreciation and self-sacrifice resulting in neglect of the care-giver) where many evangelical women tend to get stuck; to *interdependence* (a new connection between self and others which honours concern but avoids self-exploitation), (Glaz and Stevenson-Moessner, 1991:33,209).

one extreme, institutionally silence women and, at the other, exhibit frequently conflicting expectations of the ways women may function in the church.

Women's Worlds and the Way They Negotiate Them

A range of feminist research from the U.S.A. has refined my understanding of the ways in which conservative women negotiate their personal and spiritual development in worlds which operate according to conflicting gender rules and expectations. The cultural mores and taboos which a Christian woman - Monday to Friday - negotiates in her secular, egalitarian workplace may contrast significantly with those she negotiates at church on a Sunday. The spiritual, emotional and relational dissonance which some women experience as a result of having to 'wear different masks' to function effectively in these worlds causes some to leave the church, feeling that the benefits of accommodating to the gender and theological expectations there fail to compensate for their loss of dignity or identity.

A number of feminist studies from the States (Ruether, 1985,⁴⁴ Winter et al., 1994⁴⁵) deliberately attend to the painful experience of women whose struggle with the inherent inconsistencies of negotiating these conflicting gendered 'worlds' has led to their alienation within and ultimate withdrawal from the church, 'deprived, discounted and stifled in areas of significance to them' (Winter et al., 1994:45).

There is, however, another body of feminist literature which examines the stories of women who experience conservative forms of religion as an *empowering* rather than an *oppressive* environment and who are openly happy and thriving there (Brasher, 1998,⁴⁶ Manning, 1999,⁴⁷ Baillie, 2002,⁴⁸ and Gallagher, 2003⁴⁹). This literature

⁴⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985) has written extensively on the phenomenon of 'Women-Church' and the emerging spiritualities sourced by women re-imagining faith within a feminist framework.

⁴⁵ Miriam Therese Winter and her associates collated the testimonies of over 4,000 American women involved in women's groups attached to churches who were developing new forms of feminist spirituality.

⁴⁶ Brenda Brasher's study of fundamentalist evangelical women is reviewed in detail below.

⁴⁷ Christel Manning's comparative study of women experiencing and negotiating the gender tensions within conservative religious communities interviewed women from conservative Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Jewish communities in the U.S.A.

⁴⁸ Sandra Baillie's study explored the extent to which evangelical women were 'empowered' or 'imprisoned' in conservative Christian communities in Belfast: one of the few U.K. studies of its kind,

explores women's reasons for joining and remaining committed to conservative faith communities; their ways of reconciling feminist concerns with their willing subordination there as well as the means by which their spiritual nurture is catered for within those environments. While these studies confirm the facts of women's unequal access to opportunities for leadership and spiritual resources in conservative communities, frequently maintained by hegemony (Baillie, 2002:46), relatively few of these women perceived themselves to be either spiritually or socially oppressed (Baillie, 2002; Manning, 1999), a phenomenon widely confirmed by the response of my own research participants. Indeed, Brasher's research findings reveal that many women in patriarchal communities felt that their submission ironically *increased* their power within those communities (Brasher, 1998:6).

While women demonstrably practiced *contradictory* relational styles between their egalitarian workplaces and their churches, they willingly accepted gender inequality as part of the natural equilibrium of church society.⁵⁰ Women's ability to see their subordination as a natural consequence of their loving obedience to God in the context of mutual male and female submission frequently enabled them theologically and emotionally to resolve this potential source of dissonance. Findings further demonstrated that conservative women frequently balanced the *dissonance* of marginalisation with the *benefits* of relationship in their communities. The equilibrium of this potential gender dissonance was similarly aided by the *approval* women perceived themselves as receiving as a result of service in the community (Brasher, 1998; Baillie, 2002). Many women thus deliberately suspended suspicion regarding gender discrimination at church in order to preserve that equilibrium in those essential relationships thus significantly confirming the primacy of relationality over rationality in women's identity formation (Brasher, 1998:139).

Baillie conducted over 2000 postal questionnaires and conducted 20 interviews with clergy and 40 in-depth interviews with women.

⁴⁹ Sally Gallagher's study explores the effects of female submission and the concept of male headship on women's identity formation and roles at home and church in evangelical communities in the U.S.A.

⁵⁰ A move Sandra Baillie suggests they achieve by the 'bifurcation' or separation 'of consciousness' the detrimental consequences of which I explore in chapter 4 (Smith in Baillie, 2002).

Women's Ways of Nurturing Faith

Brenda Brasher's exploration of the ways in which conservative women actually *advance* their spiritual development in explicitly patriarchal communities has significantly informed my own understanding of the significance of church and para-church group networks in the spiritual development of evangelical women in the U.K. Her work, which explicitly explores the relationship between fundamentalism and female power, identifies the ways in which conservative women effectively *capitalise* upon the unequal balance of power in their congregations to their developmental advantage. The remainder of this chapter reviews her assessment of the means by which conservative women speak about their faith and the contexts within which they practice alternative faithing styles thus identifying the ways in which her findings have refined the trajectories of my own research.

From Consumers to Producers: Women 'Doing' Theology

The restrictions placed on the ways women may speak and act in some congregations, frequently construes them *passively*, Brasher suggests, as those 'to whom faith happens' rather than those who play an active role in the construction of theology (Brasher, 98:118). Women's deference to authority figures and their lack of confidence in their own opinions or ability to articulate their thoughts in public are frequently reinforced in contexts where their theological knowledge is disregarded, unless presented in a rational, linear way. 'In traditional studies,' Brenda Brasher suggests, 'women are seen as an object that Fundamentalism frames' - passive victims of conservative forms of Christianity (Brasher 98:25). Such trends will only be reversed, Susan Durber suggests, when women are perceived as *producers* rather than consumers of theology (Durber, 2007:171).⁵¹ Brasher's study crucially highlights the means by which women's ways of 'doing church' in small groups and enclaves do precisely that.

⁵¹ On the need to reverse the trend of women perceiving words primarily as weapons used by others against them see Belenky et al., 1997. For a study of the alternative ways in which women take responsibility for their views and find a means of articulating them by developing different ways of talking, thinking about and embodying theological reflection see Le Cornu, 2006:16.

The Gendered Shape of Conservative Congregations: Female Enclaves and the Phenomenon of 'Parallel Church'

Brasher's study of women's conversion narratives and analysis of six month's field experience attending the women's ministry programme of two churches in the States, helped her to identify the ways in which fundamentalist women create space for their own ways of knowing God within a dominant, patriarchal culture.⁵² Brasher's findings unsurprisingly confirmed women's preference for alternative ways of faithing to the forms commonly practiced in public worship in the church.

The conversion narratives of women who had recently joined these Protestant congregations revealed that women's reasons for joining these communities had more to do with the experience of love and care they received through the highly developed relational networks of pastoral and social care there than convert's unquestioning acceptance of the community's theological or social norms. Indeed, the strings of relational attachment which anchored those women to the faith community were fostered through their involvement in female 'enclaves' in the church in the form of mother's and toddler's groups, women's bible study groups, informal support networks and retreats. Women described these relational networks as an empowering source of social and spiritual care frequently significantly expanding their opportunities for meaningful relationships and service. Brasher's observation thus, to some extent, confirms the primacy of relationality over rationality in women's commitment to their religious communities. It also, however, implicitly questions the traditional evangelical theology of 'conversion' and understanding of its place and significance in the socialisation⁵³ of believers and in the process of women finding faith, the implications of which my own research explores.

The Sunday congregational 'experience', as assessed by Brasher's research participants, was the least conducive site for their religious encounters with God.

⁵² For other examples of the ways in which women 'frame' conservative communities in order to find ways of promoting personhood and nurture there see Conn 1986; Fischer 1990; Manning: 1999 and Gallagher, 2003.

⁵³ On the tendency of evangelical churches to impose cultural as well as biblical 'packages' on their converts, see McGrath, 1995. For an exploration of the tendency in mission to employ 'the language of conversion while actually requiring people...to become proselytes' and the tendency to 'impose on converts 'pre-packaged' forms of church life and discipleship' see Smith, 2003:128.

Brasher's field work equally confirmed that mid-week enclaves, together with informal networks of friendship and care, provided a more personal, interactive context for women's exploration of biblical texts and their own lived experience. Here, rather than assuming the role of silent, passive recipients, women engaged in active dialogical learning, asking questions, sharing insights and processing concerns frequently dismissed in male dominated groups. These networks of intentional interaction, critical reflection and mutual care thus significantly complemented the linear, rational, passive approach to education mediated through the traditional structures of 'Sunday' church. In these 'gender neutral' contexts women were permitted to exercise their gifts of leadership, participating as peer mentors and pastors in ways that would have been considered subversive in the main, mixed sex congregation (1998:5).

The Strengths of an Enclave Approach

The reason that women's 'enclaves' appear to be particularly effective in promoting spiritual development among women in the U.S.A. is that they create places that value and practice what Nicola Slee describes as women's 'typically contextual and relational form of analysis and reflection' (Slee, 2004:76). The freedom to practice 'connected knowing'⁵⁴ in such groups (that is learning by means of participation in and through dialogue and reflecting) creates an environment far more conducive to women's spiritual growth than passive learning contexts which fail to integrate the relational and emotional with the cognitive dimensions of maturing faith. The sharing of personal experience, engagement with scripture, narration of encounters with God, exploration of dreams and visions, unfolding of prophetic insight, experiences of healing and words of knowledge commonly practiced in such groups (Brasher, 1998:25) create what she describes as a *parallel symbolic world* frequently reflected in the metaphorical language women use to describe their spiritual experience (1998:92). It is only in such circles that the sharing and critiquing of experience, normally treated with suspicion in other congregational contexts, is allowed.

⁵⁴ On the phenomenon of and implications of 'connected knowing' as learning by empathy rather than explicit formal instruction (a form of learning some men report finding as threatening as some women do a rational, adversarial approach) see Belenky, 1997:114. On women's ways of growing through the process of 'intersubjectivity' see Slee, 2004.

Brasher's observation of the styles of education practiced in 'enclave' faithing reflect what Belenky describes as a 'midwife' rather than the formerly critiqued 'banking' approach to Christian education, where spiritual mentors support students in their *own* exploration of their faith, 'identifying knowledge within and attempting to draw it out so as to deliver their own words to the world' (Belenky, 1997:217). Belenky's perceptions are supported by a range of scholars (Hull, 1991, Slee, 2004, Ward, 2005,⁵⁵ Mercer, 2006 and Jamieson, 2004, 2006) who call for more interactive, student-led approaches to learning in Christian discipleship (such as those proposed by Michael Polanyi⁵⁶ in the 1960's and Jack Mezirov in the 1970's⁵⁷). This kind of dialogical approach to women's learning, Le Cornu suggests, crucially identifies the need for women to combine a rigorous theology which 'shapes the thinker' as she reflects upon religious experience with discerning frameworks which will empower women to respond actively to God (Springstead in Le Cornu, 2006:31).

Problems and Perspectives: From Transformation to Collusion

Despite the clear benefits of gender-specific nurture for women's spiritual emancipation and transformation, Brasher ultimately condemns fundamentalist women for their collusion with the structures of power in male dominated congregations which institutionalise the marginalisation of women, thus raising serious questions for my own research.⁵⁸ Gender, she observes, ironically functions as a 'sacred partition' to legitimise women's exercise of the same spiritual gifts as men. The use of this 'gender wall' to rationalize the development of 'parallel

⁵⁵ Ward proposes a 'building brick' rather than a 'banking' view of learning which resembles 'a vast and flexible network of ideas and feelings' where new ideas are linked in the network and assimilated into the existing map of someone's understanding of the world....a map of interlinking pathways and connections that stretch out in varying directions...some relevant...where the current learning occurs, others are byways and avenues waiting for future exploration' (Ward, 2005:67).

⁵⁶ On the impact within the evangelical community of the neglect to engage with Polanyi's call for education to be seen as a *process* of change and growth which develops in use and action rather than the acquisition of knowledge as a static, unchanging *commodity* see Ward, 2005:65.

⁵⁷ On the similarity between Fowler's idea of faith stage change and Mezirov's concept of 'transformational learning' as 'the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference... to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change' see Mezirov, 2000:8; Mercer, 2006 and Fleischer, 2006 (with particular emphasis on the gospel of Mark's portrayal of Jesus as an agent provocateur in the education of his disciples).

⁵⁸ Marginalisation in Christian education and nurture, however, is clearly not only a gender issue. While this is not the focus of this present study, dimensions of race, class, education and gender bias are implicit in many forms of Christian discipleship.

religious worlds' in a church culture which otherwise institutionally discriminates against women, she suggests, is inherently inconsistent (Brasher, 1998:3-4; 12-13).

Enclaves and the Perpetuation of Dependent Faithing Styles

Brasher's additional concerns regarding gender-specific enclaves relate to their potential to perpetuate *dependent* faithing styles. While, as Slee confirms (2004:173-5), women find more freedom to articulate their faith relationally in gender-specific contexts,⁵⁹ the theologically bounded nature of conservative Christian groups appears to reinforce theological *dependency* as much in small group settings as in the church, an observation my own research generally confirms. Brasher consequently critiques enclaves in the U.S.A. for adopting the individualistic, self-improving, self-authoritative characteristics of the personal growth movement, rather than developing an alternative reflective, appropriately self-critical culture (Brasher, 1998:21). While small group, gender-specific contexts potentially allow women to handle biblical texts in a more *dialogical* way, women's lack of theological education and prior socialisation *against* engaging with historical critical resources frequently means that women fail to acknowledge or engage with the patriarchal contexts of those texts, which is a trend my own participant group's apparent ignorance of these hermeneutical trajectories confirms.

Parallel Church and the Normalisation of Female Marginalisation

The inherent dangers of creating parallel, gender-specific discipleship forums specifically geared towards and run by women, it appears, are as clear as perpetuating forms of church which normalise the concerns and preferences of men. These dangers are intensified when, as James, reinforcing Brasher's critique confirms: 'women's ministry becomes a world unto itself, a self-sustaining pocket in the church...[with] their own programs for pastoral care, evangelism, missions, mercy, and community service' (James, 2001:214). In such circumstances, James notes, the lack of healthy cross-fertilisation between male and female faithing strategies tends to mean that, 'men and women run on separate tracks' (James, 2001:215). She

⁵⁹ For Slee's analysis of the range of women's preferred conversational and dialogical faithing styles see Slee, 2004:61-80.

comments, ironically, ‘the church cannot reach full maturity if women minister only to segments of the body as if they were knotted off by a tourniquet’ (James, 2001:215-6).⁶⁰ Gendered ministry structures thus, ironically, actually *reinforce* the implicit gender discrimination present in adult discipleship, thus expanding the ‘gap’ between men’s and women’s ways of encountering and speaking about God. Gendered forms of ‘parallel church’ which create their own hierarchical structures of power in an American cultural context, Brasher suggests, are inherently *detrimental* to the task of men and women exploring new ways of thinking and speaking about the phenomenon of knowing God *together*. These observations clearly raise questions for my own research, regarding the extent to which church and para-church small group networks in the U.K. may be perpetuating the very same discrimination.⁶¹

The Objectification of Women and the Absence of God

One of the disadvantages of Brasher’s explicit portrayal of her research participants as ‘culturally constructed consumers of religious goods over which men hold the monopoly [...]...bargaining with patriarchy to get what they want’ (Brasher, 1998:55, 68) is her commoditisation of women as the *consumers* of cultural conservatism without reference to their identity as *participants* in the being of God or the body of Christ. While it is hard to agree entirely with Brasher’s analysis, her critique raises an important question regarding the potentially unequal equilibrium which exists between women’s reasons for joining, and remaining in, church. The relational benefits which women receive from involvement in the faith community may inevitably make it easy for them to join and very hard for them to leave. This may potentially lead to a major source of dissonance in women’s relationship with themselves, their community and their God, a hypothesis which my own research presently explores.

⁶⁰ While James’ exposé of evangelical women’s experiences ‘when life and beliefs collide’ is unique in its *admission* of aspects of spiritual dissonance it ultimately fails in its attempt to understand or *address* this phenomenon due to an exclusive dependence on perspectives from *within* conservative evangelicalism thus confirming Brasher’s critique above.

⁶¹ For an examination of the ways in which women construct and exercise power within women’s groups, programmes, retreats, informal social networks and the manipulative strategies often used to effect change in the male power base of the congregation through ‘pillow talk’ see Brasher, 1998.

While Brasher is right, with Christel Manning (1999),⁶² to highlight the costs involved in conservative women's decision to avoid the relational risk of exposing gender discrimination in the congregation by adopting a *coping*, rather than a *prophetic* stance, she does this to the detriment of acknowledging uncomfortable questions regarding the role and participation of God in women's faith processes. Creegan and Pohl comment, 'while traditionally feminism has been sceptical of the transcendent, preferring to reconstruct images of God from within the self, the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' has been finally turned against feminism itself asking the question, 'What if God is really there, really revealing Godself to us?' (Creegan & Pohl 2005:153). This indeed is a fundamental question, and one which the educational and feminist research I have thus far reviewed appears to ignore. While this research, as I have demonstrated, somewhat over-zealously 'demonises' certain aspects of evangelical theology, education and leadership, it is unaccountably silent regarding the role of God as a potential protagonist in the complex psychological processes which constitute human faith development.

It is unclear to what extent the 'invisibility' of God in the field of faith development research and, indeed, as my own research demonstrates, in women's actual experience, is due to divine absence, inactivity or incomprehensibility. For evangelical women who daily negotiate the dynamic equilibrium which exists between what is transcendent and what is encultured in their Christianity, this creates profound tensions. That these tensions are rarely publicly acknowledged within the evangelical community complicates this task frequently reflected, as my own findings confirm, in women's tendency to spiritualise or internalise impasse, rather than admit the role it plays in their experience of spiritual dissonance.

British Women's Ways of Knowing God: A Complementary Approach

Prior to Nicola Slee's pioneering study and resulting analysis of British women's ways of understanding and expressing their faith, there had been no comparable study of women's religious development, either in the U.K. or in continental Europe. Slee's findings, and the subsequent models of women's faithing strategies which her analysis

⁶² On forms of collusion, the internalisation of patriarchy and the dangers this entails see (Manning, 1999).

produced, provide a vital corrective to the negative connotations placed on parallel church in some U.S. feminist research. Indeed, rather than condemning the role of gender-specific environments in the nurture of Christian women, Slee highlights the need for a profound, intentional increase in *relational*, *dialogical* and *apophatic*, as well as *gender-specific*, contextual learning in theological education and church spheres in the U.K.. Her analysis confirms the importance of my own research which, ironically in that light, exposes the institutional *silencing* of women and their deliberate *concealment* of their profound experience of spiritual dissonance in those very environments (Slee, 2004:184).

Patterning and Processing: Women's Ways of Exteriorising the Interior Life

Slee's work on the patterning and processes which women use to find and articulate the meaning of their spiritual lives has profoundly shaped my own frame of reference for exploring the constantly changing, dimensional nature of women's relationships in their 'multiple worlds'. Her description of the relational and conversational strategies women use to talk about their lives provides a rich *spectrum* of dialogical ways in which women reflect upon and articulate their faith. Given the implicit inadequacies of the above analyses of women's lives in relation to God, Slee's model crucially redresses that imbalance by providing a heuristic picture of the ways in which women's strategies for expressing faith frequently *embody* the changing nature of their relationship with God in ways not easily recognised by the casual listener or observer.

Slee's research demonstrates that women's preference for learning by talking about concrete *experience* more than *abstractions* or *concepts* shapes the way they understand and articulate the developmental crises and opportunities of faith. Her findings highlight the fact, however, that women's preference for relational over abstract, propositional and analytical faithing styles⁶³ frequently alienates them in Western academic and ecclesial contexts, where their speech about faith and

⁶³ Despite the high level of intellectual and educational ability of participants in Slee's study, the women demonstrably preferred concrete, visual, narrative and embodied thinking over the propositional, abstract or analytical. Theological and psychological notions of stages were only mentioned by those familiar with such concepts as counsellors, spiritual directors or theology graduates (Slee, 2004:74).

descriptions of their experience of God are frequently misunderstood, dismissed or judged theologically inadequate.

Slee's description of the range of women's linguistic, para-linguistic⁶⁴ and non-linguistic strategies or *processes* for 'discerning and embodying shape, pattern, meaning and coherence in their life experience' (Slee, 2004:62), illustrates the extent to which women's diverse relational faithing strategies constitute a substantial 'language' for exploring women's ways of knowing God in themselves, the world and their relationships. These processing strategies, Slee observes, 'range from wordless, contemplative prayer to creative activities such as painting or sculpting, from physical pursuits such as walking, gardening or dancing to a wordless being with others, or the tactile, intimate bonding with child or lover in which meaning took tacit shape, from attentiveness to pattern and beauty in the natural world, to involvement in social activism and political reform', thus 'identifying the wider ways of faithing available to women beyond the conversational context' (Slee, 2004:62).⁶⁵ While women frequently lament the difficulties they have in attempting to express their faith in rational, abstract language, Slee's findings support the view that women's habitual linguistic and non-linguistic ways of articulating their growing relationship with God actually constitute a *substantial* theological language. Women's ignorance of the legitimate nature of their faithing strategies frequently reinforces their silence. Indeed, these insecurities caused many of my own participants to disparage their stumbling attempts to voice the story of their spiritual lives. Slee's understanding of the 'embedded' nature of female theology in the fabric of women's life narratives, however, gave me, as a researcher, a different perspective on their frequently meandering, repetitive stories which implicitly concealed substantial insights into the nature of women's relationships with God.

'Intertwining' and 'Splitting' in Women's Developing Relationality

The *patterns* which Slee identifies as intrinsically present in women's metaphorical interpretation of their experience frequently reflect the changing nature of women's

⁶⁴ That is arising at or around the edges of language and conversational speech (Slee, 2004:62).

⁶⁵ For a detailed overview of these processing strategies see Slee, 2004:61-80.

relationships. Her account of the ways in which women's experience of *alienation*⁶⁶ (Slee, 2004:81), *awakenings*⁶⁷ (2004:109) and *relationality*⁶⁸ (2004:139) honours the manner in which these patterns frequently *intertwine* in women's lives and yet may break apart during long periods of isolation or 'splitting' which is a common feature of women's experience of spiritual paralysis and a phenomenon I analyse in greater depth in chapter 4 (Slee, 2004:134). Her insights have profoundly shaped my own attention to the embedded, metaphorical nature of women's speech about God, crucially identifying the ways in which narratives of alienation, ironically, reflect women's substantial *awareness* of God's absence, thus frequently marking significant landmarks in a woman's maturing patterns of relating to herself, her faith community and her God.

Conclusions and Implications

The insights and the concerns of educational and feminist scholarship clearly raise important questions for this research. Despite Slee's strong endorsement of the need to establish more creative learning environments in the U.K. which would cater for the spiritual needs of women, the British Christian education system's tendency to perpetuate dependent faithing styles and promote male-learner-oriented discipleship implicitly retards the development of Christian women. This demands that I seriously explore the ways in which these patterns may be influencing women's experience of dissonance, and the wider contours of female discipleship in Scotland.

⁶⁶ Alienation describes women's experience of the loss of self, of authentic connection with others and of faith, including the sense of being stuck, marginalised, inferior and inadequate often leading to powerlessness and depression. This is frequently expressed metaphorically through images of silence; wilderness and desert; confinement and enclosure; deadness, disconnection and fragmentation; paralysis and impasse; oppression to the extent of the rape of the self and a quest or search for what is unknown (Slee, 2004:81-107).

⁶⁷ Awakenings represent the move away from the experience of alienation and paralysis towards a new sense of selfhood, spiritual consciousness and the empowerment of the responsible self to act rather than be acted upon. This was often represented metaphorically through narratives of awakening; finding one's voice or centre; leaving or returning home; relating to the marginalised or suffering as well as personal narratives of illness, suffering or death (Slee, 2004:109-134).

⁶⁸ Relationality, encompasses both functional and dysfunctional forms of female relating as much shaped by women's socialisation within patriarchal cultures as their inherent human sin. This category highlights women's preference for integration, holism and inclusion over the separatist, dualistic, hierarchical patterns characteristic of some conservative forms of faith against which women rebel (Slee, 2004:135-161).

Although the extent of gender ‘parallelism’ in the church and its implications for female discipleship may be relatively unacknowledged in the U.K., discipleship ‘enclaves’ in the form of same and mixed sex bible study and nurture groups are a key feature of the educational programmes of a number of church and para-church organisations. While para-church discipleship and leadership training programmes are currently predominantly aimed at those in primary, secondary and tertiary education, organisations like the Girls and Boys Brigade, Scripture Union,⁶⁹ the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship,⁷⁰ Youth With A Mission⁷¹ and Women’s Aglow International,⁷² together with a growing number of theological education providers in Scotland, to some extent promote this kind of intentional adult discipleship. They are thus potentially, albeit unintentionally, contributing to the creation of ‘parallel worlds’ within the Scottish church, which prove inherently unhealthy for women’s long-term spiritual development.⁷³

Although the spiritual development of women made possible in these ‘worlds’ clearly has its benefits, these are not always directly transferable within the conservative Christian community. This creates painful personal and theological tensions for gifted women openly ministering to mixed groups in para-church settings but prohibited from exercising those same gifts in their own church.⁷⁴ The double standards implicit in this practice are potentially damaging to women’s spiritual health. Ward comments, ‘many Para church agencies specifically set out to avoid the question of church.... historically their aim has been to present a relevant gospel

⁶⁹ Hereafter, S.U.

⁷⁰ Hereafter, U.C.C.F.

⁷¹ Hereafter, Y.W.A.M.

⁷² On the particular phenomenon of ‘Woman-Church’ as a resource for women’s faith development and empowerment (which seems to have attracted conservative women more particularly in the U.S. than in the U.K.) see Ruether, 1985, Winter et al. 1994, Brasher, 1998 and Manning, 1999.

⁷³ While Navigators run gender-specific discipleship courses and groups in student, church and work environments, Scripture Union provides resources for adult bible reading and all-age worship. YWAM is one of the few ministries in the UK which provides for in-depth, relational *adult* discipleship in Scotland aimed at the reformation of character and relationality rather than the accumulation of knowledge or skills through their D.T.S. (Discipleship Training Schools) and church training projects.

⁷⁴ It is important to highlight that the reasons for resistance in transfer between enclaves and church are often due to the internalisation of patriarchal values or indeed women’s reluctance to take responsibility to use their gifts. James cites an example of this, ‘Within the parameters of our own gatherings, we have complete freedom to contribute ideas, develop ministries, exercise gifts and act where we see a need...[but] these same women are reticent to carry out their powerful ministries to others in the congregation, particularly if those others happen to be men’ (James, 2001:214). While reporting this reality James fails to examine the reasons for this phenomenon.

instead of a relevant church' (Ward, 2002:13). Sadly, as my own research findings demonstrate, many evangelical women have been wounded by the double standards which currently characterise the Scottish church's discipleship of women, frequently internalising the resulting emotional and relational dissonance in unhealthy ways. Their stories are seldom told. This project aims to remedy that situation.

Despite the evidence of the above educational and feminist research, the suggestion that women retain dependent faithing styles within patriarchal communities due to their socialisation within oppressive power structures alone implicitly overlooks the complex dynamics of *human* resistance to developmental change. An examination of this phenomenon, its role in current congregational change, and the ways in which such strategies inherently damage women's faith, therefore forms the substance of the final chapter of the first part of my thesis.

Chapter 4

Learning, Longing and Leaving: Adult Discipleship and Congregational Change

Introduction

The extent to which women's maturing faith affects their patterns of relating at church is only partially understood. The reasons that some women leave while others remain actively involved in conservative congregations are equally unexplored. Research reviewing the possible reasons for congregational decline tends, understandably, to focus on the experience of those who have left rather than those who are attempting to stay, thus focusing on the visible end of the invisible process of leaving. Its insights, however, are indispensable for this study, given the implications of its findings for those who still physically attend church but may have already, albeit unconsciously, internally left.

This chapter has three aims. Firstly, having briefly described the nature of congregational change in the U.K. with particular reference to the marked decline in women attending church, I explore the ways in which this body of research literature understands the role of developmental change in the leaving process. Secondly, I assess the extent to which church 'leaver' research potentially avoids addressing the deeper questions posed by my own study. Thirdly, I review research concerns regarding the extent to which women's longing to 'belong', 'supplementing'¹ and 'splitting'² may, ironically, represent ways of *avoiding* rather than *negotiating* developmental change, thus establishing the important questions this raises for my research.

Congregational Change in the U.K.

The decline in men and women attending church congregations is a widely acknowledged phenomenon. The Scottish sociologist and historian Callum Brown's recent research demonstrates that fact. Between 1974 and the year 2000 church adherence in the U.K. fell by 45%, and churchgoing by one third. Those who left in that period were predominantly female (Brown, 2006:278). Peter Brierley's report on

¹ I use the term 'supplementing' to describe the practice of drawing on spiritual resources from non-evangelical traditions as a means of expanding a restricted spiritual 'diet'.

² 'Splitting' refers to the adoption of different identities in different parts of life.

the 2002 Scottish Church Census (2003)³ confirms that the rate of decline in church attendance is accelerating in Scotland.⁴ While the proportion of men attending Scottish churches is rising (from 37% in 1984 and 39% in 1994 to 40% in 2002), this apparent increase is actually due to the fact that more women are *leaving* the church. Between 1994 and 2002, the numbers of Scottish churchgoers declined by 120,000. Two-thirds of that loss was of women (50% aged '20-44'; 50% either 'under 20' or '45 and over'). In both 'decades',⁵ more women between the ages of 15-44 and 45-64 left the church than men. The numbers of older women (65 and over) attending church decreased slightly between 1984 and 1994, but increased between 1994 and 2002⁶ (Brierley, 2003:52-61). While Brierley's analysis clearly confirms the loss of women from Scottish congregations, it fails to indicate the extent to which that loss occurred uniformly across the denominations. Although the total number of evangelicals in Scotland declined between 1994 and 2002 (by 9% to 163,200), *mainstream* evangelical churches⁷ uniquely showed a 19% increase in church attendance in the 2002 census.⁸ Despite the importance of Brierley's statistical

³ The 2002 Scottish Church Census (following previous studies in 1984 and 1994) was conducted two years earlier than projected due to the acceleration of decline, availability of funding and urgency of addressing required change (Brierley, 2003:5). 52% of the 4,144 churches in Scotland responded to the survey representing the 49 different denominations in Scotland: Roman Catholic; Church of Scotland; other Presbyterian (including Free Church of Scotland, Continuing Free and United Free); Reformed Presbyterian; Free Presbyterian and Associated Presbyterian churches; the Episcopal Church; the Baptist churches (Baptist Union, Grace Baptist and Independent Baptist); the Independent Churches (New or House churches, Christian Brethren, Congregational, FIEC, Churches of Christ and Churches for overseas nationals or immigrants) and smaller denominations (Methodist, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Orthodox, Nazarene, Pentecostal, Quaker, United Reform, Local Ecumenical Projects, Seventh Day Adventist, Worldwide Church of God and Military Chaplaincies (Brierley, 2003).

⁴ Over the last 8 years, Brierley comments, 'churches are losing 300 a week, twice the seepage of 1994'. While churches are not actually *closing* at this rate, congregations are getting smaller (Brierley, 2003).

⁵ That is between 1984 and 1994 and between 1994 and 2004 (the Scottish survey was conducted 2 years short of the decade in 2002: c.f. footnote 3).

⁶ In the 8 years between 1994 and 2002, women attending church in Scotland declined in the following age-groups: under 15: -15% from 64,200 to 54,810; 15-19: -34% from 18,740 to 12,400; 20-29: -43% from 34,550 to 19,610; 30-44: -34% from 76,020 to 50,310; 45-64: -30% from 117,490 to 93,930 however in the 65+ age group attendance increased +2% from 110,580 to 113,020. Equivalent decline in male attendance in the same age groups for the same period were: under 15: -28% from 60,200 to 43,610; 15-19: -28% from 15,820 to 11,400; 20-29: -18% from 20,740 to 17,100; 30-44: -26% from 41,470 to 30,510; 45-64: -9% from 69,110 to 62,710 and 65+: -2% from 62,000 to 60,720 (Brierley, 2003:53).

⁷ The Survey's Churchmanship categories were derived from respondent's description of themselves as Broad, Catholic, Evangelical, Liberal, Low Church and Reformed. The Evangelical Category was then further broken down into: Reformed, Mainstream and Charismatic evangelical. Those describing themselves as *Mainstream Evangelical* included churches from Roman Catholic, Church of Scotland, Independent, Baptist, Episcopal as well as other Presbyterian and smaller independent denominations (Brierley, 2003:66).

⁸ Compared to the loss of Reformed Evangelical: 32% and Charismatic Evangelical: 8%. While Mainstream Evangelical church attendance increased by 13,740 between 1994 and 2002 giving a total

research, it is ultimately unable to provide hard evidence of the extent to which the increasingly recognised phenomenon of ‘internal leaving’⁹ may be a problem in the Scottish church. The very fact that ‘internal leavers’ actually *do* attend church conceals the extent and the complexity of this phenomenon. My own research provides some evidence for the reality of this phenomenon and the effects of ‘internal leaving’ on women’s spiritual health.

The congregational reality which lies behind the Scottish Churches Census represents a serious trend. This is particularly so, given that those leaving are predominantly the women who run activity and outreach programmes in the church (Brierley, 2003:54). The new feature in this latest Scottish study is the fact that women aged 45 and over are leaving more frequently than men (23,560 women compared to 6,400 men); and that a considerably larger number of women aged 30-44 left in the eight years between the last two surveys than in the previous decade. In his commentary, Brierley openly admits that, apart from these bare statistics, we do not know *why* women are leaving the church. Discussion of that question in focus groups at the time was various and inconclusive. Common, projected reasons for leaving included job pressures, Sunday trading and childcare issues, the perception of church as irrelevant or boring, disagreement with church teaching, and assimilation to changing attitudes in society (Brierley, 2003:132-4). Furthermore, due to the quantitative nature of the census, its results do not indicate why the women attending church on that particular Sunday had chosen to do so, thus underlining the importance of my own research, which explores the reasons women give for their continuing involvement in church, despite the alienation they sometimes experience there.

Stemming the Flow: A Fatal Wound?

This steady decline in church attendance in the U.K. is described in emotive terms, often using the imagery of ‘exodus’ or ‘impending death’ (Murray, 2004:53). Peter Brierley’s report on the 2002 Scottish Census describes the present rate of church

of 80,580 in 2002; Charismatic Evangelicals dropped 8% to 28,560 with Reformed Evangelicals losing 32% of their congregations as attendance dropped to 54,060 (Brierley, 2003:63-7).

⁹ I use the term ‘internal’ leaver to describe Christians who are physically present at services and faithfully serving in the life of the church but who have in many respects already emotionally ‘left’. For a description of this phenomenon as it relates to women who feel alienated in patriarchal environments see Ward and Wild, 1995:96.

leaving as ‘a haemorrhage akin to a burst artery’ in the Scottish church. He continues, ‘the country is littered with people who used to go to church but no longer do. We could well bleed to death. The tide is running out. At the present rate of change, we are one generation from extinction’ (Brierley, 2000:236). Indeed, in his extrapolation of the earlier, broader UK figures, Brierley suggests that by 2016 less than 1% of the British population will attend church (Brierley 2000:236).

Brierley’s somewhat emotive language mirrors and, to some extent unhelpfully sensationalises, the widespread concern in some circles regarding church leaving statistics. There is a danger, however, that such metaphors highlight the dilemma congregational decline represents to the *church*, while explicitly overlooking the distress it causes to the *leaver*. Nor do such statistics allow for the fact that a believer’s decision to leave their spiritual ‘home’ symbolises the end point in a long, often deliberately concealed, process of relational disassociation between the believer and their church. While it is clearly appropriate to mourn the loss, and indeed seek to *reverse* the departure of women from the church in Scotland, it is surely equally urgent to ascertain the extent to which the women who are presently repressing their feelings of alienation at church may have already embarked upon that disassociation process. This crucial pastoral conundrum is one of the main questions which this present research explores.

Congregational Loss, Spiritual Longing and Developmental Change

The 1990s heralded a proliferation of literature examining the ‘church leaver’ phenomenon from a variety of statistical and personal standpoints. Not only church growth professionals, but Christian leaders, in general, wrestling with tensions in their relationship with the church and their identity as evangelical Christians, began to admit that experience in public.¹⁰ The literature which I review in this chapter represents a variety of cultural perspectives on this phenomenon, ranging from William Hendrick’s *Exit Interviews* (1993) in the U.S.A., through Dave Tomlinson’s

¹⁰ Some of the more personal examples of such reflection include Gordon Lynch’s *Losing my Religion?* and Beth Dickson’s *The Secret Life of an Evangelical* which provide contrasting but complimentary insights into the experience of constriction in the evangelical church.

The Post-Evangelical (1995) in the U.K. to Alan Jamieson's doctoral studies on church leaving, *A Churchless Faith* (2003), in New Zealand.

Much of this literature emphasises the fact that congregational decline is not solely due to the loss of nominal members, but also to the loss of those involved in the leadership and running of the church. The reasons believers give for leaving church include a sense of increasing *relational alienation*, often accompanied by a *longing* for a more meaningful connection with God.¹¹ While most of Hendricks' American interviewees had been clearly active participants in their church congregations, many described themselves as 'starving spiritually' – a factor which led some to leave the church entirely, and others to seek spiritual sustenance in other congregations or traditions (Hendricks, 1993:277). Similar studies in the U.K. conducted by Fanstone (1993),¹² Davie (1994) and the aforementioned Hay (2006), similarly highlight believer's attempts to continue in faith while disassociating themselves relationally from their former congregation. This phenomenon, now frequently referred to as 'believing without belonging',¹³ or, as Alan Jamieson terms it, a 'churchless faith', is now more widely acknowledged and implicitly critiqued.

Alienation: The Experience of Cultural and Social Dissonance

Those who feel that they 'no longer fit' in their conservative evangelical environment describe this as a profoundly isolating experience, given that 'in public, everyone seems very satisfied with the status quo and no one else seems to be having any doubts or struggles with their faith' (Lynch, 2003:1). Indeed, those who openly critiqued modern evangelicalism in the late 1990s found their alienation compounded by the mixed reception their books received from the evangelical public.¹⁴

¹¹ In Hendricks' aforementioned qualitative study of evangelicals leaving church in the U.S.A, several interviewees explained that their decision to seek God outside the walls of the church reflected their growing sense of failing to connect with God in traditional worship, sermons and teaching programs.

¹² Fanstone's project interviewed 509 random samples of those encountered in shopping malls in England who had left church.

¹³ This concept, sourced by Carl Dudley in the late 1970's was popularised by Davie in the mid-nineties (Richter and Francis, 1998:28).

¹⁴ The concern and open hostility with which some of this literature was received was not solely due to its overt criticism of evangelical theology and culture as much as the *tone* in which those concerns were expressed and the writer's tendency to 'demonise' the church (see p.122). For a helpful overview of the responses to *The Post Evangelical* in particular see Cray et al., 1997 *The Post Evangelical Debate* and McGrath's article, 'Prophets of Doubt' in *Alpha*, August 1996.

The publication of Dave Tomlinson's *The Post-Evangelical* in 1995 'introduced a new phrase to the British Christian vocabulary' (Cray, 1997). Tomlinson coined the phrase to describe Christians who were exploring theology and spirituality beyond the 'acceptable' boundaries of the conservative evangelical community, describing such Christians as *post-evangelical* in the sense that they were *following on from* their experience within evangelicalism, rather than *ceasing to be* evangelical (Tomlinson, 1995:7). He explains, 'to be post-evangelical is to take as given many of the assumptions of evangelical faith, while at the same time moving beyond its perceived limitations' (Tomlinson, 1995:7, 3).¹⁵

Tomlinson links his growing intolerance of evangelical culture - in particular its narrow hermeneutical approach to scripture (Tomlinson, 1995:93-99) - to the rise of critical realism¹⁶ associated with post-modern thought: an epistemological position commonly adopted by those exhibiting critically reflective faithing styles (Tomlinson, 1995: 97). He identifies this deep sense of dislocation as a profoundly *cultural* as well as *epistemological* phenomenon (Tomlinson, 1995:6; Richter and Francis, 1998), thus identifying cultural dissonance as a key element in the process of dissociation which distances some evangelicals from the church. Tomlinson explicitly uses faith development theory to link this phenomenon of cultural dissonance directly with that of developmental change. His analysis supports Fowler's theory that conservative faith communities fail to sponsor developmental growth beyond conforming faith, thus predominantly producing congregations where faith stabilises at, and rarely moves beyond, stage 3 (Synthetic Conventional Faith).¹⁷

¹⁵ While many 'expanding' evangelicals, as my own research findings indicate, identify with Tomlinson's definition, those from more conservative circles within the evangelical church predictably question whether post-evangelicals can be termed evangelical at all.

¹⁶ Critical Realism is a philosophy 'which maintains that only if knowledge of the external world is explained in terms of process of mental mediation, can error, illusion, and perceptual variation be accommodated' (Audi (ed.), 1995:169).

¹⁷ While Tomlinson prefers a modification of Scott Peck's linear, sequential 4-stage model of personal growth (from *Self-Obsessed*, *Conformist* and *Individualist* (the stage of doubting and questioning) to *Integrated*) for the sake of consistency I refer to these using Fowler's faith stage terminology. Tomlinson and, as described below, Jamieson (2003:112-113), suggest that some evangelicals leave the church due to the dissonance and displacement associated with the transition from stage 3 (synthetic conventional faith) to stage 4 (Individuative-reflective faith). The tendency for congregation members to become stuck at Stage 3 spiritually, Tomlinson suggests, is ironic given the fact that they often function effectively at Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective or Stage 5: Paradoxical-Consolidative ways of structuring reality in their professional lives (Tomlinson, 1995:45-59).

Tomlinson is variously, and to some extent deservedly, critiqued for the theological inadequacy of his analysis and the bias implicit in his evaluation of evangelicalism.¹⁸ These concerns are summarised in Graham Cray's reflection that, 'the author's attempt to identify the cultural shape of evangelicalism may depend too heavily upon his own experience of the New Churches and some forms of Charismatic piety' (Cray et al., 1997:5-6). Cray's comment helpfully highlights the temptations to projection and judgementalism to which many adults negotiating transition are prone, particularly those who have been shaped by spiritually abusive environments. While Cray's critique potentially provides a means of *dismissing* Tomlinson's argument and questioning the validity of his analysis, it ironically precisely identifies the intensely *personal, contextual* nature of these extreme forms of spiritual dissonance. Indeed, Murray's additional theologically perceptive, but perhaps pastorally untimely, critique of Tomlinson's failure to identify personal sin or un-repentance as possible sources of dissonance, merely highlights the ways in which those who *experience* spiritual dissonance, and those who *critique* that experience from the sidelines, may equally exhibit forms of theological and pastoral myopia (Murray, 2004). Despite these weaknesses, Tomlinson's exposé of the dynamics which lie behind a Christian's decision to leave the church significantly identify previously unacknowledged practical and theological tensions within evangelicalism: tensions which many women's experience confirms, but which few have the courage to publicly voice.

From Conformity to Expansion: Faith as a Socialising as Well as a Spiritualising Process

Richter and Francis (1990) similarly identify faithing change as a factor in the phenomenon of leaving, but consider it an *underlying* rather than a *precipitating* factor, functioning within but not necessarily predominant in, the matrix of social and spiritual factors which contribute to church leaving.¹⁹ The patterns of church leaving in England in the early 1990s, they suggest, demonstrate the significance of

¹⁸ See the aforementioned Cray et al., 1997; McGrath A, 'Prophets of Doubt' in *Alpha*, August 1996. Richter and Francis' also raise the fair critique that Tomlinson neglects the complexities and varieties of evangelicalism which do not all demand unquestioning obedience (1998:57).

¹⁹ These included unfulfilled expectations of church worship, leadership and pastoral care; changes due to moving house, divorce or illness and loss of faith. Changing values (Richter and Francis, 1998:39-52) and stages of faith (reported as a sense of 'stifling' of spiritual growth (1998:53-64)) were often cited as underlying factors in but not the sole reason for leaving.

adolescence as a threshold of social and spiritual change given that 80% of church leavers had already left before the age of 20.²⁰ Over 40% of those who left after that time did so in part, they report, due to a change in the way they *held* their faith.

While Richter and Francis draw upon Fowler to explain the link between faith stage restriction and leaving (1998:53-64),²¹ they stress the role of *social* belonging and *relational* well-being as more prominent factors in that decision. Leaving, for many of their participants, had symbolised a *transfer of belonging* rather than a retreat from commitment or a loss of faith.²² Richter and Francis comment, ‘they see their leaving primarily as a ceasing to socialise with a certain congregation and ceasing to behave in an expected way’, ironically often due to finding their social and spiritual needs more adequately met *outside* the Christian congregation (1998:ix). As Mary Tuomi Hammond observes, ‘if people cannot speak openly in church and ask their questions, express their doubts, tell their stories – they will go elsewhere to find authentic community and support’ (Jamieson, 2004:45). Richter and Francis thus confirm what feminist scholars observe regarding the *social* dimensions of finding and maintaining faith, commenting that ‘...evangelism is a socialising as well as a spiritual process’ (1998:ix). ‘Conservative churches’, these researchers suggest, ‘feel it is better to lose people on the periphery if it means a more committed core...’ thus confirming church leaders’ tendency to focus upon the missional task, rather than the spiritual malaise congregational loss potentially represents (1998:10). They, together with Murray (2004:40), highlight the need for research such as my own which explores the faith processes of those who choose to *remain* within the faith community, despite the internal pressure to leave.

²⁰ Leaving at times of physiological and social change is noted among those entering adolescence and students leaving home as well as mid-life believers: see Fowler (1995,1984), Parks (1986), Rutledge (1989), Ward (1996) and Astley and Wills, (1999).

²¹ Richter and Francis observe that believers also leave congregations due to the threat of a *higher* level of faith stage in the congregation, thus accounting for the homogeneity of some churches (1998:56).

²² While ‘loss of faith’ is acknowledged by Astley to refer to the loss of one *form* of faith prior to the taking up of another (i.e.: it may represent a change in *content* of faith or in a believer’s previous *way of understanding and relating* to God) as opposed to the *denial of the existence* of God (Astley, 1991:37-8), Richter and Francis identify 3 forms of atheism: *philosophical* (the denial of the *existence* of God and the truth claims of religious faith), *experiential* (the loss of a sense of the *goodness and love* of God) and *transitional* (the *temporary* questioning of certain aspects of the concept of God, frequently associated with faithing change which involves a *distancing* of the believer from God), (Richter and Francis, 1998:29-34). My own participants transitionally exhibited signs of all three forms of ‘atheism’, particularly those who had experienced major trauma or abuse.

The Dynamics of Disillusionment and the Dilemmas of Leadership

While church leavers are sometimes caricatured as being inauthentic in their professed faith or un-committed to the church, this is not necessarily always the case.²³ Alan Jamieson's extensive research (2003;²⁴ 2004; 2006), on the post-church experience of former active leaders among New Zealand's Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, confirms this fact.²⁵ Jamieson makes extensive use of Fowler's faith stages in his analysis thus adding weight to the concern that communities which operate at a low 'modal developmental level'²⁶ restrict the growth not just of their members but also their *leaders* beyond that stage (Jamieson, 2004:112).²⁷ His findings confirm the importance of the trajectories of my own research, exploring the ways in which disillusionment, burnout and leadership conflict contribute to the alienation ordained participants feel within the church. Jamieson significantly identifies the dilemma facing such leaders whose *personal* experience of alienation at church is compounded by the fact that they must fulfil a *public* leadership role within that same faith community, thus crucially identifying a phenomenon the inevitably hidden extent of which is currently unknown among evangelical leaders in Scotland.

²³ While Richter and Francis report some believers leave church due to the fact that their reason for attending was other than religious, these were predominantly in the under 20 age group (1998:12,139).

²⁴ Jamieson's original research conducted in-depth interviews with more than 100 leavers (58 women and 50 men, 83% in the 30-45 age bracket) and 50 church leaders. All participants were strongly committed adult members of Evangelical, Pentecostal or Charismatic Churches. 32% were full time paid Christian leaders, 19% involved in full-time theological education, 94% had held at least one significant leadership position in their church (Jamieson, 2002:11-15). His more recent research followed the faith journeys of his original interviewees over the subsequent 6 years.

²⁵ Jamieson's elision of the categories of Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in New Zealand does not entirely contribute to our understanding of the same issues in the less homogenous British church scene. Despite that, his writings still strike a chord with many U.K. leavers *and* 'stayers'. For a substantial critique of the limitations of his approach see Murray, 2004:49-55.

²⁶ 'The modal development level is the *average expectable level of development for adults* in a given community, it refers to the conscious or unconscious image of adult faith towards which the education practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance in a community aim' (Fowler: 1988:198).

²⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of Fowler's insights into congregational modal development and the likelihood of a mismatch between personal and congregational levels leading to a sense of 'not belonging' or eagerness to 'move on' see Astley in Francis and Katz, 2000:250.

The Process of Leaving

One of the key contributions of Jamieson's analysis to this present project is his exploration of leaving as a *process* rather than an *event*.²⁸ Indeed, his unique contribution to the pastoral care of those trying to make sense of their changing relationship with the church is his categorisation of leavers into distinct, definable groups. Jamieson identifies four types of church 'leavers', analysing their diverse approaches to processing transitional dissonance and its influence on the changing nature of their relationship with the church. After briefly acknowledging the leavers he terms *Disillusioned Followers* whose faithing styles do not change,²⁹ Jamieson concentrates on the three remaining categories of leaver for whom, he suggests, faithing change has precipitated the process of leaving. In particular, he explores the tensions associated with faithing transition around stage 4, represented by his *Reflective Exiles*³⁰ and *Transitional Explorers*,³¹ as well as the re-orientation and integration characteristic of those entering stage 5, his *Integrated Wayfinders*.³² Jamieson's description of the experience of these believers provides a practical framework for understanding the tensions which exist between faithing change and conservative Christianity. Furthermore, his observation of pastors' widespread ignorance of the phenomenon of faithing change or the ways in which it might affect congregational *discipleship* as well as congregational *loss* confirms the pastoral isolation which many of my own participants have reported (Jamieson, 2002:44).

²⁸ Jamieson draws his understanding of leaving as *process* from the work of American sociologist and ex-nun Helen Ebaugh whose study of nuns leaving their vocation led her to describe that experience as a process with discernable phases. For an overview of that 4 stage 'process' through 1) first doubts, 2) seeking and weighing alternatives, 3) negotiating turning points – here the person makes a firm decision to exit and 4) developing a new sense of identity see Jamieson, 2002:29-45.

²⁹ *Disillusioned Followers*: exhibit a received, dependent, unexamined faith. They continue to believe uncritically, finding support from books, seminars and websites. They do not question the 'given's' of evangelical faith but are frequently very angry (Jamieson, 2003: 45-58).

³⁰ *Reflective Exiles* question their inherited *frameworks of faith* as well as the role, function and place of the church. They deconstruct their faith in an attempt to distinguish personal faith from church culture. Frequently remaining at church through this process, they often move to the margins and struggle with the 'boundaries' of a more exclusive faith (Jamieson, 2002:59).

³¹ *Transitional Explorers* find a new, personally owned faith which brings energy and momentum to the reconstruction of their faith frameworks sometimes involving leaving former faith communities (Jamieson, 2002:75-90). This resembles elements of Slee's description of 'awakening' (2004:109-34).

³² *Integrated Wayfarers* have an articulate, rational grasp of their process of questioning and emerging hermeneutical frameworks, often embracing a 'wide' view of salvation (Jamieson, 2002: 91-105).

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Current ‘Leaver’ Literature

One of the major emphases in the findings of leaver research which has shaped this present project is its appreciation of the way faithing change directly influences believers’ relationship with God. Indeed the *loss* and *recovery* of that relationship is frequently identified, but rarely specifically examined as a key feature of developmental change.³³ Anderson and Hopkins (1992),³⁴ stress that women’s emphasis on *relationality* as their primary hermeneutic exists at a cosmic as well as an interpersonal level thus further reinforcing Nye’s definition of human spirituality as ‘relational consciousness’ (Hay and Nye, 2006). It is the *loss* of this sense of communion with God and, indeed, the *longing* for ‘something more’ which, Hendricks suggests, frequently leads believers to seek God *outside* the walls of the church (1993:277).

Losing and Finding God

The ‘loss’ and ‘rediscovery’ of God is identified by several commentators as a feature of maturing spiritual transformation.³⁵ Gordon Lynch describes these re-orienting encounters with God in the words of Meister Eckhart: ‘[when our] wilderness [meets] God’s wilderness...stripping away our ideas and beliefs about God as part of the process of truly moving towards a deep encounter with the divine which results in ways of relating to the world which are more provisional and open to change’ (Lynch, 2003:36). Indeed, Beth Dickson casts God as a major protagonist in the re-orientation of divine-human relationality, describing God as actively *provoking* believers to engage with him in new ways designed to protect them from an immature divine-human relationship. She explains, ‘God will not be shoehorned into other people’s understanding of him. He is above and beyond our ideas of him and in his huge restlessness will prod and cajole us to leave behind any expression of himself which he feels is harming us’ (Dickson, 2005:90).

³³ For an examination of the role of ‘*transitional atheism*’ in this process see Richter and Francis, 1998:32-3.

³⁴ Their study explored North American and Canadian women’s ‘spiritual journeys’.

³⁵ One of the most wide-ranging accounts of this experience can be found in Jamieson (2004), particularly his use of Ricoeur’s concept of ‘post-critical naïveté’, the search for a ‘new’ God and the practice of settling with a ‘distracted’ or ‘former’ image of God as a temporary ‘safe option’ during transitional spiritual experiences (Jamieson, 2004:18, 104, 113).

The loss of formerly reassuring images of God often results in a period of disorientation, prior to the emergence of new ways of imaging and relating to God.³⁶ Thomas Merton describes the kind of terror such encounters with God provoke when he writes, ‘What if [God] should turn out to be other than I have pictured him, and what if, in his piercing presence, whole layers of what I have known myself to be should dissolve away and an utterly unpredictable encounter should take place?’ (Merton, 1999:13). Indeed, Gordon Lynch’s experience of just such an encounter left him, he describes, in ‘a landscape with no sign-posts’ (Lynch, 2003:58-9). The lack of acknowledgement of such experiences by pastors or others in the public realm creates severe dilemmas for adult disciples who, lacking a context within which to understand such experiences, judge them spiritually deviant. Those disoriented in their relationship with God thus frequently fear they are losing their faith. As James suggests, at the root of many women’s struggles are not always their circumstances, but their faulty ways of imaging and relating to God. She comments, ‘women are relieved to be taken seriously and freely admit that their inadequate and faulty views of God exacerbate their problems and make it harder to trust him’ (James, 2001:24).³⁷ Indeed, believer’s narratives of the felt loss of their ‘familiar’, followed by their rediscovery and subsequent re-commitment to a God they now understand and relate to in a new way appears, as my own research confirms, to be a key feature of the Christian experience of faithing change. This phenomenon is rarely analysed in developmental or ‘leaver’ literature, an oversight this project addresses.³⁸

Omissions and Recapitulations: Reinforcing Linearity

Leaver literature significantly highlights the psychological, class and educational dimensions of discipleship frequently unacknowledged in evangelical circles. Its failure either to identify or analyse the role which *gender* plays in the leaving process, however, is a significant omission. While the principles of Fowler’s faith

³⁶ Newbiggin metaphorically encapsulates this in his description of God as an intruder who transforms the conversations we are having about him by suddenly walking into the room, causing us to ‘change into a different mode’ (Newbiggin, 1995:11). On the terror of facing the ‘real’ God as opposed to one’s domesticated image of him and the role of existential ‘dread’ in spiritual formation see Merton, 1999:13.

³⁷ On the dilemmas of re-establishing trust when experimenting with new ways of relating to God in response to a re-orienting divine-human encounter see Jamison’s analysis of Job (2004:113).

³⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of the tension between trust and betrayal and its implications for the divine-human relationship see Newbiggin, 1995:14.

development theory are widely employed within this research field, only cursory attention is paid to the potential of his linear model and androcentric bias to distort the spiritual experience of women.³⁹ Jamieson's initially innovative, but ultimately insufficient, linear, sequential heuristic model fails to allow for the *intertwining* or *blending* of faithing styles which characterises many women's mature adult faith.⁴⁰ His description of 'Integrated Wayfinders', i.e. those who have *resolved* their dissonance into new forms of re-integrated faith, as those who have found a 'safe place...to live [which, while it] may need repairs [leaves the believer with] no need to do the major structural work again', is dangerously misleading. Jamieson's metaphor of the resolution of transitional dissonance by moving into a new home, while perhaps reassuring for those who have survived the first 'storm' of faithing change, hardly prepares believers for the *dimensional, episodic, re-capitulatory* nature of adult faith development (Jamieson, 2006:20). The inherent dangers of proposing a *predictable* linear heuristic map of spiritual formation are considerable and informed my own decision to avoid this trajectory in my research. Heuristic models, while potentially pastorally useful as a means of educating believers in the *basics* of faithing change, can easily be misused due to their inherent tendency to distort and domesticate the phenomenon. They also fail to acknowledge or inadequately explore the influence of sin on human transitional experience.⁴¹ Ultimately such models intentionally intellectualise and systematise what is in fact a *relational* phenomenon, thus attempting to tame a human experience which often feels, at its core, nether 'safe' nor predictable. The landscape of faithing change and its implication for the congregational journey through such territory are consequently far more complex than Jamieson describes. Indeed, heuristic models are frequently more useful when held and interpreted *in relation* to one another rather than *separately* or exclusively on

³⁹ While Richter and Francis (1995) highlight the inadequacies of Fowler's approach, Jamieson's model ultimately inadequately represents the spiritual development of women by its normalisation of linear, sequential growth. Jamieson recently admitted that 'assigning people to these major categories ...may appear to make a very fluid and dynamic process into an ordered and sequential movement from one box to another. This is certainly not what it feels like for the people involved' (2006:21). His model, however, implicitly perpetuates that illusion.

⁴⁰ While many leavers clearly identify with aspects of Jamieson's leaver 'groups' most believers probably reflect a *blend* of the characteristics of two or more groups. My own participants exhibited aspects of each of these groups including 1) areas of faith which remained unexamined (characteristic of *Disillusioned Followers*), 2) questioning the givens and moving to the margins of the congregation (characteristic of *Reflective Exiles*), 3) Finding energy from exploring beyond the margins and adopting a broader view of salvation (characteristic of *Transitional Explorers*) and 4) exhibiting an increasing grasp of their process of questioning (characteristic of *Integrated Wayfinders*).

⁴¹ On the significance of Jamieson's omission of 'the lack of repentance' as a contributing factor to Christian desert experiences see Murray, 2004.

their own, an observation which counsels against the exclusive use of a single heuristic tool.

The Hidden Phenomenon of ‘Internal Leaving’

Finally, leaver literature fails to explore adequately one of the main research trajectories of this enquiry, namely the hidden phenomenon of *internal* leaving. Ward and Wild describe this phenomenon in relation to women who, becoming aware of their marginalisation within a patriarchal religious environment, feel they no longer belong in, but have not yet left, the church. They describe such believers as being both ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the congregation, i.e. present in the pew but with no strong sense of belonging there any more (Ward and Wild, 1995:96). Those experiencing transitional dissonance at church, for whatever reason, as my own research demonstrates, frequently describe this phenomenon. Leaver literature fails to address the fact that a proportion of those currently attending church – including my own research participants - may already be in the process of leaving.

While Jamieson, Richter and Francis acknowledge that there are as many ways of *staying* as *leaving* a congregation, they fail to explore fully the implications of that fact. My own project specifically considers the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies women use to control their feelings of dissonance and maintain their active involvement in evangelical congregations. Ward and Wild (1995) observe that ‘internal leavers’ have in many respects already emotionally left their congregations, which is unsurprising, given Jamieson’s observation that those who feel marginalised and thus ‘not heard’ often give up talking about how they feel. Quoting U.S. pastor Mary Tuomi Hammond, Jamieson describes such believers as ‘one step from the door’, trapped in coping mechanisms which hold them back from transformation (Jamieson, 2004:6-7). Given the above findings, my study explores the extent to which my own participants’ experience of spiritual dissonance may indicate they are involved in the process of dissociation, which can lead either to church leaving or to profound spiritual stagnation.

'Exodus' or 'Evasion'? - The Necessity of Leaving

The 'necessity' of leaving developmentally restrictive communities to further psychologically healthier forms of faithing is an underlying assumption in some feminist and leaver literature. Few examples are given of more 'collaborative' possibilities. The cost involved in leaving, however, is immense, a reality this present research confirms. For some this experience feels like a form of self-imposed *exile*, for others it resembles an *exodus* or *liberation*.⁴² Veiling crucially enquires, 'in what way is exile an option, something chosen? ...It is not easy to think a new thing, harder still to live in a condition of exile. Yet sometimes that is what it takes to escape the binding of a book that no longer holds as it used to... there are times that urge us to depart, times when we feel we must take up the nomadic existence of an exiled wanderer, in order to enlarge and set free the home to which we belong – the place we never really leave' (Veiling, 1996:78). As Veiling observes, the act of leaving - chosen or enforced - places the 'exile' in an ultimately disorienting, paradoxical relationship with 'home'.

Feminist theory is less anxious about women withdrawing from their involvement in traditional church, since it views this phenomenon as a vital stage in the process of re-negotiating a new relationship with what used to be one's 'home'. Rosemary Radford Ruether, observing the experience of women re-negotiating their relationships with patriarchal churches while experimenting with new forms of feminist spirituality,⁴³ highlights the vital importance of *transitional environments* in women's re-visioning of their previous relationships. She writes, '[women] desperately need primary communities that nurture their journey into wholeness, rather than constantly negating and thwarting it.....This means that we need to form gathered communities to support us as we set out on our exodus from patriarchy'. She continues, 'we do not form new communities lightly, but only because the crisis has grown so acute and the efforts to effect change so uncompromising that we often cannot even continue to communicate within these traditional church institutions unless we have an alternative community

⁴² While the former is reflected in Slee's analysis of women's patterning of their experience via metaphors of 'alienation' 'wilderness' 'confinement' and 'deadness' (2004:82-107); the latter is affirmed by their narratives of 'awakening' or release from constricting environments (2004:113ff).

⁴³ For a collection of narratives summarising the experience of women experimenting with these options in the U.S.A., see Winter et al., 1994.

of reference that nurtures and supports our being' (Ruether 1985:5). Her words echo the feelings and the frustrations of women who feel unable to communicate the extent of their dissonance within the evangelical community and need a transitional environment within which to process their transition into new kinds of relationship with their spiritual 'home', one that both respect the limits of that community and promote their own spiritual growth.

Reflective Learning and the Creation of a Critical Culture

The language and imagery of exodus is often used to describe women's withdrawal from patriarchal communities so that a new *critical culture*⁴⁴ might emerge, one capable of supporting women in their search for a more mature identity (Ruether, 1985). The vital role of a 'critical culture' in the cyclical processes of reflective faithing change is identified in a wide body of research (Hiebert, 1994⁴⁵; Mezirov in Fleischer, 2006⁴⁶; Kegan, 1982⁴⁷; Parks, 2000⁴⁸ and Fowler, 1988⁴⁹). Indeed, Ruether's description of the critical culture represented by Women-Church in the 1980s remarkably echoes Jamieson's description of contemporary 'post-church' groups in New Zealand. 'Critical Cultures' or *transitional environments*, intentionally provide space for exiles from former faith communities to process their emerging experience, frequently allowing them to give voice to the deep emotions involved in that experience for the very first time.⁵⁰ Ruether explains, 'this process of consciousness-raising must necessarily have a separatist stage. Women have to withdraw from male-dominated spaces so they can gather together and define their own experience' (Ruether 85:59). Ruether thus, in the case of women re-negotiating

⁴⁴ That is: a safe environment within which women can reflect upon and critique the culture which they have left and find tools to reflexively critique the culture of communities which they might join. For an exploration of this theme in the context of Women-Church see Ruether, 1985:59.

⁴⁵ For Hiebert's analysis of the role, hermeneutical importance and missiological indispensability of a 'discerning community' for the purpose of re-contextualising scripture in ways which expand the penetration and relevance of the church in contemporary society see Hiebert, 1994:30.

⁴⁶ For a review of Mezirov's work on the need for more dialogical settings for learning, the emancipatory role of rational discourse and emotional engagement as a vehicle for transformation and the formation of small, intentional 'cells' of critical reflection and action with a view to forming 'agents of cultural change' see Fleischer, 2006.

⁴⁷ Kegan speaks of critical cultures as 'cultures of embedded ness' that provide supports that impact developing selfhood throughout the lifespan and prevent panic or foreclosure of a developmental transition (Kegan, 1982).

⁴⁸ See Parks on 'mentoring environments' for the formation of critical thought in Parks, 2000:xii.

⁴⁹ See Fowler on the role of the 'sponsoring community' in faithing transition Fowler, 1988:115.

⁵⁰ For a description of Jamieson's use of the term '*exiles*' to describe some leavers see 2002:60-74.

their relationship with patriarchy, views some degree of separation from the 'home' environment as a vital part of the pastoral and hermeneutical cycles of re-contextualisation and growth: a strategy which features prominently in some church leaver's negotiation of their changing relationship with their spiritual 'home'.⁵¹

Ruether (1985) together with Ward and Wild (1995) locates the decision to withdraw from a faith community in a wider process within which productive *engagement* rather than separatist *hostility* is the goal. Ruether explains, 'The need for a separate base in order to form a critical culture should not be confused with ideological separatism [...]... we are not talking here about separatism as total ideology', she suggests, '...but as a stage in a process, a stage that is absolutely necessary but not an end in itself, a stage toward a further end in the formation of a critical culture and community of women and men in exodus from patriarchy' (Ruether 1985:59-60). For Ruether thus withdrawal and separation, for a limited time, are a necessary evil to be responsibly navigated as a means towards the greater goal of relational integration. The overwhelming problem for evangelical women, however, as my own findings demonstrate, is that transitional environments are hard to find within the evangelical community. Indeed, Winter et al. (1994) indicate that women's *supplementation* of their spirituality from sources outside the conservative community sometimes avoids the necessity of their actually leaving their spiritual 'home', a strategy which some of my own participants are attempting to use. Women's experimentation with alternative forms of spirituality, Winter suggests, directly reflects their desire to be present as their *authentic selves* within their former faith communities, as Winter puts it, 'to leave the old way of relating and to stay on one's own terms, to be present in a whole new way' (Winter et al., 1994:114). In other words, this is a vital embodiment of mature female relationality.

Both feminist and leaver research thus stress the necessary emergence of 'critical cultures' within which believers can begin to admit the nature of their spiritual dissonance with a view to engaging with its implications for their ways of holding faith itself and relating to others in the faith community. It is in these contexts that

⁵¹ See Ward and Wild (1995:4-5) on the necessity of leaving an 'oppressive' community temporarily as a feature of the 'liminal state' vital to a healthy developmental transition. They see this as a twin movement designed to 1) guard or protect the creative potential of such developmental change and 2) contain the accompanying threat of disintegration.

those previously silenced develop new languages with which to define and explore their inchoate experience,⁵² voicing their dissonance and grieving their losses as the first step in the process of exploring new boundaries of their emerging faith. What my research intends to explore, in a Scottish context, is the extent to which women's narratives demonstrate that such 'critical cultures' *exist* and the ways women are using them to support their adult discipleship. This issue also raises the question of the extent to which such groups or networks are truly, appropriately 'critical', or merely reinforce new forms of homogeneity around alternative theological and cultural norms.

The Dangers of Demonizing the Parent Community

Neither feminist nor leaver research, however, adequately addresses the faith community's institutional tendency to avoid dealing with spiritual dissonance. The demonstrable lack of pastoral follow up of 'leavers' and the relative isolation of post-church groups from ecclesial frameworks reflects the complex ambiguity and underlying hostility which frequently characterise strained relationships between the 'home' environment and actual or internal 'leavers' (Richter and Francis, 1998; Jamieson 2003, 2004, 2006 and Hagberg and Guelich, 2005). Ruether highlights this dramatically when she writes, 'the decision to create a final institutional break with a parent community generally entails excessive bitterness and misrepresentation on both sides. Not only does the parent institution vilify the new movement, but the new movement has often moved toward an angry demonization of the parent community, denying its own source and claiming that the parent church is incapable of producing any true spiritual fruit. This decisively blocks creative communication and shuts each up in mutual rigidity. Neither group can admit any good in the other lest its own legitimacy be called into question' (Ruether 1985:37). The destructive tendencies Ruether observes clearly illustrate the dangers of models of relational transformation which legitimise forms of separation without working towards ultimate reconciliation. Indeed, Cray et al. (1997), Jamieson (2004) and Carson (2005) observe that the self-reinforcing communities which have sometimes grown up around networks of disaffected 'leavers' tend to be syncretistic in their approach to re-constructing faith.

⁵² For a more exploration of this theme in the context of Women-Church see Ruether, 1985:59.

‘Leaver’ literature generally, and leaver narratives in particular, thus inevitably manifest the very tensions they explore. Despite its illumination of the tensions developmental change represents for individual believers, most of the literature fails to address the impact of these factors on the body of Christ as a whole. Although as early as 1988 James Fowler proposed the concept of ‘multi-modal church’ as a way of addressing the inevitable clash of different faithing styles within the congregation, a workable ecclesial model is yet to be realised (Fowler, 1988:82-97).⁵³ This is perhaps one factor contributing to the rise of congregational attrition. The extent to which Scottish women’s experience reflects these tensions and the implications this may have for the emergence of ‘critical cultures’ in the church remains to be seen.

Developmental Change and ‘Women’s Ways of Being’ at Church

Daniel Taylor curtly observes, ‘Leaving the church entirely is rarely the answer. Tragically, the illusions and misconceptions of the Christian subculture often drive the wounded into illusions and misconceptions of a different kind. They substitute one inadequate conception of the world for another.’ (Taylor, 2004:44). Given not only the relational cost, but also the theological compromise implicitly associated with leaving the Christian church, many evangelical women choose to stay. The remainder of this chapter reviews research concerns regarding the extent to which women’s ways of *managing* the dissonance they experience at church may lead them into the compromise Taylor describes above of substituting one ‘inadequate conception’ for another. Indeed, some scholars suggests that the longing to ‘belong’, the ‘supplementary’ use of spiritual resources from outside the evangelical tradition, and the use of ‘splitting’ as a strategy to integrate spiritual dissonance at church, is potentially detrimental to women’s spiritual lives. The following brief review of these concerns aims to provide a context for my own study of the extent to which these factors potentially contribute to the spiritual dissonance of some evangelical women in Scotland.

⁵³ Leaver literature fails to substantially address either the angry, adolescent and judgemental tendencies that may characterise those in faithing transition, or the clashes which are likely to occur between congregation members due to conflicting faithing styles. It thus avoids addressing the pastoral challenges facing transitional believers or the related implications for the styles of teaching, worship, counselling and community employed within the church.

Developmental Yearnings and the Longing to Belong

A woman's desire to maintain relationship will tend to lead her to address spiritual dissonance by any other means rather than leaving her congregational 'home'.⁵⁴

Nancy Chodorow suggests that, women's paradoxical yearning for differentiation *and* communion makes relational change a particularly complex dilemma for them, particularly when it risks relationships in the faith community (Chodorow in Parks, 2000:49). Furthermore, the explicitly 'bounded' or 'closed set' nature of some conservative churches⁵⁵ intensifies the cost of leaving for women whose congregations will interpret that act as a renunciation of their identity as 'orthodox' Christians (Chodorow in Grey, 1991:25).

The fear of change, developmental or other, can cause women to become stuck in their spiritual development. The loss of former, familiar ways of understanding faith, John Hull suggests, frequently causes believers actively to resist developmental change. He explains, 'The successive images of the life of faith destroy their predecessors. This means that growth is always initially seen...as being destructive'⁵⁶ (Hull, 1991:186). While fundamentally questioning Hull's assumption that successive faithing stages necessarily *destroy* their predecessors, given my feminist developmental understanding that believers *blend* rather than *replace* their faithing styles as they mature, the fear of this *degree* of dissonance causes many adults to resist developmental change. This leads some adults, Hull suggests, to 'maintain a defence against entering a new stage for years, decades or even while life lasts' (Hull, 1991:186).

⁵⁴ See Slee's discussion of women's preference for ongoing *connection* when threatened with the potential loss of human relationship, citing Devor's reworking of Fowler's stage 3-5 (Slee, 2004:35).

⁵⁵ On the concept of the church as a *bounded set* where orthodoxy is defined as whether you are 'in' or 'out' as opposed to an *extrinsic well-formed centred set* which recognises variation among believers and defines orthodoxy in terms of 'movement towards the centre' of union with Christ rather than exclusion at external boundary lines see Heibert, 1994:112-115.

⁵⁶ On the concept of faith being 're-learned' in turbulent periods of testing see Hull, 1991:186

Relational Hiding and Developmental Substitution

The fear of *exposure* as well as of *change* frequently leads to forms of hiding,⁵⁷ Stasi Eldredge observes, ‘Hiding women are those of us who never speak up at a Bible study or PTA council or any kind of meeting...We hide our truest selves and offer only what we believe is wanted, what is safe...We have spoken in the past and met with blank stares and mocking guffaws. We will not do it again. We hide because we are afraid.’ (Eldredge, 2005:56). In women’s hiding, Eldredge suggests, their vital contribution to the body of Christ is lost. She observes, furthermore, that one of the main ways evangelical women hide from themselves and from others is in Christian ‘busyness’. ‘Put up a shield and get on with life’, she writes, ‘...Hide. Hide in busyness; hide in church activities...’ (Eldredge, 2005:45). Evangelical commentators widely confirm the extent to which the compulsive activity frequently associated with Christian service can be detrimental to Christian discipleship, suggesting that many believers get their sense of *belonging* in the Christian community from intense involvement in leadership positions, church activities and ‘meetings’⁵⁸ (Richter and Francis, 1998:122-6; Bebbington, 2000; Webber, 2004:174; Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:74).

While spiritual activism, as Bebbington (2000) observes, is an indispensable characteristic of evangelical spirituality, evangelicals rarely acknowledge the extent to which addiction to Christian service may lead some believers to *avoid*, rather than *engage* with, the dilemmas of spiritual growth.⁵⁹ While spiritual ‘activity’ can sometimes function as a healthy *remedy* for spiritual malaise, Hull and others warn that it can also *hinder* spiritual development, particularly when used as a strategy to avoid ‘liminal space’.⁶⁰ Shults and Sandage in fact identify both compulsive activity and extreme contemplative withdrawal within a range of strategies subconsciously used to avoid developmental change. They explain, ‘some try to avoid liminal

⁵⁷ On the role of care-givers in establishing the human tendency to hide by refusing to share their own struggles and the socialising impact of the ‘don’t talk’ rule on spiritual development and the ability to face and process sin see Tate and Parker, 2007:220-221.

⁵⁸ On the dilemmas of the practice of rating the orthodoxy, consistency and spiritual health of church members on the basis of their church attendance see Ward, 1996:156; 2002:17.

⁵⁹ For an analysis of the ways in which obsessive spiritual practices including bible reading ironically *restrict* some believers’ spiritual development see Hull, 1991:134.

⁶⁰ For an examination of the role of liminal space in spiritual transformation see chapter 2: pp.65-68.

space...by returning to grandiose certainty or spiritual productivity. Others embrace uncertainty...through chronic wandering and commitment avoidance, preferring the lack of boundaries and containment offered by 'liminoid space'⁶¹ (Shults and Sandage, 2006).⁶² My understanding of this phenomenon and its potentially detrimental effect on women's spiritual health, intensified by my reading in this field, has thus crucially alerted me to the difficulties of *interpreting* the significance of service in women's spiritual lives, especially given its *ambiguity* as an indicator of maturity and its *priority* in the lives of many of the women interviewed here.

The Quest for a New Spirituality: Supplementing⁶³ as a Form of Developmental Diversion

Few evangelical churches can hope to satisfy all the spiritual tastes of their demonstrably diverse congregations, a fact which my own research suggests leads increasing numbers of women to explore *relational* forms of spirituality outside the evangelical church. Alister McGrath specifically links this practice to the phenomenon of congregational attrition, asserting that 'unless we can develop or rediscover forms of spirituality which are thoroughly evangelical in their roots and outlook, today's evangelicals may be tomorrow's ex-evangelicals...[and] the present growth of the movement may not be sustained in the longer term' (McGrath, 1994:141).

Despite McGrath's admission of the poverty of contemporary evangelical spirituality, like many other conservative evangelicals he seeks a solution from *within* evangelicalism's own history of spirituality. Both McGrath and other evangelical scholars (Volf, 1999; McIntosh 1999; Gardiner, 2002; Carson, 2005 and Shults and Sandage, 2006), express varying degrees of concern regarding the increasingly common practice of supplementing one's spiritual diet by drawing upon the wide range of resources available to enhance one's spiritual nurture out with the evangelical tradition. McGrath specifically fears the creation of a 'spiritually derivative' evangelical spirituality, a concern perhaps reflected in some leaders'

⁶¹ For a definition of the difference between liminal vs. liminoid space, see Moore, 2001.

⁶² On women's tendency to avoid liminal space of their frequently disorienting 'inner world' by focussing their attention on 'outside activity' during mid-life change see Rupp, 2004:42.

⁶³ For my definition of *supplementing* see p 106.

resistance to supplementation as intrinsically dangerous to congregational life, rather than merely a potential threat to their leadership.⁶⁴ Indeed, Shults and Sandage (2006) fear that practices such as supplementing may potentially reinforce immature faithing styles by promoting the practice of new *coping mechanisms*, rather than the new forms of relational *being* which characterise mature adult faith.

The concern that spiritual supplementing represents an emerging form of contextual Christianity which is essentially *consumerist* rather than *missional* in intent, compounds women's sense that the external forms of spirituality which they are drawing upon are disapproved of within the church. Miroslav Wolf's identification of this kind of 'eclectic spirituality' as the root of the contemporary church's shift away from revolutionary, ecclesial living further compounds the guilt which women feel in their pursuit of more relational forms of spirituality. He states, 'the worm of modernity is slowly eating away at the root of the will to ecclesial community; faith lived ecclesially is being replaced by faith lived individualistically' (Volf, 1998:11). Echoing Shults and Sandage's concern he continues, 'ecclesial life it would appear, as much for the post confessional Christian as the seeking agnostic, is under threat of being relegated to a consumer possibility rather than an altered state of being' (Volf, 1998:11).

This question of the evangelical church's predominantly negative perception of the practice of supplementing is of implicit relevance to my own research, due to the fact that these perceptions are likely to inhibit the community's ability to understand and accept women's spiritual journeys *beyond* the congregation. My brief review of the literature in this field is thus both apologetic and pastoral in intent. It establishes, firstly, the extent to which the evident suspicion of this phenomenon may have implications for the communication of my research findings within its constituent community. Secondly, it illustrates the importance of clarifying both the *benefits* of supplementing and the extent to which women's *concealment* of this practice raises wider questions for the long-term reform of women's discipleship in Scotland.

⁶⁴ This is reflected in the writings of McGrath himself as well as Don Carson's critique of the spirituality characterised by the Emerging Church (Carson, 2005). For an extensive examination of the dangers of 'grossly misreading medieval mystics through lens of contemporary 'experientialism' hoping that 'we will find in them allies for a position which, in truth, they reject' see Turner, 1995:5.

The way through these tensions, Miroslav Volf suggests, is for disillusioned Christians to return to a new kind of ‘ecclesial living’, rather than focus upon the ‘individual quest’. Indeed, he asserts that, ‘the test of true transformation of the will is the willingness to be involved in ecclesial being’ (Volf, 1998:179). While in some respects his observation is true, Volf’s argument fails to acknowledge the extent to which the repressive patterns and social structures of some congregations militate *against* addressing the needs of precisely the *marginalised* group that form the focus of this present study, a fact which had propelled many evangelical women on exactly the kind of ‘individual quest’ he condemns. Women’s fear of the consequences of discovery of their patterns of supplementing often leads them to conceal that practice. The symbolic suppression of significant parts of *themselves* frequently leads women to wear masks in the congregation which, while securing their acceptance and approval there, repress and deny their emerging selves. The final part of this chapter reviews the literature which explores this phenomenon in some depth, establishing the questions it raises regarding the theological and pastoral implications of this research.

Parallel Worlds and Parallel Lives: The Tendency Towards Splitting

The common side-effect of a woman’s ability to negotiate complex relationships in a variety of worlds is the phenomenon of psychological splitting, i.e. the adoption of different identities in different parts of her life. The gap which some women describe developing between their public and private selves as a result of the practice of ‘splitting’, potentially leads to the profound loss of the *self*. While a woman’s ability to play a variety of roles at home, at work and at church is generally a positive attribute, the sense of compromise and loss of self associated with the *unhealthy* practice of this life skill can have a detrimental effect on women’s spiritual health. The prominence of narratives of splitting, mask-wearing and loss of the self in my own participant interviews necessitates a brief review of the literature relating to this phenomenon and a summary of its implications for my own research.

Psychological Splitting and Group Membership

Clinically, ‘splitting’ refers to a psychological coping behaviour which uses displacement as a means of enabling a person to hold apparently contradictory, un-

integrated views.⁶⁵ It is most commonly used in the context of physical, emotional or sexual abuse to describe the feeling survivors have when they separate their consciousness from their bodies, a practice which often leaves individuals with the sense of being divided into more than one person (Bass and Davis, 1988:43-4). Significantly for this research, however, the term is also used to describe the strategies believers use to enable them to comply with the stringent theological and behavioural requirements commonly associated with group belonging in conservative Christian communities - a practice subconsciously employed by several of my research participants (Hull, 1991; Taylor 1992 and Young, 2004).

Young describes the process of splitting as 'the separation of different aspects of a person to protect themselves from being overwhelmed by what they feel', a practice which can produce an internal psychological division in which different parts of the individual's personality are in unconscious conflict, either with one another or with God (Young, 2004:64). *Theological* splitting describes the way in which believers subconsciously compartmentalise versions of Christian teaching which they find hard to reconcile intellectually or personally, particularly in conservative Christian congregations⁶⁶ (Young, 2004:152). The subconscious use of the psychological strategy of 'splitting' to control conflicting emotions or elements of the self perceived unacceptable to the church community, Young suggests, frequently prevents the church from facing its 'shadow side', unconsciously repressing, rather than redressing, behaviour which is potentially profoundly damaging to the self and the community (2004:96; 108).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the 'bifurcation of consciousness' which allows women to operate within a feminist framework at work and a subordinationist framework at church, see Baillie, 2002.

⁶⁶ On theological splitting as a form of '*ideological closure*' which short circuits the process of growth see Hull, 1991:65; 135, for an exploration of various other kinds of 'learning sicknesses' (that is strategies believers use to avoid facing up to the cognitive problems of religious knowledge) such as '*withdrawal and separation*' (as in the case of those we have described as 'internal leavers'), '*thought stopping*' (a form of splitting facilitated by the deliberate refusal to think about emerging questions), '*salvation by surrender*' (that is a nostalgic return to childhood faith), the '*descent into piety*' (in which faith is transferred from God to a particular technique, practice or attitude which when performed produce a sense of spiritual relief: commonly church going or devotional practices) and the adoption of new spiritual '*gurus*' (often writers) or *experiences* see Hull, 1991:120-138. These strategies, as my findings shortly reveal, were extensively used by my participants to 'control' potentially destructive spiritual dissonance.

⁶⁷ In conservative congregations such taboos exist particularly in the areas of 'liberal' theology, gender discrimination and human sexuality.

Splitting is described by Carl Jung as the development of a ‘conforming persona’, ‘a complicated set of relations between the individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual’ (Jung, in Young, 2004:73). The Christian, Young suggests, may sometimes sacrifice an aspect of him or herself in order to maintain a sense of belonging within the community, constructing a persona which conforms to group expectations while concealing those parts which might be rejected. He asserts, ‘The threat of exclusion or marginalisation which is often implicit within the culture of a Christian church or sect... [means that adherents] are likely to adopt a persona acceptable to their congregation, complying with the rules of conduct laid down’ (Young, 2004:40). ‘The Christian’s fear of rejection either by God or their ecclesial community’, he suggests, ‘may lead them to surrender to the god of group belonging...thereby seriously inhibiting their ability to live with integrity as true selves...’ (2004:40; 151).⁶⁸

For those whose desire to belong overpowers their sense of personal freedom and integrity, the habit of living as a false self may, Young suggests, become second nature. After a time, ‘...those persons who live habitually as false selves are unaware of their true selves...however these do not cease to exist; instead they remain blocked and become unconscious’ (Young, 2004:79). As Hull notes, this often subconscious practice can have a seriously detrimental affect upon the human personality. The long-term repression of one’s true self often results in the development of a ‘spirituality of passivity, a phenomenon described by some of my own interviewees. This represents an extreme form of splitting which may account for the experience described by ‘internal leavers’ of being *present* within, without the sense of *belonging* to, the congregation. Hull reflects, ‘One goes to church just as one goes to the hospital, as a patient not as an agent, to be acted upon not to act....this passing over of responsibility is one more way of avoiding painful and responsible engagement with Christian belief....boredom, dread and passivity lead finally to the phenomenon of

⁶⁸ Richter and Francis note that church leavers *least* likely to return to church include those whose main reason for leaving was *personal authenticity*: the sense that they were unable to keep going to church and be true to themselves and their real, internal values (Richter and Francis, 1998:139).

exhaustion' (Hull, 1991:141-2).⁶⁹ While this way of relating at church is frequently perceived by its sufferers and, to some extent, its congregational observers, to be indicative of a general 'lack of commitment', it is rarely ever considered to be the result of spiritual abuse.⁷⁰ The fact that this coping strategy is used by some believers at all in their everyday lives at church should be the source of considerable concern, given that these extreme forms of psychological separation are usually considered indicative of abuse. Indeed, the parallels one can clearly draw between some women's coping strategies at church, and those commonly exhibited by the survivors of sexual abuse - such as minimising, rationalising and denying; withdrawing into silence; escaping through over-achievement and workaholism; disengaging through psychological splitting and eating disorders (Bass and Davis, 1998:40-54) - demand we urgently address this phenomenon and its potential sources within the evangelical community.

The Protean Self, Developmental Blending and Synthesis

While the phenomenon of splitting is often, necessarily, understood in a negative light, Christel Manning suggests, by contrast, that it may also, ironically, play an indispensable role in the processes by which women deal with their paradoxical developmental longing for both *differentiation* and *belonging*.

Manning (1999) argues that many women compartmentalise their experience in order to negotiate the inconsistencies in their worlds. This tendency, she suggest, enables women to reconcile apparently contradictory ways of being in order to blend within

⁶⁹ Hull observes that the 'spirituality of passivity' is most frequently referred to in the expression 'recharging the batteries - probably the most common metaphor used by contemporary Christian adults in Britain to describe their experience in their local church on a Sunday'. He continues, 'although most people speak in this way...one cannot fail to notice that far from empowering them, going to church actually drains many Christians. It exhausts them...to be forced into the presence of that about which they are so ambiguous and unfulfilled?' (Hull, 1991:143).

⁷⁰ Spiritual abuse is defined by Johnson and Van Vonderen as 'the mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining or decreasing that person's spiritual empowerment...overriding the feelings and opinions of another, without regard to what will result in the other person's state of living, emotions or spiritual well-being' (Johnson and Van Vonderen, 1991:20). This has clearly been the experience of those participants who had experienced traumatic spiritual abuse, but it might equally characterise the everyday dis-empowerment of Christian women in church communities which theological and social structures fail to allow for women's unique ways of knowing God and negotiating spiritual growth.

the conflicting value systems of the worlds in which they move.⁷¹ Manning further identifies the processes of *blending* and *synthesis*, alongside splitting, as characteristic of the way many women make sense of their lives: maintaining a sense of belonging in a variety of social contexts despite their inherent contradictions.⁷² She further suggests that women frequently use patterns of compartmentalising *and* blending simultaneously to conserve their sense of value, identity and security in these worlds, both for themselves and for others, as part of their intrinsic ethic of care.

Manning's thesis is based on the work of R.J. Lifton,⁷³ who suggests that splitting is part of the *normal* way in which human beings adapt to change. Lifton uses the concept of the 'protean self' (based on the Greek God Proteus who appeared in many forms) to explain the complex ambiguity of women's practice of adopting different identities in different parts of their lives.⁷⁴ Lifton suggests that there are three manifestations of the protean self, namely *sequential*:⁷⁵ the cumulative unfolding of the maturing self, *simultaneous*: a variety of often antithetic images of the self which individuals draw upon in any given situation, and *social*: a variety of forms of self presentation for different environments such as the office, home and church. The adoption of protean selves, he suggests, not only helps men and women adapt to the complex contexts they encounter in life, they are also the means by which human beings maintain their *identity* through change⁷⁶ - a process which often requires them to function simultaneously in more than one mode (Manning, 1999:156).

Manning's adoption of Lifton's concept of the protean self goes some way to explaining the complex nature of women's patterns of relating, thus providing a context within which the apparent contradictions in the lives of conservative women

⁷¹ On the 'bifurcation of consciousness' and the unconscious ways in which women switch between value systems without apparently noting their inconsistency see Baillie, 2002.

⁷² On the ways women make sense of their lives through synthesis see Slee, 2004.

⁷³ Lifton's understanding of the 'protean self' arose from his work with those struggling with survivor guilt following the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings: Lifton, 1993.

⁷⁴ Proteanism, Lifton suggests, is in fact a '*quest for authenticity*': 'a balancing act between responsible shape shifting, on the one hand, and efforts to consolidate and cohere on the other'. He posits the 'protean self' as an alternative to the static 'Tepee model' of adulthood described by Carlyle Marney as 'fixed poles in a circle bound together to form a roof which symbolises maturity as the ability to remain stable in the storm' (Fowler, 2000:10).

⁷⁵ Given my critique of sequential models of growth in chapter 1, Lifton's particular interpretation of sequential selves as they relate to developmental change would require some adaptation.

⁷⁶ John Hull similarly identifies the practice of splitting as a particular kind of dissociation which is a common response to the pain of cognitive inconsistency (Hull, 1991:136).

begin to make sense. The concept ultimately fails however to enquire whether or not splitting might be a feature of women's developing relationship with *God*, thus potentially explaining their extreme experiences of spiritual abandonment at times of faithing change and personal crisis. Nor, finally, does it explore the extent to which the practice of splitting, which some evangelical women use to control their spiritual dissonance at church, may indicate the presence of spiritual abuse.

Developing a 'Secret Life': The Detrimental Consequences of Splitting

Several of the women interviewed for this project admitted, albeit reluctantly, their practice of hiding themselves in their congregations, commonly described as wearing 'masks' or living 'parallel lives'.⁷⁷ This practice, when maintained over a long period of time, polarises women's public and private selves - a reality the title of Beth Dickson's recent book, *The Secret Life of an Evangelical* confirms. As one of the few evangelical women in Scotland willing to speak publicly about these experiences, Dickson's words give vital voice to the concerns many maturing evangelical women dare not express regarding their adult discipleship in the church. Gifted in bible teaching, but prohibited from this role in her own tradition, Dickson describes the effect this had on her emerging identity as an evangelical woman: 'It seemed to me that as an Evangelical I had a secret life [...]... The way I saw it, it was the church that was confused, not me. On the one hand it was telling me that I was a priest, and on the other, it was not allowing me to practice as one. The older one got, the less easy it was to bear. So much of yourself had to be shorn off or bound up - like the feet of Chinese women - that going to church became a very destructive experience' (Dickson, 2005:1; 15). Dickson's experience of constriction, a common feature of many participant accounts, also, ironically, calls attention to the ways in which evangelical women sometimes collude in their own spiritual oppression. 'I began' she explains, 'to co-operate in the very personally dangerous project of editing myself out of my own life...a sequence of giving up things and trying to suppress various parts of my personality in order to conform with ideas of womanhood of which I was

⁷⁷ This is not a phenomenon exclusive to women. For an analysis of the role of compartmentalisation, the wearing of masks and the feeling of invisibility which men describe see McCloughry, 1992. 'Many men change their behaviour according to the context, either because they see themselves fulfilling different roles or because they have divided their life into water-tight compartments which are sealed off from one another...The end result of such compartmentalism [sic.] is that men can suffer from living in parallel worlds' (McCloughry, 1992:8-9).

suspicious but which I was unable to reject out of hand because I didn't have a hermeneutic that would allow me to do so' (Dickson, 2005:16). Only in a less restrictive Christian community did Beth finally begin to discover herself, '...as a complete human being, not one who needed to deny large parts of her personality in the presence of God.' (2005:22). While Dickson's memoir testifies to the liberation which is possible following such experiences, this present project seeks to honour the testimonies of 21 other Scottish women, several of whom are still, to a greater or lesser extent, trapped within their 'secret lives'.

Conclusion

As this review of 'leaver' literature suggests, contemporary evangelicalism urgently needs to learn from the experience of those who, for a variety of reasons, have decided to leave the church. Its tendency to be drawn to the stories of leavers, however, has generally marginalised the voices of those who have chosen to stay. The strategies which externally committed but internally disquieted believers use to maintain their equilibrium at church are often invisible to the naked eye, particularly when their underlying experience of dissonance and its occasional distress are carefully hidden from view.

From the Shadows into the Light

The first part of this thesis reviewed the literature which explores the unique contours of women's spiritual development. It identified, in particular, the detrimental ways in which women commonly repress aspects of their developing selves in order to retain their membership in Christian communities.

Part two of this thesis symbolically creates a *transitional environment* where Christian women may safely venture out of the shadows into the light, anonymously revealing the hidden dimensions of their 'secret lives'. It deliberately draws attention to the need to address specific aspects of these women's spiritual dissonance at root, particularly those which relate to their inadequate nurture and lack of voice within the evangelical community. As Poling observes:

‘A loving community is sensitive to the potential abuse of power and is careful to provide protection for its most vulnerable members. The discussion about whether or not abuse of power exists in a community cannot depend on the perception or honesty of the powerful because the powerful tend to justify themselves at the expense of others. Those who are vulnerable must be given authority to testify about their perceptions of the abuse of power’ (Poling 1991:151).

The next three chapters give voice to the vulnerable, revealing the *complexity* and the *diversity* of their spiritual lives. Chapter 5, ‘*Where have they come from?*’, reviews the factors which have shaped these women’s spiritual development in the past, chapter 6, ‘*Where are they now?*’, explores the ‘spiritual impasse’ some of them report experiencing in the present, and chapter 7, ‘*Where are they going?*’, assesses the means by which many of these women are attempting to move forward in their faith.

Part II

Voices from Silence

Chapter 5

Where have they come from?

Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which women's early faith experience in their family homes and in the local church both influenced their spiritual development and shaped their strategies for dealing with experiences of spiritual dissonance in the Christian life. It explores three of the generative themes which emerged from my research participants' narratives, reflecting women's past and present concerns regarding: their *search for meaning*, their *longing to belong* and their *desire to grow*.

The Search for Meaning

Many of my research participants described their longing to *belong* in the faith community long before they understood what it actually meant to *believe*. This frequently created tensions for them as they tried to understand the meaning of 'church' and the significance of a personal relationship with God.

Making Sense of Church: Women's First Experiences of the Christian Community

Most women's relational attachment to the church began at an early age.¹ The majority of my participants were either brought up in the church or were at some point socially incorporated into it through Sunday school, youth group or voluntary organisation involvement.

Frameworks of meaning were predictably implicit for the children of Christian parents and those who habitually attended church:

'...we didn't sing choruses we sang nice hymns and...went into little circles and had stories and...it was just sort of part of *life*' (Margaret).

One clergyman's daughter, shocked by her inability to recall many details of her childhood faith, remarked:

¹ Seventeen participants attended Sunday school consistently from their early childhood onwards. Only four participants had not attended either Sunday school or church as a child.

‘I don’t remember [church] making a big spiritual impression on me. It was more... *activities*... keeping the place going....doing practical things. I don’t remember my father talking about Christian things very much really. It was...something...we did as a family and it was part of life and...one didn’t question it really...just got on and did what was necessary’ (Rebecca).

For children brought up in Christian homes, it was the repeated *rhythm* of church life rather than its *content* which seemed to give it significance:

‘...we were brought up in church so that Sunday had a very set kind of pattern...you were up early in the morning, you went to church...had your lunch then went to Sunday School... so....church was always... part of the...reality round about the...*pattern* of life’ (Elaine).

Another interviewee recalled, with a degree of retrospective irony, the security she felt in her unquestioning acceptance of faith in the family home. Her experience of church life was an intrinsic part of that reassuring pattern, inextricably connected with what it meant to *belong* to her family:

‘.... in my home nothing was questioned...I felt secure and....perfectly happy just to be told what was the right way to do things. So I suppose... the whole church thing was ‘part of the parcel’...’ (Carol).

It was understandably hard for participants to remember what they understood church to ‘be’ in those early days. One woman recalled trying to connect it with the rhythms of life:

‘One day....in the children’s service I was thinking, this church business is like....we are a bit like....these old wrist watches... that you have to wind up once a day at least...we are a bit like these watches, we get wound up on Sunday and then we run down during the week and then next Sunday we come back to be (laughing) wound up again’ (Pamela).

Pamela shared a vivid memory of the indirect ways in which she had realised her emerging sense of self was directly connected with the positive social experience of being in church:

‘... I really liked Sunday school it was where I stood out, you know....where I [was].....good...and I knew the bible well.....I felt... I could *shine* and so I got a lot of my...kind of....self worth from [that]’ (Pamela).

Positive, nurturing experiences in their biological families and faith communities were frequently key factors in women’s emerging sense of self and significance. ‘Un-churched’ participants reported experiencing a sense of *belonging* and *acceptance* in the church beyond anything they had experienced in other communities, cementing their strong relational attachment to the church in a vital way.² Church thus, for them, clearly constituted a secure, affirming environment in which they established their identity as human beings and found satisfying answers to their early questions about the meaning of life.

Remarkably, even for young children, the thrill of belonging to a large, thriving faith community was a strong and significant memory:

‘....the church was absolutely packed [...]...they were all up and down the pulpit steps, the choir stalls were packed, the place was heaving and....the sermon was...maybe an hour long – *nobody* batted an eyelid’ (Morag).

Some women’s social experience of church however was initially negative, this was primarily due to being sent to Sunday school as a form of childcare. While Sunday school offered many positive experiences of the Christian community, some women described it as an essentially *alienating* experience: illustrating the significance of women’s experience of the church as a social as well as a spiritual phenomenon.

‘..my wee brother and I were sent [to church] to get out of the way for a wee while....we were to go and give our collection and we used to...walk right round all

² This finding confirms Brasher’s reports regarding the primarily *relational* nature of women’s strong religious attachment to the church: see p.95ff.

the chairs and sing, ‘dropping, dropping pennies...’ and we obviously didn’t do it [well] enough and [the Sunday school teacher] ranted and raved and started yelling at us and said we had to do it again...and it was horrendous, you know, I was really scared of that woman’ (Alison).

The Importance of Connection: The Intuitive, the Relational and the Conceptual

Several women found it hard to connect their sense of the ‘felt presence’ of God in their intuitive ‘inner world’ with the descriptions of God they encountered at church. In some cases it took many years for women to connect their adult experience of knowing God with those early childhood experiences. From an early age, many participants reported a *tacit* awareness of God. This was frequently accompanied by a sense of being protected and loved by him:

‘... I had...a sense of who God was, but it wasn’t until I was 8 or 9 that I began to realise...or understand the spiritual dimension [of that relationship]...I might not have...used relational terms to explain it but [I] understood that God was looking after me, God was *with* me and because God *loved* me things were going to be OK...[I suppose I had a] sense of God being in *control* and...that he would make sure nothing bad ever happened to me.....which later (laughing)...proved...wasn’t going to be the case!’ (Fiona).³

Some women’s awe in recollecting their childhood awareness of a ‘presence’ they suspected might be God was evident in its retelling many years after the event:

‘I always...even when I was quite little...had that sense of [*slowly, ponderous... filled with a growing awe*] ...a *force* in the universe...it wasn’t quite...‘good things would happen to you if you were well behaved’ but...there was something out there...to be *respected*....and a sense of the fear of the Lord... not in a...frightening... negative way...but just in an awesome...there’s just a *force*... I did see it as a benevolent force....and sometimes...things would happen...and I would think [*whispering*] ‘That’s *God*’ (Hazel).

³ Fiona astutely reflected on the naivety of her childhood belief that God’s protection was fundamentally guaranteed: the disillusionment of which was a key factor her own later experience of spiritual dissonance due to an unexpected family bereavement. Her experience of God as divine *parent* is commonly associated with early, dependent faithing styles (Fowler, 1995).

It proved difficult for Hazel however, as for other participants, to connect their early intuitive sense of the awesomeness of God with the social reality of the church.

Hazel's earlier tacit experience, she recalls was:

'... very disconnected from my experience of Sunday school.....I *hated* Sunday school with a passion [because] I had to dress up. If I'd been allowed to go [in my own clothes] that would have been one step better, but also [...]... It was all that *emotional* stuff, it just wasn't a 'safe place' so I just didn't like it [...]....its like that disconnection between your spiritual *reality* and your spiritual *awareness* and this thing called *church*... there have been times...where they've come together but....a lot of times.....they don't' (Hazel).

She commented later on:

'...as much as I had a sense of God or...whatever, I probably got more from things like the Guides and just my own sense of ... my own wee mad mind, (laughs) you know, than specifically the church' (Hazel).

Hazel's sense of spiritual *disconnection* and social *alienation* at church, while different in degree, was as real for her at interview as it had been in her first recounted experience. Indeed Hazel was not alone in her struggle to feel that church might ever prove to be a 'safe place'. Others had difficulty relating their spiritual awareness to the ways in which the knowledge of God was spoken about at church. Significantly, it was the *relational* support of a group of elderly women in the church which motivated her to stay in the church despite this sense of spiritual and social dissonance which pervaded her teenage years:

'..if it wasn't for that wee bunch of women...they just...took me under their wing and into their hearts, they were so *thrilled* to have me there... genuinely interested in what was happening in my life...and that really helped...to *glue* me to the church until I left school and went to Uni.' (Hazel).

Women like Hazel, as early as in their adolescence, were demonstrably already experiencing and attempting to resolve the dissonance between their *inner* and *outer* spiritual worlds. Frequently they attempted to do this by focussing on the *relational*

compensation which they received from other key relationships at church.⁴ To use Hazel's own metaphor, the 'adhesive' which bonded her to the church was primarily *relational* in nature.⁵

While, as an adolescent, Hazel was to some degree developmentally equipped to deal with her experience of dissonance, this was not the case for participants forced to face this kind of disruption at an earlier age. At the time of her mother's suicide, when she was four years of age, Alison developed a highly *positive* attachment to God which sustained her through that traumatic experience. Her mystical experience of God's loving presence at that time balanced the relational alienation she experienced in the home of the carers with whom she was placed and who refused to acknowledge her mother's suicide or answer her inevitable questions. Alison's dialogical, open relationship with God at that time was remarkable for a child only four years old:

'I had a sense of a God...who cared [...]... something deep within me knew there was a God who cared...and my theology was simple: I talked and he listened, and I would rage...against this God... for taking my mother: 'Why did you do this? Why did you take her away? Why could you have done this to me?' But in a way....I looked on that as a *healthy* relationship with a God. But I somehow... I can't...link it up with the...teaching that comes from the Christian church about my God...and I do not recognise the God of my childhood often...that's preached in the Christian church' (Alison).

Alison's elemental experience of herself as a *beloved* child of God was subsequently ironically displaced by teaching on hell which she encountered at a local evangelical church. The image of a wrathful deity which she discovered there challenged her primal image of a loving God. This experience was extremely damaging to her, emotionally and spiritually, at that time:

'I don't know whether the hell fire and brimstone kind of teaching was getting to me but I woke up one night taking spasms...I thought I was dying and they had to call the doctor in. And I was *terrified* I was going to die and go to hell... I felt I was this

⁴ This confirms the findings of Brasher and Baillie regarding the compensatory role of approval in women's experience of this kind of relational dissonance (p.93).

⁵ Participant observations of the primacy of their relational links with congregations support Brasher's thesis that relationality is prime over rationality in women's spirituality (p.95).

bad person and that I was going to go to hell...I think it was to do with the teaching that....I was sinful....and I didn't know what to do about that' (Alison).

Alison's experience, thankfully, was unique among my research participants. Her narrative, however, clearly highlights the extent to which a person's primal imaginal connection with God directly affects their ability to interpret the church's language and its perhaps well-intentioned attempts to inform or indeed *reform* their prior conceptual understanding of God.

The Mystery of Relationship with God

Given the emphasis laid upon the importance of entering into a 'personal relationship with God' in the evangelical tradition, it was significant to note that several participants spoke about their struggle to relate to this concept at all. This was a source of considerable spiritual anxiety for them in their early years. While 'relationship with Jesus' was a phrase participants heard frequently repeated in sermons, sung in songs and emphasised in attempts to evangelise them, some women confessed they had no idea what it actually *meant*.⁶

Silence in the Family: The Lack of Role Models for the 'Interior' Life

Participant narratives clearly showed that most women had lacked substantial role models to teach them about the 'interior' reality of the spiritual life. This was not due to the *absence* of believing adults in children's world's, but to those adults rarely *speaking* with them about their personal experience of God. One interviewee remarked that it was only following the unexpected death of her mother that her father began to speak more openly about his personal relationship with God.

Many participants experienced considerable difficulty trying to answer the opening interview question about their parents' spiritual lives. This inevitably exposed their scant knowledge of their parents' faith experience. Indeed, this realisation prompted

⁶ While I had suspected that one potentially rich vein of data would be women's reflections on knowing God as Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit over the years this was not the case, confirming Slee's (2004) findings regarding the 'apophatic' nature of many women's relationship with God.

several women to ask their parents, for the very first time, to tell them their own spiritual story. As women reflected upon this significant gap in their understanding of their parents' interior lives, many confirmed that they had rarely, if ever, spoken with their own close family members about their personal experience of faith. While this may reflect a general human tendency, the lack of role models to mentor women in the complex contours of their emerging spiritual lives may compound women's demonstrable difficulty in engaging with their later experience of spiritual change, their tendency towards silence and their difficulty in articulating and processing personal sin.⁷ Some participants ascribed their parents' resistance to share the personal aspects of their faith to a common cultural reluctance to talk about religion, politics or finance in Scottish homes. This was frequently reinforced by the fact that many women perceived their parents to be very 'private' people:

'[My parents] grew up in the church, they were very much a part of it, very much involved....but that is talking about their 'churchianity' ...I couldn't say anything about their spirituality, it's not something they would have talked about' (Frances).

'Mum did [talk about religious things] a bit...if we initiated it...she was a very private sort of person in lots of ways [...]...mum, I think probably had a...a very simple....no, actually it was probably a very *messy* faith but... there really was not.....a great deal of opportunity to talk about spiritual things with them.I think they were scared of....the very fragile security they had being invaded' (Margaret).

While, on occasion, some women remembered family *theological* discussions concerning the bible, they rarely recalled conversations exploring the *experiential* reality of knowing God,⁸ an omission one participant had deliberately redressed in the spiritual nurture of her own children. Spiritual conversation in many Scottish homes, as a result of this cultural 'taboo', predominantly centred upon the *activity* of the church rather than the *life of faith*. It is hardly surprising therefore, that women experienced varying degrees of spiritual *disorientation* in their early faith experience: given the lack of *generational* resources they possessed to orient themselves

⁷ On the tendency to hide weakness and failure rather than embrace one's full humanity – learned in interaction with one's earliest care-givers and the ways in which this leads to hiding as well as the 'don't talk' rule and its impact on the ability to face and process sin see Tate and Parker, 2007:220-221.

⁸ One notable exception to this was a participant who had a close spiritual relationship with her mother whose unexpected death created a significant gap in her ongoing processing of her spiritual life.

imaginatively or *developmentally* in their spiritual lives. Participants rarely recalled any presentation of heuristic models of growth, either at home, or in church, where the main thrust of congregational teaching seemed to focus on the sinfulness of ‘man’, the death of Jesus and the importance of sacrificial service and witness as an appropriate response to the cross.⁹ Women’s lack of biblical teaching regarding the complex realities of the interior life of faith or the multi-layered dimensions of spiritual change may account not only for their lack of reference to such triangulation points in their faith narratives but also the extent to which they were demonstrably unprepared and ill equipped to face the realities of spiritual transformation as they arose in their lives.¹⁰

The notable exceptions to this omission were the participants who demonstrated a basic knowledge of some biblical principles or theoretical frameworks relating to the process of spiritual growth. Most women had encountered these resources through para-church discipleship, counselling training or tertiary theological or psychological education. The sense of spiritual ‘orientation’ which was sometimes demonstrated in the narratives of these participants was also reflected in the accounts of those whose parents or significant carers had spoken more openly and personally to them about their experience of faith. These women seemed, at least to some extent, to be able to exteriorise and reflect upon, rather than ignore or deliberately repress, their interior lives. The effect of such personal, relational models of faith was considerable. Significantly, this was as true of ‘vocal’ parents who openly *struggled* with their faith as of those whose faith was firm and who regularly attended church. One woman’s appreciation of conversations with her father about God, despite their lack of theological *content* and their unexpected, untimely end, clearly inspired her subsequent personal relationship with God:

‘...my dad...was a fantastic singer and would sing choruses to me all the time [...]... he never ever spoke about going to church or having any kind of faith but...[he] would talk about God. He died... (pause)...and...it was a time that...my faith was

⁹ On the developmentally detrimental effect of an over-emphasis on service see chapter 4, p.126.

¹⁰ While one or two women had come across heuristic models such as Teresa of Avila’s ‘Interior Castle’, they were unsure how to engage with those insights. Only those who had read Alan Jamieson’s recent books had heard of James Fowler’s stages of faith. Feminist heuristic models were entirely unknown.

being challenged again and so....I never got the chance to have a conversation with him about where he was at or what he thought' (Fiona).

Another participant recalled,

'My mum loved to pray and...it was really fantastic to...listen to her prayers in church because....there was a different quality...to hers than some of the other people that prayed.... It felt sincere, and she had her own language...she always called Jesus 'teacher' and then her voice would kind of quiver and she would be full of emotion about it but....I don't think she had any clue about being spiritual...or even... discipleship... but she had...a very real relationship with God' (Pamela).

The small glimpses which women snatched of even the imperfect spiritual experience of their parents was formative in their spiritual development.

The Problem of Questioning and the Rise of Spiritual Alienation

Women's early attempts to interpret their spiritual lives were thus sadly more often hindered than helped by their parents' silence. Parental resistance to answering daughter's questions about faith similarly retarded some women's spiritual development. The apparent disapproval of their enquiring minds had predominantly caused participants to withdraw internally rather than persist in their questioning of resistant adults. By such means young girls were often deliberately socialised to prefer silence over honest speech and repression over accountable, dialogical reflection as their main strategy for addressing internal spiritual dilemmas.¹¹

'We never talked about religion in our family. It was one of those taboo subjects. It was considered embarrassing in my family...after all those years...I still have a lot of that with me now still...' (Deborah).

'I would regularly ask questions that people didn't like to answer...and I think my mother would say, 'Because you just *do*'...and I think that was probably because she

¹¹ On the socialisation of young girls to not ask questions see chapter 3, pp.90-91. Note also Carol's father's resistance to her asking questions in this chapter, p.151.

didn't really know the answer herself...hadn't thought it out...I'm there asking the inevitable question you're 'not allowed to ask'' (Maria).

The ways in which women's spiritual questions were handled in their nurturing environments thus frequently determined the strategies they chose to use for dealing with cognitive and other dissonance in their subsequent adult discipleship. This was particularly marked when parents' preference for dependent faithing styles had made them resistant themselves to intellectual challenge or existential reflection, and thus unable to teach the wise practice of these spiritual disciplines to their daughters. The fact that most of these young women frequently lacked actual examples of the ways in which their own *parents* or other adult role models handled spiritual doubt, theological questioning or the battle with personal sin left them in a very vulnerable position. The self-repressive process upon which some women subsequently embarked commonly marked the beginning of their feelings of spiritual alienation within themselves, a process which, as we shall see in the next chapter, frequently leads to the loss of the reflective 'self'.¹²

Journeying Alone: The Significance of Mystical Encounter

Sometimes lacking a 'safe' forum for conversations about God as well as a forum to develop their emerging, 'reflective self', some women described feeling 'on their own' in the spiritual life, with few triangulation points to help them navigate the inevitable 'crises' of faith. The 'death' of Santa Claus precipitated precisely this kind of crisis for Joanna at the time of a family bereavement. She explains:

'[I] started thinking a bit more analytically and that was when I started questioning everything - which were stories and which were real? ...and it started to matter...like what happened to people I had loved and that had now died? [...]... and of course... Santa wasn't real...and so consequently it kind of...I couldn't really distinguish whether...the stuff at church was... story or whether it was real...[...]...that's where I suppose my...parents didn't really have answersbecause my mum would have just [said], 'Well of *course* its real'. So a lot of that exploring and thinking was done

¹² On the habitual repression of questions as a practice which commonly leads to women's loss of access to themselves see chapter 3, p.90.

on my own and...you know, getting out the children's bible and trying to figure out is this real or is it not?' (Joanna).

In the end Joanna decided to take matters into her own hands, reflecting:

'[I had]nothing to lose...why don't I just pray and ask Jesus to show me that it is real ...and that's where it all started....I started [to pray] as if he was a person, as if he was there and that's where the relationship started' (Joanna).

Like Joanna, several other participants reported opening themselves to the *mystery* of relationship with God, despite lacking any theological framework or 'processing place' to help them understand precisely where that experience might lead.¹³

Mystical encounters featured in the conversion narratives of two particular women, one in her teens, the other in her late fifties, neither of whom were practicing Christians at the time.

'.... I saw God...it was light...it was a vaguely human....shape but it was a light...and...he just said, 'Come'...and so I went out....I had to start finding out what it was afterwards, but I made that commitment because He was *there*' (Ruth).

Deborah's encounter occurred as she was driving up the M9:

'I was about half way along...the road and....it was just (almost whispering) like I had this sense of God filling the car, just from nowhere...just... (pause)...just like God was in the car with me....this God that I'd denied for 30 years, this God I'd never spoken to....and trusted in....he was *there*...with me....such a (whispering) power.....power.....power (whispering) And then, there was....it was like he was saying to me very clearly, 'Take this car and drive...to [a nearby church]...And I went and I sat down....I started to read the bible.... and the tears started to come... and....it was just like a....cleansing, washing.... re-birth whatever ...like a snake losing its skinI didn't have the language for it, I didn't have the constructs or the concepts for it, I now understand what happened, but at the time I didn't know what was happening to me but it was real ; it was powerful; it was meaningful..... (Deborah).

¹³ Another participant, more practically, took her 'search for God' to the encyclopaedia section of the local library rather than the church.

While the reality of the relational and the intuitive frequently initiates women's relationship with God, particularly in situations when all other access to him is restricted, the lack of adequate relational and reflexively theological contexts within which to *process* that experience frequently limits women's ability to integrate the intuitive and the cognitive; the experiential and the theological, in their spiritual development.

The Spiritual 'Route Map' of Christian Service

The experience of 'travelling' alone, armed only with a very basic inherited spiritual route map, had socialised the majority of my original research participants into a predominantly active, minimally reflective spiritual life. Given their lack of resources to orient them in the life of faith, this is hardly surprising. Women's socialised tendency to focus on Christian service as their main source of spiritual activity and, indeed, personal significance in the Christian community had, in some cases, distracted participants from developing the more analytical dimensions of their once intellectually inquisitive but increasingly passive faith. While some women were clearly content with the subtle equilibrium they had achieved between sacrificial activity and reflective inactivity, others felt that their excessive involvement in Christian service was in danger of distracting them from the underlying, unresolved issues in their lives, and thus was detrimental to their long-term spiritual health. These women's concerns reflect those of Glaz and Stevenson-Moessner regarding the damaging effect which transitional altruism can have upon women's spirituality when it is normalised as the ultimate goal of Christian faith.¹⁴

It is not surprising, given the marginalisation of women's interior lives in the manner described above, that many of my participants had learned to repress, rather than explore, their spiritual dissonance, thus setting up a potentially unhealthy imbalance between their *inner* and *outer* lives. Within this framework, vast tracts of women's interior lives seemed to have been systematically silenced.

¹⁴ See pp.91-92 on the dangers of Christian altruism and the stagnation of the self. See also Grey, 1991: 15-19 on women locked into the spiral of self-giving and women's failure to take responsibility for their spiritual lives by negating the self.

The Longing to Belong

In addition to the quest for meaning, many women identified their intense ‘longing to belong’ as a destructively dominant feature of their spiritual lives, relationally *attaching* them to the faith community, but also, ironically, *adding* to their experience of spiritual dissonance. This created a number of tensions for women as they tried to maintain the delicate balance between their *external* relationships in the faith community and their *internal* life of faith.

The Internal Inconsistency of Conforming Faith

Women’s descriptions of their early faith experience, instead of focussing on the *theological* aspects of authentic faith,¹⁵ prioritised two related dimensions of women’s spiritual lives, namely, the experience of *belonging* and being *accepted* within the faith community and the experience of *belonging* to and being *accepted* by God.

Their longing to belong, coupled with their drive to seek the approval of parents and authority figures, led some of them to adhere *externally* to the ‘code’ of the faith community, while concealing an *internal* sense of relational or cognitive disorientation. This was occasionally exacerbated by the fact that the faith community’s preference for rational, analytical ways of speaking about God, failed to help some women grasp what it truly meant to ‘know’ God. Thus, some participants reported being aware of a gap emerging between their *social inclusion* in the Christian community as a result of their adoption of its doctrines and customs, and their not-yet-consolidated *spiritual union* with God which frequently occurred, they perceived, at a much later stage.

Carol’s tendency to conform first arose in her family home as her desire to please her parents led her actively to suppress her impulse to question in order to understand.¹⁶ She experienced considerable difficulty trying to understand salvation as a

¹⁵ Confirming Slee’s findings (2004) few of my women used either conceptual or theological ways of speaking about, reflecting upon or analysing their faith, despite their high level of theological training.

¹⁶ Carol’s preferred dialogical style of processing highlights the importance of the midwife approach to education (pp.96-7).

transforming rather than a *conforming* experience, given the subtle pressure the faith community exerted upon her to embrace *uniformity* and *conformity* there:

‘...although salvation was individual, personal, there was nothing individualistic that I could see...it was a *clone* mentality... there was a way you behaved and a way you didn’t behave and in our home ...you didn’t question....[my father] was *disappointed* on the few occasions that I challenged him. He would say things to me like, ‘I’m disappointed that any daughter of mine would think like that or come out with a thing like that.’ And I just *knew*...what they expected of me and wanted *very much* to give them that’ (Carol).¹⁷

The codes of belief and behaviour around which many evangelical faith communities revolve were hard for some women to relate to. Those responsible for theological teaching there sometimes failed to communicate doctrinal concepts in ways which were accessible to those who preferred ‘connected’ to ‘separate’ ways of knowing.¹⁸ The theological and social codes which marked the boundaries of ‘orthodox’ faith were, therefore, described by a variety of participants as a ‘package’ which one had to adopt in order to ‘belong’ in the evangelical church. Indeed, several women openly admitted having adopted the package without really knowing what it meant. While this perhaps suggests these women saw Christianity as a consumer option, their use of such metaphorical language might equally reflect their relational *disconnection* from the ‘product’ which was being preached, namely an essentially *conceptual* solution to the *relational* problem of human alienation from God.

Safety and Security: Accepting the ‘Package’ and the Process of Growth

Many participants’ decision to accept the package of faith in their early years was linked to their desire to secure or maintain a sense of relational *safety* and *security*.

‘God was the ‘benevolent protector’ and I [realised I] had to be on his side....to be

¹⁷ On the deep unconscious need to live up to the ‘programs of worth’ in our families and our communities of origin and the ways in which this can lead children to lose access to the truth of their own desires and lead to the creation and maintenance of false selves see Fowler 1996:13.

¹⁸ On the importance of ‘connected knowing’ in women’s spiritual development and its practice in ‘enclaves’ and thus the detrimental effect of this reported lack, see chapter 2, pp.53-54; chapter 3, pp.88; 96.

safe...ours was a family that very much tried to keep you safe from these wicked worldly ways...which included the smoking... the drinking, the gambling, the wearing of certain types of clothes... So...yes...it was a *package*' (Carol).

Women's early conviction that 'coming to faith' involved their adoption of a fixed package of moral behaviour and doctrinal beliefs was widespread. Becoming a Christian within this model symbolised faith for the majority of women as a systemic, cumulative behavioural program of establishing and maintaining a variety of theological beliefs, devotional practices and moral standards, without which it would be impossible for them to please God. As one woman put it:

'In terms of church, there is a period of 'Well who am I in this?' ... 'Do I want to blend or do I not want to blend?' ... What's that to do with you as a *person* and what's that to do with the *structure* that you are seeking to join? If I want to be in the Guides I need to wear the uniform. OK, I've joined the church, what's the uniform?' (Maria)

The package explicitly involved the profession of a personal commitment to Christ, subsequently authenticated by a changed lifestyle. Elaine explained the elements she perceived the package would involve:

'I think very clearly...there was definitely... a point of decision - that you had to come to Christ, and... respond to him and ask him into your life. And then...as a kind of result of that certain things followed so...your growth was very much caught up in the, you know, 'read your bible, pray every day and you'll grow, grow, grow' (Elaine).

Elaine identified three main elements in the package of disciplines which she intuitively picked up would be associated with her *growing* life as a Christian: reading the bible, praying and attempting to bring others to Christ. Women like Elaine often measured their level of spiritual health according to their practice of these disciplines, mostly in a negative way:

'...through the Christian Endeavour there was quite an emphasis on learning to pray. Not just personal prayer but group prayer... [another] thing was the witnessing thing - that there was this responsibility to go and win other people for Jesus because they were lost and, I can remember... buying pencils with bible verses on them ...in the

hope that this was going to be good enough [...]... and I found it quite difficult... taking a stand....which seemed to be part of the....'package'I found that quite difficult...' (Elaine).

Other interviewees added church attendance and service to the package. Fulfilment of these requirements confirmed (or questioned) your spiritual orthodoxy, a regime some women happily embraced and against which others explicitly rebelled:

'I knew that ...there were things that Christians *ought* to do. One of them was....they had to have a quiet time - they had to read their bible...they had to use the S.U. methodand they had to go to church that was 'right'. And I also began to get hold of the idea that there were things Christians *didn't* do. Like drinking and dancing and going to the pictures' (Margaret).

'there were things that you were expected to do or not and I thought.....you know I'm not going to lose my *faith* by not turning up to church on a Sunday morning, and yet I was kind of getting the distinct impression that unless I *did* X, Y and Z I wasn't going to cut it...do you know what I mean?' (Maria).

Life within the package, as some women described it, determined your spiritual authenticity within the religious community. When asked if she had any sense of faith as a growing or developing experience in her teenage years, Carol replied, 'No':

'Everything seemed to hark back to your decision [...]... and that decision being made, you adopted a *lifestyle* and I suppose the thing then was that you [should not be] tempted *out* of that lifestyle. There were ways you did things and by doing them you showed you were a Christian and you had made your decision so heaven was ahead....and you were on the right side' (Carol).

Other participants confirmed that their early identity as Christians had been based on moral *conformity* and categories of *separation* from the surrounding subculture, rather than any concept of Christian development as an organic process of growth:

'...it wasn't really spiritual growth as much but...good morality...and then....you are saved, but at the same time...if you belonged to the church you were in 'Israel' and...

if you *didn't* belong to that church you weren't going to heaven so...growing up I thought churches like the Methodists....and the Baptists were all sects....and all heresies of some kind...' (Pamela).

Tensions in Christian Nurture: The Problem with 'Banking'

The social expectation that true Christian regeneration would be reflected in a convert's commitment to consistency and conformity was frequently reinforced by its educational processes. In an early clash of opinion regarding her understanding of the Holy Spirit, Carol nearly came to blows with her local minister. Reflecting on that experience from the perspective of the present day, she observed:

'I said, I thought the Holy Spirit was an *influence* and of course [the minister] was horrified...he took me aside afterwards and said, 'No, the Holy Spirit was one of the *persons* of the Trinity.' So that was a *doctrine* he gave me, not an explanation andthat was what I grew up with. *Doctrines* that I had to sign up to...and, because I wanted to *belong* to that group, I was going to sign up to them, but there was not really....anything....dynamic going on *within* me' (Carol).

The banking approach to Christian education, which Carol's minister's response reflected, neither honoured the significance of her attempt to understand the Holy Spirit within her *own* frame of reference, nor helped connect the meaning making processes in which she was already engaged with the yet unrealised *relational* dimension of her experience of God.¹⁹

The Evangelical Community as a 'Bounded' Set

Women's intuitive perception of the 'bounded' nature of the evangelical community was demonstrably present from an early age and played a major role in maintaining participants' conformity to its doctrinal and social norms.²⁰ This was frequently reinforced by a participant's fear of displeasing or disappointing her Christian parents.

¹⁹ On the potentially retarding impact of a 'banking' approach to Christian education and its potential alienation of women learners see chapter 3, pp.85-89. For a rationale of Belenky's alternative 'midwife' approach to women's education see chapter 3, p.97.

²⁰ On the implications of the evangelical community as a 'bounded' or 'closed' set see chapter 3, pp.88-9; 98; chapter 4, p.125.

Despite the feeling that it was often a chore, many young women's commitment to church attendance was directly linked to maintaining a sense of belonging, approval and acceptance in their family homes.

'I always wanted to give my Dad the right answers...I suppose I wanted him to think...that I was a good Christian [...]...[the] fear of disappointing my dad was really, really significant...and my sisters would both say the same....I wouldn't say it to my dad because...he would hate to think that but...that is probably still there for us in some ways ...' (Louise).

Conformity to the rhythms and values of Christian family life was perceived by some participants to be the key, not only to their acceptance and approval in the home, but also their eternal spiritual destiny. Their attentive conformity to the instinctively felt social mores of the group was at times more often motivated by the desire for self-preservation than responsible theological conviction. This came at a much later stage. Belief in the *concept* of God was, for some, the pragmatic means to social and existential ends, namely the maintenance of a sense of belonging and the urgent avoidance of eternal damnation.

Carol perceptively identified the relational dissonance she experienced as a teenage Christian. Her desire to belong and be considered 'in' the Christian community, compounded by her fear of the eternal consequences of being considered 'out', led Carol, despite her underlying theological doubts, to conform to her faith community's 'code', for the sake of preserving the prime relationships in her life.

'*Above all* I did not want to be disloyal. Now I had these questions, even as a wee girl I had these questions – you know – lurking: 'What does it *mean*?' Because I did think I should be able to *understand* it [...] ...but I would have felt I was running out on Jesus...[...]... 'so....it always boiled down to [the fact that] I was going to join the camp my mum and dad were in or was I going to step outwith. And I wasn't brave enough to step outwith....' (Carol).

The irony of these relational tensions frequently meant that women who might intrinsically have felt themselves to be at least socially 'in' the family of faith because

their birth parents were members of the Christian community, often felt internally *alienated* there because they had not yet entered into a personal relationship with God. Women, however, who *had* made a personal faith commitment and attempted to join the community from the *outside*, sometimes felt equally alienated there, despite their adherence to its moral and theological codes. One Sunday, Fiona – a convert from a non-Christian home – decided to respond again to a public altar call in the hope that it might confirm her legitimate spiritual standing within her adopted faith community:

....I wanted to tell the rest of the people that I went to church with...that I definitely *was* a Christian....I can remember in a service [there was] an altar call...and I had gone forward and told the elder that I definitely *was* a Christian and I that I knew I was going to heaven.....and I remember him praying...and I can remember feeling that kind of assurance that, because I had told somebody it was definitely OK, everybody knew that I was a Christian....however, as the months went on I was aware that lots of people had been baptised and nobody had ever asked me...and I was too embarrassed to ask if it was OK if I was baptised...my perception was that I was not *allowed* to be baptised for some reason...[..]... I was aware there was a whole other lot of stuff going on to do with these people at church that I wasn't part of' (Fiona).

Fiona, herself now a Christian minister, reflecting on her adolescent experience, directly questions the theology and pastoral ethics of a community whose spiritual and pastoral care demonstrated a 'hunting' rather than a 'nurturing' approach to evangelism and discipleship. The relational alienation which characterised her involvement there eventually caused her to leave the church:

'...by the time I got to 15....I had stopped going to church... nobody from church ever came looking for me. (Pause) I often wonder why? ... sometimes I think it is this...Christian scalps, its OK, she's 'in'....we don't need to worry.....but... by the time I was 15, 16 I had stopped going altogether' (Fiona).

Identity and Belonging

Christian identity, as most women conceived it in their youth, was largely defined by a person's spiritual *location*, that is whether or not they were 'in' or 'out' of the

sharply delineated evangelical faith community. Indeed, most participants realised that they had inherited a predominantly *static* view of salvation, based on whether or not a person was spiritually 'safe', or potentially 'in danger' of eternal damnation. Few participants felt their younger selves had any grasp of the fact that there could be either momentum within or dimensions to the experience of maturing faith. Once the decision to commit your life to Christ had been made, it was your *lifestyle* which testified to your identity, either as a *consistent*, and therefore authentic person of faith, or a fundamentally *compromised* Christian. Group boundaries and the basis for exclusion had been generally picked up from parents:

'My mother was *very* clear as to who was a Christian and who was not...if you did certain things you were 'suspect' so.... I had a clear...sense of... [if I became a Christian I knew] right away what kind of *lifestyle* I would have, what sort of person I would *be*' (Carol).

Ironically, despite evangelicalism's emphasis on salvation by faith alone, several participants realised that the 'faith' they had actually practiced in their youth plainly reflected a salvation by *works*. Relationship with Christ therefore, for many women, centred upon the 'decision' they knew they were expected to make at conversion and the behavioural standards which they would subsequently adhere to as a testimony to their truly regenerate identity. Few women felt they had any grasp, at that time, of the *integration* of the twin cords of regeneration and sanctification in a maturing relationship with God.

Women's insecurity regarding the basis of their 'belonging' in the Christian community was thus frequently compounded by the complex relationship which exists between *socialisation*, *regeneration* and *conversion* in the process of 'initiation' which leads to official inclusion in an evangelical church. The gap which frequently exists between the mystical reality of *regeneration* and the cultural function of *conversion* as it is practiced as a rite of passage in the evangelical church created difficulties for a variety of women. These tensions were particularly acute for those women who had realised that their 'longing to belong' was tempting them to confess adherence to the community's doctrinal and behavioural creed before they had truly

entered into a 'personal relationship with God', or even understood what that really meant.²¹

Cultural Socialisation and Personal Regeneration: Living in the Gap

Some women's first conscious experiences of social and spiritual dissonance occurred when they realised that they were living in the gap which sometimes exists between 'belonging' to the church and 'belonging' to God. This was often due to the fact that the twin processes of spiritual *incorporation* into the mystical body of Christ and cultural *socialisation* into membership of the faith community are rarely, if ever, simultaneous. This tension lay at the core of some women's first sense that they were living in separate 'worlds', realising that while they had publicly adopted the 'codes' of the church they had not yet fully understood or entered into the covenantal regenerative state described within evangelicalism as a 'personal relationship' with God.

Several women confessed the mixed motives they realised they had in their early attachment to the church:

'Looking back now, I can say I just wanted to *belong* somewhere... I was very happy to conform to whatever it was a Christian was...there was a *driven-ness* to do it, because it was the right thing to do...as an adult looking back I can say I just wanted to become part of something and to belong...' (Moir).

Moir's longing to belong was particularly acute due to the fact that the faith community represented, for her, a profoundly restorative *communal* alternative to the dysfunctional family in which she had been raised:

'I still think there was a lot of me that was all about *conforming*, all about desperately wanting to be part, rather than an *individual* relationship between me and God. It was all about, I want to be part of this club, I want to be like these people, I want to be accepted by these people and so, not consciously, but always doing whatever it would

²¹ It is clearly, in many ways, ultimately impossible to know what 'relationship with God' means, but the degree of confusion and insecurity which this clearly caused some women suggests that the use of this term, particularly in the context of early discipleship, may need to be reviewed.

take to be accepted and be part...there was a *hunger* for God there or I wouldn't have [gone overseas as a missionary]...but I think there was a big part...that was just, suddenly being part and *belonging* to something and being able to leave behind my awful...background' (Moira).

Despite her mixed motives for conforming to the 'codes' of her adopted faith community, Moira speaks of the tension she felt between her longing for a real relationship with God and her desire to be approved by the leaders of her church:

'...[in this church, faith] wasn't an *external* thing - people's lives were really affected by God and it was a very *personal* relationship with God...which I knew I didn't have. And I strived for, well I think, maybe about 3 years, it didn't happen immediately, I strived for this relationship that I knew that they had it [...]... I was doing it [to be accepted by the group]...it was this desperate need to conform and to be.....accepted' (Moira).

Moira's honest confession clearly illustrates the dangers of conversion models which fail to account for the highly relational, contextual nature of women's emerging faith. The long term pastoral consequences of failing to address the way a woman's prior *socialisation* may seriously affect her understanding of faith and navigation of the experience of Christian *conversion* are demonstrably grave.²²

Moira's internal drive to conform was in many ways intensified by her faith community's particularly severe understanding of the *eternal* implications of non-conformism:

'...if you didn't belong to the Brethren you were going to hell, basically...because they were the ones that had the truth. I'm not that conscious of coming to God feeling I was a terrible sinner or anything, although I would obviously pray whatever prayer was [required] but...isn't that funny? I can't remember much about....my faith or belief then at all? Except the fear that if you didn't stick to this narrow way then.... But I mean I certainly wasn't good.....yeah I did all the right things

²² On the dangers of using the language of conversion while actually encouraging people to become proselytes via socialisation into 'pre-packaged' forms of church life and discipleship see chapter 3, p.95 and footnote 53.

outwardly I didn't smoke, drink, swear....so, yes, I became....I *conformed* very quickly to this image of what I was meant to be...' (Moira).

By the time she was in her late teens, Moira was deeply disappointed that external conformity had not brought about internal spiritual change. Even as she passed through the rites of passage of the Brethren faith community, she feared for her integrity before God:

'...by the time I was about 18... I think I'd realised the hypocrisy....of my life - I'd changed on the outside, but nothing had changed on the inside. Like...dramatically the night I got baptised... you know the verse 'You're baptised in Christ, the old is gone, the new has come.' I expected something dramatic to happen when I came out of the pool but it didn't. I was so disappointed.... I just remember the utter disappointment that it's just me and I'm still the same [...]... I would pray and read my bible, but God wasn't... *personal*...' (Moira).

Other participants were similarly aware of the gap which existed between their conformity to the package and their difficulty negotiating a 'personal relationship' with God when, in fact, it was the *communal* aspects of union with Christ which more easily connected with them. Given that a personal relationship with God is widely accepted as a cultural norm within evangelicalism, such women had little option but to suspect themselves of being spiritually deviant in this respect. Given the social and, indeed, *eternal* consequences of publicly admitting this lack, few women gave voice to these anxieties for fear of the consequences which such an admission might bring.

Spiritual Maturity: Rites of Passage and 'Markers' of Growth

Given the tensions described above, navigating the 'rites of passage' involved in joining some evangelical communities created huge dilemmas for some participants.²³ This posed ethical as well as social dilemmas for those who felt under pressure to

²³ As well as having to give public testimony to their conversion experience, some women were interviewed by elders in the church in order to ascertain that they were truly regenerate as well as appropriately orthodox in their beliefs and behaviour.

‘move forward’ with their friends, while realising they were not quite ready to take the plunge:

‘At ‘consecration evenings’... if you could give your testimony of how you became a Christian you got your silver badge, but that was the only way you could get that. And I can remember friends being ahead of me...and doing that...and knowing that I wasn’t quite at that place [...]...I always felt slightly behind them because, I suppose, my own...’decision’ for Jesus was after theirs and so I kind of jumped on that bandwagon maybe two or three years later than they did’ (Elaine).

While Elaine, along with other interviewees, was impressed by the care taken to ensure the authentic nature of her faith, the cultural frameworks of faith ‘validation’ implicitly socially disadvantaged those whose faith was not as developed as that of their peers. The gap which existed between Elaine’s desire to *belong* and her concern to be *authentic* directly contributed to her sense of social and spiritual alienation at church:

‘[One of my major dilemmas was]... the ‘belonging’ thing [wanting to be part of a] huge peer group [of] 60 or 70 young people that was vibrant and growing and... there was a sense of...feeling that you were missing out when you weren’t fully ‘in’ it, because you hadn’t...done the ‘become a Christian’ thing...and you hadn’t been able to give a testimony yet because you didn’t *have* one...and there was an ‘in’ sense and ‘out’ sense ...in that’ (Elaine).

While there are clearly potentially *spiritual* as well as *social* reasons for the alienation some people feel in their pre-conversion experience of Christian community,²⁴ these are sometimes unnecessarily exaggerated by a lack of understanding of the social pressure which conversion’s role as an authenticating rite may sometimes cause.²⁵ The failure to address the pastoral implications of this fact is potentially damaging to women’s spiritual development, especially given their demonstrably high propensity to acquiesce in order to secure relationship within the faith community. The honest testimony of these and other women suggests that the highly relational, multi-

²⁴ Conviction of sin may be experienced as a form of spiritual and social alienation.

²⁵ This is particularly so for those who lack a clear ‘conversion’ narrative due to the fact that they experienced regeneration as a gradual process rather than a sudden event.

dimensional, re-capitulatory nature of many women's faith formation processes *prior to*, as well as *following*, regeneration frequently creates developmental tensions, which can be exacerbated by the induction processes practiced in the church. There is clearly the need for a more detailed analysis of the complex *communal*, as well as individual, and *relational*, as well as conceptual, dimensions of Christian regeneration. Furthermore, we should acknowledge and redress the ways in which some church's practice of the traditional evangelical rites of passage may not allow adequately for women's frequently serpentine and rarely sequential path to that point in their spiritual lives.

The Desire to Grow

One of the most striking features of my participants' spiritual life stories was the prominent role which para-church organisations evidently play in women's personal and spiritual development in Scotland.²⁶ Most of my participants' initial experiences 'beyond the boundaries' of their evangelical home church were through their involvement in para-church groups. Here many experienced their first contact with Christians who believed, worshipped and behaved differently. Frequently, through these diverse relationships, they discovered new ways of talking and thinking about faith, which motivated them to take personal responsibility for their spiritual lives.

Expansion and Integration: Pictures of Salvation and the Dynamics of Growth

Although over 80% of church leavers have normally abandoned the church by the age of twenty,²⁷ my own research participants intriguingly described adolescence as a time which heralded new ways of developing, rather than discarding, their faith. While this, perhaps predictably, merely reflects the transitional characteristics of the shift from stage 2: Mythic-Literal faith to stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional faith which commonly occurs during adolescence,²⁸ it additionally coincides with women's exposure to new models of Christian discipleship through para-church ministry.

²⁶ For an overview of women's church and para-church involvement see Appendix 7.

²⁷ On the threshold of adolescence as a time of faith *loss* rather than augmentation see chapter 4, p.113.

²⁸ See Fowler, 1995:151-173.

Carol described the re-orienting influence of the new nurturing *environment* she discovered at university on her understanding of the nature of the Christian faith:

‘[Prior to university, faith] was a *transaction*...it was very much ABC and I knew what you did and that was it...(pause)... and I didn’t have questions or any sense of this being a *developing* thing....until my late teens, when I entered *another* Christian world’ (Carol).

Prior to her university experience, Carol had conceived of faith as a static state, maintained by persevering belief in orthodox doctrine, faithful attention to prescribed spiritual disciplines and consistent behaviour which conformed to a strict moral and social code. Her exposure to Christians socialised in other ways opened her mind to the possibility of understanding faith as a developmental *process* of exploration and assimilation, questioning and re-definition, expansion and growth.

Several women significantly described themselves as first encountering the ‘reality’ of faith in the lives of their para-church leaders and mentors. They detected in these people an intangible *dimension* of the spiritual life which they had not apparently encountered (or been aware of) before. Indeed, when women attempted to describe the ‘difference’, words predictably failed them. These leaders’ inspirational teaching from and infectious love for the bible had launched many participants upon a lifetime of daily bible reading and discovery:

‘...I think [the local SU staff worker] was the first person that spoke as if the bible was relevant....there was meaning....there was... there was... ‘*something*’... and so I joined the Scripture Union at that time and got an SU pack and started reading the bible....every day’ (Sheila).

Several more mature participants highlighted the indispensable role of Scripture Union in their early spiritual nurture, training them in disciplines they had subsequently practiced for over 60 years. Through that agency, several women forged friendships which provided life-long networks of discussion, nurture and practical spiritual care. Women also frequently picked up new *imagery* to describe not only the

person of God but theological concepts which they had perhaps struggled to grasp before. Margaret discovered:

‘...a completely different picture of God and Jesus and what he’s done and what it meant to follow him from anything I got in Sunday school....’ (Margaret).

She also found new *language* in the children’s novels she picked up at that time. The embodiment of theological truth in narrative form helped her make sense of her faith in a more accessible way, in particular, of the concept of sin:

‘You can’t be a good girl ‘cos there’s a *twist* in you ...but Jesus can deal with that!’ (Margaret).

As a result of this exposure and expansion women inevitably became more consciously aware of the limitations of church as a learning environment. Several admitted that, as growing teenagers and young adults, their main sources of spiritual nurture and Christian education were increasingly found elsewhere:

‘I think church became less significant for me....in my walk with God [...]... the things which were significant [in my development as a Christian] were S.U. camps. Church...wasn’t significant in that....and probably caused more problems than it actually....solved’ (Louise).

‘...reading the bible...that *really*, really fed me...I suppose church...I suppose it must have [fed me] but...I mean it’s difficult to know isn’t it? ‘Cos you sort of eat food and you know it does you good but you don’t necessarily see where the carrot has gone when you look at your leg do you?...but I think certainly that the C.U. was *rigorous* and being part of the leadership [there] made me think what is important to grow as a Christian and what is important for other people to...to receive’ (Rachel).

Many participants had maintained to this day strong links with the para-church organisations they had initially joined in their youth. Eight had been involved as children in school S.U. groups, four regularly attended S.U. camps (initially as participants and latterly as leaders). Most women were first introduced to the idea of a ‘quiet time’ and the habit of daily bible reading through the ministry of S.U. As

older teenagers and young adults, fourteen of my participants had been significantly influenced by the discipling ministry of the Navigators, U.C.C.F. and Y.W.A.M. Three of them subsequently joined the full-time staff of a campus or mission ministry. These organisations clearly played an indispensable role in the nurture of women's faith in Scotland and deliberately shaped the ways in which they learned to nurture others. Several women specifically identified para-church youth and student organisations, rather than the church, as the main source of their present active understanding of Christian doctrine and practice.²⁹

Re-negotiating Relationships with 'Home'

While many participants spoke enthusiastically of the exponential growth they experienced as a result of their para-church discipleship, women's memories of church during that same period were significantly hazy, thus symbolically reflecting some women's shift into the first phase of negotiating a new relationship with their spiritual 'home':³⁰

'I don't remember much about church as a student [because I was]....sucked into....para-church things [through my U.C.C.F. and S.U. involvement [...]]... I actually was asked to be a deacon in my local church quite young....But I don't remember much of the experience [of going to church] through...the three years of my first degree...' (Elaine).

Women predominantly persevered with active involvement in their home church, despite its frustrations. This was frequently due to the stress para-church organisations place on the church being the believer's primary nurturing environment. In reality, however, many women knew that the church was not, for them, fulfilling this vital purpose. They gradually realised that they would have to draw on other

²⁹ Other participants, however, would describe themselves as having considerably moved *beyond* the understanding of Christian doctrine which they had espoused at that time of exponential development as will be illustrated in the following two chapters. The self-referential nature of the theology which characterises some of these evangelical discipleship and mission organisations, while deeply formative for many women still maintains rather than expands conservative evangelical theological norms: a factor which limits the development of those it influences within certain bounds. The primarily *missional* intent of these para-church groups clearly contributes to this dynamic.

³⁰ These findings support Parks, Hull, Veiling and Ruether's observations regarding the re-orientation transition and expansion bring to a believer's relationship with their former spiritual 'home' without necessarily leaving that fellowship: chapter 2, pp.59-60; chapter 3, pp.86-7 and chapter 4, pp.120-23.

sources to satisfy their growing desire for spiritual refreshment and pastoral care, particularly given their increasing involvement in Christian ministry. The informal networks which naturally developed through the relationships women forged in para-church circles represented, for many participants, a 'spacious place' in which to grow and stretch their theological and personal wings. While, for some women, church sadly still represented a place where they felt considerable pressure to *conform*, para-church celebrated their *difference* and became a place where many women felt free to be *themselves*. There they felt they could talk honestly and openly about their emotions, raising frank questions about their faith and practicing contextual, *relational* forms of faithing and ministry to an extent not usually possible at church.³¹

Women's attempts to encourage more open, *dialogical* learning practices at church sadly sometimes fell on deaf ears, as Margaret's experience in a more traditional Church of Scotland in the 1950s confirms:

'...I did join the local church. I decided for myself that if I was a Christian I ought to be a member of the church, [...] I said on one occasion... couldn't we have a bible study group in the church? (Silence).... 'Oh....,' said the minister, 'What would you want a thing like that for? We read the bible in church.' So I just shut up... (laughter) and kept going to the SU fellowship...you know....the Women's Guild....would have occasional bible studies...but basically, that was about it after you left bible class, (sighs)...all you got was....what you got in church' (Margaret).

Resistance to women's initiative from the leadership of the church frequently provoked a silent acquiescence, accompanied by a quiet but impassioned resolve to find spiritual food and companionship elsewhere. Experiences of rejection frequently fuelled women's first attempts subtly to *supplement* their inadequate nurture in the church. Some women thus re-directed their pursuit of spiritual growth into student discipleship groups, informal peer-mentoring networks of friends and theological correspondence courses. Margaret, for example, joined a local support group for

³¹ While it could be said that church small groups provide precisely this kind of forum, women predominantly spoke of their nurturing relationships *outside* church in this liberating way. Small groups in some churches intentionally reinforce the theological and behavioural 'norms' of the home church community whereas para-church sourced groups and networks tended to promote a wider theological spread of opinion and practice.

women she described as ‘too old for the SU group’ but lacking contextual, conversational nurture in their local churches:

‘I was in the ‘Old Crocks’ for three years... there was nowhere else we knew where we could get the kind of group bible study...that we’d had in the S.U. fellowship... and we wanted it. And so this group of....oh probably about eight or nine of us met once a month... [...] ...for two years if not three...’ (Margaret).

She remarks, significantly:

‘... that was really important because that was the first time I really was able to *enjoy* Christian fellowship. I wasn’t sort of feeling I was *covering up* anything. And it was....you know it was *brilliant!*’ (Margaret).

While Margaret was amazed that it had taken her until the age of 31 to find a place where she felt she could be herself in the Christian world, this was a common experience for many of the women I interviewed.³² The confidence that they were accepted as their ‘true selves’ was clearly vital for their spiritual development – something, some women commented, they rarely experienced at church:

‘I was *far* better nurtured in Scripture Union [than in the church]... I think, in church, ...there’s a kind of *social* atmosphere... its not that that’s *wrong*, but you meet people on a different footing in church, you don’t....necessarilyfeel that they’re....on your wavelength. And that’s what church is... it’s all different kinds of people all together, but I suppose.... I mean I don’t want to put down the church.... (silence)... It’s more *people* that I remember [in S.U.]...the quality of the people that I met and the way they *accepted* me for where I was’ (Shiela).

Margaret, somewhat embarrassingly, admitted the deeply ambivalent relationship which she has had with church, despite her persevering attendance there over the years:

³² ‘The false self arises as the child begins to choose what is safe to disclose and what is not safe to disclose – thus begins the conscious or unconscious behaviour of deceiving others and ultimately deceiving themselves. It is a strategy for survival, in a deeply threatened relational matrix, against a potentially truer self’ (Stern 1985:209-10, 227-8). It is also a strategy used by adult women at church.

‘I’ve probably been a bit of a *schizophrenic*. I ‘went to church’ - Christians ‘go to church’. And if you’re going to go to church you are probably better to go to one you can reach most easily... But, most of my early Christian teaching, training and fellowship were found within the interdenominational organisations. I didn’t find it easy to have ‘spiritual’ rapport with....with your average member of the church that I was going to’ (Margaret).

The Search for a ‘Safe’ Place

Several participants, like Margaret, identified their need to find an environment where they felt ‘safe’ to wrestle with their questions. Few reported finding that place within the traditional structures of the church. Furthermore, many confessed that they frequently felt relationally *isolated* there. Small group bible studies, where they existed, were not always open to the honest emotions or theological questions some women needed to address. Church services, mostly led from the front with no provision for questions, discussion or silent reflection, were unhelpful for a number of women:

‘...nobody spoke to me at church. I didn’t get very much from it and [would] just go home again [...]... I do....struggle with not being given time and space...particularly as when I come home I’m not given time and space either. By the time I get home I’ve forgotten the sermon. ...and I know that...for me, it’s got to become *part* of me if it’s to stay...otherwise I’m going to forget it and it’s lost.... And I don’t want to lose what God tells me...’ (Ruth).

The ‘closed’ social culture of some churches, often reinforced by a ‘banking’ approach to learning, thus sometimes militated against women feeling they could be fully ‘present’ in such communities as their true selves, or able to express their ideas and questions there. By comparison, women’s experience of para-church nurture directly contributed to the *expansion* of their faith in a number of ways. Firstly, the inter-denominational context of para-church groups *broadened their theological and relational boundaries*, secondly, the deliberate promotion of ‘connected’ as opposed to ‘separate knowing’ *deepened honesty and developed frameworks of personal accountability* and, thirdly, the *celebration of difference* enabled women to develop a

sense of appropriate personal significance as their spiritual gifts were identified, affirmed and empowered in ministry.

Glass Ceilings and Gender Discrimination

Despite these obvious strengths, women sadly also identified the presence of ‘glass ceilings’ which restricted their development in the para-church world. While deliberately and effectively facilitating women’s spiritual growth at the grass roots of the church, in many areas, para-church ministries also occasionally functioned to *retard* women’s social and spiritual development.

The presence of forms of gender discrimination within the upper levels of para-church leadership, and occasionally also, in the field, appeared to have caused considerable distress to a variety of ministering women, thus confirming the fear that the problems of gender collusion sometimes implicit in forms of ‘parallel church’ are also, ironically, *reinforcing*, rather than *redressing*, gender discrimination in the Scottish evangelical church.³³

Despite women’s freedom to develop and use their spiritual gifts in a variety of para-church settings, the theological *boundaries* which this violates in some conservative evangelical circles clearly limits the *transferability* of women’s leadership, teaching and training skills in mixed-gender church contexts. Indeed, some of the women I interviewed had faced explicit gender discrimination in para-church organisations for precisely this reason:

‘When I went on a mission trip with [mission organisation] the leader...grabbed me one day and said, ‘Look, you have the gift of teaching but you are not under *any* circumstances to teach men.’ And he was very, *very* dismissive of me and that...again was a sort of a very *festering* theme all the way through in terms of who am I, how can I serve, how am I seen etc...that’s something that...a *very* painful thing’ (Rachel).

³³ On the tendency of enclaves to perpetuate gender discrimination see chapter 3, pp.143-5.

One woman, who subsequently worked within a para-church group, reported the ways in which she had felt disregarded and disrespected by the ‘complementarian’ leadership in that organisation, which implicitly created barriers against women as impenetrable and oppressive as any she had experienced in the church:

I think [para-church leadership structures are] quite hierarchical....I think people actually don’t *realise* there is a ‘glass ceiling’... they think there is more freedom than actually..... there is often a much *smaller* group that are calling the shots at the top. So there is a hierarchy but it is probably less evident [than in the church]’ (Maria).

Women, like Fiona, who held top managerial and training roles in their professional worlds as well as considerable para-church ministry expertise, reported experiencing gender discrimination at church due to the limits set on their involvement there:

‘[Women’s] Aglow ... had an immense influence on shaping me... from being a kind of ‘pew sitter’ to being involved in ministry. And I think up to that point I had always understood my role as being quite em....limited....[..]... So I was then involved in *two* para-church type... ‘ministries’ if you want to call them that and...the *only* thing I was able to do in the church was children’s work!’ (Fiona).

Intriguingly, despite the considerable alienation which Fiona has experienced through her deliberate marginalisation, her loyalty to the church has remained unswaying³⁴

‘...my ‘out of church’ life was very much about leading people, administering lots of strategic stuff, equipping people... so I couldn’t see my role in the church very easily. I taught very senior counselling people, counsellors and heads of department So although I helped out [in the children’s work] I just couldn’t find my ‘niche’in the church.... I kind of questioned what my role would really be in a local church. Never thought of *leaving* the church, I have to say, I never thought, you know, I have to get out of here and find a different church’ (Fiona).

³⁴ This potentially supports Baillie and Brasher’s observations regarding the ‘bifurcation’ or ‘separation’ of consciousness’ and the suspension of a hermeneutic of suspicion by which women reconcile paradoxical contradictions in the multiple worlds in which they live and the position of ‘strong relational loyalty’ from which evangelical women appear to be able to sustain openly discriminatory relationships within the church: see chapter 3, pp.92-3; chapter 4, pp.129-131.

Restrictions on Intimacy and the Inner Life

While para-church discipling relationships were generally more open and honest than those women experienced in their churches, Elaine identified the existence of further ‘glass-ceilings’ in the limitations set on the topics some women would openly discuss regarding the ‘inner’ or more personal life:

‘[we got] talking about....relationships with members of the opposite sex and so on. And I remember this [leader] just clamming up completely and saying, ‘Well that’s not something we’re going to talk about’ (Elaine).

Even in para-church settings, it seems, women were often intentionally socialised to *repress* their emotions and questions, particularly those associated with the evangelical ‘taboos’ of gender discrimination and human sexuality,³⁵ putting their energy instead into sacrificial Christian service:

‘[My para-church mentors] were significant people for me and they gave me a lot of encouragement and a lot of support and a lot of affirmation [but]... I don’t remember with these women ever really talking about the real heart issues...about how they were feeling as *women* [...]...it was too scary for us to face the questions for ourselves. So you just don’t, you face something that is outside yourself rather than actually the questions that might be kicking around...inside yourself. Because quite often....experiences at camp were very emotional...leaders would come on the team and they would just be falling apart, because I think of the intensity... you [were to] say to the person, ‘Look you’re here to *serve*’ (Elaine).

Ironically, this characteristic focus on Christian service encouraged women to maintain discrete ‘internal’ and ‘external’ worlds. Women’s ‘ethic of care and responsibility’, which pre-disposes them towards practicing this kind of psychological displacement, also frequently encouraged them to give a much higher priority to the spiritual development of *others*, to the neglect of attending to the complex developmental dilemmas subconsciously present in their own ‘internal’ worlds.

³⁵ On the taboo against naming sexual and emotional needs in some churches see Slee, 2004:87.

The Start of Splitting and the Emergence of Parallel Selves

As a result of the increasing gap which sometimes develops between women's internal and external spiritual lives, as well as the multiple spheres of life and ministry in which they habitually move, some women, like Elaine, admitted beginning to feel that they were living in separate 'worlds':

‘[It was like] feeling that you were living parallel existences, and I think that is a phrase that I would use to describe to some degree the whole... S.U. experience ... my kind of....annual shot in the arm of enthusiasm [in the way that other] folks might have attended Spring Harvest...for me, the way I would describe it is...they were running *parallel*....in life...and not necessarily *integrated*’ (Elaine).

Despite the awareness that they were beginning to live out ‘parallel lives’ few women knew how to interpret or address this phenomenon. In its early days this displacement was just a part of the ordinary negotiations in which women are habitually involved, due to the fact that they simultaneously live in multiple worlds. Difficulties only started to emerge when women began to realise they were repressing parts of themselves in order to continue to ‘belong’ in one of those worlds.

In their teenage and early adult years, however, most women had established a healthy balance between their complex relationships of loyalty to themselves, their churches and their God. Generally they maintained that balance for a number of years before the cracks began to show and that delicate equilibrium was slowly but significantly displaced. The next chapter explores the ways in which this displacement occurred and the strategies which my participants attempted to use to hold their lives together.

Chapter 6

Where are they now?

Introduction

Periods of disorientation and re-orientation are remarkably common in the life of faith but rarely admitted or examined in the evangelical community. This chapter reverses that trend by making public women's descriptions of the forms of dissonance which have marred their attempts at negotiating the changing landscape of maturing faith.

Firstly it explores the *metaphors of constriction, consequence of expansion and experiences of crisis* which characterise women's accounts of their maturing faith, thus assessing the strengths and weaknesses of women's attempts to make sense of this experience. Secondly, it suggests that the lack of 'processing places' to help believers talk about their theological and relational dissonance in the church may inadvertently *reinforce* women's use of 'coping strategies' which *perpetuate* rather than *resolve* their spiritual disequilibrium. Thirdly, and finally, it reveals the ways in which women's loss of *identity* as individuals and loss of *belonging* in the church frequently result in feelings of relational paralysis and alienation, as well as experiences of abandonment in their relationship with God.

Metaphors of Constriction

Metaphors of constriction featured prominently in a number of participant narratives, reflecting women's changing relationship with evangelicalism in general and their local church as their spiritual 'home'. While few participants were actually considering leaving the church,¹ many experienced it as a place which created 'an intolerable sense of confinement for those who have questions...where doubts and growing edges are not tolerated or even acknowledged' (Jamieson, 2003:103).²

¹ Some later participants were deliberately selected due to the fact that their accumulating frustration had actually caused them to leave the church, their stories feature in the following chapter.

² On confinement and enclosure as images commonly used to describe the transitional experience of faithing change and women's experience of constriction due to gender discrimination or alienating teaching styles in the church, see Slee, 2004:89-90; Jamieson, 2004:140 and Lynch, 2003:13.

There's No Place Like Home

In contrast to the majority of my participants, four of the women I interviewed described their church enthusiastically as a satisfying, nurturing environment where they had a clear sense of their place and role. These predominantly more mature interviewees³ spoke warmly of the church as a place where they felt free to be themselves, where they could explore questions and talk honestly about their feelings and problems in a liberating and sustaining way. Margaret reported a significant *improvement* in her relationships at church over the years:

‘I didn’t find it easy to have ‘spiritual’ rapport with...your average member of the church that I was going to...I sometimes wondered if I was talking the same *language*! But over...the past 25 years....either people have come to a greater understanding or *I’ve* come to a greater understanding!’ (Margaret).

The majority of participants, including those presently frustrated at church, expressed gratitude for the ways in which the church had shaped and protected their faith in their early years: providing a ‘world’ within whose boundaries they had been – to a lesser or greater extent - happy to live. Their loyalty to their congregations, which was clearly evident, made it particularly hard for women to articulate the claustrophobia they often felt in an environment whose boundaries had not expanded with them in their growth.

The ‘Constriction’ of Growth

While the pain of *constriction* dominated many women’s narratives, very few realised this might be directly related to their cognitive and relational developmental *expansion*. As women’s exposure to alternative theologies and faithing styles increased, facilitated by their involvement in para-church and theological education, many women began to move from a primarily dependent to an inter-dependent

³ The women who were predominantly satisfied in their churches were over 70 years of age, apart from one woman (aged 42) who was involved in an independent fellowship. This church was deliberately experimenting with new ways of ‘doing church’, exploring a variety of didactic styles of education more accessible to ‘connected knowers’, in both midweek and Sunday gatherings.

faithing style, increasingly challenging the ‘modal development levels’⁴ of their ‘home’ congregations. The unspoken resistance with which their critical questions or alternative faithing styles were met frequently compounded their sense of constriction.

The Symptoms of Constriction: Growing Pains

Most participants’ spiritual claustrophobia had accumulated over a number of years, as their emerging self awareness compelled them to question the ‘fixed’ and ‘exclusive’ theological and cultural boundaries of conservative evangelicalism. Some women, however, experienced a *sudden*, rather than *gradual*, loss of ‘equilibrium’ linked to disorienting events in their personal lives. For a third group, the lure of *exploration* beyond the strict boundaries of evangelicalism alerted them to the fruitful spiritualities outside their spiritual ‘home’. Generally, a combination of these three elements led to interviewee’s increasingly painful sense of not being ‘at home’ any more.

Women identified feelings of constriction in two dimensions: *internally* – due to the ways in which the ‘code’ and culture of the church made them suppress or conceal vital parts of themselves and *externally*, due to the ways in which the community implicitly limited member’s engagement with theologies and spiritualities outside the group.

The Loss of Self

It was often as late as their mid-thirties that women realised their practice of ‘blending in’ in order to ‘fit’ at church was causing them to deny vital aspects of themselves:

‘I think some of my struggle in my early Christian life to ‘fit’ would be my own personal struggle with being comfortable myself in who I am... I really loved my thirties because I just thought, ‘I don’t give a toss now what anybody thinks of me.’ Now I can see the torment of my 20’s [thinking], ‘I just want to fit in here, I just want

⁴ See p.114 and footnotes 26-7 on the constriction which ‘modal development levels’ can cause in the growth of congregation members.

to *blend*’ and knowing full well that I [didn’t] and that I was putting up with stuff all the time’ (Maria).

Dorothy found it particularly hard to connect with a congregation that was reluctant to talk honestly with one another about the struggles they were facing in their faith.

‘I was getting involved with church [but] people did not respond...in a way I was used to most Christians in the Christian communities I’ve been in. I didn’t feel I could be *myself*...with [them]...I felt I could be myself with the non-Christians. But I did not feel I could be myself with the Christians...’ (Dorothy).

She explains that her understanding of the socialisation process of initiation into the church may have contributed to her experience of alienation there:

A Christian *is* a certain way. How they react to issues...how they live their life, all the way down to sometimes how they dress or things like that...[...]...the way that you learn to be, once you take that step of faith, you start getting *enculturated* [sic.] – the Christian culture....manipulates you into this *mould*, which is a mould I don’t like, that I didn’t like and I didn’t *fit*’ (Dorothy).

Women’s ‘loss of self’ was frequently revealed in narratives which described their loss of ‘voice’. While Ruth and Maria’s narratives focus on the gender restrictions in church, the loss of ‘voice’ which echoed throughout other women’s narratives *and* silences referred to women’s loss of *being* or *significance* as people whose perspective was valued in the church:

‘I don’t feel I use my voice in church...at all [...]I’m *not* a militant feminist...I’m justwell a [denomination] Woman – i.e. invisible, silent....now the [denomination] Church has come on a long way and women *do* take part and women *do* speak but...I still...don’t have a voice. It is a paradox and a conflict [...]... every now and then I think....I would like to take a church service....I would like to take a whole service and preach...but nobody’s ever suggested it, [...].... *nobody* considered....would I want to be encouraged and brought on with preaching and teaching....so I feel that voice has gone’ (Ruth).

‘I would say evangelicalism is equated with male dominance, it’s not communicated that women have a valued role. There will be some men who’d be really hurt and upset at that... but I think, traditionally, my view or my experience...is that a woman’s place is to be the home-maker...so I would say, by and large, the majority of women in evangelical circles [play] a supportive, background [role]..... I think some women feel like they just can’t, they don’t *express* [themselves], I mean I think ...the mode of *expression* in.... the churches tradition can be sometimes quite *stifled*...’ (Maria).

Metaphors of Constriction

Women struggled to find images to describe the ways in which their formerly ‘roomy’ faithing styles and spiritual ‘homes’ were beginning to limit their growth. Several used the metaphor of ‘growing out of clothing that no longer ‘fits’: from the custodial oppression of a ‘straitjacket’ through the starchy restriction of an ill-fitting standard order ‘uniform’ to the distress of an infant ‘clothed in a baby-grow that’s pinching at the wrists and ankles because it’s too small...’

Ruth explained:

‘I have often found the teaching of the church stifling or claustrophobic. There is no sense of the freedom of new life. The teaching is very much of a ‘one size fits’ all attitude, everyone must be the *same* - no allowance for individuality. The leaders of the church are selling us short. They tell us we must have ‘off the peg’ clothes, the same for everyone. But God wants us to have ‘bespoke’, individual hand-made garments. God wants to clothe each one of us in our own, personal, *unique* robe’ (Ruth).

Images such as wearing a uniform or being enclosed in a cage simultaneously conjured up women’s paradoxical experiences of protection *and* oppression, freedom *and* constriction, which were reflected in their ambivalent mid-life relationship with the spiritual ‘home’, which facilitated *and* restricted their growth:

‘...for a long time I felt - the usual analogy - I felt like a bird in a cage [...]...and for a whole year it would have been like that... not that I was hemmed in, in a small cage

[I was] in a big cage with plenty of room, lots of freedom but...it was like the cage door was down and there was a *threshold*...' (Moira).

Moira's realisation that there was a world she could explore beyond the threshold of her 'cage' evoked mixed feelings of terror *and* excitement. At such thresholds women became aware of the need to take responsibility for their desire to travel and the consequences which that journey might bring.

Alienation from Church Culture and Teaching Styles

Women's sense of 'putting up with stuff' that didn't 'fit' them at church was regularly linked to church structures and services, thus demonstrating the lack of change in approaches to learning in the church over participants' lifetimes. Several participants spoke of the weariness of 'gospel' services aimed at not yet or new Christians, which had changed little since their youth and rarely addressed their more searching adult questions. Participants reported attending Sunday services to model 'consistency' to their children, rather than receive any spiritual benefit or education there themselves. Some felt that their church was more like a form of Christian entertainment than a watering and training place for active Christians:

'...I used to say to friends [...]... of the two forms of entertainment I would rather go to the pictures because it doesn't *frustrate* me. I felt I was being entertained when I went to church [...]...you sat there and it all happened *to* you....it was *entertainment* ... I got so frustrated I came out in tears some days, and I used to think I *would* rather go to the pictures because I've got no expectations [there]' (Moira).

Several participants admitted struggling, as they had done in their youth, with the lack of 'permission' to engage honestly with ambivalent emotions and disturbing questions in the context of worship at church, features which generally accompany periods of spiritual darkness or dryness during times of crisis or faithing change. The fact that these realities were rarely mentioned from the pulpit, or reflected in congregational prayers or worship, reinforced women's tendency to repress their experience as spiritually abnormal. Some questioned the wisdom of remaining in an environment

which encouraged them to repress rather than address the complex contours of their inner lives:

‘I don’t feel comfortable in any church really. When it comes to....your actual structure of the service doesn’t do it for me. [...]... sitting, enduring a church service where it’s just not scratching where I’m itching at all. I come out and I don’t feel any different, I don’t feel like I’ve been helped to focus on God...some of that might be because I’m still in a dark place where I’m finding it hard to feel and touch God...I don’t know...maybe that’s some reflection of *my* dryness but, why am I putting myself through that?’ (Maria).

‘There was no room...to be quiet... even prayer was very noisy....and wordy....and putting it out there and not just keeping it... it wasn’t OK to keep it to yourself, it wasn’t OK to pray silently, it wasn’t OK to just look at a candle flame... I wasn’t able to articulate any of that, I didn’t know what the alternatives... its like....its not quite fitting me, well I better sort myself so it does fit me... so I do fit it’ (Hazel).

As women had rarely given voice to these frustrations before, repressed, inchoate emotion frequently broke through in silence or articulation:

‘My own church life lacks an emotional side to it. It’s a very rational head knowledgeand you need your emotional side to be healthy...and I was *angry* as well. I think I was just getting angry at stuff, you know the...(sigh)...the lack of emotion, the lack of the kind of worship that I maybe would have liked...that need in me for....*different* stuff....liking the *feeling* things and the ‘touchy feely stuff’and knowing that... singing was just a vacuous emotion in some ways but at the same time really *wanting* it but if you try to put that into *words* it just sounds like ‘What are you....What are you.....?...You know?’ (Elspeth).

‘I went regularly to [church], I even went to some of the home groups but everything was teaching based, there was no real process [...]...so, a very superficial level of intimacy in a sense...very superficial discussion ...apologetic and nothing to do with me and my relationship with God’ (Pamela).

One woman, impressed at the theological and personal engagement modelled in a church Alpha Group, was disappointed to find honest nurture outlawed in the church itself:

‘we were [...]... told that people didn’t like to...share....personal things, that it was more about bible study and that we shouldn’t really be discussing personal things. We hated it. We absolutely hated it. We lasted about 3 or 4 weeks... they were exploring things at a level that we were just way beyond...we were pushing them...and they didn’t have answers for us’ (Fiona).

When, like Elspeth above, women tried to describe what was *missing* in church they typically failed. Some resorted to phrases like ‘touchy feely stuff’ before falling silent, frustrated by their inability to describe what they were hungry for.⁵ This observation highlights the failure of traditional evangelical language to identify this crucial dimension of unexplored, inarticulate faith with which women intuitively *connect*, but feel despised for trying to explore. It also betrays the subtle shame many women felt when talking about the emotional and relational dimensions of faith, which tend to be less respected in more rationally oriented congregations:

The Dilemmas of Leadership

The tensions of constriction were particularly poignant for women leading churches, particularly when the ‘modal’ congregational faithing style differed considerably from their own. While this compounded their sense of alienation in the congregation, these Christian leaders chose to live within those limits for the sake of their congregations:

‘The churches I work in are usually what I would call more living *museums* so.... I’m pushed into very old-fashioned worship which doesn’t do a thing for me, even although *I’m* the one creating it... I’m restricted by what *they* need... There is no bible study where...I am not ‘the authority’ or where I am not struggling to meet their needs as my priority so that there’s no.....bible study where I’m really being *fed*....if I get a bible study at *all*’ (Frances).

⁵ The phrase ‘touchy-feely stuff’ is frequently humorously but effectively *derogatively* used by men and women to refer to relational ways of thinking and talking about faith, something they find hard to relate to, and implicitly *threatening*. This practice deliberately reinforces the oppression and marginalisation of alternative forms of faithing, categorising them as ‘inferior’ and ‘insubstantial’ compared to the more ‘solid’ or ‘reliable’ rational, analytical ways of talking about faith ‘normalised’ in some evangelical faith communities. For an analysis of the ways in which women’s language is generally considered ‘inferior’ to men’s, and the tendency of men to expect women to be ‘bi-lingual’, while themselves refusing to learn women’s language, see Henley and Kramarae in Juschka (ed.) 2001:26.

As well as the distinct lack of intentional development of ordained leaders reported widely by my participants in a variety of church circles, other ordained participants identified that the pain of losing ‘soul mates’ in the congregation significantly contributed to their spiritual isolation there. Hazel describes the departure of a close friend from church who shared her spiritual frustrations but could ‘vote with her feet’, while Hazel had to stay:

‘She just said, ‘I feel closer to God going to Salsa Club than I do coming to church.’ ‘I feel like I can’t take that into church with me....its not being *honoured*, you feel like you’re being *strait-jacketed* and its rules and regulations in this institution, in this system...and these power games and this lame, tame worship that doesn’t even let you move your body or really celebrate or.... I just felt like I was...going to wither and die inside...’ (Hazel).

Hazel felt deeply wounded at the reaction of other church members to her friend’s decision to leave:

‘...that’s the worst thing about it, you know, some of the adults in the church would look at someone like her and say, ‘Oh M’s left the church...she’s just not *committed* enough’[but people like M] are the very people whose faith means so *much* to them that they can’t *bear* to sit there and feel *squished*. ‘Cos that’s how she describes it....she says, ‘I just sit there and I just feel...that I’ve got all this life in me and its.... just being *squished*’ ... And I know what she means. Its frustrating, [people like her are] so much on my wavelength and then they *leave*’ (Hazel).

Women and the Bible: The ‘Quiet Time’

Women’s feelings of constriction related to their practice of the *disciplines* of the faith as well as their *experience* of church. The practice of a daily ‘Quiet Time’ – a core evangelical spiritual discipline – clearly constituted a joyful, satisfying rhythm for my more mature participants. Few of them, however, demonstrated any awareness of significant *changes* or *development* in their patterns of reading over the course of fifty to sixty years. Conscientious readers rather appreciated the solace they received from their *consistency* of the practice and its *reinforcement* of their ‘received’ faith, rather

than the ways it significantly *challenged*, or had, itself, been *re-shaped* by changes in their faithing styles or personal life circumstances:

‘It was just an *eye opener* to me...what it meant to know the bible...and...to feel that you could talk to God just like you would to a *relative* you know – I mean that was just a total...that has formed my life really [...]...I grew in leaps and bounds from ...just straight forward bible teaching in the church and then the habit of...personal bible reading...using Scripture Union notes...’ (Rebecca).

‘Now these [habits of reading SU notes and church attendance] were all established in my thinking by the time I was thirteen-and-a-half and....basically they have *never* been problems for me. There are occasions when I have...thoughtfully...broken the rule - if I can put it like that - but there’s been a good reason for it and ...it has only been a sort of ‘glitch’...on the screen. But they are part of my life because they go right back to the beginning of my...Christian training’ (Margaret).

‘I can’t remember any difficult[ies in having my ‘quiet time’]....I think sometimes it was pretty *routine*...but it did carry on. I hardly ever didn’t do it [...]....I owe a great deal to Scripture Union....I’ve hardly ever not read my bible. Sometimes it’s been pretty.... (silence).....give me an *exam* on it ten minutes after I’ve finished! (laughter)’ (Shiela).

For women under 60, the realisation that, despite years of struggle, they had failed, consistently, to maintain these inherited models of spirituality, was the cause of considerably anxiety and pain. Most were embarrassed to admit the reality of their ‘Quiet Time’ practice. Several felt ‘haunted’ by the song taught at Sunday school:

‘Read your bible, pray every day, pray every day, pray every day;
Read your bible, pray every day and you’ll grow, grow, grow!’

The link between the systemic *discipline* of the ‘quiet time’ and the organic *dynamics* of spiritual growth was vague in participant narratives, the ‘Quiet Time’ representing a *structural habit* to be maintained (rather like a form of spiritual ‘teeth-cleaning’) rather than it being a progressively maturing *relational dimension* of the spiritual life. Most women assumed their struggles must relate to personal sin, laziness or

disobedience. Some were frustrated that church teaching failed to set the spiritual practices of bible reading and prayer within the wider context of Christian growth:

‘You were taught that *system*. You know, you used Scripture Union notes, you do it daily, you have your ‘Quiet Time’ that’s *it*...and there was no teaching about *growth*, no teaching about *developing*. And I think there was the feeling that, well, that was *it*!....That was all you were ever going to *get* as well...’ (Ruth).

Most women appeared either *unaware* of the ‘movements’ or ‘seasons’ of their spiritual lives, or *ill-equipped* to discern the meaning behind the changes they had experienced, and the ways these might demand the adaptation of their personal spiritual devotional lives. Few had any understanding of the ways in which their fluctuating experience of bible reflection and prayer might actually reflect significant developmental changes in their relationship with God, or other dimensions of their spiritual lives. Many women thus purely felt deeply *ashamed* by their personal inconsistency, describing it in the hushed tones normally reserved to describe embarrassing illnesses. Women who’s lay or professional ministry involved discipling younger Christians felt particularly exposed talking about their devotional lives. Several considered themselves hypocrites for teaching the discipline of personal bible reading and prayer to new Christians, while failing, as adults, to keep those standards themselves. Few had ever admitted these difficulties in public, due to their sense of guilt and shame, particularly when their personal preference was for a more *holistic* or *embodied* spirituality:

‘I have never found it easy to be disciplined with ‘Quiet Times’. That is one of my, *major* problems with my Christian life. I do have regular ‘Quiet Times’ but I have always struggled to be disciplined enough to sit down regularly and listen to God and pray ... I am a very *practical* person, and I am inclined to go for that rather than stick to, you know, the *Mary* stuff as opposed to, you know, I’m a *Martha*....I would much rather go and express my spirituality down in the labour ward, by cleaning up someone’s blood after having a baby [...]....in making scones, its expressed in providing hospitality for people...’ (Morag).

Failure to meet the spiritual ‘norms’ of daily bible reading and prayer led many women to perceive there was an essential deficiency in their spiritual lives, quiet time performance being the majority of women’s gauge of their spiritual ‘temperature’.

‘You were three weeks ‘behind’...but we didn’t like to *admit* it to each other....I think it was the test of a committed Christian...that they would have [a ‘Quiet Time’] and do that and abide by it - and so if you weren’t doing very well at it that showed a lack of commitment’ (Ruth).

Some felt this failure indicated backward as opposed to forward travel in their spiritual lives:

‘I’d do ‘Quiet Times’ pretty religiously...yeah [...]...It could cause you to have guilt problems if you were not having your quiet time or praying every day or praying for your friends or witnessing you know...I thought I wasn’t growing spiritually at all...because if you’re looking at it *linearly*, I thought I was *regressing*, ‘cos... I wasn’t reading my bible, I wasn’t sort of praying, or anything like that I mean.... having a quote ‘Quiet Time’ as in the ‘70’s devotion...or is it a chain and *ball*? [...]...People wouldn’t believe it if I told them I hardly ever read my bible. Now I’ve been permeated with Scripture at other times in my life [...]...but I think it’s become... more part of a *routine* [...]...I need to read it just to be....refreshed – and I don’t *do* it. [...]...And so I kind of *miss* that...but I don’t think it fits in my lifestyle at the moment’ (Dorothy).

The disapproval experienced by those who publicly admitted struggling with their ‘Quiet Times’ intensified their sense of personal failure and caused some interviewees to feel they were leading a double life:

‘[I experienced]...a whole lot of guilt about things....and a lot of it was to do with following...perceived patterns of what is the right thing to do like reading the bible every day and praying every day and....honestly....I do feel better when I do it...[...].but in married life that doesn’t happen...I don’t have my own space any more to do that. It all kind of collapsed for quite a bit and yet nobody *knows* that. ‘Cos you’re there saying, ‘Yeah! Fine!’, confident, assured.... There is.... a huge difficulty in that for me as an individual in that...how I *appear* can be so far from where I *am* and....if you try to...*explain* where you are, people very quickly stop you.

They really don't want to know that, because they want to know you're OK...and if you're not OK, well, the world's gone to pot' (Elspeth).

Child-rearing frequently wreaked havoc in women's spiritual lives, confirmed by Beth Dickson's confessional admission that during her parenting years:

'Reading the bible just made me cry. It seemed there was a whole world inside it which I was locked out from. Or that there was a glass corridor between me and the people of the bible and I had lost direct access to the stories I had enjoyed in childhood. This had happened without me doing anything to provoke it that I could see – I was not aware of any egregious sin which might have caused it – but it scared me, because nothing had prepared me for such a situation...[and]...I didn't feel able to tell anyone what was happening...I wasn't strong enough to listen to someone telling me there must be some sin somewhere or this would not be happening or giving me some anodyne advice which didn't recognise the problem, far less go to the heart of the matter' (Dickson, 2005:67).

Women's *shame* regarding their 'quiet time' practice was one of the key factors that led them to suspect that their spiritual dissonance was a form of spiritual sickness. At the same time it reinforced their practice of concealing their authentic 'inner life', presenting instead a 'false self that masks authentic identity', which merely compounded the loss of their 'true self' in the congregation.⁶

Finding a Remedy for the 'Dis-ease'

Women's failure to meet the standards they perceived would 'authenticate' them as 'committed' Christians frequently led them to doubt their identity as 'good' evangelicals.⁷ While some had clearly lost hope of ever progressing beyond their present inconsistency, other women were experimenting with new ways of celebrating the discipline. Pamela, a full time missionary with a Para-church organisation, confessed:

⁶ Sandage's typology of the struggles which precipitate transformation highlights that the concealment of one's failure to meet one's own or others' standards can lead to a 'commitment to a false self that masks authentic identity' (Shults and Sandage, 2006:222). On masks, see this chapter p.204-6.

⁷ On the common developmental problems associated with drawing identity and value from performance see Tate and Parker, 2007:220.

‘.....I haven’t had a quiet time for *years*....while I was [studying theology] I probably hardly *ever* went to church. My quiet time was on the bus and most of my spiritual food and contemplation stuff was from my studies: things that I dragged in and pursued in my own talks with Godbut years ago [...]... my quiet times would be *walking* rather than sitting down reading and praying.... but, since I moved to [new location] I’ve lost it’ (Pamela).

Pamela’s story illustrates the ways women can feel that their non-linguistic faithing styles, such as finding nourishment through walking in nature, are less valid or valuable than the normative practice of sitting on a chair reflecting on a text. Women’s inherently messy spiritual lives, frequently sidelined by their care of others, are brimming with this sense of failure due to their inability to maintain the linear path they believe constitutes the ‘normal’ spiritual life. These feelings simply perpetuate patterns of repression and repetition, rather than promote new dimensions of growth

Many women honestly believed that the solution to their inconsistency was to try harder and longer to try to fulfil the ‘Quiet Time’ norm, thus pursuing what Shults and Sandage (2006) describe as ‘first order’ rather than ‘second order’ change. Women’s attempts to replace formerly unsuccessful ‘Quiet Time’ methods with new ones, as my own findings suggest, frequently retard their exploration of a different *order* of change in the maturing spiritual life which is *relational* rather than *methodological* in nature.⁸

The Consequences of Expansion: Cultural and Hermeneutical Change

Participants’ relationship with the bible was also thrown into confusion by the development of women’s critical abilities to engage with sacred texts. As women’s acquisition of more sophisticated cognitive skills coincided with their exposure to environments which encouraged rather than prohibited theological critique, women’s ways of reading and interpreting scripture changed. This had caused several participants to question the received theology of their spiritual ‘home’. Few women

⁸ On the distinction between first and second order transformation and the tendency to choose first order transformation as a way of avoiding the transforming potential of ‘liminal space’, see my references to the insight of Shults and Sandage: chapter 2, p.65ff and chapter 4, p.125-6.

faced this change prior to their 30s. Thereafter many admitted they longed for a deeper, wider doctrinal framework than the one normalised in their 'home' church:

'...I was so caught up when I was young with ... conversion experiences and people witnessing to their conversion and....being born again, I bought that totally and...I would think it was probably...late 20s...30sI started to ask *questions*..... I [realised I] was only skimming the surface, and there were depths I was nowhere near. I had a picture...in my head...of going out to paddle... and I wasn't even up to my *ankles*, I was just in the water' (Alison).⁹

In their 30s, 40s and 50s women, often secretly, began to explore faith 'beyond the shallows', traversing boundaries within which they had previously felt compelled to remain.

'I picked up the first Catholic book I'd ever *read!* And it was a guy called Thomas Merton. Now to me who'd just been reading *evangelical* books (laughing) this was quite a [change].....and it was Christian *meditation!*' (Alison).

Alison's evident enthusiasm reflects the revolutionary nature of the journey she had decided to embark upon, a fact which those outside the evangelical community may find hard to grasp. Women expressed varying degrees of wonder at the resources they found, frequently heightened due to the reversal of their socialised fear of Catholicism. This kind of expansion however sometimes proved a disconcerting experience for conservative evangelicals venturing into the uncharted territory of theological education.

⁹ Alison's metaphor of moving from shallow to deeper water reflects and confirms Nicola Slee's understanding of the patterning of 'awakening' which characterises some women's movement from alienation and paralysis into the phase of exploration, expansion and consolidation in transitional faithing change (Slee, 2004:109-134). It also resonates with Jamieson's image of, 'transitional explorers' as swimmers abandoning the confines of the swimming pool for the sea (Jamieson, 2005).

The Adventure of Theological Education

John Hull pertinently observes that,

‘One of the first results of theological study is to expose the innocent and not-so-innocent falsifications of the ideology. This often creates in the believer a profound sense of shock, and gives him a sense of moving in and out of the ideological circle. But the experience of ideological enclosure is never the same again once one has learned to go in and out. The very knowledge that there is an outside in itself is a shocking experience...since it not only opens up new possibilities of freedom and commitment, but presents an entirely novel viewpoint from which to consider the ideology.’ (Hull, 1991:66)

Hull helpfully identifies not only the shock involved in engaging with ideologies which challenge your previous ‘ideological enclosure’, but also the implications this will have for a believer’s relationship with the explicitly impermeable boundaries of their spiritual home. Indeed, several participants reported that their theological education had caused them to re-evaluate the received doctrine of their home faith community. This meant that the experience of theological education was a relief as well as a shock for some women:

‘[when I was young I felt]... a real kind of tension about questions that weren’t really being answered about how certain things should...*work*. [...]...there was a kind of mismatch between....you know, what you were hearing [from the pulpit] and what you were actually experiencing’ (Elaine).

Theological education, for Elaine, established a ‘critical culture’ within which to explore openly her questions of faith and address the gap she perceived existed between the sermon and the street. Morag’s critical awareness emerged as late as her 50s when she finally began studying for a theology degree:

‘I don’t think I was *questioning* my faith or anything at that time, but somehow I think the seeds of questioning were just beginning. And by the time I graduated with that degree...I was... at the start of questioning my Christian faith and [the doctrines which] I’d held dear for most of my life’ (Morag).

Morag's subsequent post-graduate studies opened a Pandora's Box of questions which, as she reveals below, led her to a place of spiritual desolation. Women who had engaged at this level of theological reflection reported feeling increasingly isolated in churches which failed to acknowledge their hermeneutical questions. While their studies fundamentally changed the ways these women interacted with the biblical text at a professional level, they occasionally precipitated a crisis of identity for women in their devotional lives. As women's former ways of reading scripture collapsed under the pressure of their hermeneutical questions, they often 'put the bible down because they could no longer read it as the word of God in the way they used to, and at this point they have no other way of interpreting it.' Jamieson continues, 'another way of assessing the scriptures and new lenses through which to see them are now needed because the old ways are no longer sufficient' (Jamieson 2004:56). The fresh hermeneutical perspectives which distanced women relationally from the biblical text, also ironically alienated them from God. This is a dilemma few theological courses pastorally engage with, thus compounding women's sense of spiritual alienation from themselves, their congregations and their God.

Testing the Boundaries

Participants suspended in this state of *unresolved* transition found themselves challenging the fixed parameters of evangelical faith but with few triangulation points by which to navigate. Most were questioning the bounded nature of evangelicalism and its dogmatic classification of who is 'in' and who is 'out' of God's kingdom. Participants were particularly wrestling with a conservative understanding of limited atonement, judgement and hell. Interviewees predominantly described themselves as becoming 'wider' in their understanding of faith to the extent that the theological boundaries they had previously experienced as spacious began to strain at the seams:

[My resistance to some aspects of evangelicalism reflects my]...reaction against the [mentality which] says that if you can tick 'all the right boxes' you're 'in' but if you *can't* tick all the right boxes you're 'out'... within the tradition that I grew up in and the experiences that I've had its [as if] we've got God all sewn up and we know exactly how God works and thinks and acts... I suppose [in] the kind of spirituality I

long for ...God is actually more able to welcome people than [we as evangelicals] have allowed him to be' (Elaine).

'...the theology I believed [said] you have to take the whole package and there's a heaven and a hell....and I struggled with that.... Just because you 'make the decision' you're 'OK', but you're *not* OK if you don't make that decision. [...]...I no longer believe....you have to be born again in the sense that if you're not you go to... hell' (Alison).

'The questions [I was asking during my theological training] related to the kind of middle-of-the-road evangelical position that I'd held...especially in the area of 'reformed' faith, and this whole [question] of for whom did Christ die, and limited atonement, and all that sort of thing. I began to wonder whether I had actually got it *right* and whether maybe some other people in some other church communions might also have it right as well' (Morag).

I used to think, you had to be an evangelical to be a Christian....I've changed my mind a lot about that. I don't....decide who's a Christian any more, I just look at my colleagues and I appreciate each one of them' (Susan).

Women predominantly described 'truth' and the 'kingdom of God' as *expanding* entities in their developing faith rather than static, 'bounded' theological or cultural sets, a change that women felt more authentically honoured the *relational* attributes of God than the *conceptual* definitions of truth and justice which defined the static 'boundaries' of their previous beliefs. Pamela described this boundary change symbolically during the image exercise when she selected a picture of a man tightrope walking over a gorge to represent her prior doctrinal framework:

'Truth was very narrow and it was a bit of a tightrope situation – if you don't get that [truth]...and hold to it then you will fall off into some kind of abyss.... I actually think this is a picture of what I...will *not* say my relationship with God is like.... [it] reminds me of a theological view that's very limited in that – its right, wrong; truth, error; black ,white....although I'm not saying that there *isn't* that in God, but I...I don't perceive it as such a *narrow* thing any more, there's more to...[it than that]' (Pamela).

Pamela's struggle to reconcile her *expanding* doctrinal framework with her inherently *restrictive* inherited one was a problem shared by several women in this questioning place.¹⁰ While previous models of faith felt to most participants like outgrown clothes, few had any idea what the 'next size up' would look like. Deliberately resisting relativism, several expressed the conviction that there *were* boundaries in the life of faith, but remained essentially unconvinced that they lay in the places some conservative evangelicals determine. Women were thus predictably wrestling with conservative evangelical teaching on homosexuality and the fate of sincere followers of other world religions, as well as the existence and nature of hell. They were, however, mostly unable to voice reasoned theological alternatives to these views at interview.¹¹ Few felt they had any 'safe' theological forum to explore what a more 'permeable' evangelical doctrinal 'membrane' would look like.¹²

Experiences of Crisis

Most women's spiritual dissonance was the result of a gradual build-up of pressure over a number of years. Several participants, however, reported that extreme personal circumstances propelled them out of dependent faithing into the liminal environment where developmental change takes place. Major life crises such as divorce, physical or psychological illness, burnout and bereavement were often the catalysts which disrupted participants' previously maintained spiritual equilibrium, causing them to question the sufficiency of their prior frameworks of faith.¹³ Less public, but equally re-orienting, developmental 'ground-shifts' notably came quietly to other participants:¹⁴

¹⁰ While this was a key issue for those under 60, my more mature participants had not entered this questioning place.

¹¹ While clearly, the narrative format of the interview did not lend itself to women exploring these ideas, it is clear from my other conversations with some of these women that one of the distinct 'lacks' of any potential 'critical cultures' in which they are involved is their insufficient engagement with these questions.

¹² Many of my participants wrestling with these questions displayed the 'lack of energy, certainty and confidence' which Jamieson describes associated with 'Reflective Exiles', i.e. those Christians who get stuck in the reflective stage and fail to move on to the stage of 'rebuilding' (Jamieson, 2003:73).

¹³ 'We may conceptualise crisis in relation to faith as a situation in which the organising structure and meaning of one's life are threatened or disrupted by given life events or experiences. One's self concept and identity are no longer viable in the light of what happens, so one must find a new way of envisioning one's life both past and present that will bring meaning out of the chaos of one's present experience' (Gooden in Stokes, 1982:105).

¹⁴ See chapter 2, p.64.

‘I was always taught that spiritual growth came when the parameters of the ‘box’ of your belief [were] rattled and shatteredpermeated....or broken... and that’s when you *grew* spiritually....[when] something drastic happened to you....But I don’t think, looking at my life...spiritual growth has *always* been that way...’ (Dorothy).

Developmental crises often occur when circumstances allow questions to surface instead of denying them, initiating a journey inwards which spends its energy on *integration* rather than *service* (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:83; 93). Therefore it was often these sorts of ‘ground shifting’ events, whatever their origin, which interrupted women’s almost compulsive ‘addiction’ to Christian service in ways which enabled them to cross the threshold into a new territory of developmental change.

Parabolic Narratives: The Portrayal of Unresolved Crisis

Anderson and Foley (2001:14) accurately observe that ‘if the stories we create are to be authentic reflections of the lives we live, we need room for ambiguity and vulnerability’. Women’s narratives of their experience of crisis are thus predictably messy, multi-dimensional, ambiguous affairs, characterised by mixed metaphors, truncation, inter-locution, hanging arguments, tangential statements and re-capitulations of prior, reassuring, mythical pictures of God.¹⁵ Women’s narratives in a somewhat ‘Frankenstein-ian’ way blended ‘mythical’ and ‘parabolic’ narratives in a manner which frequently exposed the inherent inconsistencies in their frameworks of interpretation of the spiritual life, thus exposing ‘the seams and edges of the myths we fashion... the fault lines beneath the comfortable surfaces of the worlds we build for ourselves’ (Anderson and Foley, 2001:11). My participants’ stories of their experience linguistically honoured the *disorder* and *paradox* which characterised their as yet unresolved interpretations of transitional experience, resisting the temptation to fit their experience into prior conceptual frameworks which no longer afford an adequate explanation of their lives. The inherently ambivalent, un-finished dimensions of their metaphor-spattered narratives thus *preclude* their public sharing in

¹⁵ ‘Mythical narrations comfort us and assure us that everything is going to be all right; parables challenge and dispute the reconciliation that our myths have created’ (Anderson and Foley, 2001:11)

traditional evangelical contexts, due to their parabolic potential to function as agents of disruption as well as change in such environments.¹⁶

Women navigating the experience of crisis frequently, in retrospect, viewed them as major *thresholds* in their growth. Some clearly sensed the presence of God close by them at the core of their questioning and found their faith community an intrinsically ‘safe’ place to express their pain.

‘...the miscarriage...was awful...but I had logically thought that if something like that happened to me I would not believe in God, because God could have stopped it and didn’t...or maybe I wouldn’t not *believe* in him but I would be *angry* at him. In actual fact what happened was I was really *comforted* by him [...]...I remember feeling healing through this, just the sun and...crying with God and just feeling him *there* for me...and feeling him closer than I’d felt in a long time. The exact opposite of what I’d have logically thought [...]...I remember going to church on Sunday and tears streaming down my face and...it still being positive, still being in the *right* place’ (Elspeth).

For others, crises rocked the foundations of their faith, calling into question imagined expectations of God and his role in the lives of his people:

‘...spiritually [my divorce]... was another knocking away of the black and white, cut and dry, ‘everything’s neat and tidy in the garden’ ...and [my husband] was a Christian and I married him for totally all the right reasons... and it was like you had promised God that it was ‘till death [us] do part’ and all the rest of it and then...its just *gone*....*shattered*... its like...here’s what I believed, and here’s what’s actually happened and they don’t *fit*’ (Hazel).

Morag’s mother’s death caused her to question not only her as yet un-reflected frameworks of faith, but also the nature of the God she had thought she believed in:

¹⁶ In contrast to the narrative form of ‘testimony’, which is the preferred vehicle for inspirational ‘life-sharing’, there are very few contexts within the evangelical culture which could ‘contain’ the *parabolic* nature of most of these participant narratives. This creates clear obstacles to the appropriate pastoral care and personal development of these profoundly insightful women.

‘I think probably [my mother’s death was] one of the most devastating periods of my life. Because your mother doesn’t die, does she? ...(long pause)... losing her caused me to question God probably more than any other thing...[I remember arguing]... ‘Lord, why did you do this?’ and ‘Why can’t you make my mother better?’ and ‘If she’s going to die, take her quickly’ And it took six more *long, weary, painful* weeks for her to die, and I could not understand why the Lord did it that way’ (Morag).

Such events frequently catapulted women into unexplored spiritual territory, revealing uncomfortable truths about the inadequate foundations of their faith and the discontinuity between their outer and inner lives. Pamela’s crisis came after twelve years of sacrificial service in a para-church setting, she explains:

‘...one of the things that [forced me to face my internal inconsistency]...apart from just crying all the time...was the sense that...my Christianity...wasn’t *working*. And that I was *incongruous*, in the sense of...the things I *said* I was believing and thought I was building my life on in terms of ...Christ, the cross...the development of character, responding to God, all the stuff that I thought was...the *way* of life, suddenly brought me to this point of collapse after twelve years [...]...I had this inner thing like, ‘I’m *perceived* as this ‘Christian’ but I know that I’m not living up to God’s standards and that I have no power to actually do it either [...]...and although my world still looked pretty together from the outside, inside, I was falling apart’ (Pamela).

Pamela realised that her Christian identity and relationship with God was based on a subtle salvation by works, driven by the desire to find acceptance:

‘... I was still doing things for God at a subconscious level and somehow hoping to be OK through that....and it was like one of those things that is slightly ‘off’...like if you drill down [looking for oil] and you are one tenth of a degree off, the further you drill down the wider...you miss the mark and so....it was just ... a foundational thing between performing *for* God and being performance *driven* and... *performance* based acceptance versus accepting *God’s* acceptance and receiving it as a *gift*, [it questioned] not just my salvation but *everything*....’ (Pamela).

Pamela's realisation that she was drilling 'off-centre' helped her see the need to realign the internal and external dimensions of her life. Other participants' decisions to stop colluding with the patriarchal ethos of their community represented their own unique thresholds of growth. Rachel, a lay pastoral worker in the church that had been her spiritual home for over twelve years, finally made the decision to leave:

'...when I realised that, you know, I was just somebody until they got a *man*, and they kept praying for the *man* of God's choice and ...when I was banned from starting a service because if I said, 'Let's sing hymn 21' that was taking authority from men... I resigned from the church because I thought, I've outstayed my welcome' (Rachel).

The Socialisation of Silence: The Lack of a Proper 'Processing Place'

The spiritual isolation which participants, like Rachel, experienced in these times of dismantling change often reflected in a stance of silence was frequently exaggerated by women's lack of a 'safe' place or 'critical culture' within which to 'gather together and define their own experience' (Ruether, 1985:59). Very few of my participants had found a place where they could give voice to their deep emotional dissonance, grieve their losses and search for a more mature spiritual identity.¹⁷ Indeed most women's prior socialised silence had become even more entrenched following their experience.

On Silence: A Response to Oppression

Riet Bons-Storms observes that, as women, we 'resist speaking of our hidden conflicts for fear we may lose the esteem of others in our families, in the church....if we begin to talk too honestly we risk losing our ability to repress the conflicts – a repression which allows us to carry on with the tasks of love and work that are important to us' (1996:9). She thus succinctly puts her finger on the fear which *maintains* women's habitual practice of repressing their pain, as well as the strategies of 'love and work' which ironically *perpetuate*, rather than *resolve*, women's experience of dissonance.

¹⁷ On the importance of a 'critical culture' in women's negotiation of faithing change see chapter 4, p.121ff.

Women's Silence as a Faithing Stance

Silence is acknowledged as a fundamental faithing position for many women, 'marked by an absence of voice and language with which to name the reality in which their lives are so deeply embedded' (Slee, 2004:86) and thus constituting a significant obstacle in their personal growth (Belenky, 1997:23-32). Whether due to social deprivation, abuse, the loss of voice during adolescence, or the wordless pain of inter-stage transition, women's silence demands to be acknowledged in the context of healthy as well as unhealthy growth. As Kathleen Fischer puts it, 'Women have long lived in the intervals between their inchoate experiences and the definitions given to that experience by the stories of men. They have sensed vaguely that there is another truth buried in their stories, but [they] have not been able to find a language for it.' (Fischer, 1990:5). Sadly, however, women's habitual repression of the perplexing experience of dissonance frequently denies them access to these events for the purposes of their own reflection, as well as concealing them from the outside world. Indeed my own findings reinforce Slee's concerns regarding the role of paralysis and passivity in the internal alienation of those unable to name their experiences 'as women...fundamentally cut off from some part of themselves...unable to speak openly and truthfully...about some aspect of their story or experience...for fear of judgement and rejection' (Slee, 2004:87).

Silence at Church

Women often concealed their experience from their congregations due to their previous experiences of rejection. Bons-Storms (1996), observes that it is hard for women to sustain a sense of *identity* in the face of the disbelief and silencing by pastors and counsellors who 'are deaf and blind to the experience of others whose stories do not fit within their frame'. Few women reported the existence of any 'safe' place where they might disclose their feelings of anger towards God, or engage with their emotional pain, questioning and disorientation.

Rachel experienced rejection by both friends within and the pastor of her 'home' church during a time of intense spiritual darkness when she had felt abandoned by God:

‘As I became more vocal with God [about my anger and my questioning] I became more vocal with people... no one could cope with me saying these things...I don’t think people understood the depth of my resistance [...]...I couldn’t necessarily see any sort of future in terms of ever finding God...I was in a Church that I felt was my home, but among people who couldn’t understand me or didn’t know what to do with me or thought I was a ‘problem’ [...]... Always, in the past, the way my faith grew was through *doubt* and through *questioning*, but this was a doubt unlike any other and....I wasn’t getting *answers*...very few people actually understood what I was saying, and I think that was part of the desperation.... I would come back to church to see the pastor and he’d say, ‘How are things going?’ and I would tell him, heartbroken, and...I knew he didn’t know what to say. He just didn’t know...I think a lot of people in church [avoided me]... I think the word had got round, ‘Don’t ask her how she is....because she might *tell* you!’ (Rachel).

Elaine’s feelings of alienation from herself and her faith community increased due to her experience of depression:

‘....I remember walking out of the doctor’s the day he said ‘Actually I think you are depressed’, feeling a sense of shame about that....its like you’re trapped in this tunnel, but no one else sees that and it actually doesn’t make a huge amount of sense.I tried to explain it to one of my friends and she actually pulled back from friendship which just exacerbates the problem because you feel even more victimised, despite the fact you tried to actually share that with someone else [...]...[my pastor] couldn’t engage with [my experience of depression], he didn’t understand it’ (Elaine).

Some women saw their silence as a form of realism, recognising their church’s inability to engage with their emotions or help them process their questions about God. Many chose to live undercover, maintaining active lives of service on the outside while repressing chaos and distress within. Most women recognised that others struggled with their attempts to process their experience by voicing it out loud, which is a common feature of women’s ‘conversational faithing’.¹⁸

‘I think women process stuff by talking out loud. I know we should talk to God...I do understand that....but sometimes you need to share that with another person to allow you to *process* it [...]...there would definitely always be in me a frustration about not

¹⁸ Slee, 2004:62-5.

getting...the real *debate*, the real kind of cut and thrust of things, the *genuine* stuff [at church]... we don't *talk*. We're scared to say what we really think because its not 'PC' ...and because....yeah I'm scared *myself* to say things in company....I work things out a lot by *verbalising* things....so when you say things, you're *processing*....but people take it as *processed* and you can get yourself into masses of trouble...' (Elspeth).

Women who were 'external processors',¹⁹ and thus often misunderstood by those around them, began to habitually choose silence in learning contexts which failed to provide an appropriate environment for emerging dialogical exploration.

Silence at Work: The Dilemmas of Professional Ministry

As well as feeling silenced at church, few women succeeded in finding a 'critical culture' within the spheres of professional Christian ministry. Women tended to conceal their spiritual struggles at work for fear of exposing the inconsistency between their internal and external lives:

'There were things...that I knew....I could not in all honesty...say.....in the context of....Christian work, because they weren't true for me. I mean, to say that God guides you....and I wasn't letting him guide *me*,....that put a limitation on what I could say... I could do it when I was teaching a group, but if I was involved in two-way conversation it was eventually going to come out that....or I felt it was going to come out that I was doing....you know, I wasn't actually living what I was saying' (Margaret).

Joanna's conversation with her atheist father launched her on a process of seriously questioning her faith. Only when she left full-time ministry did she feel free to explore those questions for herself. She explains:

'I remember having a conversation with my Dad [...]...I could really relate to why he didn't believe... and that...made me question things as well. And that was quite a struggle, to be questioning the things I was going into schools and teaching, and really wrestling with that and trying to reconcile that....I think when I [left that

¹⁹ That is, those who prefer to process and come to an understanding of their experience by talking about it in a cyclic, exploratory way, only gradually forming conclusions.

ministry]the pressure lifted because [...]... I didn't work in a Christian context any more and I could really start looking at those doubts....I felt.....too much of a fraud to be going around....teaching...and evangelising and harbouring doubts at the same time' (Joanna)

Paradoxically, for some women, it was training for ordination that gave them the tools to deconstruct themselves and their faith but failed to provide an adequate relational framework within which to re-assemble their lives:

'In those days selection school was a 3-day marathon, where you had all sorts of tests to take....it was like having your whole life pulled out in front of you and left on the table....at the end of it no one was helping you to put it back. Which would actually be a large part of the whole experience of training to be a minister and, (laughing), *being* a minister in fact!' (Elaine).

The lack of places to talk about their experience of ministry without fear of judgement, or being 'fixed', left many women with a sense of spiritual immobility, particularly when accompanied by an inner resistance to talking to God. Even model students, who performed well in their studies, identified a subtle wedge between their academic work and their ongoing spiritual formation:

'I felt that the opportunity for a real degree of spiritual growth within the [theological college] wasn't really there [...]...I was so busy with assignments all the time, I had scarcely any time to fellowship with people, to really get down to waiting on God myself and to feel (slight laugh) that I was actually *advancing* in my Christian life. I felt I was, despite going through theological education... I was *stagnating*' (Morag).

Women in ministry yearned for more of a 'processing place'. While pastoral support was theoretically available, few felt it addressed the roots of their dilemmas or their experience of stagnation, tending instead towards a 'problem solving' approach, which militated against any realistic engagement with their inherently cyclical problems:

'I have sought out help but it's been...*issue* based... I'm not sure that they would want to....meet with you on how these things are actually affecting you as a *person*,

its more about, 'Here's the issue; here's the problem, what is the process to get a solution?' But not about how you may or may not *feel*... One colleague had the humility to say, 'I wake up every day, Elaine, and I wonder what I'm doing?' But that kind of disarming honesty is... sadly lacking in... in the ministers that I have encountered... and particularly so amongst the more evangelical and conservative group [...]... for whom there is a tendency towards a kind of arrogance... which I increasingly find... off-putting.... and uncomfortable' (Elaine).

The weight and the implications of these ordained women's spiritual questions, coupled with the lack of proper processing places, led many of them to feel that they were in a state of paralysis, stuck with little sense of who they were or where they wanted to go.

Women's Strategies for Dealing with Dissonance: Frameworks of Interpretation

Given the lack of a 'critical culture' or a safe place to engage honestly with deep, often ambivalent emotions, many women's strategies for *interpreting* and *dealing* with their dissonance were shaped by their prior cultural socialisation and religious education. Women thus predominantly interpreted their spiritual dissonance as a form of spiritual sickness, a factor which regularly delayed their ability to assimilate new faithing styles into their interpretive spiritual repertoire.²⁰

The Internalisation and the Projection of Blame

Many women avoided admitting the symptoms of their 'sickness', due to the fear that they were to blame for their dis-ease. Some wondered if their extreme distress was a spiritual symptom of the menopause or a mid-life crisis. Very few participants demonstrated knowledge of an alternative interpretive framework which might help them understand the *variety* of potential sources of their spiritual distress.²¹ One interviewee feared that her spiritual paralysis was the symbolic fruit of long-term, self-caused spiritual dryness:

²⁰ On women's tendency to self-blame for feelings of dissatisfaction and depression and its resulting retardation of their spiritual integration, see Stokes, 1982:27.

²¹ Few participants were familiar with the concept of the Dark Night of the Soul, or any other heuristic models within which the experience of darkness might have a variety of potential causes and meanings.

‘[Reflecting on] the last few years of feeling I’m in a *desert* experience [...]...a dry, arid awful place [...] ...self inflicted [...]... my fault: because I don’t *read* right, don’t *pray* right, don’t spend *time* with God, I’m *disobedient*, I’m *sinning*, whatever, its *my* fault I was in the desert’ (Moirira).

Participants who had experienced gender discrimination or gender-related marginalisation in their ministry, customarily *rationalised* their pain, holding it in suspension by subtle strategies of transference and self-blame:

‘....I remember struggling with quite a strong sense of *failure*....that I really struggled [to resist] because I knew I *hadn’t* failed, but it was something that [the senior pastor and other male colleagues had projected] onto me....[because] I hadn’t met their expectations.... [It was hard to deal] with that and actually realise.... that....*they* were in the wrong and that I hadn’t *caused* that situation, but... I was looking....for a reason why *I* might have caused this’ (Joanna).

Maria tried to avoid *internalising* the pain of gender discrimination by projecting her feelings of anger elsewhere:

‘[As a result of that experience I realised that]...basically I don’t *count* and I don’t have a *voice* and... what’s behind all of that is [that] the evil one doesn’t want me to get well, he wants me to be debilitated, he wants me to be....buckled down by this...I can see it. I mean, I don’t want to over-spiritualise things, but...these people in Christian leadership, they were being *puppeted* by the evil one....and they’re sadly unaware of it’ (Maria).

Maria’s astute analysis of other dimensions of her experience of marginalisation sits uncomfortably with her use of this kind of mythical narrative to make sense of her abusive experience. This is just one example of the ways in which women subtly *blend* predominantly *sophisticated* faithing styles with prior ‘*default*’ styles in order to establish protective ‘buffers’ to help them survive a crisis.

On Becoming 'Liberal'

Other participants suspected that their 'disease' was that they were simply becoming Liberal and thus potentially running the risk of publicly branding themselves a threat to any self-respecting evangelical congregation.²²

'I thought I was just becoming Liberal... 'wishy washy' because I was questioning everything. I hated being told what things meant. I disliked being told that 'This is what this passage says', and you're thinking 'I don't think it says *that*, I think it says *this*...' (Elspeth).

Elspeth was deeply concerned that her ordained husband was also becoming 'Liberal', due to the fact that his theological boundaries were more permeable than they had been before:

'....you can ask [him] about homosexuality and he doesn't come down....boomphyou're *wrong* or *right*. He can talk a way through it and to me it just sounded like it was being *slimy*...*slithery*...he was actually just *avoiding* the question [...]...I suppose God's been pushing my boundaries by the people, by my friends, by the situations that they're in, he's been showing me that it's OK....and..... that's been really, really good, because its like you're finding your faith for *yourself*...and I think it'll be all the more *solid* for it at the end' (Elspeth).

Elaine, despite beginning to believe, like Elspeth, that her theological questioning might actually *strengthen* her faith, felt constrained by the voice of condemnation she had internalised from her youth:

'...there is always this voice in the background from the kind of 'straight jacket' years saying, 'Are you compromising, are you selling out on what you've been brought up to believe and what you know to be the truth?' (Elaine).

Several women who were stretching the boundaries of their 'straitjacket' years reported being haunted by such condemnatory voices. Some feared their longing for

²² Leslie Newbiggin underlines the fear which being branded with this term would cause for women who realised that 'the words liberal and fundamentalist are used today not so much to identify oneself as to label the enemy' (Newbiggin, 1995:1).

‘more’ than they felt they were receiving at church betrayed a selfish, narcissistic, consumer oriented spirituality,²³ worrying that their longing for breadth and tolerance might be symptomatic of *compromise* not growth, with its root in capitulation to the ‘spirit of the age’ rather than a solid, ‘biblically anchored’ faith. Several repressed their theological concerns due to the lack of honour given to ‘dangerous questions’ within the evangelical community. Some spoke despondently of the lack of engagement with the more searching questions of faith in church services and bible study groups. The subconscious horror of where their questioning might take them thus reinforced many women’s silence:

‘...having lived for 30 years of your life with a very particular understanding of the human condition and sin and of the atonement that Christ has made on the cross...it almost seems sacrilegious to [question] that and....yeah...[with a single clap followed by silence...she is clearly at the edge of what she can express]... I can’t say any more than that right now but it almost seems like that is a place that you just *should not go* [she ends with another clap followed by a long silence symbolic of the words she cannot say]’ (Elaine).

Some women feared that their desire to explore beyond the theological ‘limits’ of the evangelical community would lead to personal collapse at its best, and the loss of their salvation at its worst. Six of the women indicated that they felt perilously close to the collapse of their faith, variously describing themselves as being on ‘dangerous ground’, ‘going off the rails and falling away’,²⁴ ‘becoming a heretic’ or, as one woman put it, ‘feeling like a [theological] Gay in evangelicalism’.

Some confessed anger at their congregational peers’ reluctance to talk publicly about their practices of supplementing and expansion, or share their resources of alternative spiritual care:

‘[I was] extremely angry with the church for never mentioning any [local retreat centres]...and then finding out that women in the church were...going elsewhere for

²³ This is hardly surprising, given that believer’s practice of supplementing is frequently, publicly, interpreted in this way, see chapter 4, p.127-8.

²⁴ This was illustrated graphically by one woman who, as part of the image exercise, chose a picture of a train ploughing through the wall of a station to symbolise her fear of where her unresolved dissonance might take her.

that feeding, and being very angry with them because they'd never said it and they still wouldn't say it.... They were just so used to keeping it *hidden* and *down* and *buried* and *away* from the church that they didn't even tell you when you wanted to know...because they didn't want to 'rock the boat', and they didn't want to get into trouble and they didn't want to be thrown out of the church' (Ruth).

Several women expressed the fear that 'coming out' as believers privately re-thinking their faith might cause others to question their orthodoxy, identity and status within the evangelical community.

Coping Strategies: The Tendency Towards Repression and the Drive to Hide

Women's early learned strategies of repressing strong emotion and paradoxical questioning became one of the main ways they dealt with spiritual dissonance as adults. Participants used a variety of repressive tactics to deal with their dissonance, from eating disorders to escape into imaginary worlds. Women used metaphors of 'retreat' or 'withdrawal' to describe this process:

'I started...a whole fantasy world, I made a choice to withdraw... I progressively lived in this alternative world and eventually just existed in it...' (Pamela).

'...basically I retreated... into my children...I didn't even want to go to church any more... I would just hang out with my Christian friends, and I didn't want my kids...to have a wrong model of Christianity. So I had a real struggle with being....*consistent* as far as...being in a local church [...].I'd have discussions with my husband...we both would say, "We don't want to go to church today...we don't want to hear the same sermon about this and...how bad we are and how we need to change"' (Dorothy).

Many women, using a variety of forms of emotional and relational withdrawal, were clearly separating themselves *internally* from church, despite usually continuing to attend its services 'for the sake of the kids'. Participant's negotiations however of a new relationship with their spiritual 'homes' were rarely reciprocal due to the fact that the 'homes' were predominantly unaware of their internal frustration. Relational paralysis, due to women's fear of the consequences of speech, short-circuited their

urge to disclose the almost imperceptible process of disassociation. Elspeth predictably chose to internalise her frustration given that she would soon be re-locating to another city:

‘It’s quite sore...in church....I’m able to live with it because I know that I’m leaving... if I wasn’t leaving I would have to deal with it, I would have to go and say [something]....I really don’t want to [do that] because I think it could cause hurt I don’t need to cause. Because I’m leaving, I think I can just handle it myself...there are lots of things that I really like and value and cherish in [the church] and for me to quibble about a little thing....its not little to me [...]... if I could find a way of saying it that would cause...(silence)...I don’t know how to do that’ (Elspeth).

Women’s strong ‘ethic of care’, while ostensibly functioning to protect their pastors and congregations from hurt also, simultaneously, subconsciously functioned to protect the women themselves. The cost of prophetic speech was clearly too high for the majority of participants whom I interviewed. The concealment of their dissonance caused Elspeth and others to feel they must wear masks to blend in at church. Ironically some women in ministry were using similar strategies:

‘I think a lot of time you live a façade but you are quite happy to do it. You don’t really think about it...it’s when trouble hits...when everything goes wrong that you realise [...]...I was aware of how long I had just put the face on and that had *suit*ed [...]...because of those expectations of what the Christian life was about...’ (Elspeth).

‘It felt like every time I was walking out the door for anything [ministry] related, I was putting a false face on...I used to have this...daydream that you could...have this holographic self that you could put out there to...be seen, and the real you could run away [and hide]’ (Hazel).

The presence of metaphors of disconnection, dissemblance, separation and ‘splitting’ in my participant narratives confirms Slee’s observations regarding the significance of this potentially *retarding* feature of women’s spiritual experience. Women’s practice of ‘splitting’, variously described by participant as the loss, suppression or disassociation of the self, commonly leads to personal fragmentation and breakdown

due to women's inability to resolve the imbalance between their own needs and the demands of others.²⁵

This analysis was confirmed when ordained and lay women collectively admitted suppressing their internal questions by immersing themselves in ministry, thereby simply reinforcing the gap between their *real* and *projected* selves. Those in full-time ministry habitually prioritised care for others over their own spiritual needs, focussing their energy on *serving* others rather than *processing* the incongruities of their own personal lives. This choice had trapped several women in destructive relating patterns based upon transitional *altruism* rather than the *interdependence* which characterises mature female relating (Glaz and Stevenson-Moessner, 1991:33, 209).²⁶ Some participants, however, rationalised this choice by arguing that their altruism was part of their *preferred personality* and *spirituality styles*. Several of these women described themselves as 'practical people' who preferred to leave 'internal reflection' to those more suited to that task. While this was undoubtedly successful as a coping strategy for some women, it was clear from the later stages of at least two of these interviews that the participant's apparent bravado masked her deep, unacknowledged internal disintegration.²⁷ For those participants for whom the division between their *outer* and *inner* lives was *reluctant* as opposed to *preferred*, the external pressure to *perform*, and the internal desire for *integrity*, threatened to tear them apart:

'This is my crisis now in daily living...how...in a world that is so *performance* driven and churches that are so *performance* driven...[do you attend to] your... spiritual formation process... its like two tracks of a...of a railway and you have the spiritual formation track that....has a direction and...sometimes it feels like...the tracks go so far apart that your legs nearly *split* and then it comes close again and the one informs the other. And the same with your work, sometimes it feels like... where your spiritual formation is taking you and your relationship with God is taking you

²⁵ Slee similarly identifies women's experience of not only cognitive dissonance but what she describes as an 'existential dissonance between the mind and emotion, the needs of the self and the demands of others' (Slee, 2004:92).

²⁶ Thus frequently reinforcing the patterns modelled by their mentors and exemplars in Christian service: a pattern which ironically has distracted many women from facing the real spiritual work of progressing towards relational maturity and *inter-dependence* (a new connection between self and others which honours concern but avoids self exploitation), see chapter 5, pp.149, 171. On Christian altruism and the stagnation of the self, see chapter 3, pp. 91.

²⁷ Frequently, following a short break, participants would present a less guarded picture of their lives.

has very little to do with what you are actually busy doing, and at other times it seems like the two come more together as one' (Pamela).

Parallel Lives

The net result of the drive to hide and the phenomenon of splitting was some women's sense, described above by Pamela, that they were living 'parallel lives' as 'conforming' *external* but 'expanding' *internal* selves. Maria recognised this phenomenon at an early age, soon after her conversion:

'I didn't want to be *different*, I wanted to *blend* but I couldn't *merge* with the background [...]...I lived this *dual life* for quite a while becauseI didn't know how to integrate it [...]...but I did run this sort of *parallel life* for quite a long time...' (Maria)

All women, to some extent, live healthy 'parallel lives' due to the fact that they have to negotiate complex intertwining relationships on multiple tracks in diverse worlds.²⁸ The 'parallel lives' which these evangelical women describe, however, are not merely the result of appropriate *blending* but potentially, and in some cases clearly, a symptom of spiritual abuse.²⁹ While most evangelical faith communities do not perceive themselves as intentionally abusing women in this way, the processes of socialisation and patterns of validation which operate there sometimes culpably collude with women's tendency to self-abuse, through repression, as a strategy for dealing with emotional pain and avoiding relational conflict.³⁰

Internal Leavers

The phenomenon of 'splitting' seemed to contribute directly to some women's emerging identity as unconscious 'internal leavers' in their 'home' church. While most of the women interviewed for this project were externally active in their

²⁸ Indeed, some women would argue that the ways in which they conceal their true selves from others is rooted in their desire to love and honour those whose faithing styles and perspectives are different from their own, and who might be unduly disturbed by their experience.

²⁹ Note Johnson and Van Vonderen's definition of spiritual abuse cited on p.132, footnote 70.

³⁰ It should also be noted that some participant narratives of *marginalisation*, *coercion* and *domination* by male leaders provide clear evidence of *intentional* spiritual abuse in some Christian communities as a means of maintaining social control and reinforcing male domination in the group.

churches: running bible study groups, leading children's church, conforming to the codes and expectations of their home community, in another significant sense they had internally 'checked out' of those communities at an emotional and/or theological level as a means of protecting themselves from the pain of their spiritual imbalance. As Poling confirms, 'One of the chief defences against fragmentation of the self is splitting. In deficient development, islands of pain and need are internalized in isolation from one another' in order to prevent or control the anxiety related to these conflicts (Poling, 1991:103). Participants' who began to recognise, in the course of their interview, that they were closer to leaving church than they had imagined, acknowledged the importance of admitting and addressing the gap existing between their external and internal selves. The prospect, however, of publicly articulating their concerns for their spiritual health in the hope of negotiating a new relationship with their spiritual 'home' was too overwhelming for some. While these realisations to some extent resembled the pattern of 'awakening' discerned by Slee,³¹ women's experience of past failed attempts to re-negotiate relationships with former faith communities militated against them taking this crucial step.

The Cost of 'Coming Out': Re-negotiating the Relationship with 'Home'

Some women had, however, courageously admitted their 'longing for more' in their home churches, thus facing the risk of rejection. The cost of speaking out is high in conservative congregations, as Moira's eviction from two different churches makes evident. Her narrative illustrates not only the devastation which excommunication brings, but also the intensity of her longing for 'something more', which drew her towards a more open church environment. In each case, Moira's home churches were unhappy with her 'supplementing' involvement in less conservative Christian communities:

'It was a formal meeting with five or six elders sitting on the platform, and me in front, and the meeting behind....and they excommunicated me [...]...they'd come and spoken to me and said that I couldn't keep going to the church and going to [an

³¹ 'Awakenings', in Slee's model, refer to the experience of breakthrough or awakening to a new consciousness and spiritual vitality which empowers women to move from the paralysis which characterises the early stages of transition into the phase which moves towards transformational change and the establishment of new, more mature, forms of relationship (Slee, 2004:109-134).

independent non-Brethren church] or it would be bad, or I'd end up in a mental hospital... but by then I just knew that that was where I wanted to be and I'd be happy to give up anything to get....whatever these people had, I wanted it...' (Moir).

On the second occasion, in another church, more extreme tactics were used:

'[The community leader] used a lot of emotional blackmail [...]... there was a real psychic power there, not demonic, but just very, very strong....I would go into his study...to try and talk about [my relationship with the church] and I would come out feeling as if somebody had put me in a spinner at full speed for an hour, ...it was like I was in the middle of a cult...'cos, remember, the whole thing was to *fit in* and *belong*, and suddenly I was going *against*...I mean [the leader] basically cursed me out of [the church]....and he said, 'You'll never settle, you'll never be happy in anything in your life, you'll always live your life...[as if] the grass is greener on the other side.' [...] ...I don't know what I did... wrong really,....except I saw through the façade [...]... I'm forgetting the trauma of it, but at the time I was traumatised...' (Moir).

Moir later joined and subsequently left another community that was part of that same church stream. It was at this time that she finally met an elder who understood her decision to leave. He remarked, astutely:

'You know, [Moir], you're too *big* for [our church]. [This church stream is] too *narrow* and you're...much *wider* than that...you have forced yourself into an image' ... At the time I didn't understand but I think he is dead right. It was too narrow...there was no *periphery*. In the end, people that were different *left*. So you were left with a...single group of people who were very one-minded, which was a wonderful way to have a church, but then it would never bring anybody else in. And I didn't *fit in*, towards the end' (Moir).

While Moir's story is an extreme example, the fragile equilibrium between women's longing for 'something more' and their fear of rejection featured in many participant narratives. The inherent difficulties in maintaining that balance caused most women

to choose silence over speech.³² Although Moira's decision to 'come out' occurred in the context of having found a new faith community, the fact that few participants saw any alternative to their present situation caused many to 'put up and shut up' at home.

Where are they now?

Women unable to repair the disequilibrium between their internal and external worlds frequently appeared 'stuck' in what Slee describes as a 'developmental cul-de-sac' of crisis,³³ a 'deadlock of the divided self', which some women resolve during early or middle adulthood (Slee, 2004:106). In common with several of Slee's own participants however my interviewees appeared unable to resolve this crisis, leaving them 'fragmented, disconnected, unreal, paralysed, broken, alienated, abused or even dead' (p.106). My own findings confirm Slee's hypothesis that 'while cognitive and emotional dissonance can be creative and lead to the disequilibrium of the existing faith stage and the gradual emergence of a new, more satisfying one, this did not always seem to be the case' (p.95). Indeed, Slee continues, 'where the lack of connection was acute, it was experienced even more strongly as a fragmentation...or total breakdown or collapse of the self' (p.95), a fact which my own findings will shortly confirm.

While, in an ideal world, women's experience of spiritual dissonance and developmental disequilibrium integrate into new, more mature, inter-dependent faithing styles, this was not the case for the majority of my project participants. To this day, many describe themselves as spiritually disoriented, fragmented and distressed. It appears to be extremely difficult for some evangelical women to break out of their socialised practice of drawing their identity from their relationships to others (a hallmark of Fowler's stage 3 'conforming' Synthetic-Conventional faith). The fact that these women paradoxically exhibit the *cognitive* hallmarks of Fowler's stage 4, while operating *relationally* within the 'conforming' confines of stage 3, reflects their women's capability not only to *blend* Fowler's faithing styles, but also to

³² For a more extensive exploration of British women's 'quest for the unknown' frequently expressed as the longing for 'something more' see Slee, 2004:98-100.

³³ For other accounts of the developmental importance of women recovering an integrated self despite its frequent disintegration due to the separation of the self in cultures which socialise women to displace their own needs and selves for the sake of others see Belenky et al. (1986) and Bons-Storm (1996).

become ‘stuck’ in its *dimensions* rather than its *stages*. Their preference for relational *compromise* over personal *integrity* is ultimately retarding these women’s spiritual development, making it inherently *unlikely* that they will ever be able to restore their healthy spiritual equilibrium until they find a place where they can be their true selves.³⁴ Women’s practice of disconnecting their *interior* and *exterior* selves by living ‘parallel lives’, is maintaining their immature, relationally *dependent* identity within the evangelical community. It is, however, at the same time causing these women to question the integrity of their identity as ‘true’ members of the evangelical community, given the intrinsically ambiguous reality of their divided spiritual ‘self’.

Identity, Alienation and Spiritual Abandonment: The Problem of Belonging

Women’s private questioning of their ‘internal’ identity as evangelicals, raised by the fact that they felt they perhaps no longer ‘belonged’ in the evangelical community, was not merely a sociological question. For some participants it fundamentally questioned whether they really ‘belonged’ to God.

The felt pressure to define themselves as ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the evangelical community backed some women into a theological corner, particularly given that the branding of someone as theologically liberal in conservative Christian circles frequently implicitly questions their salvation:

‘...the minister and his wife had us for tea, and they said you can’t sit on the fence, you have to decide whether you are an Evangelical or a Liberal... I was aware we weren’t fitting into either camp [which] seemed to mean we were going to end up having to be Liberal because we were no longer fitting in with what they wanted us to believe’ (Elspeth).

Several women admitted that they no longer knew ‘where the boundary lines’ of right and wrong and, consequently, of salvation, might lie:

³⁴ This confirms Gilligan’s thesis that ‘girls and women keep large parts of themselves out of relationship – the relational crisis which they face in adolescence and adulthood is learning to come forward and engage with the world as themselves’ (Gilligan, 1996:xxxiii). Unfortunately, evangelical women tend to find it impossible to ‘come out’ as their ‘real selves’ in the faith community due to the shame which they fear that would entail.

‘...for the first time in my life I didn’t have...boundaries...[my inherited theological frameworks] were all very narrow tramlines of right and wrong, very legalistic, no shades of grey, everything’s black or white and suddenly, here I was in a situation... where I had no goalposts of what was right and what was wrong. So I swung a bit. I remember that feeling of just not having...these goal posts’ (Moir).

Paralysis

The loss of former boundaries caused some women to become relationally and theologically ‘stuck’, unable to move in any direction and trapped in what Slee describes as a ‘no-woman’s-land: a refugee camp outside the official boundaries of belonging’, where many women seem paralysed, incapable of moving on (Slee, 2004:90):

‘... at that stage [I remember] being a wee bit scared to go anywhere beyond what you knew were the ‘orthodox’ ways of explaining things [...] it’s a bit like.... ‘Jenga’....if you take that brick out, there’s just a possibility that the whole thing will fall apart, so we’d better just leave that there....’ (Elaine)

Elaine’s theological paralysis manifested itself in an emotional paralysis which disempowered her in ministry and began to form itself into a depression:³⁵

‘...there were two days this week where I spent the whole morning in bed... Now, what’s going on there? If I’m being really honest about that is its just a complete denial of the need to actually *process*.... what is going on inside you,... you could pray, you could talk to God,... ...its not a *time* issue, its just I don’t *want* to do it. And part of that is probably because you think, ‘I’m just not quite sure...where this is actually going to take me...in my own journey’ (Elaine).

³⁵ Some try to avoid liminal space by returning to grandiose certainty or spiritual productivity...others bypass the *via negativa* through chronic wandering and commitment avoidance’ (Shults and Sandage, 2006:18; 233-235). In such crises, the ‘productive life’ often unravels, throwing women in to limbo as they try to avoid the inner journey which might expose the deeper tensions preventing forward movement (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:95). Merton, however cautions against cultivating an ‘inner life’ which is nothing but a ‘brave and absurd attempt to evade reality altogether’ (Merton, 1999:45).

Other participants similarly described themselves as in a state of suspension confirming the patterning of ‘deadening’, ‘blocking down and shutting off’ of emotions which Slee’s (2004) participants also described:

‘I think [my husband and I are] kind of in....voluntary limbo [...] I [have been] avoiding the questions again...because I don’t really want to have to deal with them....I don’t have the hope to hang on to, to take me through [this experience]’ (Louise).

Despite the fact that stage theory and other models of growth suggest that crisis creates *energy* for change and movement, this has not been the case for some of these evangelical women.

One of the most moving examples of this kind of ‘impasse’ occurred at the end of an interview during the ‘image exercise’. Maria set out an array of over 15 pictures in a sequential collage of her spiritual life, moving from her early years on the left to the present on her right. After completing the collage she sat back and began to cry. Later she explained the reason for her tears:

‘This is a pictorial view of where I am and where I’ve come in terms of the spiritual walk...(weeping)...I’m realising all the colour is at this end (pointing to the beginning) and there’s...(weeping)...no colour at this end (pointing to where she is now)...I’m not upset because of what it brings up, I feel quite *detached* from [that]...its just good to be able to see...for me as a visual person...that actually it’s quite *contained*...its not disorderly, its not outrageous, its not chaotic, there’s some *sense* to this...rather than just this morass of pictures...I suppose I see God in a different [way]’ (Maria).

Despite the exercise’s potential to help Maria see pattern in the perplexity of her present situation, her underlying detachment shielded her from the emotional trauma of this dark time. Her strategy for containment at that moment in time while vitally

maintaining emotional control in a difficult situation was, ironically, potentially delaying the integration of difficult emotions into her maturing style of faith.³⁶

Women in Crisis

Some of these women, clearly on the edge of exhaustion, were seriously near to giving up on themselves, their congregations and, in two cases, their God.

‘Am I having a midlife crisis? ... [No] this is completely *different*... There was that period in my mid twenties ...when I voted with my feet and didn’t bother going to church ...This [in contrast] is a very, *very* serious and worrying search for God....I just wonder whether I can differentiate between a search for God and a search for the truth...[...].Who cares two hoots about me and my spiritual journey? Nobody does. Not a soul in the world... because I haven’t told them... I thought to myself, I think God *does* know what’s going on. And I don’t know why my life’s come to this point, but all I know is that I’m very dangerously near to giving up ...’ (Moira).

‘I probably don’t have the energy or the resources right now to work all this out... I don’t know how many...more ...months, *years* I can live like this anyway [...]... one in five ministers abandon ship after five years.....you know... and I think, ‘Am I going to become that statistic?’ because of what’s happening for me in my own personal journey?’ (Elaine).

‘...the last 18 months of study has been a theological rollercoaster, because I’ve actually been shaken to the *core* of my theological being... shaking my faith... making me wonder what it is I’ve believed all these years. I’ve actually even wondered if there’s anything *there* to believe at all. Now I never, in all the years of my life, ever thought I would ask that question... the feeling of fear I have is: what if I’ve been *wrong* all the time... about all the basics of the Christian faith? [...]...I recall recently lying in bed with a pounding heart, blood pulsating through my head, feeling

³⁶ Poling relates this kind of numbness to the experience of those who have been abused when he observes, ‘Transition of the self...is fraught with ambiguity. Victims often repress large amounts of pain and other negative feelings in order to survive the trauma of abuse. They numb themselves to physical and emotional feelings for many years in order to resist being overwhelmed. They achieve balance through denial and dissociation of memory and feelings. There is little awareness of tension or need. There is little sense of ambiguity because negative experiences are banished from awareness’ (Poling, 1991:115).

absolutely scared that I'd got it all wrong. And I never in my entire life thought it would come to this...' (Morag).

Questioning God

Sharon Parks writes that 'to undergo shipwreck is to be threatened in a total and primary way. In shipwreck what has dependably served as shelter and protection and help and carried one where one wanted to go comes apart. What once promised trustworthiness vanishes' (Parks, 2000:28). Most women's experience of 'shipwreck' fundamentally caused them to question their relationship with God, and whether or not he could ever be trusted again. This was not only disturbing for those who had lost their intimacy with God, but also for those who felt his abandonment at the time of their crisis. The disintegration and re-configuration of some women's relationship with God occurred as a one-off event. For others it involved a serpentine journey towards a new divine-human relationship.

While a number of women were subliminally, *apophatically* aware that their relationship with God had changed over the years, few had ever actively reflected on that experience, or put it in into words. Participants in general struggled to describe their relationship with God at interview due to their inability to reflect on the maturing dynamics of that relationship themselves. Two women, however, were particularly articulate regarding the loss of their youthful intimacy with God and the confusing emotional ambivalence which ensued:

'The intimacy with God...that I would have known as a younger Christian was definitely in remission...How can it be that from...when you're..... 17 and you have this really *intimate* relationship with God where you feel loved by God and you love him in return...how can it be that the journey of your life has taken you to a place...where that kind of intimacy with God is actually something...that...on the *outside* you would say...you desire...but, in reality, you don't?' (Elaine).

'... what I miss is....there's nothing *personal*....*intimate* about God....and ... I desperately miss the intimacy because... I suddenly realised....I no longer have a *personal* God that I believe is interested in the intimate details of my life, and I *miss* that because whether.... that's been....my security blanket...something I've hid

behind in a wrong way... there's another [part of me that wants] to find that afresh, [...].I miss the intimacy....' (Moirira).

Spiritual Abandonment

At times of crisis, the God who had been presented, to most of the women in their childhood, as a *protecting* presence, often took on the shape of a *hostile stranger*, whose existence they deeply resented:

'It was as if we'd all been hit by a bus, and there was nobody to help us. And there we were, missionaries... we'd gone to serve God, we'd gone because we thought God had sent us there, and God wasn't allowing us somehow to serve him! It was a very difficult time, because we just couldn't understand why we were being hammered one thing after another like this' (Morag).

'[We] began to have issues with the church. I think...issues with God: we felt God had kind of taken us somewhere and then left us stranded...I think from that point....we stopped [going to church].....being in church was difficult anyway, because it was this God that I suddenly didn't recognise' (Louise).

For Rachel the ultimate moment of betrayal came when, in the midst of her embittered resistance to the deity she felt was the cause of her spiritual pain, she tried to reconnect with God:

'I thought... I suppose I better make the best of it and try and find God again. So, having sort of shouted 'Go away, go away!' I thought, 'OK, I'll turn round and say, 'OK....can I come back?' And when I turned round he'd *gone*...completely *gone*. And...I couldn't, couldn't find him' (Rachel).

The loss of the mythical image of God: a God women had thought would protect them and care for them forever caused several participants to question their belief that God

was good and could be trusted.³⁷ Following the sudden deaths of two infants in her family, Louise cried out:

‘Why didn’t God intervene? That’s.....to me, that’s not a *loving* God.’ (Louise)

Others felt similarly reluctant to take the risk of trusting this ‘abandoning’ God again:

‘It’s not the fear of God, it’s the fear of *everything* in everyday life, and I don’t....trust God....to control that.... because I know that I *don’t* trust God for the future, I *don’t* trust God with...plans for me. I have big problems with the ‘I’ve got a plan for you and I know where I’m going and everything’ (Ruth).

Rachel’s sense of abandonment by God, despite the terror that involved, represented a significant threshold in her adult, spiritual life. Her account of this liminal experience³⁸ demonstrates her unique ability to re-interpret that dismantling experience in the context of a new, deepening, yet profoundly *different* relationship with God. Her narrative weaves together a haunting sense of God’s *presence* through *absence*, a reality which finally motivates her in a fresh quest to ‘find’ God:

‘[My experience of abandonment] went on for three years. The first year of saying ‘Go away!’ and the second two not being able to find God and yet feeling a sort of... an *intensity* about it, so that... ‘OK!’ I’d say, ‘OK, right, I’m not interested, I’m not going to look any more, if you won’t come and if you won’t appear I’m not going to bother.’ And then the next minute, it bothered *utterly*... andthe despair....of not finding Godand someone at the communion service [saying] ‘God is close to the broken hearted and near to those who’ve given up hope.’ And me thinking, ‘OK, if he’s close to me and I’ve given up hope, OK God, today....*today* can I find you, today can you show me who you are?’ And the roaring answer was.... complete *silence* ...and the *disappointment*... perhaps again it was a sort of repetition in a different sort of way of my quest and my hunger for God when I was at school, and this was twenty something years later’ (Rachel).

³⁷ On the potential emergence of basic mistrust rather than trust towards God due to the teaching that they are protected from the evil of the world see the case study in Tate and Parker, 2007:219 on spiritual development after ‘spiritual birth’ following Erikson’s stages.

³⁸ For an overview of the importance of liminal space in developmental transformation which facilitates second order change of ‘being’ rather than first order exchange of ‘coping mechanism’ see chapter 2, p.68-70;

God the Assailant

Rachel's present quest, however, took her to a terrifying place where she confronted her darkest fears about the person of God and his intentions towards her:

'The more I began to think about [God] he'd sort of turned from a slave driver, I think, and there were a number of images... sort of fleetingly...which encapsulated how I saw God... I saw him as a rapist³⁹... that overpowered me....made me do something I didn't want to do, made me feel like dirt,... at that stage, I saw him as just an aggressor' (Rachel).

Her journey took her to a place of deep personal abandonment:

'I remember walking along the pier and it began to pour with rain. I was soaking wet, the waves were lashing against the pier and I remember saying, 'Listen God...this is the last opportunity.....I need to find you, I'm not sure how I can know that I've found God but I need to find you. I need to know you believe me and care for me and where are you? I remember walking to the end of the pier...it was dark and ... I was completely on my own [...].I [remember] thinking, 'Right, that's it...I'm *never* going to look for God again. This is the end, you know, looking for God doesn't help me. It is ending in....*misery*...you don't *exist* - I'm sure he does - but you don't exist for *me* and that is the end. And it was a decision. That was the end. I was not going to look for God (claps hands) any more. And I came back, walked off the pier, went back to (the city)...and was ill for a week' (Rachel).

Rachel's articulate account captures the sense of alienation and violation which several interviewees felt, but few had the courage, or the words, to describe.⁴⁰ It crucially describes women's existential terror of the God who dominates and exploits,

³⁹ For a comparable analysis of other British women's experience of the loss of self reflected in women's use of metaphors of a dominating, oppressive, abusive God see Slee, 2004:104-5.

⁴⁰ Participants' evident resistance to facing internally or voicing externally their repressed anger, confusion or frustration at God reflects the fact that engaging with these questions is taboo in some evangelical circles. I did not press participants reluctant to acknowledge these dimensions of their relationship with God for obvious pastoral reasons. The fact that, unlike Rachel, some participants seemed to be in *denial* of, and clearly had no theological or pastoral frameworks within which to process subliminal tensions in their relationship with God, was clearly damaging women's spiritual health, thus frequently accentuating the alienation, numbness and dullness they felt characterised their relationship with God. The lack of permission to admit or processing places to do this kind of 'spiritual work' within evangelicalism is clearly a matter of grave pastoral concern.

rather than the God who protects and loves, the latter being the God many participants knew they were supposed to be worshipping on a Sunday but were deeply, disturbingly unconvinced - or *afraid* - was actually there.⁴¹ The emotional horror, distress and anger which the 'loss of trust' engendered in some participants made it hard for them to worship in church, given that there are no public or even private ways within the evangelical tradition to express anger, terror, or horror towards God or process intense psychological pain.

'It was so painful to go to church and be told, you know, God loves you, God is close ...if you call to him he'll answer - all these things to me were *incomplete*...were just *mocking* me because 'na, naaa, na, naaa, naaa' there they are, but they're not for *you*. And all these things that were held out as *promises* actually weren't *real*....I mean, there was no one more desperate to find God than me, and yet he just wasn't [there]' (Rachel).

The loss of identity as well as of an entire world view which such existential crises represent commonly *widened* the gap between women's internal and external worlds, particularly when, like Rachel, you were ministering to others at the same time. The shock of the 'loss' of the 'familiar' God led some women to question their eternal destiny:

'I suppose my options would be [as I try to make sense of this]... either the whole thing's a crock... which [calls] into question every other experience I've had of God....and that's where I would have been last year.....at some points. [But] I'm past that, in that [I believe] my *experiences* of God....to date...were *real*....[and yet] I really felt God went on holiday some time around September and hasn't appeared back since.....he's left some *nutter* in charge...God really has a *lot* of explaining to do when we get there. Questioning *whether* I get there!' (Louise).

⁴¹ While Slee's examination of women's use of images of violence and domination to describe loss of self or faith connects these with women's experience of male domination in the church community and society at large, this was not a connection that the majority of my participants made. This is not to suggest that these themes are not *present* in their loss of identity, but that they were not *prominent* in most women's interpretation of these experiences at interview (Slee, 2004:104-5).

Women Leaving Church

Many women, like Louise, were somewhat desperately trying to establish an equilibrium between the reality of their early experience of God and his abandoning absence in the present. What they lacked, however, was any conceptual or theological framework within which to make *sense* of the contradictions of their dismembered world or their ‘smashed’ God. Lacking a critical culture or a processing place in which to disclose, interpret and rebuild their picture of God, women either continued to attend church while harbouring intense anger and pain or stopped attending church altogether, a phenomenon I explore in chapter 7. The lack of pastoral support for Louise’s family after their withdrawal from church lay leadership, following their multiple bereavements, merely confirmed her in her sense of alienation from the church community and from God:

‘I don’t know if...it was just the church that we were part of...or....how we behaved in grief....there’s been a non-response from church and the church leadership....there has never been any kind of, you know, ‘Gosh, these folks were actually *leading* something in our church and actually they are *struggling* ...you know, maybe we should go and *visit* them?’ (sigh)...whereas it’s been....Christians or non Christians *outside* of the church who’ve actually picked up on these things that we’re struggling with and actually been the ones who came around. So it would take me a lot to convince me about Church community’ (Louise).

Doxological Crises

God’s absence from women’s narratives did not necessarily indicate his absence from their spiritual histories. Women’s apophatic awareness of God often rendered them incapable of creating a narrative that artificially ‘inserted’ him into their story.

Walton rightly observes the dangers involved in believers trying ‘to achieve narratives of wholeness and healing’ which ‘prevent us from encountering God in the midst of extreme circumstances’ (Walton in Graham et al., 2005:71). God is as much known, she suggests, through painful, chaotic and apophatic experiences as he is observed in the light.

The doxological crisis precipitated by the ‘loss of God’ is further complicated by the fact that God may not, in fact, be lost. Rather more disconcertingly, he may simply prove to be ‘other’ than we thought him to be. Jamieson explains,

‘At various points on the journey of faith we too discover that God is not where we thought God would be and even, perhaps, who we thought God was. We realise we haven’t got God figured at all. We either come to see God in a new light or we cease to search after God at all.’ (Jamieson, 2004:104)

The difficulties of worshipping an ‘unfamiliar God’ are profound for those wrestling with ‘internal leaving’, but even more acute for those ordained to lead others in worship:

‘I [have] found myself leading people... but actually with a deep question in my own heart: ‘Is that really true? Is that what I *really*... believe....at this point in time? [...]...And these are....it’s...it’s terrifying.... because the implications of that are so far ranging... ‘Can I really in all integrity continue to do this job with these kind of questions?’ ...and again....it’s that strange thing about ‘parallels’, where you are living in your own life one particular journey, but in your professional life you’re living another’ (Elaine).

In the midst of exhaustion and confusion, evangelical women are evidently struggling to know where to turn. Some feel in a vacuum, others know some of the reasons for their ‘unravelling’, but have no idea how their equilibrium might be restored. Some participants, profoundly afraid, indicated that they were deliberately *resisting* the call to new ways of knowing God. They longed, rather, to *return* to the spiritual ‘security’ they had known before:

‘It will maybe just go away and I’ll be able to get back to my Christian faith as it *was*, [...]...all I know is that once I had a simple faith and now it is so complex and confused. And I wish at this point in time that I had it all together, but I think that’s still pending [...]:... the only thing I want, more than anything else in the world, is to have my own, complete, naive simple faith restored’ (Morag).

Despite that primal longing to return, Morag is slowly realising that there is no way back. She knows she needs to find travelling companions to help navigate this wilderness journey, but she doubts she can find such a 'critical culture' in the evangelical church:

'What we all need in life is some kind of soul-mate... Not, maybe, just one, but people that we can relate to, that will understand where we're coming from and who will *like* us and *respect* us and *accept* us whatever way we are... Within my tradition I don't think there's anything that can help me. And the reason I say that is because there are so few women doing [hermeneutical study there] I think the only thing that can help me are women who have been through what I'm going through now and have come through the other end intact. I don't think I'm actually totally blown apart *yet*, I don't think I'm totally not intact. I don't think so. But (pause) ...I don't know how to express this ...to anybody other than somebody who really understands ...' (Morag).

For Rachel, this recurring, dismantling experience has ironically marked the beginning of yet another search. As her friend observed:

'You know God's been so important to you, this is like a *death*.'

Rachel reflects:

'And I think that's what it was. I thought I should feel *relieved* that I didn't need to look for God any more and that it was all over...and that was it ...really, if [God] wanted to find me he knew where I was: but it was the very moment of saying this is the *end* of it...I think I started my *search*' (Rachel).

It is the nature of this search and the discoveries evangelical women have made in this new territory of faith which my final chapter explores.

Chapter 7

Where are they going?

Introduction

Despite their feelings of disorientation, paralysis and disempowerment described in the previous chapter, many of my research participants are trying to move forward. This chapter explores the spiritual journeys of two groups of women: those who have chosen to *remain* within the evangelical community and those who are currently in the *process* of leaving or have already *left*. It also examines women's *relationship with home*, the *nature of their spiritual quest*, their *strategies for staying* and the *reality of leaving*.

Women's Relationship with 'Home'

The women who were church members at the time of interview fell roughly into two groups: those who felt content at church and those who suppress their frustration in order to remain. The participants who felt most 'at home' in their church communities were in their seventies and exhibited the active, vibrant faithing styles reflective of stage three faith:¹

'I've grown as a Christian through obeying each command from the Lord [by] putting into practice what he's asked us to do...and actually getting on with it' (Rebecca).

While the peace, assurance and enthusiastic energy these women exuded was remarkable, their unreflective stance was atypical of the participant group as a whole, as Sheila's reflection on her first interview suggested:

'I'm not a very *retrospective* person, you are making me do something that is unnatural....I don't like to explore negative things....I would rather just be ignorant of things like that' (Sheila).

While these participants' unreflective spirituality made the life-review interview a challenging experience, their narratives highlighted the ability of those who have

¹ These participants' faithing styles were characterised by a stable ideological framework which had changed very little over the years; an acceptance of traditional authority roles, and a sacrificial commitment to service (Fowler, 1995:173).

established a solid, stage three equilibrium to maintain that stability for an extended period of time.

Working Hard to be 'at Home': The Search for a New Equilibrium

There were, however, other participants who felt they had to work hard to remain connected within their church communities.² Women whose inner and outer lives had become imbalanced at church because of their sense of disconnection and inner boredom were usually ashamed of that fact. Indeed some had begun to withdraw gradually to the margins of their congregations.³ Their narratives confirmed Hull's observation that 'boredom, dread and passivity lead finally to the phenomenon of exhaustion': he suggests 'going to church actually drains many Christians...it is draining of their energies to be forced into the presence of that about which they are so ambiguous and unfulfilled' (Hull, 1991:143).

Despite their obvious frustration with church, few participants felt comfortable criticising their spiritual 'home'. Some felt guilty for, as they saw it, projecting their unmet spiritual needs onto their local church. When asked the main reason for their continued involvement, most women cited obedience, personal accountability or loyalty to the community:

'I continued to go to church... [throughout my struggles in faith]...and I think that was ...probably [the] benefit of quite a strict upbringing which says, 'This is good for you even if you don't *feel* it at the time' (Elaine).

'I went into the Deaconate as a discipline... [because] it would put me under church authority [and ensure that]... somebody [would confront] me if I did go off the rails... It's *service*...and that's what keeps me in the church. I would say I get remarkably little out of it. I mean, no! (laughs)...I get very little *back* from being in the church. I get an *awful* lot from the work I do with my *parish*' (Frances).

² For a survey of women's attendance and ministry involvement see Appendix 7.

³ Jamieson observes that, in the initial stages of leaving, church members may subtly move towards the margins of the church by teaching Sunday school, for example, instead of attending morning services (2004). My own participants more often became less consistent in their church attendance.

While some women persevered with church attendance for fear of any negative impact leaving might have on their children or spouse, others wrestled with the long term dilemmas of their situation. One participant, whose children made up the entire Sunday school with herself as its only teacher, questioned the value of Sunday worship given that both she and her children were excluded from most of the service:

‘I’m sitting there thinking, ‘How much [am I doing this] for my kids to have...a kind of tradition to fight *back* against or a tradition to start thinking about, because there is something about these things that are *formative* for children.... There is an element of discipline and regularity and obedience [and]...that’s an important principle for them to learn’ (Maria).

Maria’s involvement in the Kirk session, while in some ways as frustrating as her experience of Sunday services, demonstrated her commitment to *reform* rather than *revolution*:

‘I may not *like* the way things are [at church] but I can’t change this if I’m *outside* of it. I can [however] seek to influence from *within* and maybe earn my way to have some influence [...]... I really don’t want to communicate that I am knocking the traditional church because I [still] have a lot to learn and I’ve learned a *lot* from choosing to submit to what I see as the structure’ (Maria).

Other participants reluctantly confessed that their laudable ‘submission’ was in fact a form of conflict avoidance. They admitted that, through their collusion, they repeatedly reinforced the very structures which urgently required reform.

The Double Edged Sword of ‘Parallel Church’

Participants whose expectations of dialogical Christian nurture had been raised by para-church discipleship found the qualitative gap between enclave discipleship and congregational education acutely disappointing. The frustration women expressed, as they recalled their teenage years, regarding the lack of intentional discipleship at church, was commonly accentuated in their adult years, as the gap between their

interdependent faithing styles and the dependent 'modal developmental level' of their congregations increased:⁴

'There's a huge lack of continuity [between my para-church workplace and my local church] because of the lack of....the values...[of] openness, brokenness, transparency, servanthood. The local church... may or may not confront people for change, depending on their personality...you have to move at a much slower pace, even with discipleship training, because you have so little time in the week ... From [our para-church] context, if you want to grow, you have to commit to a *process* where there is a level of *openness* and a level of *sharing* and a level of *input* and a level of...*accountability* and expectation that you will... apply some truths, come back and say how it has been [...]... it's very hard to get a [church] group to commit, actually to a process [...]...you lack the continuity, you lack the....the structure, you lack the commitment to the process' (Pamela).

Some women's over-active involvement in para-church ministry, as paid staff or volunteers, often subtly *masked* the growing 'wedge' between their para-church and church-based discipleship. Some participants admitted realising that the relief they felt when they had to miss Sunday services because of their para-church activities betrayed the extent to which they were working hard to conceal their spiritual frustration and boredom not only from their friends at church but also, unconsciously, from themselves. By such means the gap between women's outer and inner worlds frequently increased.

On Leaving

Nancy Chodorow observes that, unlike boys, most girls learn to define themselves in terms of their *relations* and *connections*. They are thus, she suggests, potentially more threatened by separation than are most men (Grey, 1991:25). As a result, women often live 'undercover' in their congregations for extensive periods of time: concealing both from themselves and their peers the extent of their unhappiness there. Women consequently often repress the very urge to differentiate, which would enable them to progress from immature *dependent* to more mature *interdependent* faithing styles. The fear of leaving, however, predictably pre-disposes evangelical women to

⁴ See p.114.

choose a strategy of ‘supplementing’ over ‘leaving’ as their main way of restoring the equilibrium in their spiritual lives. The next section of this chapter explores the ways in which women are trying to tap into sources of energy, which may help them to move out of the ‘spiritual impasse’ described in the last chapter, while maintaining their disciplined involvement in their evangelical church.

The Nature of Women’s Spiritual Quest

The patterns of ‘breakthrough’ or ‘awakening’, which Slee’s UK research identified as a main component of women’s faithing styles, were confirmed by my own participants’ narratives as being a key feature of their ‘emerging’ adult faith (Slee, 2004:109). Women’s use of a range of images and metaphors, centring on the generative themes of *journey* and *expansion*, symbolised their unfolding experience of *reconnection* to the ‘*self*’, the *world* and their *God* in new ways. Slee’s participant narratives of leaving,⁵ travelling⁶ and coming home⁷ mirror and confirm my own participant’s experience of departure, expansion and return as a main rhythm of women’s ‘recovering’ spiritual lives, dating from the time they first decided to re-negotiate their relationship with their former faithing styles and congregational ‘homes’.

From Silence and Constriction to Articulation and Exploration

Women’s feelings of spiritual disorientation commonly increased as they matured in faith, due to the lack of heuristic frameworks within the evangelical community to help them understand their symptoms in the context of developmental change. The lack of teaching on spiritual growth in the church or the example of adults successfully navigating faithing change in the Christian community, seriously disadvantaged women in their spiritual development.

‘The Church of Scotland has a major problem because it has never recognised spirituality [...]...people are now beginning to....be comfortable with the word, but

⁵ On leaving home, making the break and separation see Slee, 2004:114-118.

⁶ On travel to another country, people or place see Slee, 2004:118-121.

⁷ On coming home, finding one’s centre and coming to rest see Slee, 2004:121.

ten years ago they weren't...the idea of discipleship just doesn't come in to it [...].I don't think they understand growth - spiritual growth at all' (Frances).

Several participants explained that they lacked any strategy for interpreting the fact that their spiritual lives seemed to be so different from the 'norm'. Women's inherited models of discipleship commonly portrayed maturing faith as:

'...just more of the same, like keep up this pattern...discipline of, you know, reading the bible and praying...' (Hazel).

The profound 'ground-shifts' of theological questioning and relational disorientation, which accompany life in a fallen world, often came as a terrible shock to women who had hoped that, since they knew God, 'everything would be OK'. Participants admitted desperately longing for a way to orient themselves in their faith:

'[I need to find] that way of relating to God and understanding prayer ...that actually hits *reality* in the life that I live...and my own ragged edges and the ragged edges of the experiences that I've had that don't have neat happy endings and to finally stop thinking, right, there is something *wrong* with me for not being able to fit into that mould' (Hazel).

In this landscape of spiritual disorientation, the language and imagery of quest, discovery and journeying was one of the main ways in which women attempted to make sense of their experience.

Questing: The Female Journey

'Questing', as a psychological term, is used to describe a person's willing decision to face existential questions head-on and without attempting to reduce their complexity. On this understanding of the religious 'quest', self-criticism and doubt are perceived as positive.⁸ The female quest, in feminist literature, is distinguished from the

⁸ See my discussion of the spiritual quest and the 'dark night of the soul' in chapter 2, p.65ff. On 'quest' as a scale to measure religiosity, see Burns, 1999. On the concept of 'quest' *within* the religious environment (as opposed to a quest which necessitates leaving 'home'); the multidimensional nature of its motivation and Daniel Bateson's use of the 'quest' motif as a continuing search for truth involving the readiness to face doubt, self criticism and incompleteness see Beck and Jessup, 2004:283-294.

traditional epic journey in a variety of ways (Christ, 1995; Grey, 1989:61-83, 2003; Stevenson-Moessner, 2000).⁹ Women's journeys repeatedly involve *wandering* and *isolation* as well as *journeying* and *homecoming*, in contrast to the male hero's 'epic journey' in pursuit of his goal. In feminist heuristic models of growth, as I illustrated in chapter 2, the emphasis of the female spiritual quest is more frequently laid on the *process* of the 'journey', rather than the *goal* of 'arrival'.¹⁰ Indeed the image of the caterpillar, deathlike within its cocoon, waiting for new life to emerge, powerfully illustrates women's extended times of voluntary or involuntary limbo, trapped in virtual suspension, thus showing the extent to which women's experiences of spiritual transformation often are the *antithesis* of a linear, heroic journey.

Liminality and Withdrawal

The importance of liminality and withdrawal in women's processes of growth has been highlighted in previous chapters as a way of honouring the 'no women's land' which exists between old and new ways of being in the 'relationship' of faith. They encompass the twin movements of (a) *separation* or *detachment* from an earlier fixed point in one's theological or congregational framework and (b) the corresponding *aggregation* involved in a person's *return* to a stable place.¹¹ Growth is thus frequently described as a liminal movement away from the place of spiritual equilibrium, on a journey which involves questioning, expansion and assimilation. By such means the self creates new space for its own growth, and for the emergence of more mature, interdependent ways of relating to the outside world.

Liminal space paradoxically often represents a place of freedom and relief, as well as of loneliness and doubt.¹² Jamieson (2003), Slee (2004) and Grainger (1993)¹³

⁹ Carol Christ suggests female quests lead women to 'new found self-awareness and self-confidence' where the goal of the female hero is not 'dominating, controlling or owning' the world as in traditional male models of heroism but defining the self or re-defining roles, Christ (1995). See also, Christ and Plaskow (eds.), (1992:228-45) and Washbourne (1997).

¹⁰ See chapter 2, p.58ff.

¹¹ For a discussion of 'questing, questioning and liminal space', see chapter 2, pp.65-69.

¹² On the apophatic nature of liminal space, see Lynch, 2003:34-35.

¹³ Roger Grainger (1993:43) describes the move from critical distance to a new penetrating engagement with faith in the metaphor of 'crossing the Jordan' from exile to new territory, which appropriately complements Veiling and Ruether's descriptions of women's path to mature, liberating faith often necessitating the experience of 'exodus' or 'exile' from their patriarchal community – see chapter 4 p.120ff.

suggest that those who engage in the process of doubting and questioning actually redirect the energy they used to *resist* spiritual disintegration into the exploration and maintenance of new ways of knowing God and engaging with the world. Women appear to use the language of the ‘spiritual journey’ as one of their main ways of re-directing their spiritual energy from maintaining a ‘façade’ in a somewhat ‘artificial’ home to exploring new ways of living in the real world.

The Language of Journey

Most of the women who used the language of ‘journeying’ or ‘expanding’ to describe their movement out of an impasse were unconscious of its source, but recognised that it had most probably entered into their vocabulary in the past five or ten years. While journeying metaphors often occur in scripture, intriguingly, participants rarely referred to the bible as their source of this heuristic device. Some realised that they had inherited phrases such as ‘my walk with God’ or ‘walking the walk’ from the early days of their spiritual nurture. Those for whom the language of journey was new, traced it to their exposure to Catholic writers such as Margaret Silf and Henri Nouwen or the symbolism of Celtic Christianity. One woman linked her adoption of a journeying metaphor to her memories of the image of a boy and girl walking hand in hand through the woods in a ‘Start-Rite’ shoe advert from the 1960s.¹⁴ The language of journey, she explained, helped her to envision spiritual development in terms of *movement* and *exploration*, in contrast to the impasse of *repetition* and *stagnation*, which characterised the image of Christian discipleship she had inherited from her church. She commented with a twinkle in her eye and a sigh of excitement:

‘...that’s when things *really* started to grow....and really going into *journeys*...’

(Ruth)

From Systems to Journeying: Exploring Adult Faith

Most participants, including Ruth, relished their use of journeying metaphors in comparison to the restrained ways in which they had previously described their

¹⁴ For an exploration of the metaphor of ‘walking’ with God as a time honoured evangelical way of talking about holiness as a journey or race focussed on Christ (Heb. 12:1,2), see Gillett, 1993:94.

experience of restriction at church. Their metaphors of journey were self consciously symbolic of their shift from conformity to exploration as the major impulse of their spiritual lives, i.e. from seeing faith as passive ‘rule keeping’ to experiencing it as an *active, responsible, adult* partnership with an *adventurous* God.

‘...to be ‘good’ you’re given a set of clear rules and then you *keep* the rules and then you’re ‘good’. Now that is about the mentality of a 5 year old and I do need really to grow up, [and God would say], ‘No...you listen...and we’ll explore *together*’ [...]...and sometimes [God would say] ‘Well do you *want* to do this or do you want to do *that*?’ God doesn’t mind. Either will do - your choice, they’re *both* good. ‘I’ve given you a choice because....you know... *both* of them are the right answer and you choose!’ (Ruth is smiling from ear to ear)...but its been very *exciting*... its a lot of *fun* to be going on a journey...and the bad bits won’t last forever and there are always good bits, like you’re not always on your own...’ (Ruth).

For participants like Ruth, this re-orientation of perspective was profoundly liberating, providing not only a *framework of interpretation* for her previous stagnation but also a *call to move responsibly forward* into uncharted territory with God:

‘Your Christianity is a journey and you should be moving on and you can’t stay where you are...that was very releasing...Apart from feeling the anger that I’d...wasted a decade or two...and was not going *anywhere*...but it was very releasing and very *freeing*...because it was like, ‘Wow! I’m not a failure!’ ...and it’s not my *fault* that I’m not getting much out of [church] because...I’ve got a long way to go [I learned that]...I had to take more *responsibility* for myself, I couldn’t just sit and expect the church to do it for me....but they’d never told me that...or at least I’d never picked it up...and so discovering...I can just...go on....and God is there *with* me and....we can explore *different* things, we can do things *different* ways...we can *change* things I am terribly set in...’ (Ruth).

The key themes Ruth identifies of *moving, releasing, taking responsibility, discovering*, and exploring *difference* in a way which promotes change, reflects the content and the tone of many participant narratives of ‘awakening’. These ‘revelations’ – which indeed they were for many women – marked not only new

thresholds of *realisation* and *expansion* within the female self but they also brought new energy to *penetrate*, rather than be *penned in* by, their worlds. Significantly they also began to portray God as an *active, dialoguing* partner in their growth.

Internal and External Expansion: The Discovery of the Self

As the examples below demonstrate, women used the language of journey symbolically to integrate two *dimensions* of their growth: their experience of *internal* expansion, exploring previously '*split off*' or *repressed* dimensions of their beings and their experience of *external* expansion as they began to explore the world beyond the theological and cultural boundaries of their faith community. For some women, given their inherited fear of travel in both directions, this re-orientation of their internal and external lives was a difficult experience.

Believers are specifically discouraged from 'journeying within' in traditional evangelical spirituality. Arthur W. Pink, an evangelical writer in the 1950s warned 'the great mistake made by most of the Lord's people is in hoping to discover in themselves that which is to be found in Christ alone' (Pink, 1955). While Pink is right to warn believers against self-sanctification, such teaching has frequently retarded rather than empowered women in the sanctification process, misleading them to suppress the 'true selves' Christ came to redeem. Thus women's counter-cultural decision to explore their interior worlds frequently tapped into new sources of spiritual liberation and personal expansion, hitherto concealed. Following her description of her first Catholic retreat Alison exclaimed:

'...that was the beginning of...instead of following...a Christian tradition of looking *out* to find the answers, and looking *out* to find God... I started the journey of looking *inwards*...a very, very healing journey...' (Alison).

Once women's fears of the consequences of exploring their interior worlds subsided, they began to redirect the energy they had formerly used to *displace* and *repress* their unanswerable questions into *exploring* new ways of engaging with their perplexity.

From Doing to Being

In the course of this re-orientation, several participants realised they were being called to a different kind of life: one not driven by the need to seek divine or human approval. Thomas Merton explains that, often, ‘in order to be true to God and to ourselves we must break with the familiar, established and secure norms and go off into the unknown...turning to a freedom based no longer on social approval and relative alienation, but on direct dependence on an invisible and inscrutable God’ (Merton, 1999:26). Several participants, like Alison, realised that they must embark on this kind of journey and be willing to face the ‘darkness...silence...waiting, not knowing... and all those things one wants to avoid by staying constantly preoccupied with the external world’ (Rupp, 2004:42). Few women, however, knew of anyone who could guide them on this kind of ‘internal’ journey. As a result, many of them began to draw on the considerable resources of the Catholic community for spiritual guidance and refreshment:

‘I started to really....really seek....through going on retreats and mainly through Catholic spirituality.... and that’s been a profound experience for me [...]... a journey...of truth...and seeking...and taking risks... I started to explore my spirituality and, instead of listening to other people telling me where I should be and what I should believe,...I was given a *freedom* by others...to discover what was within *myself*....and I think that’s been a wonderful journey’ (Alison).

As women like Alison began to discover and re-affirm their ‘true selves’, they faced the choice of whether or not to give up their practice of maintaining a ‘false self’ at church, thus releasing energy to engage with God and others in a more open and honest way.¹⁵ In this way, women began to know themselves *directly*, many of them for the very first time, rather than through the eyes of those in their religious communities to whom they had given the power to define them.¹⁶

¹⁵ On the purgative stripping off of masks of false selfhood and the release into new ways of relating to ‘the other’, see Shults and Sandage, 2006:235.

¹⁶ Men, suggests Carol Gilligan, follow Socrates and think that if they know themselves they will know women. Women, by contrast, think that if they know others they will come to know themselves. Women’s developmental task, in the middle years, Gilligan suggests, is to re-connect with the true self they have persistently ignored (Gilligan 1996).

The Emerging Self: The Pain of Birth and Re-birth

Women's first realisation that there is a self within which they have previously repressed can be frightening as well as a liberating. John Hull comments:

'Depression and even anguish are often experienced as the emotions associated with the early stages of emergence. This takes place when the old me can now be reflected upon by the newly emerging me, which is beginning to be conscious of it. The anxiety, in other words, is over the loss of the self, at a time when it is still too early to describe it as the previous self. It is the grief felt at emerging from the embedded self into something which I do not yet recognise as being me. It is the experience of birth and re-birth.' (Hull, 1985:178)

Moira describes the anxiety, disorientation and grief of precisely this experience when, in her fifties, she discovered a part of herself which had been repressed for over forty-five years:

'I don't know what happened, but something snapped inside of me...and all I can [say]... it was like a wee....four year old child stood up inside me, jumping up and down and crying for attention. I went to my room and cried hysterically for about two hours and, I guess, that was the inner child for the first time demanding some kind of attention. And at that point I knew then that I needed some help, there was something going on inside me that I don't know how to explain....' (Moira).

Sadly, as Moira discovered, this kind of help is not readily available in the evangelical world in Scotland.

Metaphors of Growth: Integration and Expansion¹⁷

Women used a variety of images to capture the multi-dimensional nature of their experiences of travel and expansion in their internal and external worlds.

¹⁷ For a review of other models of multi-dimensional growth see chapter 2, pp.58-62.

The metaphorical ‘cage’ of evangelicalism within which Moira described herself as growing up had in fact provided a highly *protective* environment for her emerging faith, a fact which, ironically, made it very hard for her to leave.¹⁸ Her ‘awakening’ consequently demanded that she review her personal image of *God* as well as the theological boundaries of her *faith*:

‘...for a long time I felt like a bird in a cage...it was like the cage door was down [...]...and slowly but surely I was standing on the threshold looking out and saying, ‘Nah....God cannie really be this big!’ And I went back into the cage where it was safe. And I was like that for quite a long time...and I remember, I can see myself perching on the threshold, thinking....And I know that I’ve stepped off [now] and I’m in the field, the cage is far behind. I *used* to be able to ‘recluse’ back to the cage...but I can’t get back there any more...and I’m in this field and I can’t see any horizon, its just...too huge, too big and its....it was really scary at first....’ (Moira).

Several women, including Moira, felt themselves ‘stepping back and forth’ over the ‘boundary lines’ of faith for an extended period during this kind of transition. Despite her initial fear, Moira recognised the necessity of leaving the security of her conservative evangelical ‘cage’ and its apparent certainty, in order to orient herself in a much wider theological and relational ‘landscape’. Her realisation that her *identity* as a Christian had thus far had been based on *conformity* rather than *responsibility* was a frightening and disorienting experience. She realised that she had no idea who she really was or of where she wanted to go now that she was ‘free’ to explore the field beyond the only ‘safe place’ she had ever known:

‘Because I’d always just conformed to whatever there was to conform to and I was suddenly [out of the cage] in this huge field...I hadn’t a clue what I even *wanted* to do let alone what I *should* do. So that was a *very* significant point actually and then it all crumbled and I was left...bereft [...]...I don’t know what my gifts are, I don’t know what I’m good at, I don’t even know what I want to do, I don’t know what my dreams are, I don’t know what my hopes are, and that was quite scary, to suddenly realise I’ve never even asked these questions, let alone knew what they were’ (Moira).

¹⁸ For Moira’s description of the *constriction* of that cage see chapter 6, p.177-8.

Ironically, Moira's decision to step over that threshold confronted her with the fact that she had no means of orientating herself in this new season of her life. The 'cage' of conforming faith had provided an essential artificial exoskeleton without whose protection Moira's emerging self lay, defenceless, without form or self awareness. The decision to leave the cage thus, for many of my participants, constituted a terrifying experience.

'Crustacean' Spirituality

Moira's personal metaphor accurately reflects many women's transition from being a 'repressed and divided', to a holistic, integrated self. Sheehy vividly metaphorically compares Christian growth to the expansion of a shell-fish through a series of 'shells', which are progressively grown and outgrown, discarded and replaced:

'We are not unlike a particularly hard crustacean. The lobster grows by developing and shedding a series of hard, protective shells. Each time it expands from within, the confining shell must be sloughed off. It is left exposed and vulnerable until, in time, a new covering grows to replace the old....with each passage from one stage of human growth to the next we, too, must shed a protective structure. We are left exposed and vulnerable but also yeasty and embryonic again: capable of stretching in ways we hadn't known before' (Sheehy quoted in Stokes, 1982:21).

Sheehy's portrait of the cyclical nature of this multi-dimensional expansion and the vulnerability of the unprotected crustacean between 'moult' succinctly captures the *precarious*, and yet intrinsically *potent*, predicament of women living between 'safe places' in their spiritual growth. Little 'transitional protection' is provided for developing Christians during seasons of developmental vulnerability within the evangelical community, a factor which clearly contributes to women's patterns of travel beyond their spiritual 'home' to find 'safe places' within which to shelter while their new protective 'coverings' grow.

Beyond the 'Shell': The Dilemmas of 'Blending'

Since the day that she 'emerged' from her first protective 'shell', Moira sought to explore her internal and external worlds in an intentionally discerning way. By such means she discovered, for the first time, who she felt she was in the eyes of God and the new way he wanted her live in the world. While there were elements of her former faith framework which Moira felt necessary to discard, it proved a more complicated process to work out how to re-contextualise the elements she chose to retain:

'...it's no longer such a dilemma [to live outside of the cage], but I'm still out in this field with no [real sense of orientation]....I'm not sure where my guidelines are.... and I find I now want some stuff that was back in that cage....but I don't want it in the cage. I want it to be out in the field with it....if that makes sense...' (Moira).

Moira, in common with many of my participants, was trying to work out how to 'blend' the 'stuff that was back in the cage' and which she wanted to *retain* in her 'new' faith framework (such as the authority of scripture, substitutionary atonement and the reality of final judgement) with the biblical hermeneutics, atonement theories and doubts about hell which she was encountering 'in the field'. Given the lack of a 'critical culture' to process these questions, many of my participants reported wrestling with their doubts and questions primarily on their own. Some rapidly realised they had the potential to come up with questionable 'solutions':

'I've even lately started to think about reincarnation [...]...it was apparently part of the teaching of the early church...it was thrown out in the 16th Century for some reason...was it Constantinople? [...]...but reincarnation was an early belief of the church...which is good because it made me feel I could tick a *box* then (laughing) you know! There's always that bit, 'Oh dear', you know, 'you're on *dangerous* ground!' I...I don't understand enough about it....it makes a lot of *sense* to me but then how do you tie that up with Jesus saying, 'It is appointed unto man once to die and...after that the judgement'?...I don't know....' (Alison).

Alison's passion, her confusion and her embarrassment as she tries to tighten up her 'alternative' faith framework, is clearly evident in her struggle to express these

thoughts. Despite her theological training she feels unable to resolve fully these dilemmas without merely capitulating to the ‘default’ settings of her former faith community, or resorting to the strategies of ‘thought stopping’, ‘salvation by surrender’ or ‘submission to authority’ which, as Hull highlights, repress the kind of growth Alison needs to pursue.¹⁹ Kegan (1982) suggests that without a ‘culture of embeddedness’ to provide a supporting framework for the developing self and its evolving theological frameworks, panic or abandonment may tragically bring a premature end to developmental transition, either returning believers to the embrace of their former faithing styles or abandoning them to the perils of ‘no-man’s-land’.

Recurring, Expanding Cycles of Growth

‘Transitional Explorers’²⁰ like Alison thus frequently find themselves trapped in the ‘no-mans land’ between ‘dangerous ground’ and ‘box ticking’. Reluctant to set up home on either soil, they do not know how to resolve their theological dilemmas. Lacking a ‘critical culture’ to explore their questions; deprived of the cut and thrust of intellectual engagement in their ‘mother tongue’,²¹ many women quietly conceal their re-imagined frameworks of faith. Women thus often become theologically and relationally isolated, which increases the temptation either to continue maintaining their ‘parallel lives’ of external conformity, or to leave the evangelical community entirely.

While both Moira’s and Alison’s stories reflect the experience of participants ‘lost in the field’ outside ‘the cage’, Carol’s heuristic model of growth demonstrates her firm grasp of the *recurring* dynamic of ‘shedding shells’ in her spiritual development.

¹⁹ Hull identifies a range of what he calls ‘learning sicknesses’ which characterise believers resisting faithing change. These include 1) ‘withdrawal and separation’ characteristic of the internal leaving I discussed in chapter 5; 2) ‘thought stopping’: a form of psychological separation from the controlling power of the group in which ‘deviant’ thoughts or questions are deliberately repressed; 3) ‘salvation by surrender’ a nostalgic return to a childhood faith; 4) ‘descent into piety’: where faith is transferred from God to a particular technique, practice of activity (as discussed in the role of the ‘Quiet Time’ in chapter 6) and 5) ‘Submission to Authority’ where believers subordinate their questions to the ‘answers’ of a higher authority in the church or scripture (Hull, 1991:120-138).

²⁰ ‘Transitional Explorers’ find a new, personally owned faith which brings energy and momentum to the reconstruction of their emerging faith frameworks sometimes involving leaving former faith communities. They frequently also embrace a wider view of salvation (Jamieson, 2002:75-90).

²¹ Evangelical teachers frequently address women’s theological conundrums using ‘rational’ arguments and a combative apologetic approach rather than engaging with them in the ‘conversational’ and ‘narrative’ tones of their spiritual ‘mother tongue’.

Her story, explained in detail here, reflects, and insightfully articulates, the experience of those few participants who identified an emerging *shape* and *pattern* to their unfolding experience of maturing faith.

In a more complex version of Moira's journey from bird cage to field, Carol described her growth as a progression through a series of theological 'frameworks' or 'boxes'. These 'boxes' - far from symbolising *containment* or *limitation* - represented the *rich*, increasingly *expansive* ways in which Carol tried to contextualise the chaos of her world within a consistent, theological framework. Within these 'boxes', Carol's perception of *herself*, the *transcendence of God* and her *openness* to those '*outside*' her faith 'boundaries' steadily grew. Each successive box functioned as a source of *existential shelter*, *protection* and *illuminated meaning* appropriate to the 'stage' or 'faithing style' which her development afforded. Her 'boxes' thus represented what Carol believed to be progressively *more adequate* ways of making sense of her faith despite the *complexity* and *perplexity* of her lived experience. Each box became a new 'home' for Carol, offering space for expansion and integration until it, too, failed to accommodate the fresh questions which new growth or unexpected circumstances posed. She explained,

'As a child my life felt very prescribed, I wanted to choose 'my' people, who was I going to *belong* to and it was going to be the Church of Christ [...]...it wasn't *wrong* to have understanding...it was OK to take on understanding and that took me out of my 'home'...beyond my 'home' and my denomination...[...]... I then accepted a new 'box', you know, I left the 'box' of 'home' and 'home church' and I took on the 'ideas' 'box', and then I took on the....'covenant theology, grace' 'box'....and the 'expository teaching' 'box'...[...]...but then real life got *a greater* grip of me and eh, the 'boxes' wouldn't fit! (laughs)' (Carol).

Reinforcing Ruether (1985), Hull, (1991), Veiling (1996), Parks (2000) and Slee (2004), re-negotiating relationship with 'home' is a crucial and central question in women's spiritual development for it demands that this recurring theme be openly acknowledged and addressed in evangelical models of spiritual growth. When Carol's 'boxes' metaphorically 'ran out' as the reality of life demonstrated that her

frameworks of interpretation would not ‘fit’ any more, she found herself, like Moira and Alison, ‘out in the field’.

Spiralling and Blending

Although Carol’s description of the sequential development of her faith might appear to emphasise a *linear* model of growth, women’s actual experience was neither as chronologically sequential nor clinically ‘boxed’ as Carol’s metaphor might suggest. Two other participants, Morag and Hazel, tried to capture the dimensional, re-capitulatory nature of their developmental expansion.

While, ironically, *conforming* faith’s rhythmic practice of bible reading and prayer at times resembled, for some participants, the ‘progress’ of a hamster in a wheel, *expanding* faith’s new perspective on the deceptively repetitive ‘stagnation’ of the spiritual life took on new meaning as women realised that they were in fact growing in different *dimensions* and *cycles*, rather than re-treading a self-defeating circle. Morag selected a picture of a Middle Eastern ‘tower of Babel’ in her ‘image exercise’ to illustrate this point. She explained her choice of image:

‘I like the tower idea...and then I saw the people and they are going round, and round, and round....but actually *getting* somewhere at the end of it and I think....twenty one years into really getting to know God better and better and better and the twenty years before that knowing that he was in your life and knowing (laughs) you’ve probably got *another* twenty years to live at least: there is still a long way to go. That picture [explains].....it may feel like it’s going nowhere...seeing the same view....you’re seeing the same thing every time you go up the circle but actually you’re still getting somewhere *different*....and moving on a bit each time’ (Morag).

The experience of encountering ‘the same view’ time after time in their discipleship frequently discouraged women in the spiritual journey. The sense of *messiness* or *retardation* some experienced as they faced habitual sin, or simply tried to balance work and family life, made many fear they were simply ‘going nowhere’. The metaphor of a spiral clearly helped some women grasp the fact that, while honest

discipleship may bring with it a frustrating sense of ‘*déjà vu*’, they were actually engaging with these dimensions of their discipleship at progressively *new* levels: ‘moving on a bit each time’.

Hazel’s description of her growth echoes Morag’s picture of a spiral while simultaneously acknowledging the inherent ‘messiness’ of multi-dimensional and usually far from sequential growth:

‘It isn’t all sussed out, you know, growth is *not* linear....sometimes you get fed this kind of notion that [...]...you have this conversion experience and then you grow...‘ever closer to God’ and your prayer gets ‘ever more...whatever’ and your bible reading gets ‘ever more...whatever’ and... its all on this... increasing pathways of....knowledge and meaning and wisdom and you grow ever more Christ-like...and then one day we die. And.....actually there’s a lot of stops and starts and...unlearning and re-learning and....going back to square one and, I mean, you do the basic things all over again and yet...at the same time it is gradually *moving* in the direction of growth...even the times that you feel like you’ve gone back to square one you haven’t...and there are plateaux and there is backwards and forwards and...times you feel like nothing’s happening at all [...]......your life is *whole* and, I mean, at the same time there are many different *strands* to it and....we’re all *multi faceted* people....and we all show different faces in different contexts and in different company...but we’re still a whole person and so...your sense of God and...and your sense of growth....as a person, which includes spiritual growth...is something that’s picking up on all these strands’ (Hazel).

Hazel’s metaphor of the ‘stranded’ nature of spiritual personhood demonstrates her grasp of the *simultaneous*, but rarely uniformly maturing, *multiple dimensions* of spiritual growth frequently reflected in women’s *blending* of faith styles as a feature of their natural spiritual development. In addition, her identification of the subtle ways in which women present their ‘faces’ to one another revealed her insight into the healthy ways in which women sometimes *mediate* themselves and their faithing styles in congregational relationships to avoid hindering others in their growth.²²

Another participant, Alison, similarly identified this need to respect the variety of

²² Hazel’s understanding of the ‘multi-faceted’ nature of human self-presentation in women’s complex worlds resembles Lifton’s model of the ‘protean self’ as an adaptive human strategy for maintaining relationship despite differences which might otherwise divide: see chapter 4, pp.132-3.

faithing styles present in the church. She used yet another heuristic model which demonstrated her grasp of dimensional growth and its impact on congregational spiritual formation:

‘...you can’t always hurry people on to the new stage, not that you are further on than them, it’s nothing to do with that, in a way it’s a bit like a bicycle wheel where you’re all going in different directions like the spokes of a wheel and not a case of some that’s further on than others. I know where I am because of my life’s journey and because of where I am at [...]...You can get frustrated with people sometimes, where they’re at [a different place but]....I’ve been there [too in the past] and I have no right to try and [change them]...’ (Alison).

While women like Alison clearly count it a high value to *honour* those who prefer more dependent faithing styles, that same respect was not always returned to them. While there will always be relational tensions, arising from the reality of *difference* in a congregation, the climate of some churches actually militates against women exploring interdependent faithing styles, due to the distress this may cause to other members of the congregation. So long as the reality of faithing change continues unacknowledged in evangelical circles, this situation is unlikely to change.

The Challenge of Hermeneutical Expansion

The metaphor of growing faith as movement *between* ‘boxes’ did not only feature in Carol’s experience, Maria too employed a similar metaphor to represent the parallel reality of *hermeneutical* expansion:

‘[When] you’re a teenager, you’re trying to make sense of the world: you’re probably trying to put *labels* to things ‘till your mid-twenties or so...and then you spend the rest of your life *unpacking* the things that you’d already ‘squared away’! I think I see a lot of traditions in church where they’re still just ‘packing the boxes’, trying to make sense of it. And they’ve not got to the bit of thinking, “Well, maybe we got that *wrong*, maybe we need to *change* that, maybe somebody....maybe even a *non-Christian* might be able to help us review what we’re doing? Oh my word!” - you know?’ (Maria).

Several participants' vision of 'expanding' faith resembled the picture Maria paints, *reviewing* and *refining* provisional theological frameworks in the light of the insight and critique of people both within and without the faith community. Several women had begun to realise that, as adults, they should expect to 'unpack the boxes' for the rest of their Christian lives.

As Alison's theological quandaries over 'reincarnation' (illustrated above)²³ indicate, some women are intensely aware of the need to think critically, as well as expansively, as they re-negotiate the theological frameworks their new 'selves' want to use to interpret scripture and their own human experience. As Hull succinctly suggests, drawing on the work of Robert Kegan (1982), an *evolving 'self'* urgently requires an *evolving hermeneutic* of scripture:

'Just as the evolution of the self is the evolution of the meaning which the self constructs, so the hermeneutical principles of this construction will undergo similar development. But if the self develops in its interpretation of itself, as its story becomes longer, more self-conscious and more articulate, it is essential that this should be held in relationship to a continuing evolution of the ability to interpret scripture....an inter-personal adolescent or adult who retains an impulsive or imperial method of interpreting the Bible will find that the Bible and self become alienated' (Hull, 1991:183).

Given the reluctance of some evangelical congregations to engage at this level of critical thinking and reflection, women's experiments with new ways of thinking about and interpreting scripture are frequently viewed with suspicion.

Lifelong Learning: Living with the Cracks

Carol's experience of 'moving between boxes' in a consistently reviewed, liberating hermeneutical cycle was predominantly positive because of her expanding image of God, she explains:

²³ See p.237.

‘I have greater confidence in God now than I’ve ever had. I have seen [...]... that you can express intellectual doubts and it doesn’t matter, because God is bigger – He is a *mystery*, revealed through a glass darkly. You can be *any* denomination....I’m out of a box!’ (Carol).

While Carol speaks enthusiastically of her expanding circles of ‘inclusion’, she is, at the same time, uncomfortably aware of the developmental naiveté which may habitually blind her to the fact that she has simply moved into another ‘box’. Despite this reality, it appears, from Carol’s narrative, that it is her personal relationship with God which seems to have taken the place of any theological frameworks at the core of her faith. She reflects:

‘There is an *excitement* [about being ‘out of a box’]...but maybe I’ll be *wrong*, maybe I’ll just fall into *another*.... box. I don’t know, but I feel now...I probably connect more *directly* with God...more intimately....I don’t go through ‘the system’ now.... I don’t know if that’s ...*right*...but that really is how it is. I hope it’s not just that I’ve become...complacent and less rigorous, I hope it’s not that, but I feel I have more, in spite of all the days when it’s nothing but bad news....I have this utter...*confidence* in God...as a *good* God [...]... So I *feel*, as I said before....I’m probably...*dangerously* out of a box’ (Carol).

Several participants, having experienced their own journey through successive ‘boxes’ of faith, began to realise that this was going to be a life-long process rather than a one-off event. For some this was a terrifying prospect which they faced with considerable resistance; for others these ‘dismantling’ experiences had clearly begun to represent potential, if daunting, new thresholds of growth:

‘I don’t want to build on [a new theological framework] that is going to show up loads of cracks in 5 years and get me to another ‘crisis’ - which probably *will* happen. Once you get [further on in] the process you realise, OK, this might happen again, but it is part of the process’ (Pamela).

Dismantling and rebuilding, questioning and re-affirming thus, for many participants, had become an *essential* feature of their model of healthy spiritual growth. Not only did women like Pamela recognise that their first experience of disorientation was

unlikely to be their last, but they also began to display increasing poise in their anticipation of future ‘dismantling thresholds’ of developmental change.

The Spectre of Censure

The spectre of censure, however, was never far from such women. Carol’s enthusiasm as she celebrated the anticipated freedom of future stages of faith was undoubtedly tempered by her awareness that not all evangelicals would view her ‘growth’ in a positive light. Her excitement as she anticipates her husband’s retirement from the ministry is diluted by her fear that she might actually be becoming a ‘heretic’, having abandoned the ‘formulas’ and ‘systems’ of her early faith. What draws her deeper down this path, however, is the pull of *freedom*:

‘In my early life, and until fairly recently, I relied heavily on formula and....systemsand....now I’m not so reliant or even so *desirous* of even having them... So I don’t know if that suggests, (laughing) *maturity* or....becoming a *heretic* or what...I wouldn’t think the sky would fall in if I missed a service or prayer meeting although, because I am a minister’s wife, I would still make every effort because I want to encourage others.....I don’t think its dreadful if I don’t read my bible every day, I think I can feed well on my bible two or three times a week and recall it...and I do that and I hope that’s not just being lazy [...]and...I suppose I could be radical and say, (laughing) supposing I chose never to set foot in a church again, I don’t think that necessarily makes me a *castaway*. But I don’t intend that (laughs). ‘Cos I do *enjoy*.....being nurtured in a fellowship.... but whether that is within ‘a church’ – that’s eh....I’m not so sure, in fact I know its not, its much wider...and freer.’

(Carol)

While it is clear that, for Carol, church is a fundamental part of her Christian lifestyle, it is equally clear that her relationship with congregational life is in the process of re-negotiation. This is a topic to which we shall return when we examine the issue of women leaving the church.

The Quest for God²⁴

As has already been illustrated in the narratives above, as well as re-negotiating their relationship with themselves and the church, some women reported deep changes in their relationship with God. This was by no means the experience of all research participants, indeed, as MacKinlay's research confirms,²⁵ even when interviewed in their 70s and 80s believers 'demonstrate difficulty coming to a real understanding of God even by a lifetime of intellectual activity – just when they seem to grasp one picture of God they are confronted by another one' (MacKinlay, 2001:79).²⁶

MacKinlay suggests that the main mid-life task for Christians is the critical re-evaluation of former images of God and a realistic appraisal of their adequacy to sustain frameworks of faith which reliably interpret lived 'reality'. The maturing process thus, she suggests, thus involves the appropriate discarding of early, provisional, and the establishment of mature, realistic images of God. My research confirms that this pattern of the 'loss' and 'recovery' of God features in the life narratives of some believers. There are other believers, however, who do not experience major shifts in their relationship with God. It is not clear to which extent this is because such shifts only happen for certain types of individuals, within certain styles of faith or because some women lack the linguistic tools to reflect upon or articulate their experience. While my participants demonstrated varying degrees of awareness of change in their relationship with God, it was predictably those who had faced major 'ground shifts' in that relationship who had reflected upon, and thus were articulate in describing, those experiences. As Slee's (2004) research confirms, many women's experience of God is a profoundly apophatic phenomenon and is thus, by definition, hidden from human articulation or review. Given how difficult it is to explore what is hidden, my present discussion of this theme focuses, in the

²⁴ My choice of the term 'quest' reflects the fact that several participants described themselves 'searching' for God. Their quests were however characteristically female rather than epic in nature. For a summary of the characteristics of the female quest see p.227ff.

²⁵ In MacKinlay's research, only 8 of her 24 participants interviewed for her project on the spirituality of ageing perceived there to have been changes in their way of thinking about and relating to God. For an overview of my use of MacKinlay's research see chapter 1, p.22ff.

²⁶ Note the clear link between this phenomenon and Carol's enthusiastic assertion of God as 'mystery' on p.244.

main, on the narratives of those participants for whom this was a significant, conscious experience.

Grieving and loss

The experience of faithing transition or personal crisis may be accompanied by a form of spiritual dissonance which some women experience as the loss²⁷ of, or abandonment by, God.²⁸ This usually occurs when one's former image and present experience of God fail to coincide. It sometimes manifests itself in an extended period of spiritual alienation and darkness, during which the believer paradoxically feels bereft, of but at the same time rails against, an absent or abusive deity.²⁹ Some of my participants' reported 'quests' for God arose when the period of stagnation, depression and paralysis, which commonly accompanied the transitional loss of their formerly 'protective' deity, was superseded by the reinstatement of dialogue with a strange, potentially unpredictable and 'unknown' God.³⁰

Transitional Resistance to God

As well as re-negotiating their relationship with themselves and the church, maturing believers frequently faced the more complex challenge of re-negotiating their relationship with God, particularly when the believer's provisional understanding of God failed to provide an adequate framework for interpreting the perplexing circumstances of life. This occasionally precipitated a faithing crisis. Hull (1991), rightly observes that many believers actively resist this elemental change by repressing their feelings of betrayal and reinforcing prior reassuring images of God. This common strategy for resolving such spiritual disequilibrium was evidenced by

²⁷ On the loss of and grieving for God, community and friendships during faith transition, see Lynch, 2003:38-9.

²⁸ See the narratives of Elaine, Moira, Morag and, in particular, Louise and Rachel in chapter 6, pp. 214-219. Participants frequently simultaneously were grieving the loss of their former faith frameworks, their 'ideal image' of the faith community and the loss of the sense of security they had relied on in their youth: that everything was going to be 'OK'. See Fiona's narrative: chapter 5, p.140.

²⁹ For an extreme example of this common form of spiritual dissonance, see Rachel's narrative in chapter 6, pp.216-218.

³⁰ While Rachel, and four other participants actively pursued, in their own words, a 'search for God' the 'finding' happened over months or years during which it was hard to discern who was seeking who. Their searching bore the hallmarks of the female quest of wandering and isolation rather than the epic journey of ascent. For two of these participants, God simply, quietly 'reappeared' again. Dorothy recalls remarking, at that time, 'Oh, *there* you are!' She gave no explanation for the reunion.

my participants' references to 'just trusting God' in their crisis or to the reassurance they received from knowing God was 'in control'. By these means, several participants deliberately denied or repressed their ambivalent feelings towards God, thus avoiding the theological questions which their circumstances justifiably raised. Eleven of my participants exhibited varying degrees of resistance to their ambivalent emotions towards God.

The lack of permission to *admit*, language to *describe*, or frameworks to *understand*, divine-human dissonance within the evangelical community thus directly contributed to participants' repression of unresolved tensions in their relationship with God. Unconsciously afraid that their feelings of fear, numbness or anger towards God were indicative of theological sickness, few women felt free to admit these emotions or grasped their significance in the context of their spiritual development. Those honest and brave enough to share their stories have been quoted in chapter 6.³¹ Few women suspected that these symptoms might represent the 'growing pains' of unresolved developmental tensions in the divine-human relationship, which urgently needed to be addressed.³²

The decision to reverse this kind of relational 'impasse' is rarely undertaken lightly by any believer, as is vividly expressed in Thomas Merton's description of the terror of facing the 'unknown' God:

'If I am what I think myself to be and God is as I have pictured him to be, then perhaps I could bear to risk [moving into the presence of the God who is a consuming fire]. But what if he should turn out to be other than I have pictured him, and what if, in his piercing presence, whole layers of what I have known myself to be should dissolve away and an utterly unpredictable encounter should take place? (Merton, 1999:13)

It is to my own participants' narratives of just such encounters that I now turn.

³¹ See chapter 6, pp.214-218.

³² Women were seldom aware of the tradition which locates spiritual darkness, dryness and abandonment in the context of God's purgative but loving nurture. For a review of the dark night, liminal space and spiritual transformation, see chapter 2, p.61ff.

Re-negotiating Relationship with God

The re-negotiation of relationship with God following a period of spiritual alienation has been described as the ‘move from a posture of knowing to one of seeking’ when that which the believer now seeks is no longer an *answer* but a *person* (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:97). This description acknowledges women’s courageous attempts to connect *relationally* to a deity with whom it seems impossible to connect *rationally*, given the impossibility of understanding his role in the perplexing paradoxes they face. The resulting encounter was frequently tentative and exploratory in nature, resembling a ‘scorpion-like’ dance which reflected the believer’s cautious exploration of the possibility of opening themselves, again, to the God who seemed to have let them down.³³ The potential of this kind of transition, however, as Shults and Sandage suggest, is that ‘the transforming process can promote a more secure attachment with God and the differentiation of self that allows for greater spiritual and relational intimacy’ (Shults and Sandage, 2006:235). Hagberg and Guelich observe that at Fowler’s stage 4,³⁴ which they describe as the ‘inner journey’:

‘...we discover God is not who we had thought he was – God is very different... we now have to contend with a God who is much more personally available to us... We come to see that we had placed God in a box – a box of our own making, perhaps constructed in our childhood. We had prescribed who God was for ourselves and for others. Now God breaks out of the box.’ (Hagberg and Guelich, 2005:98-99).

Coming Home

Two participants described the transforming power of this kind of encounter in vivid, personal terms. Rachel described the unexpected moment of her reconciliation with God after several years of an apparently fruitless search for him:

³³ On the difficulties of re-establishing trust with the God who has abandoned, see chapter 6, pp.216-217.

³⁴ As recently as in 2002 Fowler crucially revised his description of stage 4 faith to include the concept of ‘relational knowing’. While this stage clearly needs re-working to account for the dimensionality of women’s faithing, Fowler’s revision potentially acknowledges this phenomenon of relational covenantal connection to God independent of a ‘water-tight’ rational framework for understanding his role in the world.

'[Walking] by the river I'm suddenly thinking....even if I don't *feel* it, even if I don't *find* God, I have got to make a *decision*. What decision am I going to make? ...you know if hell's fury is to be unleashed I have to hold onto something. And I remember thinking, 'What is the most important thing that God needs to be?' And he had to be *good*. I didn't care if he loved me or didn't love me, he had to be good... because I'd looked at evil and I remember walking along the river and saying for the first time... 'God I choose to believe that you're good, please take this evil from my mind.' And (claps hands) suddenly, there was just this sudden....everything changed and nothing changed and I knew that I'd made the decision [silence.....she begins to cry]...' (Rachel).

Rachel's 'decision' to open herself to God in prayer, on that day, did not change the difficult circumstances of her life. It did, however, symbolise a profound *relational* as well as *conceptual* re-orientation in her way of imaging, and relating to, the God who previously had seemed abusive.³⁵ The fundamental nature of the re-orientation which ensued confirmed the fact that the 'decision' she had made was not the transitionally resistant 'salvation by surrender' (a nostalgic return to childhood faith) which Hull warns against.³⁶ Rather, it appeared to symbolise, for her, a 'second order' change of *being* through which new ways of relating to God, the self and the other are born.³⁷ Rachel's description of that surrender put into words a reality other research participants had experienced but few could put into words. They had reached the point of decision: to yield to the being of God despite the possible consequences. It was often through this act that participants perceived themselves to be unexpectedly loved and cherished by God, as reflected in Moira's description of her reunion with God following a time of deep spiritual darkness:

'I remember going into my kitchen...and [experiencing] another one of these 'sacred spaces' where, as real as is real, it happened. I felt God put his hand on my shoulder and say, 'It's OK, I'm here.' And I think I burst into tears....I'm going to cry now (weeping)... (silence)...and for the first time in my life...I realised that God *loved* me. And that was liberating... [...]...because for the first time I realised God loved me for who I *was*' (Moira).

³⁵ See chapter 6, pp.216-19.

³⁶ See footnote 16, p.233.

³⁷ See chapter 2, pp.68-69.

The crucial shift from believing that God loved them for what they could *do* for him or for the extent to which they *conformed* to the patterns of ‘acceptable’ faith, to realising that God loved them as their *true selves*, was revolutionary for some women many decades after ‘conversion’. For women like Rachel and Moira, the liberation received via these personal mystical experiences re-oriented their ways of holding and living out the Christian faith.

In Rachel’s experience this ‘home-coming’³⁸ was profoundly liberating, but paradoxically also symbolic of the beginning of a new stage of her spiritual journey:

‘That [decision] had changed....everything....had completelyreversed everything..... the terrors had gone, and the *searching* had gone...and....I was just like..... ‘Oh yes *that* was a long journey!’ And now I’m sort of....well I don’t know if I’m....I’m *home*. I’m in a very different...no I’m *going* to call it home because to me [it’s]... uncharted territory but.... (with a sigh) that’s that bit of the journey finished. That is over. And....everything’s different’ (Rachel).

Despite the fact that ‘coming home’ represented a liberating and re-orienting experience for some women, it did not make it any easier for them either to be at church or find the resources they needed to continue growing in their relationship with God. Given the lack of open-ness to these ways of thinking, talking and living out faith in some churches, women frequently compensated for the spiritual disequilibrium they felt there by supplementing their spiritual diet elsewhere.

Strategies for Staying: The Importance of Supplementing

Ruether has observed that women who feel alienated from their institutional churches are ‘by and large not choosing the familiar schismatic solution’, but combining attendance and leadership in a historical church with involvement in outside networks of support, which more actively promote their spiritual and personal

³⁸ Alan Jamieson helpfully sets this crucial *relational* re-orientation in a biblical, philosophical and sociological context when he describes it in terms of 1) the second call that Jesus issued to the disciple Peter in John 21; 2) Paul Ricoeur’s reference to a ‘point beyond the desert of criticisms where we wish to be called again’; and 3) the believer’s sense of ‘coming home’: finding their place of core being and belonging in God himself as well as in the body of Christ (Jamieson, 2004).

development (Winter et al. 1994:248).³⁹ Given the lack of either ‘critical cultures’ or ‘holding environments’ within evangelicalism in Scotland, some women tried to create their own ‘processing places’ through networks of friendship and resources in the wider Christian community.

Literature

While women’s reading habits were clearly limited, especially for those involved in the care of young children, books were one of the main ways women discovered new language to describe and ways of resolving their spiritual dissonance. This was not because reading was their *preferred* learning approach, but because it could be pursued *anonymously*.

‘It was meeting individuals...and having the courage to break away,...starting to read books that weren’t on the church book stall...that were not necessarily ‘approved’ evangelical ones, but the ones that *I* thought looked interesting...that’s when things...really started to grow!’ (Ruth).

Participants were particularly drawn to writings from the Catholic tradition.⁴⁰

‘I do find that the Catholic Church and the Catholic writings ...much more *human*....much more *gutsy* sometimes. [The]...things I read are mainly Catholic writings because I find a great depth in them....and a great sense of spirituality [...]...I just don’t read evangelical books any more because I....I don’t relate to them’ (Alison).

While Tomlinson’s *The Post-Evangelical* and Lynch’s *Losing My Religion* had variously incensed and helped different participants, they crucially ‘normalised’ the experience of displacement within the evangelical community in a way which helped women engage with questions they had previously thought only existed inside their heads and provided them with a sense of identity:

³⁹ For a discussion of the role of loyalty in women’s decisions to stay despite feeling alienated at church, see Winter et al., 1994:57-62.

⁴⁰ Authors mentioned by name included Margaret Silf, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Ronald Rolheiser, Joyce Rupp, Gerard Hughes. Participants also mentioned books by Alan Jamieson, Dave Tomlinson, Gordon Lynch, Brian McLaren and Mike Yaconelli.

‘*The Post-Evangelical* by David Tomlinson was the one thing that [helped me process what was happening to me] because I thought I was just becoming Liberal...wishy washy... [...]...and it just *fitted* me. And it was... supportive of being that way, it was saying that’s OK to be that way, you are still a Christian and it really helped [...]...in finding a label for myself...it was OK to be who I was because there were other people out who were the same thing’ (Elspeth).

Retreats, Spiritual Direction and Psychotherapy

Access to ecumenical resources which admitted the reality of doubt and desolation normalised women’s experience of spiritual darkness, giving them permission to be themselves and admit their struggles without being judged. This led several participants to go on retreats and arrange to have spiritual direction. Indeed, the increased protestant demand for retreats and spiritual direction in the UK is well documented (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005:69). My research confirms that evangelical women are open to, and intentionally drawing upon, the resources of Ignatian and other forms of guided and independent retreats,⁴¹ spiritual direction,⁴² and even psychotherapy,⁴³ as a means of expressing and processing their interior lives. For many, this was a liberating experience, giving them access to their hidden emotions and enabling some, for the very first time, to remove the masks which they habitually wore at church:

‘Training to be a [spiritual] director was very good because it...it gave me much more of an insight into [my] own emotions and being able to actually articulate, name and handle them’ (Frances).

‘[When I was in spiritual direction I felt]....It ok to be who I *am*....with my fears, with my *doubt*, there is no fear....you can express doubts, it is the sort of place where if you say, ‘I don’t know if I even believe in a God any more’, that’s acceptable. It’s wonderful...freeing....and the very freeing of that it makes you want to search even *more*....not being told how to live but to be enabled and empowered and *helped* to discover the truth [...]... The main thing was I was just accepted as I

⁴¹ Eight participants reported going on guided retreats.

⁴² Six women had experience of spiritual direction. One was a trained director herself.

⁴³ One participant resorted to the professional help of a psychotherapist given the lack of counselling resources within the evangelical community to support those who have experienced profound abuse.

was, I didn't have to be anybody, I didn't have to pretend, you know. I took the mask off....' (Alison).

'[After a three year course on Spiritual direction I discovered it was]....not just a safe place, but an exciting place as well, because you could just be....*you*.....were just an equal with everybody...I could just be *me*' (Hazel).

Participants consistently mentioned Ignatian spirituality as one of the main resources which had helped them to re-connect with the bible and with their emotion, due to the fact that it affirmed, and indeed capitalised upon, the reflective, narrative, conversational and imaginative faithing styles which women demonstrably prefer:⁴⁴

'...I had a terror...I was absolutely *terrified* to read the bible [...].... I was like a child...[hearing]... a language that I didn't understand... [So I] simply read a story from the gospel and imagined I was thereessentially it's the Ignatian thing... I don't know if anyone *taught* me it... I just *did* it....And so that happened for a very long time, just reading a gospel story, just looking at Jesus, just deciding who I was in the story and responding to [it]' (Rachel).

'[It was] like moving from that 'Oh don't trust your feelings!' to... 'Well...what *else* are you going to do with them?' They're there to be listened to and they are there because they tell you things... that whole Ignatian thing, I just thought it was fantastic...it just made *sense*....Yeah! This *connects* with me and...how I do this thing called Christianity' (Hazel).

Confirming the findings of Slee (2004:62), my participants were particularly excited by *non-linguistic* ways of faithing: specifically walking, painting, sculpture, symbolic journeying in labyrinths and circle dancing - activities which helped them give voice to unconscious dimensions of their internal dialogue with God:

'As a younger person [faith] was all about the cerebral, it was all about the head, theology and doing the right thing, following the rules...and yet, as I have got in

⁴⁴ Beth Dickson provides a helpful rationale for Ignatian spirituality: 'Ignatius believed that our emotions are truer guides than our thoughts which are so much at risk of being spin-doctored either by ourselves or others. Because for so much of our time our emotional responses appear to happen to us rather than being willed, they are more likely to reflect accurately what is going on inside' (Dickson, 2005:75).

touch with my gut...I have found I've got more in touch [with myself], I use clay and paints and...very powerful stuff's come out of that' (Alison).

'You are a *whole* being....not just a *rational* being. A [labyrinth gives] you that space....to reflect, meditate, you know, to touch stones [...]... to throw them in the water and with that throw your worries away. And this idea of....picturing things... that's all completely [...] new to me and completely kind of... (sigh).... wacky... but really *powerful*...' (Elspeth).

Women were surprised at the potential of these non-linguistic forms of faithing to promote *confrontational* dialogue with God: conversations which proved vital in their ongoing transformation. Frances' connection with God through nature gave her a language with which she began to access areas of her inner life which she had no prior language to explore:

'...I found myself often in dialogue with God...out of nature. I picked up a conker and I said to God [...]... 'OK Lord, I know what you are going to say, "Its prickly on the outside but its nice and smooth on the inside" and you can see the inside and you know I'm lovely inside.' And I could almost hear God's voice say, "No I'm not." And a slight pause.... 'Oh! Ok, what?' – "Your outside is nice and shiny but if you break open a conker it's actually quite mucky inside....and it's the muckiness I want to deal with." Now that sort of dialogue with God I wouldn't have been able to touch in to.... earlier...' (Frances).

Support Groups

'Processing places' were predictably rare and only occasionally discovered by evangelical women. One woman, remarkably, reported finding a 'critical culture' in her own church in a house group whose members ironically called themselves 'The Heretics'. Few others met with that degree of tolerance in their congregations. Another woman found spiritual companions in her place of work:

'I've been meeting with... [two Christian colleagues] after work on a Thursday and that's been really helpful... we are working through the questions together, raising other questions... not necessarily *answering* all the questions!' (Louise).

One woman, in-between churches at the time of interview, had been instrumental in the establishment of a small, informal ‘critical culture’ in her city. Men and women from a variety of denominations met regularly to discuss questions, wrestle with scripture and read articles by a variety of theologians to help them critique their faith from a variety of perspectives. Such groups are few and far between in Scotland, a fact which is reflected in the number of ‘lone women’ among my participants who admitted they rarely shared their questions and were struggling to find answers on their own.

From Internal to Actual Leaving

While ‘supplementing’ was helping a number of my participants to maintain some kind of balance between their *expanding* inner worlds and *constrictive* church experience, others were unsuccessful in addressing their spiritual disequilibrium. Women who had chosen to maintain their relationship with their home churches by repressing their deepest spiritual needs, appeared to be in danger of becoming ‘internal leavers’. The step from ‘internal’ to ‘actual’ leaving was clearly traumatic for a number of participants. Most tended to step ‘in and out of the cage’, to use Moira’s metaphor, reluctant to leave the church, but struggling to maintain healthy growth there. While some women experimented with changing their patterns of church attendance, or ‘trying out’ alternative congregations, others had left and returned, or left and not returned at all. For women, like Moira, who exhibited the symptoms of burnout, it was often a relief to stay at home on a Sunday, or attend churches where they could be relatively anonymous:

‘It was a real safe haven and a place to rest, nobody knew me, nothing was expected of me, do you know, I just came in, came out, folk were friendly, missed you when you weren’t there, no commitment...and that’s been really good until now’ (Moira).

Following her time of ‘respite care’, Moira is thinking of returning to church, although her expectations have significantly altered:

‘I’ve lost... *expectation* that I’ll find a church I think [...]... but I hope this isn’t going to be my lifetime experience, because, I’m not really accountable spiritually to

anybody. Although... I am incredibly isolated [...]... I don't want to cut myself off totally, because I do think...church is still important [...]....But I'm very confused about church and I don't know what to expect...but I wouldn't give up church....'

(Moir)

Two of the participants interviewed for this project were no longer attending church at the time of interview. Alison had tried to re-connect with a variety of church communities but, as yet, has not been able to find a new spiritual 'home':

'I didn't feel I *belonged*...and I went for a good number of months....I....I...even went to a class for beginners...I just didn't feel that I belonged. And so I stopped. I've been to the Episcopalian church a few times....so...I struggle... Although I'm not going to a church, I meditate, I reflect, I read, I pray and, you know, I have my daily times, but a Sunday I try and spend a bit time maybe journaling, I'll spend time in quietness em.... [...]... so I haven't given up and I'm still journeying with other people, it just doesn't happen on a Sunday morning, you know, which is sad'

(Alison).

Louise's complete withdrawal from church reflected her inability to trust and engage with the God she felt she had 'lost' at the time of her family bereavement and with whom she has not been able to re-connect:

'We pulled out,...I think, from that point...church was difficult anyway because it was this God that I suddenly didn't *recognise* [...]...so we...just stopped....we went to church a couple of times...and then we haven't been back': I think [my husband has] chucked in church...I might have a strand of hope that says that some other church might work for us....but....I think he feels that church, as it is, just doesn't work [...]...how it develops people as Christians and how it develops and creates this Christian.... community is kind of *false* which....I would have some sympathy with. I think....church community isn't really community, I think that's what I'm saying' (Louise).

For women like Alison and Louise, involvement in institutional church swings in the balance. Unlike the majority of participants, these women have come to the point where the pain of staying at Church outweighs the pain of leaving. While neither is

sure whether this situation is permanent, given the gap between their *hopes* for church and the *reality* of the churches with which they have had contact, there does not seem to be any prospect of return. For both Alison and Louise, the tangible support of fellow travellers in the workplace or of networks of likeminded people in the wider Christian community seems their only source of help.

While Alison and Louise have voted with their feet, the weight of my findings in these chapters points to the grim reality of ‘internal leaving’, at this time camouflaged by church attendance figures in the Scottish evangelical church. The fact that women are present in congregations now, however, does not mean that they, or their children, will still be there in ten years time. ‘Internal leaving’ is plainly a feature of women’s experience of constriction in churches which fail to acknowledge their unique spiritual development needs, or the complex contours of their experience of faithing change.

Although some evangelical women are currently ‘working hard’ to remain in their churches, there is no way of knowing how long their energy will last, if the dearth of understanding and resources for nurturing female faith remains the same. Since these original interviews, one participant has left her home church and four participants have reported experiencing the symptoms of spiritual burnout. Two ordained women are considering moving to new charges or leaving the ministry altogether. Unless the lack of teaching on the nature of Christian growth, and the lack of ‘processing places’ to help believers engage honestly with the contours of spiritual dissonance is addressed, the loss of such women from evangelical congregations in Scotland, while at present a ‘trickle’, may indeed prove to be a ‘fatal flood’.

Conclusion

Conclusions and Implications

Mary Grey has said that ‘as long as women are locked in the despair of the norms of patriarchy, with no opportunity for genuine self development, there can be no movement forward. We cannot explain away every depression as ‘the dark night of the soul’ (Grey, 1991:34). Indeed, as this present research demonstrates, something much darker than the ‘dark night’ lies behind some women’s stories of displacement, paralysis and loss of self in the evangelical community. Forward movement for such women, as Grey suggests, seems unlikely given their confessed fear of disclosing their feelings of displacement within the church and the ignorance of most evangelical churches regarding the extent to which this hidden phenomenon is damaging women’s spiritual growth and contributing directly to their loss from some congregations.

This research demonstrates the immense gap which exists between women’s *hopes* for the evangelical church¹ and the *reality* it represents in some congregations - given the fact that some women’s experience of evangelicalism appears to be a major source of, rather than merely the context for, their experience of spiritual dissonance. While the symptoms of disequilibrium, loss of self and paralysis described by my participants do suggest that aspects of their dissonance may be the natural result of developmental faithing change (confirming Fowler, 1995 and Slee, 2004),² the fact that these same symptoms are experienced by women traumatised by gender discrimination (Winter et al., 1994; Belenky et al., 1997; Brasher, 1998; Manning, 1999 and Baillie 2002), developmental repression (Hull, 1991, Young, 2004) and spiritual abuse (Bass and Davis 1988; Poling, 1991 and Beed, 1998), points to a much darker source of women’s spiritual dis-ease than developmental faithing change alone. Furthermore, some participants’ specific descriptions of their loss of self, the coercion of leaders, the practice of psychological splitting, and their adoption of parallel lives, compounded by their communities’ resistance to the public admission of these phenomena, would appear to indicate the presence of psychological abuse within some sectors of the evangelical community. These findings confirm not only

¹ For a brief review of participants’ vision for a different kind of evangelical church, see below.

² In particular: the loss and re-establishment of equilibrium which often occurs between stage 3 synthetic-conventional and stage 4 individuating-reflective faith.

the developmentally retarding effect of women's marginalisation within some faith communities, but also the extent to which, in some extreme cases, women's spiritual repression has seriously damaged their spiritual and psychological health.

In relation to the spiritual development of women within the evangelical church in Scotland, my research illustrates three main findings. It firstly demonstrates that, from an early age, some women were unable to find the environment or resources they needed to reflect upon their developing faith within the Scottish evangelical Christian community: subconsciously silencing their emotions and repressing their theological questions to an extent that has detrimentally affected their long-term ability to negotiate developmental spiritual change.

Secondly, while women, from an early age, discovered more adequate resources for developing their faith outside the local church – predominantly through the work of para-church children's and students' organisations in Scotland – this support network was limited in its reach and failed to prepare them to either anticipate or healthily negotiate the spiritual and relational disequilibrium characteristic of adult faithing change. Furthermore, the gap which exists between para-church and church based female nurture in Scotland ironically increased the spiritual displacement and loss of self later experienced by some women, due to the fact that the gifts and ministry roles they had developed through para-church training or professional full-time ministry were not recognised or honoured in their churches.

Thirdly, some women's fear of showing their true selves in their congregations, their practice of wearing 'masks' and the covert ways in which they are supplementing their spirituality, should give cause for grave concern regarding the extent to which the theological and social restrictions of some Scottish evangelical communities polarise women's internal and external spiritual lives. Not only is this damaging for women's relationship with themselves and the church, as my findings confirm, it frequently leads to disorientation and, in extreme cases, alienation in their relationship with God. The fact that believers feel forced to use such 'coping strategies' to sustain their involvement at church is a matter that urgently needs to be addressed. It is unsurprising that some of these women are becoming 'internal leavers' in their congregations: physically present but emotionally 'checked out', sadly confirming the

findings of Winter's U.S. study (1991:60), that apparently the only reason some women are staying at church is the lack of a viable alternative.

Despite the disturbing nature of my findings, they must be tempered by the evidence that some evangelical congregations do seem to be aware of and actively attending to these tensions in adult discipleship.³ These pockets of potential change are few, however, and were rarely identified by the women involved in this project.

Speaking to the Sources

As a means of drawing the theoretical threads of the study together I finally, briefly reflect on the wider theoretical significance of my findings in relation to the models and theories of faith development outlined in Part 1.

Faithing Change and Fowler

While, in the light of my findings, it is clear that there are significant 'blind spots' in James Fowler's model of human faith development, he must still be considered the first native speaker of a language which equips men and women to locate their experience of spiritual dissonance in the context of healthy faithing change. As Nicola Slee asserts, his understanding of faith as 'an orderly, patterned deep structure...which integrates and gives coherence to all the disparate events of [women's] lives' (2004:164) significantly normalises an experience many women currently class as deviant.

Despite this fact, traditional Faith Development Theories tend to underestimate the significance of *context* and the role of human *socialising* in the faith development process: failing to address the ways in which these may retard as well as empower believers in their spiritual development. Indeed my own findings highlight the extent to which some social, spiritual and theological contexts deliberately restrict developmental expansion, confirming Sheldrake's assertion that faith development far

³ I know of one congregation which has its own 'critical culture' to help adults engage in a dialogical way with their expanding questions of faith, and another which is experimenting with a more relational, informal Sunday service based around café-style small group interaction.

from representing a 'single trans-cultural phenomenon' is, rather, 'rooted in experiences of God that are framed by the always specific and therefore contingent histories of individuals and communities' (Sheldrake, 1998:36). The danger of Fowler's linear model and indeed, as I have demonstrated, the ways in which it is presented in some literature, is that, firstly, it fails to identify the processes and practices of blending, integration, recapitulation and repetition which characterise many women's faith journeys. In particular, it minimises the extent to which some believers become profoundly 'stuck' between detachment and aggregation. Secondly, it neglects to explore the reality of faith development as an expansion in dimensions as well as styles or stages: necessitating a more complex *dimensional* rather than a simple *directional* theory of growth. Thirdly, my findings significantly expose the extent to which Fowler and others pertinently identify but fail to fully resolve the real problems which faithing style 'culture clash' raises for the average church congregation. Both James Fowler's own vision of the 'multi-modal' congregation and more recently Francis and Richter's attempt to propose a new 'multiplex' model of church⁴ which accommodates the needs of different faithing styles, ultimately fail to acknowledge the resistance to the implications of faith development theory in some Christian congregations. As my own research indicates, there is an urgent need to engage with the theological and social resistance to the development of communities which seek to facilitate the growth of church members who may understand and express their faith in a variety of different ways. Unless this challenge is addressed it is unlikely that evangelical women will find 'safe places' to process their maturing spiritual experience within the evangelical community.

⁴ Francis and Richter's solution to the 'problem' of church leaving is to posit a model of 'multiplex church' which they hope might replace church-leaving by church-switching' (2007:309). They propose a networking 'church' which consists of a multiplicity of separate congregations meeting in the same premises or locality which embody a variety of styles of church accommodating the variety of styles of personality type and faith. Seekers enter the church through many doors and, while some back doors lead into the 'outside world', they suggest others might lead directly into different expressions of church more suitable for the faithing styles of diverse and developing church members. Their assertion that 'within the multiplex church there must be room for liberals...and conservatives' (2007:316) demonstrates their failure to acknowledge the convictions which would prevent many conservative congregations from considering such an arrangement.

The Depths of Paralysis and the Perpetuation of Alienation

While Nicola Slee's model of women's faith development honours the manner in which the patterning of alienation, awakening and relationality frequently intertwine in women's experience of faithing change, her understanding of the ways in which these strands may break apart during long periods of isolation or 'splitting' is significantly expanded and qualified by my own research findings which highlight the extent to which that experience may be exaggerated by a women's social, spiritual and theological environment. Although the patterns Slee identifies describe some aspects of evangelical women's experience of spiritual dissonance, her model fails to fully account for the dilemmas and developmental tensions which arise for women in ministry as they negotiate the complex sub-cultural and theological 'boundaries' within British evangelicalism. Indeed the extent to which some women appear 'stuck' within what Slee describes as 'developmental cul-de sacs' (Slee, 2004:106) demonstrates the ways in which the patterning she describes may be *interrupted* or *distorted* by a woman's internal or external environment. While Slee rightly asserts that cognitive and relational dissonance *can* be creative, 'leading to the emergence of a new, more satisfying experience of faith' (2004:95), this is not always the case for evangelical women. The practice of disconnecting one's interior and exterior self in order to maintain membership of the faith community makes it unlikely some participants will find a resolution for these ambiguities.

Similarly, in the same way that Slee's model fails to recognise the depth of paralysis experienced by some women in conservative communities, it underestimates the dilemmas 'awakening' presents for those who wish to remain in those environments. My findings demonstrate that some women find themselves trapped within a truncated cycle which moves between *alienation* and *awakening*, repetitively, without ever resolving that movement in new forms of *relationality* with themselves, their church or their God. Repeated, reinforced experiences of 'stuckness' rather than emancipatory growth frequently thus entrench women in persistent paralysis, re-directing the energy normally available for transformation into coping mechanisms which maintain rather than transform dependent patterns of believing and relating. Slee herself, in the conclusion to her study, highlights the fact that progress in implementing the practices which would facilitate more healthy pastoral care and

Christian education of women and girls 'are hardly prominent in the educational and pastoral practices of the church (Slee, 2004:169). Indeed the honouring and integration of the insights of feminist theological and educational discourse is notoriously slow in some churches and theological training contexts. This present research attempts to go one step further in its quest to identify some of the reasons for that resistance and the extent to which we must *qualify* our understanding of the dynamics of spiritual alienation and paralysis in such settings together with the impact of these factors on women's spiritual development.

Internal Leaving and the Process of Separation from the Church

While Leaver literature highlights the dangers inherent in the fact that many faith communities isolate those struggling in their involvement at church, it ironically fails to identify the vital role 'internal leaving' may play in the process of separation from that community. Its general failure to acknowledge the role which both *gender* and *restrictive educational approaches* play in the leaving process demonstrates the problems associated with the use of Fowler's Faith Development Theory to rationalise developmental change without acknowledging its inadequacies. Jamieson's four-fold model of church leavers falls precisely into this trap to the extent that its disarming accessibility simultaneously, if unintentionally, domesticates the complex reality of faithing change. It not only promotes a model of growth which may lure believers into a premature resolution of their faith's tensions but it also inadequately prepares *Transitional Explorers* or *Integrated Wayfinders* for the repeated 'crises' implicit in life-long transformation or the likelihood that their new, and indeed liberating, faithing stance may itself begin to resemble a 'conformist' stage⁵ they may penetrate beyond in the future. While Jamieson's categorisation of leavers into distinct, definable groupings is clearly helpful for re-orienting travellers who feel they may have become disoriented in their discipleship they ultimately constrain believers to classify themselves *within* the pre-determined phyla described by his model when in reality many people actually identify with a number of the characteristics *across* the

⁵ While linear models of faith development appear to suggest that maturing believers move seamlessly from conforming dependence to emancipatory interdependence, in reality, people move through a sequence of repeated transformations within which each new 'stage' of emancipation gradually settles into a subsequent form of 'conformity' from which eventually, in the course of further expansion, the maturing believer will be called to break forth into new dimensions of relationality.

group descriptors: again reinforcing the *integrative, recapitulatory* rather than *invariant, sequential* nature of developmental expansion . While the strength of Jamieson's model is in its ability to simplify and make more widely accessible the essence of the dynamics of change described in Fowler's stages, it potentially unhelpfully encourages those in transition to define themselves in *opposition* to former faith styles and frameworks of conviction held by themselves and, indeed, fellow members of their congregations rather than sustain those internal and external faithing stances in mutual, respectful *relation*.

Exodus, Emancipation and the 'Limits' of Expansion

Although feminist models of women's faith formation in conservative communities greatly expanded my appreciation of the need for 'transitional environments' to facilitate healthy faithing change, they ultimately failed to address the implications of the lack of such 'processing places' for women in conservative religious communities. While this reality has caused some women to leave their 'home' faith community, the implications of re-negotiating relationships within the theological, educational and gendered frameworks of church *simultaneously* raises questions largely unaddressed by this body of literature. Although feminist theology identifies the importance of a 'separatist stage' in any process of emancipation, described as a necessary 'exodus' or 'exile' (Ruether, 1984; Veiling, 1996), it fails to assess the ways in which the *lack* of transitional separation (whether real or symbolic) in some faith communities disrupts the hermeneutical cycle of re-contextualisation vital to maturing spiritual health. My own research findings confirm the extent to which some women become stuck in the internal 'separatist' stage Ruether describes (85:59), in part due to the lack of appropriate 'transitional environments' where they might define their own experience and process the deep emotions involved in processing acute forms of spiritual dissonance. While conservative women feel judged for their decision to remain in the church rather than supported in the task of creating 'processing spaces' and reforming patterns of education and nurture from within their communities the gap which commonly exists between conservative evangelical and feminist women is likely to persist and feminist literature remain inaccessible to those who might otherwise significantly benefit from its insights. This present research demonstrates the urgent need to build bridges between these communities.

Experimental Methodology and the Process of Transformation

My own approach to exploring the tensions evangelical women face in the process of spiritual transformation has deliberately resisted the temptation to propose a new *model* of spiritual growth. Nor have I constructed alternative *phyla* within which women might categorise themselves according to either their strategies for addressing spiritual dissonance, their perceived ‘stage’ or ‘style’ of faith or their resulting relational stance within the church. Given that these approaches have demonstrably tended towards *domesticating* the experience of spiritual dissonance, I resisted patterning strategies which might urge believers to prematurely resolve tensions unlikely to be fully integrated in their natural lifetime. While such models are indeed vital in the initial stages of articulating, identifying and confronting these contours of change, they potentially undermine the faith community’s grasp of the cyclic, re-capitulatory, dimensional contours of maturing discipleship: continually open to appropriate expansion and change.

My unique methodological contribution to the field of faith development research lies in this project’s intent to empower women in the process of exploring and interpreting present spiritual dissonance against the historical background of the social, spiritual and theological contexts in which they move. The spiritual life history review assists women to firstly identify the factors which have shaped their spiritual development in the past, secondly articulate and review the nature of their spiritual dissonance in the present and thirdly, evaluate the strategies they are consciously or unconsciously using in their attempts to move beyond paralysis and impasse. I thus deliberately created space for women to define their experience in, and on, their own terms. This supportive dialogical framework, developed in the course of this research, has demonstrably functioned to empower women to access dimensions of spiritual dissonance previously hidden from public sight: reversing the silence surrounding this hidden phenomenon and providing potential avenues for future engagement. While this study is clearly only the first step in a long process of empowering evangelical women and their faith communities to face the personal and communal challenge of spiritual dissonance it opens up significant trajectories for future travel in a variety of fields of research.

The Dilemmas of Awakening – A Reflective Postscript

Ironically, as participants shared their stories of disintegration and impasse in the course of their interviews, the experience of being ‘heard into voice’ and the realisation that they were no longer alone restored their determination to believe that reform might come from within the evangelical community. For some women, the very act of disclosure marked the first step on the road to recovery: an experience one participant compared to the relief she felt following her first admission of childhood sexual abuse. For women like her, the experience of being heard and believed was predictably profound, the vital significance of which this entire thesis has sought to honour and respect.

Involvement in this project inspired women to admit their longing to see a new kind of evangelicalism emerge in twenty-first century Scotland, bringing forth churches that would honour the evolving contours of spiritual growth and be communities where women felt that they truly ‘belonged’. As a spokeswoman for this participant group, I want to respect their vision by summarising it here as an integral part of this concluding statement.

Firstly, women long for their churches to acknowledge and respect their *freedom to be themselves*. They desire to be present as their authentic selves at church – without wearing masks or other forms of camouflage – longing that those selves would be valued, rather than resisted, by the evangelical community. They want their churches to accept the fact that some women’s developmental growth is patterned different from men’s and will be grossly retarded unless their alternative faithing styles are honoured in the mainstream life of the church.

Secondly, women long that the church would respect their need for two kinds of processing places to help them healthily address their changing faith: firstly, a *transitional environment* in which to admit and process their experience of spiritual dissonance, and, secondly, a *critical culture* in which to critique the changing boundaries of their expanding faith. They want church leaders and congregations to recognise and acknowledge the phenomenon of spiritual dissonance and respect the fact that its healthy resolution demands that believers re-negotiate their relationships

with themselves, the church and their God. Given the lack of understanding of, or provision for, this kind of adult discipleship in evangelicalism at the present time, women wish to be respected as they draw on the resources of other traditions.

Finally, women long to find *mentors* who have experienced dissonance, darkness and paralysis in their spiritual growth, and who will join them in this journey, for many of these women have reached the point of exhaustion travelling alone. They wish the companionship of men and women willing to be spiritual ‘midwives’, rather than ‘bankers’, who will assist them to engage critically with scripture in ways which might help them re-connect with the text and engage with their worlds in a more relevant and incisive way.

It was with some degree of discomfort that I, in my role as researcher, reflected upon my participants’ declared vision, given the actual findings of my research outlined above. These predictably indicate that the evangelical community, as it is, at present, constituted in Scotland, is unlikely to offer the understanding of, engagement with, or resources for spiritual growth which these women are desperately hoping to find.

Liminal people, it has been said, can be both powerful and dangerous, as those ‘who help us reflect upon societal transition, give it definition and shape [and] ultimately hold potential to bring about societal change’ (Ward and Wild, 1995:27). While the liminal voices which form the core of this project demonstrate the need for urgent change within the evangelical community in Scotland, women’s suspicion that their speech is more likely to be considered theologically dangerous than powerfully prophetic, at present, prevents them from reforming speech. My findings indicate that women’s fear of publicly voicing their concerns regarding the nurture of women’s faith in Scotland, and the evangelical community’s predictable resistance to the changes demanded by their prophetic voice, make it unlikely that their vision will be realised in their own generation. This does not, however, excuse the evangelical community from attending to the questions or engaging with the pleas courageously voiced here.

‘In a just community’, Poling asserts, ‘victims are believed and are given the resources they need for protection and healing.....victims of [abuse]⁶ must not be made marginal because their difficulties are uncomfortable for others. We need new ways of thinking about [abuse] that do not repeat the trauma of victimization’ (Poling, 1991:151).

It is my hope that, in some small way, this thesis might represent the first step towards hearing and believing the voice of those women currently marginalised and overlooked in the evangelical church in Scotland, thus calling a Christian community which believes itself to be just to put its present practice of adult discipleship to the test.

⁶ While Poling’s original quote refers to violent sexual abuse, his comments are appropriately pertinent.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Introductory Letter

[Address omitted]

Date

Dear X,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a research project which I am undertaking as part of my Doctoral studies at the University of Glasgow.

The Project:

The project involves the collection of women's spiritual life stories – that is the gathering of personal memories through recorded interviews. The purpose of the study is to record and reflect upon women's religious experience in order to identify the insights women have into their own spiritual development and the issues or questions they consider important as they reflect in the present upon their continuing experience of growth.

The Interview Process:

The Interview will take place over the next 6 months and will consist of:

- 1) An initial recorded interview. This would take place at a time convenient to you in a location where you feel at ease either in your own home or another agreed location of your choice. The interview will last for approximately one and a half hours but not normally longer than two hours during which you will have the opportunity to tell the story of your own spiritual history. It is entirely up to you the way in which you tell this story. Following this interview, the tape will be transcribed and a copy sent to you.
- 2) A follow-up conversation conducted either in person, by phone or e-mail giving you the chance to highlight the themes which you felt were of particular significance in the first interview and, if appropriate, explore these at greater depth. As part of this process you would have the chance to amend any parts of the first interview which you felt did not properly reflect what you wished to say. There will also be the chance to indicate any parts of the text which you would prefer not to be used in any resulting written work.

There may also, if appropriate, be the opportunity for you to take part in a relevant Focus Group discussion following your participation in the interview. Each Focus Group would consist of a group of 4-6 women meeting for one and a half to two hours on a single occasion to discuss questions or issues raised by interviewees. The particular focus of these group discussions will, to some extent, depend upon the emerging concerns or questions which arise from the interviews but may address issues relating to singleness, motherhood and ministry. Participation in a Focus

Group would be entirely at your discretion. It would be helpful for me, however, if you were able to indicate whether or not you would be interested in contributing to such a group.

In order to safeguard you as a potential interviewee and satisfy the demands of the Data Protection Act, there are some issues regarding informed consent and confidentiality of which you need to be aware. These are outlined below.

Informed Consent:

Any recorded contribution in written form, on tape or in notes taken from the interview by the interviewer will be used in accordance with the wishes of the interviewee. At the time of the first interview you would be invited to give your assent in writing by completing an informed consent agreement (copy attached).¹

Confidentiality:

Rigorous steps will be taken to preserve the anonymity of all participants in this project. Pseudonyms will be used from the transcript stage of the research and every effort will be made to edit personal details so as to protect the interviewee from identification.

Right to Withdraw:

If at any time you feel unable to continue to participate in the research for personal or other reasons, you have the right to withdraw.

Participation in the project is entirely voluntary which is why I am writing to you to explain the project details and ask if you would be willing to be a research participant in this way. It is my hope that, should you decide to take part in this project, it will be of personal interest to you as well as to those who may benefit from the insights gained from your experience.

If you have any questions about the project or would like further details, please don't hesitate to contact me at home on [detail omitted] or by e-mail at [detail omitted].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Gwen Henderson

¹ See appendix 2

Appendix 2

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Agreement

ID NUMBER:

Project Title: A Qualitative Study of Contemporary Women's Faith Formation.

Name of Researcher: Gwen D Henderson

Institution: University of Glasgow

Contact Details: [Detail omitted]

I have been given information about the above research project and the way in which my contribution to the project will be used.

I give my permission for the use of the information I provide for the purpose of illustration in the above Doctoral thesis.

I understand that

- The researcher will rigorously preserve my anonymity, to the extent that they are able, by the use of a pseudonym and the editing of recognisable data.
- I will have access to the transcripts of interviews and the opportunity to amend or remove details which I feel do not accurately represent my experience or which reveal my identity.
- My contribution will be kept safely and securely with access only to the researcher. No copies of either tapes or transcripts will be made.
- All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed following the completion of the project.
- No other use of the content of my interviews is permissible except with my consent.
- I can withdraw my consent at any time by contacting the researcher.
- I agree to preserve the anonymity of any other interviewees I might meet in the course of any Focus Group involvement which I might have and understand that the content of any such discussion group must remain confidential.

I give permission for the information I am about to give to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) with strict preservation of anonymity.

Signed Interviewee:

Date:

Address:

Signed Researcher:

Date:

This information will be retained separately and securely from the information given.

Appendix 3

Interview ‘Schedule’

It impossible to outline a standard ‘interview schedule’ due to the fact that there were no ‘standard’ interview questions used across the board in the course of this enquiry. Unlike Fowler or Slee’s semi-structured interview technique which to some extent structured the enquiry around the interest and pre-determined questions of the researcher, I predominantly used informal linguistic and non-linguistic prompting such as ‘lets explore that theme bit more’, ‘tell me a little more about that experience’ or a warm smile to help urge participants along their own trajectories of enquiry. There were frequently, however, three ‘phases’ through which each interview moved.

Phase One:

I began the interview by inviting participants to ‘tell me what you know about your parents: who they are/were, how they met and what you picked up about their own personal spiritual life histories?’ As participants came to the end of their reflections on their parents’ stories I invited them to recall their earliest memories of their childhood and their first sense of awareness that there might be ‘something’ beyond themselves or their ‘world’.

From this point on, I prompted participants to continue to move forward in the story of their growing faith by identifying the next season, phase, milestone or landmark in their faith history narrative. Boundary lines indicating significant seasonal change were frequently marked by long reflective pauses in women’s narratives. At each such pause, after an appropriate time of silence, I asked ‘Is there anything else that you feel is significant in this part of your story?’ or ‘Are we approaching a new boundary here?’ The goal of these interjections was to help participants to either reflect more deeply or feel free to move on to the next phase of their story. Some participants needed little more than this gentle prompting to elicit their entire spiritual life history.

Phase Two:

Phase two of the interview experience actively involved teasing out the deeper insights which lay behind participants’ stories. It played a vital part in the reflective process for those who lacked confidence in their ability to reflect on or interpret what was important or significant in their spiritual lives. This phase most often intertwined with rather than consecutively followed phase one as, at each pregnant pause at a significant life threshold, participants occasionally required the prompting of open questions to deepen their reflection. The questions I used to re-focus participants at such moments included:

- What are your earliest memories of your home/ school/ church/ university/work?
- Who were the people/places/events/ beliefs which stand out for you at that time in your spiritual development?
- What kind of ‘eureka moments’ or ‘turning points’ marked this particular leg of your journey?

- What are your memories of connecting with God or he with you in this season of your life?
- What kind of issues/themes/questions/anxieties were significance for you at that time?
- What helped you to understand what it meant to be or to grow as a Christian in this season of your growth?
- What kind of spiritual rhythms, patterns or practices did you develop which energised and motivated you in your faith at this time?

Such questions were used sparingly as their intent was to 'jump start' the interviewee in the process of shaping and articulating their unfolding narrative for themselves rather than impose uniformity upon the interview process.

Phase Three:

Phase three of the interview process was designed to help participants to access data potentially hidden from their self-conscious reflective self. The 'Image Exercise' functioned as a reward at the end of the interview after the 'hard work' was done. The goal, I explained, was to 'reflect on your relationship with God in a different way' either as it is now, was in the past, or might be in the future. I opened up my box of images and began covering the table with them, handing a bundle to the participant to help in the task. As we worked together I casually explained that the task was to sift through the images, picking up and putting down the ones which they felt 'drawn to' because they grabbed their attention or spoke to their hearts. They were not to worry about explaining why they were drawn to the images at this stage but simply collect the ones which 'spoke' to them.

Once the participant had chosen their array of images, we cleared the table so that they could lay them out in any way they chose. After some time for reflection, if required, I invited them to tell me the story of what had drawn them to each image and the ways in which they might link with each other or the narrative which they had already told. When the participant finally became silent at the end of the exercise the images were returned to the box, the tape recorder was stopped and the interview ended.

Subsequent Reflection:

Several weeks after the interview, following the receipt of the transcript, I contacted each participant either face to face, by telephone, or in one instance by e-mail to allow them to reflect on the experience of being interviewed and reading their spiritual life history for the first time. I usually began the conversation by asking what it had been like to talk about themselves in this way. I then enquired whether or not they were

- Surprised by anything?
- Aware of any patterns which they felt were significant?
- Struck by significant events, turning points or crises?
- Able to identify any changes in their ways of imaging or relating to God or understanding and experiencing the process of spiritual growth?
- Keen to add anything to what they had already said during the interview?

Appendix 4

Extract from Image Exercise Transcript

R= Researcher P= Participant

- R This is a way to connect with some of the things that are beyond words, and it's often hard to know how to do that....
- P (Picking up cards and holding them in separate piles) There's some that follow a theme.
- R It's really interesting, you're kind of putting them into groups...How are you deciding the groups...
- P Yeah, I'm separating them into coloured, not coloured...so far, sheep and men!
- R Are these two themes in your life then?
- P They are in the light of..... It's funny how your eye is drawn to some more than others...and I could be drawn to them for a different reason...
- R You don't always know why you're drawn to them....
- P (Laughing) No....I know...its funny.....
- R That's why I think it connects with some of the stuff that's beyond what you might be thinking....
- P Mhmmm.....these are all the ones that I immediately connect with....
- R It's like they're yours you know them and you can pick them up....
- P OK I've chosen my man picture....now I'm just putting them into women, cats, frogs, children....
- R I've never actually seen anyone put them in these groups before, you're teaching me something.
- P Animate objects...and inanimate ones as well...some of them you pick up and then you think no....or I might use it or I might not.....I'm just discarding some of these because I feel that's just not the feel of where I'm at....(sorting) ...beautiful little dog, choosing to die....(laying it aside)...changed my mind.....No that goes here....(beginning to arrange them in piles on the table)
- R You're being very thoughtful and methodical about it.....
- P I like this sketch of her growing things.....I'm not sure why...but I like it because her boobs are upside down (laughs)..... OK we are getting there.... That one goes there – I've almost got as many in my pile as I've eliminated...

- R This is going to be very interesting.....
- P (Moving the cards around) Swap that one for another one....I think....
- R This stuff might go together in a series.....
- P (Still re-arranging) Well what I'm thinking is that there might be kind of different ones at different points.....
- R Excellent.....
- P I might keep that one as well actually.....that's hard work...right OK, can I reorganise these ones? (Shunting the cards around again.)
- R I will be fascinated.....
- P (Laughter) Just more this over (beginning to place them on the table in a regular design). Think I'll change that one for that one and put that one over there actually.....
- R Yeah...
- P (Laughs) I *love* that one with the cat and the machine gun, I think it's brilliant. (Humming as she works, sorting, arranging, reconsidering....) I love that one as well, the man feeding the hippopotamus.
- R (Fascinated by the care she is taking) This is a work of art!
- P Photographic montage.....(She has arranged the photographs in vertical rows from left to right illustrating her spiritual journey.) Yeah I think that's.....I don't know I feel quite emotional....I don't know why I feel quite emotional about this.....(She begins to weep) I think....I think its because I see it.....I think you see different....I think it kind of brings....things to the surface.....its like....if this medium appeals...you know you can get quite involved with it...what's.....what's interesting for me is I'm thinking of it in terms of sort of....like a pictorial ...view of...where I am and where I've come in terms of the spiritual walk and.....it is kind of mixed up with different people obviously.....(weeping)... I'm realising what I'm thinking is all the colour is at this end (on the left, at the beginning) there's (weeping) no colour at this end (the right, where she is now). (Weeping) ...Have you got a tissue? (laughterresearcher hands her a paper handkerchief).
- I suppose, I mean, do you want me to just explain it as it goes?
- R That would be brilliant....

END OF EXTRACT

Appendix 5

Research Participant Profiles

Alison: 56, attended church from childhood. Following her conversion as a teenager, and a period of theological training, she worked in the statutory sector while serving in her local church. As her faith expanded she began to experiment with attending other congregations. She is currently not attending church.

Carol: 57, grew up in a Christian home. Her faith expanded considerably through her involvement in para-church ministry at university. Having served as a professional in the public sector, following her initial training, she now works in tertiary education. She is enthusiastically involved in her local church

Deborah: 60, was socially involved in a local church in her teens but ‘walked away from church’ in her early twenties and became an atheist. She returned 30 years later, following a mystical experience, and has been attending a local fellowship ever since. She has a variety of professional roles in the business and mission community.

Dorothy: 49, is one of my international participants. She became a Christian in her early teens. Nurtured in a church with a vibrant adult education programme, she developed a passion for overseas mission and has worked in a variety of roles in that sphere for the past 25 years. Since moving to the U.K., Dorothy has consistently felt out of place in the Scottish church and has found it hard to find a place truly to call her spiritual ‘home’.

Elaine: 37, described her early church involvement as ‘part of the pattern’ of family life. She felt drawn into the para-church world through her involvement in campus ministry, which became a main source of her personal nurture and discipleship as an emerging leader in the church. After several years in a variety of roles in education, she felt called to the ordained ministry and now pastors a church.

Elspeth: 38, attended a local church in her childhood. Her heart for the marginalised has frequently led her outside her comfort zone and was the motivation for her involvement in serving the poor and ministering to women through church. At the time of interview Elspeth was about to change church due to geographical relocation.

Fiona: 41, came from an un-churched family and attended Sunday school on her own. Despite making a public profession of faith in her church, she never felt fully accepted there. She stopped attending, following a sudden death in the family. She was drawn back to the church through a women's para-church organisation, where her gifts were recognised and developed. She gave up her professional job in the statutory sector to train for lay ministry in the church and is currently a lay pastor.

Frances: mid-50s, felt God drawing her to church from an early age. She describes her life as an 'ecumenical journey' and has been involved in a variety of denominations at different times in her life. She trained as a lay reader and is currently an ordained leader in a local church.

Hazel: 39, 'hated' Sunday school as a child, but developed her skills as a congregational leader through involvement in para-church groups at school and university, as well as through church summer mission programmes. She is an ordained leader in her church and has been actively involved in the discipleship and nurture of a number of congregations.

Joanna: 38, attended Sunday school as a child and, as a result of her involvement in para-church ministry at school and university, became involved in professional para-church ministry herself. Despite a period of re-adjustment and recovery following a difficult ministry experience, Joanna has finally found a church where she feels at home. She works in the statutory sector, blending a busy professional life with extensive involvement in her local church.

Louise: 29, was raised by parents heavily involved in church and para-church discipleship. She herself, until quite recently, was enthusiastically involved in mentoring young men and women inside and outside the church. Due to the

disorienting impact of a family crisis, Louise has ceased to attend church and is struggling to know how to re-orient herself in her relationship with God.

Margaret: 71, felt out of place at Sunday school, but finally found her spiritual feet through involvement in a number of para-church youth organisations. Having worked professionally in para-church ministry over the years, she is widely involved in the life and running of her local church, where she feels increasingly at home.

Maria: 46, was brought up in the Christian tradition, but attributes her significant ‘growth spurts’ to her experience of para-church discipleship and the long-term effects of that nurture on her professional life. She works hard to maintain a professional role in the public sector alongside lay leadership in her local church. Despite this, Maria has concerns regarding the church’s relevance, and whether it ‘fits’ herself or her children. She admits to questioning her involvement there.

Moir: 51, following her conversion, joined a small independent church. Her experience of overseas mission, however, made her feel uncomfortable with the strict theological and social boundaries of that group which, having voiced her concerns to its leaders, led to her excommunication. Moira has attended a number of churches over the past 10 years, but failed, as yet, to find a permanent spiritual ‘home’.

Morag: 58, inherited an infectious passion for sacrificial Christian service from her parents, who ran a number of outreach ministries in their local church. She developed an interest in foreign mission and subsequently worked in the private sector in a variety of overseas locations. Since returning to the U.K., she has tried to re-connect to the local church but, given the time of spiritual reorientation she is experiencing, admits that it is hard to find understanding, support and nourishment there.

Pamela: 42, another of my international participants, as a child regularly attended church with her mother. It was through contact with a para-church mission organisation in her twenties, however, that she found a place to ‘be herself’. She has since worked with that same ministry in a number of locations. Since coming to Scotland, she has been unable to find a church that practices the deep discipleship she

longs for, but is involved in a community which is experimenting with new ways of 'being church'.

Rachel: 42, spent much of her childhood abroad due to her parent's involvement in international mission. She has held a variety of church and para-church posts, but her relationship with church has been fraught for reasons of gender discrimination. While the distress of these experiences has occasionally necessitated her withdrawal from the Christian community, she is, at present, still attending an evangelical church.

Rebecca: 73, was raised in a Christian family, but came to a new realisation of faith, in her words, 'as a personal relationship with God', at university. She has been a key member of her local church for many years, pioneering a variety of ministries there, and finds it a community which relevantly and supportively nurtures her in her faith.

Ruth: 49, was converted in her early teens and thereafter began to attend church. She was disciplined by a teacher at school as well as by the para-church groups which she joined at school and university before beginning a career in the public sector. Ruth has, for many years, been feeling increasingly uncomfortable at church and is considering transferring to another congregation.

Sheila: 74, was raised in a Christian home and regularly attended church as a child. Her long-lasting, supportive relationships have been predominantly the result of the para-church friendships she forged at school and university. Following her retirement Sheila has enthusiastically continued to be involved in the lay leadership of her church where she has been happily ministering for many years.

Susan: 54, was born and raised overseas, before coming to the UK in her late twenties. She attended church with her mother in her youth, but this habit ceased following an unexpected family bereavement. She subsequently returned to church, and later trained for the ordained ministry. She has been the pastor of a local church for several years.

Appendix 6

Church Affiliation to Date

The following number of women spent a period of their lives as members of the listed denominations.

Anglican	4
Apostolic	1
Baptist	14
Brethren	4
Church of Scotland	13
Congregational	2
Episcopal (Scottish)	4
Free Church of Scotland	1
Independent Evangelical (1 ex-Brethren, 1 non denominational, 6 Charismatic/Pentecostal)	8
Methodist	3
Roman Catholic	1

Church Affiliation at Time of Interview

Baptist	4
Church of Scotland	10
Scottish Episcopal	1
Independent Evangelical (1 ex-Brethren, 3 charismatic)	4
Non attendees	2

Appendix 7

Church Attendance and Ministry Involvement

Nineteen of the women interviewed were attending church, at least two to three times a month, at the time of interview. Of that number, seven were involved in paid ministry in their church, five in ordained ministry - two ministers and two deacons, and two in lay ministry - a pastoral worker and a youth minister. Three further women, who were not in paid ministry, were heavily involved in the running of their churches, including three church elders, and two women whose husbands were ordained ministers. The remaining nine women described themselves as 'ordinary church members' although, of that number, six had been involved in church or para-church leadership in the past, and had a variety of roles in their churches, including Sunday school leadership (2), Youth Work (4), Outreach Programmes (2) and Ministry to the Elderly (1).

Para-Church Participation

All of the women interviewed for this study had been nurtured by, and many still retained strong links with, a variety of para-church organisations. Eight had participated in Scripture Union groups at school, four had regularly attended S.U. camps (both as children, and two, subsequently, as leaders), and ten of the women had used Scripture Union Bible Reading notes. Of that number, three were still using those, daily, and finding them helpful.

In addition, six women had been involved in other organisations such as the Girl Guides (3), Christian Endeavour (2) and Crusaders (1).

Fourteen women had been involved in student ministry groups while attending university. These included Methsoc. (1), Navigators (1), SCM (1) and UCCF Christian Union Groups (10). Of those fourteen women, three had subsequently joined the staff of a para-church ministry.

In later years, women were involved in a wide variety of home and overseas based mission and discipleship, working for agencies such as International Teams, Operation Mobilisation, the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, Women's Aglow International and Y.W.A.M. Several mentioned the particular support which they had received from occasional conferences, festivals and gatherings at Carberry (2), Clan Gathering (1), Iona (3), Keswick (1), Spring Harvest (2) and Swanwick (in the 1960s) (1).

Appendix 8

Transcript Extract from Main Interview

R= Researcher P= Participant

- R So let's investigate that a wee bit more, it was really interesting what you were saying that you got this different view of Jesus and God after having....
- P ...read these books. Oh yes!
- R What was your view before? Can you tell me a wee bit about your earliest beginnings of understanding about God or a spiritual dimension – where was that coming from and what were you learning?
- P (Pause)....When I was two and a half I was taught to say a... bedtime prayer – *mainly* because my mother was worried because I had a slight stammer (laughs) and the doctor said, 'Teach her something that she can say at night.' Em....what it meant I had – I don't think I had *any* idea but it was something I had to do at bedtime and I did it at bedtime right up to Primary school I think, when I got to secondary school I said I was a big girl and could say my own prayers – by that time I...I knew what I was doing when I was praying you see.
- R Do you remember what the prayer was?
- P (Enthusiastically) Oh yes! 'This night when I lie down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep, If I should die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take, God bless mummy, God bless daddy, God bless Joan, make me a good girl my own self, Amen.' And shall I *tell* you that when my *father* died when I was 29, and I....it happened very suddenly – I went home – the *first* night I was at home I got down on my knees and tried to pray, feeling I was probably the only one in the house who...could *positively* (choking) pr'...and the only words that I could bring out were these words. I could... not... put... words...together, but these were *there* and....I suppose I sort of thought, 'Well – yes, they're saying what I want to say' – well I mean....I sort of *changed* the personalities at the end, but, em....and I remember being very sorry for...a man of....religious influence who once said that he didn't want to influence his son at all and so the son had had absolutely no spiritual input in his life, and I thought – 'What happens... when you're left...as I was...you know...suddenly bereaved in a *complete* state of shock and you've nothing...that even *begins* to say to God what you want to say (laughter). But that was that – but...but what it all meant....I don't know – I knew that God was up there and....em....was good....and....my great aunt probably talked to me more about God and hymns like 'Jesus Loves Me' and 'There is a Green Hill Far Away' em.... (pause)....It was all kind of....it was*there*.....it was at the *back*...but it didn't have any.....*particular*.....effect on....on the immediate, or life, except that you've got to be a good girl. But....(laughing) you weren't always a good girl (more laughter). But....aye....as I say, it was once....em....the Dorothy Dennison books sort of brought out the idea that

you can't be a good girl, because there is this *twist* in you that makes you *not* a good girl, you know, but Jesus can deal with that.

But...I mean...and I don't *really* remember the ...sort of.....*development* of thought except this....sort of idea that I wanted to be a good girl, and eh...wasn't very good at it (laughter).

R And did your parents talk about religious things at home?

P Mum did a bit...em...if we initiated it...she was a very em, *private* sort of person in lots of ways em....but I mean if, you know, if you ask questions.....you know....I think I remember once having a discussion about the Lord's prayer with her – asking her what the different bits meant and – you know – she responded in so far as she could but...em....it was....in fact....looking back, I have to say that....*probably*....one of the factors in my...going forward from my conversion was almost a form of rebellion against the ethos of the home. There was nothing *wrong* with the ethos of the home, but it was just *different* and I was being *different* (laughter) – do you understand? In fact, later I found myself wondering what happens to the kids of *Christian* homes who want to do a little bit of self assertion (laughing) and break their parents' hearts (laughter). But eh, you know, I'm sure that that actually was a factor – that I was doing something *quite* different from what my parents did – in their, when they were in their teens for instance, yes....and then there was a different.....(pause).....eh.....I don't know what to say.....a different *objective* in my life I think. But that...I...I...I mean I remember mum at times sort of saying, 'Oh we knew how to enjoy ourselves.' Which meant that she went dancing at least once a week...em... whereas I went to an (laughing) SU fellowship (laughter) did a bible study (laughter)...

END OF EXTRACT

Appendix 9

Main Project Initial Coding Outline

NVivo revision 2.0.163 Licensee: Gwen Henderson

Project: Growing Pains Aug 30 User: Administrator Date: 31/08/2006 - 14:49:33

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: All Tree Nodes
 Created: 30/08/2006 - 20:34:49
 Modified: 30/08/2006 - 20:34:49
 Number of Nodes: 365

- 1 (1) /Search Results
- 2 (1 1) /Search Results/Single Text Lookup
- 3 (2) **/Para Church in faith formation**
- 4 (2 1) **/Strengths**
- 5 (2 1 1)/Reward of Ministry
- 6 (2 1 3) Diversity
- 7 (2 1 3 1) Safe Place
- 8 (2 1 3 2)Acceptance
- 9 (2 1 4) Relevance
- 10 (2 1 6) Intentionality
- 11 (2 1 6 1) Helping others grow
- 12 (2 1 6 1 1) Training
- 13 (2 1 6 5) Long term nurture
- 14 (2 1 6 5 1) People
- 15 (2 1 6 5 1 1) Mentoring
- 16 (2 1 6 5 1 2) Fellowship
- 17 (2 1 6 5 2) Skills
- 18 (2 1 6 5 2 1) Bible
- Reading Notes
- 19 (2 1 6 5 2 2) Leadership
- 20 (2 1 6 5 2 3) Prayer
- 21 (2 1 6 5 2 4) Financial
- Giving
- 22 (2 1 6 5 2 5) Sabbath rest
- 23 (2 1 6 5 2 6) Bible Study
- 24 (2 1 9)Education
- 25 (2 1 9 1) Teaching Preparation
- 26 (2 1 9 2) Practical Training
- 27 (2 1 9 2 1) Teams
- 28 (2 1 9 7) New Teaching
- 29 (2 1 9 7 1) Counselling
- 30 (2 1 9 7 2) 'Reformed'
- 31 (2 1 9 8) Place for single women
- 32 (2 2) **/Para Church in faith formation/Weaknesses**
- 33 (2 2 1) Busyness vs Reflection
- 34 (2 2 2) Pastoral Care
- 35 (2 2 2 1) Emotional Care
- 36 (2 2 2 2) Staff Support
- 37 (2 2 2 3) Pressure of Ministry

- 38 (2 2 2 3 1) Marriage breakdown
- 39 (2 2 2 3 2) Re-entry to secular work
- 40 (2 2 2 3 3) Busyness and exhaustion
- 41 (2 2 2 3 3 1) Lifestyle Issues
- 42 (2 2 2 3 3 2) Recreation becomes work
- 43 (2 2 2 3 3 4) Burnout
- 44 (2 3) Para Church in faith formation/Types
- 45 (2 3 1) Scripture Union
- 46 (2 3 2) Christian Union
- 47 (2 3 3) Bible College
- 48 (2 3 4) Girl Crusaders
- 49 (2 3 5) Christian Endeavour
- 50 (2 3 6) Gatherings/Conferences
- 51 (3) Socialisation and Belonging
- 52 (3 1) Xty as System
- 53 (3 1 1) Looking for 'something more'
- 54 (3 1 3) Xty as a Way of Thought - pattern of theology
- 55 (3 1 3 3) 'Camps' - in or out
- 56 (3 1 3 3 1) On the right side to be 'safe'
- 57 (3 1 3 3 2) Ambivalence
- 58 (3 1 3 3 4) Separating from others
- 59 (3 1 4) Xty as a Way of life - fitting the pattern
- 60 (3 1 4 2) Uniformity
- 61 (3 1 4 2 1) 'getting it right'
- 62 (3 1 4 2 2) 'part of the parcel'
- 63 (3 1 4 2 2 1) Boxes
- 64 (3 1 4 2 2 2) Answers
- 65 (3 1 4 2 3) People Pleasing
- 66 (3 1 4 2 4) Lifestyle
- 67 (3 1 4 2 5) Conforming to belong
- 68 (3 1 4 2 6) Following a Formula
- 69 (3 1 4 2 7) Feeling Excluded
- 70 (3 1 4 2 7 1) Charismatic Issues
- 71 (3 1 4 2 7 2) Returning Missionary
- 72 (3 1 4 2 7 3) Lack of peer gp
- 73 (3 1 4 2 7 4) Social Groupgs
- 74 (3 1 4 3) Meeting Group Requirements
- 75 (3 1 4 4) Evangelism - as a work~
- 76 (3 2) Security Issues
- 77 (3 2 1) Fear of Authority
- 78 (3 2 2) Church as an 'Unsafe Place' for
- 79 (3 2 2 3) Doubts and Fears/Emotions
- 80 (3 3) Christian 'worlds' of subcultures
- 81 (3 3 1) Different worlds, different models
- 82 (3 7) Family Issues
- 83 (3 7 1) Parental Spirituality
- 84 (3 7 2) Parental Background
- 85 (3 7 4) Family Culture – impact on growing faith
- 86 (3 7 4 3) Deliberate Changes – reform

- 87 (4) **Relationship with God**
- 88 (4 1) Images of God
- 89 (4 1 1) Father
- 90 (4 1 2) Son~Jesus
- 91 (4 1 3) Holy Spirit
- 92 (4 2) Activity of God
- 93 (4 2 1) Healing
- 94 (4 2 2) Speaking, listening
- 95 (4 2 2 1) Guiding
- 96 (4 2 2 2) Preparing~Providing
- 97 (4 2 2 3) Dreams
- 98 (4 2 2 4) Pictures
- 99 (4 2 3) Felt Presence
- 100 (4 2 4) Salvation
- 101 (4 3) Use of language to describe...
- 102 (4 3 1) Spirituality
- 103 (4 3 2) God
- 104 (4 3 3) Church
- 105 (4 4) Processes of development
- 106 (4 4 1) *Reported changes*
- 107 (4 4 1 1) Finding your Voice
- 108 (4 4 1 2) Finding Relationship
- 109 (4 4 1 2 1) From knowledge to relationship
- 110 (4 4 1 2 1 1) Giving in to God
- 111 (4 4 1 2 2) Growing up
- 112 (4 4 1 2 2 2) Loss of control
- 113 (4 4 1 3) From system to journey
- 114 (4 4 1 3 1) Role of reflection
- 115 (4 4 1 3 2) Role of emotion
- 116 (4 4 1 3 3) Start of growth
- 117 (4 4 1 3 3 1) Release
- 118 (4 4 1 3 3 2) Taking responsibility
- 119 (4 4 1 3 3 3) 'Approved' change
- 120 (4 4 1 3 3 4) Exploring diversity
- 121 (4 4 1 3 3 4 1) Breaking Away
- 122 (4 4 1 3 3 4 1 1) Beyond the
'approved'
- 123 (4 4 1 3 3 4 1 2) With like
minded
- 124 (4 4 1 3 3 4 2) Exploring
diversity/Inclusiveness
- 125 (4 4 1 3 3 5) Redefining 'failure'
- 126 (4 4 1 3 3 6) Reversing atrophy
- 127 (4 4 1 3 4) Journey Images
- 128 (4 4 1 4) Finding confidence~Role
- 129 (4 4 1 5) Black and White to Grey
- 130 (4 4 1 6) Reported Desires
- 131 (4 4 1 6 1) Wanting to be useful
- 132 (4 4 1 6 1 1) Regretting not being useful
- 133 (4 4 1 6 2) Wanting to be a good girl
- 134 (4 4 2) Sustenance~Feeding
- 135 (4 4 2 1) Spiritual disciplines
- 136 (4 4 2 1 1) Bible Reading
- 137 (4 4 2 1 1 1) Family Devotions
- 138 (4 4 2 1 1 2) Quiet Time

139	(4 4 2 1 2) Prayer
140	(4 4 2 1 2 1) Quoted speech
141	(4 4 2 1 3) Tithing
142	(4 4 2 2) Literature
143	(4 4 2 3) Hope
144	(4 4 2 4) Formative Memories
145	(4 4 2 5) Church Community
146	(4 4 2 5 1) House Groups
147	(4 4 2 6) Music
148	(4 4 2 7) Establishing Networks
149	(4 4 2 7 1) People
150	(4 4 2 7 1 1) Letters
151	(4 4 2 7 2) Conferences
152	(4 4 2 7 3) Missions~Crusades
153	(4 4 2 8) Counselling
154	(4 4 2 9) Teaching~preparation
155	(4 4 2 10) Memorable Scripture
156	(4 4 2 10 1) Waymark Verses
157	(4 4 2 11) Service
158	(4 4 2 12) Celtic Christianity
159	(4 4 2 13) Sermons
160	(4 4 3) <i>Theological Development</i>
161	(4 4 3 1) Changing Understanding of...
162	(4 4 3 1 1) Being of God
163	(4 4 3 1 2) Work of God
164	(4 4 3 1 3) Salvation
165	(4 4 3 1 3 1) 'Good girl' Philosophy
166	(4 4 3 1 4) Heaven~Hell
167	(4 4 3 1 5) Relating to Difference/Diversity
168	(4 4 3 1 5 1) Catholicism
169	(4 4 3 1 5 2) Conservatism
170	(4 4 3 1 5 3) 'God Consciousness'
171	(4 4 3 1 5 4) Charismatic
172	(4 4 3 1 5 5) Scottish Heritage
173	(4 4 3 2) Experiences
174	(4 4 4) <i>Models of Development</i>
175	(4 4 4 1) Conscious Understanding of Growth
176	(4 4 4 1 1) Source of Teaching on/models of/frameworks for growth
177	(4 4 4 1 2) Growth as a Process
178	(4 4 4 1 2 1) Light on~light off
179	(4 4 4 1 2 2) Lid on or off
180	(4 4 4 1 2 2 1) Moving between boxes
181	(4 4 4 1 2 2 1 1) Conservative Evangelical Box
182	(4 4 4 1 2 2 1 1 7) Boxes/Answers
183	(4 4 4 1 2 2 1 2) Out of the box
184	(4 4 4 1 2 2 1 2 6) Moving beyond boundaries
185	(4 4 4 1 2 2 1 2 6 1) Working world

186	(4 4 4 1 2 3) Gradual nature
187	(4 4 4 1 2 4) God active in process
188	(4 4 4 1 2 5) Pre- enlightenment
189	(4 4 4 1 2 6) Sanctification Process
190	(4 4 4 1 2 6 7) Growth as development
191	(4 4 4 1 3) Making sense of it all
192	(4 4 4 1 4) Messy Faith
193	(4 4 4 1 4 1) Fragile Security
194	(4 4 4 1 4 2) Inconsistency
195	(4 4 4 2) Supporting Fowler
196	(4 4 4 2 1) Early Acceptance vs Q'g
197	(4 4 4 2 2) Diversity and Tolerance
198	(4 4 4 3) Active Spirituality – self-descriptions
199	(4 4 4 3 1) 'Rational People'
200	(4 4 4 3 4) 'Practical People'
201	(4 4 4 3 4 1) Trust and Obey
202	(4 4 4 3 4 2) Active vs conceptual
203	(4 4 4 3 4 3) Examples of Activism
204	(4 4 4 3 4 3 1) Wanting to be 'useful'
205	(4 4 4 3 4 3 2) 'Loving people' ministry
206	(4 4 4 3 4 3 3) 'Happily Exhausted'
207	(4 4 4 4) Thresholds within Xtn Communities
208	(4 4 5) <i>Starting Points in Faith Development- at different stages</i>
209	(4 4 5 1) Tacit knowledge
210	(4 4 5 2) Personal Experience
211	(4 4 5 3) Conversion~'Decision'
212	(4 4 5 3 1) Transaction
213	(4 4 5 3 2) Dependence
214	(4 4 5 3 2 1) Becoming 'Personal'
215	(4 4 5 3 3) 'Light on'
216	(4 4 5 3 4) 'Lid off the box'
217	(4 4 5 3 5) Decision
218	(4 4 5 3 6) Rebellion
219	(4 4 5 4) Decision Making
220	(4 4 5 5) Deliberate search
221	(4 4 5 6) Doubts and Questions
222	(4 4 5 7) Landmarks of growth
223	(4 4 5 8) Christian 'Behaviourism'
224	(4 4 5 8 1) Adopting a lifestyle
225	(4 4 5 9) Fear
226	(4 4 5 9 1) Sense of sin
227	(4 4 5 9 2) Fear of God
228	(4 4 5 10) What being Christian is about
229	(4 4 6) <i>Growing Pains</i>
230	(4 4 6 1) Regrets
231	(4 4 6 2) Fear
232	(4 4 6 2 1) Backsliding
233	(4 4 6 2 2) Rejection by Church
234	(4 4 6 2 3) Abandonment by God
235	(4 4 6 2 4) 'Out of control'
236	(4 4 6 2 5) Have I got it right?'

- 237 (4 4 6 2 6) Narcissism
- 238 (4 4 6 3) Anger
- 239 (4 4 6 4) Problems with systems
- 240 (4 4 6 5) Exploring new territory
- 241 (4 4 6 5 1) Visual~symbolic
- 242 (4 4 6 5 1 1) Journalling
- 243 (4 4 6 5 1 2) Creative Arts
- 244 (4 4 6 5 1 3) Words to pictures,
- 245 (4 4 6 5 2) Celtic
- 246 (4 4 6 6) Stagnation~immobility
- 247 (4 4 6 7) Expectations of growth process
- 248 (4 4 6 8) Identity
- 249 (4 4 6 8 1) Self descriptor
- 250 (4 4 6 8 1 1) Rotten Christian
- 251 (4 4 6 8 2) Role of Women
- 252 (4 4 6 8 2 1) Feminism
- 253 (4 4 6 8 2 2) Sense of call
- 254 (4 4 6 8 2 3) Avoiding hurt
- 255 (4 4 6 8 2 4) Teaching~Example
- 256 (4 4 6 8 2 5) Resisting stereotypes
- 257 (4 4 6 8 2 6) Church culture
- 258 (4 4 6 8 2 6 1) Perceived inclusion
- 259 (4 4 6 8 2 6 2) Exclusion
- 260 (4 4 6 8 2 7) Supportive
- 261 (4 4 6 8 2 8) Key role models
- 262 (4 4 6 8 2 9) Leading~Teaching Men
- 263 (4 4 6 8 3) Perception by others
- 264 (4 4 6 8 4) Evangelicalism
- 265 (4 4 6 8 4 1) Benefits
- 266 (4 4 6 8 4 1 1) Family Forbearance
- 267 (4 4 6 8 4 2) Tensions
- 268 (4 4 6 8 4 2 1) Definitions - in or out
- 269 (4 4 6 8 4 2 2) Judgementalism
- 270 (4 4 6 8 4 2 3) Sexuality Issues
- 271 (4 4 6 8 5) Losing myself
- 272 (4 4 6 9) Bereavement
- 273 (4 4 6 10) Barren times
- 274 (4 4 6 11) Illness
- 275 (4 4 6 12) Family Issues
- 276 (4 4 6 13) Disappointment
- 277 (4 4 6 14) Spiritual Crisis
- 278 (4 4 6 15) Retirement
- 279 (4 4 6 16) Singleness
- 280 (4 4 6 16 1) Loneliness
- 281 (4 4 6 16 2) Availability
- 282 (4 4 6 16 3) Identity
- 283 (4 4 7) *Early Days*
- 284 (4 4 7 1) Memories
- 285 (4 4 7 2) Childhood Prayers
- 286 (7) **Relationship with Church**
- 287 (7 2) **Why church?**
- 288 (7 2 1) 'Insiders'
- 289 (7 2 1 1) Attractive
- 290 (7 2 1 1 3) Different

291	(7 2 1 1 3 1) Something Real
292	(7 2 1 1 3 2) Personal Relationship
293	(7 2 1 1 3 3) Exciting
294	(7 2 1 2) Habit~ 'done' thing
295	(7 2 1 3) For sake of the Kids
296	(7 2 1 4) Fear of Hell
297	(7 2 1 5) To remain 'in'
298	(7 2 1 6) Loyalty
299	(7 2 1 7) About making friends
300	(7 2 1 8) 'Ought' to be a member
301	(7 2 1 9) Call to Influence Revival
302	(7 2 1 9 1) Prayer
303	(7 2 2) 'Outsiders'
304	(7 3) <u>Why struggling?</u>
305	(7 3 1) Experience of Church in faith format
306	(7 3 1 1) Strengths
307	(7 3 1 1 1) Spiritual home
308	(7 3 1 1 2) Pastoral Care
309	(7 3 1 1 3) Teaching
310	(7 3 1 1 4) Open community
311	(7 3 1 2) Weaknesses
312	(7 3 1 2 1) Alien - not understood or relevant
313	(7 3 1 2 1 2) Insiders
314	(7 3 1 2 1 3) Outsiders
315	(7 3 1 2 1 3 1) Language
316	(7 3 1 2 2) Lack of teaching
317	(7 3 1 2 2 1) Need for Interaction
318	(7 3 1 2 2 1 1) Relevance to working world
319	(7 3 1 2 2 1 2) Bible Study
320	(7 3 1 2 3) Controlling vs flexible
321	(7 3 1 2 3 1) Not fitting the mould
322	(7 3 1 2 3 3) Problems with Questions
323	(7 3 1 2 3 4) Problems with intimacy and honesty
324	(7 3 1 2 3 4 1) Fear of Emotions
325	(7 3 1 2 3 4 2) Keeping it hidden, down, buried
326	(7 3 1 2 3 4 3) Don't want to rock the boat
327	(7 3 1 2 3 4 4) Religion as private
328	(7 3 1 2 4) Lack of reflection
329	(7 3 1 2 5) Lack of community
330	(7 3 1 2 5 1) Lack of friends/ likeminded peers
331	(7 3 1 2 5 2) Lack of 'fellowship' or Spiritual Rapport
332	(7 3 2) /Landmarks of struggle

- 333 (7 4) /Relationship with Church/Why Staying
- 334 (7 4 1) Before re-evaluation
- 335 (7 4 2) After re-evaluation
- 336 (7 4 2 1) Longings for different kind of church
- 337 (7 4 2 1 1) New levels of being church
- 338 (7 4 2 1 1 2) Affirms community
- 339 (7 4 2 1 1 2 1) Prophetic prayer
- 340 (7 4 2 1 1 3) Affirm difference
- 341 (7 4 2 1 1 3 1) Reflective learning
- 342 (7 4 2 1 2) Personal
- 343 (7 4 2 1 2 1) Relationship with God
- 344 (7 4 2 1 3) Room for 'something more'
- 345 (7 4 2 1 4) Addresses Training Needs
- 346 (7 4 2 1 5) Encourages honesty
- 347 (7 4 2 1 5 2) To be true to yourself
- 348 (7 4 2 1 5 2 4) No masks
- 349 (7 4 2 2) Realism
- 350 (7 4 2 2 4) Church as family - not sorted
- 351 (7 4 3) 'Tricks' to help you stay
- 352 (7 4 3 1) 'Surviving' Services
- 353 (7 4 3 2) Supplementing Church
- 354 (7 5) Ministry – symptoms of 'splitting'
- 355 (7 5 1) Vision~Calling
- 356 (7 5 2) Challenge
- 357 (7 5 3) Double Life
- 358 (7 5 3 1) Covering up
- 359 (7 5 3 1 1) Inconsistency
- 360 (7 5 4) Helping others grow
- 361 (7 5 4 1) Organising
- 362 (7 5 4 2) Encouraging
- 363 (7 6) Why Evangelicalism?
- 364 (7 6 1) Personal Relationship~Real
- 365 (7 6 2) Biblical~Authentic~Call of God

Appendix 10 – Sample Interviewee Transcript Summary

Table 1: Interviewee Demographics

Inter view ee	Age	Family	Church History	Parent's Details	Occupation	Landmarks of Faith	Para Church	Keynotes	Values	Points of Personal Meaning
001	49	Youngest of 3 siblings	<p>No church background.</p> <p>Methodist following conversion– felt alien so left.</p> <p>Went to teacher's church where finally Baptised.</p> <p>Went on her own initiative to a Brethren church: following examination by elders admitted to Breaking of Bread</p> <p>University attended local Church.</p> <p>Attending same church now despite feeling increasing lack of 'fit'.</p> <p>Sanctuary currently in church BS group</p>	<p>Father ran own business.</p> <p>Mother helped with company finance.</p> <p>Mother felt uncomfortable with her choice of church (see Table 2).</p>	X	<p>Searched in school library for answers to questions of faith.</p> <p>Went forward as a teenager at a Crusade – vision of a light saying 'Come'</p> <p>First experience of finding her 'voice' helping to lead SU group at school</p> <p>Long journey to being able to display emotional honesty</p> <p>Discovering faith as a journey with God not obedience to a set of rules.</p> <p>Celebrating difference in herself and her way of connecting to God.</p> <p>Being herself without masks</p>	<p>SU – 'safe place'</p> <p>Teacher did weekly bible study with her in her early days of faith</p> <p>Led school SU group</p> <p>Mixed experience of CU at university.</p> <p>Key nurturing and expanding influence of Iona, Carberry.</p>	<p>Disappointment with narrow approach of church to 'difference' and growth.</p> <p>Importance of being herself, excitement of exploring who she is and how she connects with God.</p> <p>Frustrated but staying at church with the help of outside and inside support.</p> <p>Longs Church could be place where you can be yourself without masks</p> <p>Church needs to address different ways people learn, reflect and meet with God through silence, pictures, honest talk, emotions. Visual and symbolic as well as analytical/logical.</p>	<p>Honesty, openness, wanting to connect.</p> <p>Difference is OK</p>	<p>Search for 'something else'... realising there is 'something more'.</p> <p>God with her – not alone – key motif</p> <p>Discovering her real self/voice</p> <p>Acknowledging she has blocked down her emotion and creativity.</p> <p>Freedom to explore 'unauthorised books, traditions, etc'</p> <p>Release of realising there are resources outside church for growth. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pictures/art • Journaling <p>Realising she is 'scary' to some people due to her questioning norms.</p> </p>

Table 2: Interviewee Growth/Spirituality

Interviewee	Early Days	Parental/Church Spirituality	Images of God	Models of Growth
001	<p>Intuitive search for ‘something else’ took her on a search to school library and other spiritualities.</p>	<p>Parents never spoke of spiritual things. Grandmother took her a couple of times to Sunday School when she came to stay. Mother would have preferred she went to a more ‘upwardly mobile’ church than she did.</p> <p>Present ‘home’ church problematic – realising church like a dysfunctional family – Hard to be open emotionally. Hard to be herself. Did not feel heard or understood</p> <p>Bit of a ‘them and us’ mentality – hard to conform to strict conservatism any more – no longer going to try and be fitted into their mould. If they have problems with that she feels it’s ‘their’ problem.</p> <p>‘Heretics Group’ – processing place to be honest</p> <p>Woman at church: invisible, silent... ‘I don’t have a voice’. Expected to bake cakes or join cleaning rota. ‘Now if I was a man I’d have been brought on in that...but I wasn’t I was a woman...that meant you got asked to bake cakes and I’m no good at that so I was never asked again....so I feel that</p>	<p>Felt Presence – understood only later</p> <p>God as light saying ‘Come’: ‘When he started doing the call I saw God...it was light...it was a vaguely human...shape but it was a light...and...He just said, ‘Come’...and so I went out....I had to start finding out what it was afterwards, but I made that commitment because He was there.’</p> <p>Core reassurance of God with her – never having to be alone again.</p> <p>Primary image of God behind her, or with his arm around her Having ‘grown up conversations’ with God God rather than church key partner in growth – do things differently tog with him ‘God can say hard things... is pleased to have that level of conversation.’</p> <p>Aware of pushing God away when things are overwhelming: use of illness to get a break. Church ‘is nothing’, don’t want to go to house group, don’t want to pray. Just survive ‘overload’.</p> <p>Sense she will be loved and approved of if she can do everything right</p> <p>Resistance to God triggered by fear – of being out of control.</p> <p>Understands Loss of intimacy with God as result of her attempts to be ‘in control’</p>	<p>Visionary encounter prior to understanding – strong view that tacit, pre-cognitive experience vital and substantial starting point.</p> <p>Role of presence crucial in early beginning of relationship with God Made a commitment based on sense of presence of God, understanding followed.</p> <p>Vital role of mentors: Christian teacher met weekly for bible study, recommended books, took her to evening service. Key but rare.</p> <p>Thresholds of orthodoxy – admission to Breaking of Bread Two pictures of growth clash in her experience and understanding –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> growth as fitting in: system, obedience, fear of honesty, masks, silence, getting it right: church’s view/her past view growth as breaking out into diversity: freedom, negotiation, creativity, emotion, abandoning control (present experience) <p>Importance of finding her voice: when asked to give CU school talk: ‘realising it wasn’t all me, that God does help you and give you words..I felt, I felt that was my voice, I think that was the first time I really felt....I was speaking as a Christian.’</p> <p>Perceived growth taught as obedience to system not organic growth – about reading Bible notes, attending church...‘you were taught that system. You know, you used Scripture Union notes, you do it daily, you have your quiet time that’s it. Em....and there was no teaching about growth, no teaching about developing. And I think there was the feeling that, well that was it and that was all you were ever going to get as well.....[.]you were 3 weeks behind...but we didn’t like to admit to each other....I think it was the test of a committed Christian... that they would have that and do that and abide by it – and so if you weren’t doing very well at it that showed a lack...of commitment.’</p> <p>Role of barren periods: ‘University marks a very barren period and a period when I just stopped, I didn’t grow, I wasn’t active...’ ‘I</p>

		<p>voice has gone.’ Brings out voice at church house group: safer place to be herself</p>	<p><u>Image Exercise</u> - Key pictures</p> <p><u>Dog in bag</u> - God carries people but not in a bag like the church – you get to walk beside him</p> <p><u>Child led by safety harness</u>: God lets us have reins: so we won’t wander too far into danger</p> <p>Adult rather than child relationship with God: ‘...he can tell me things he couldn’t tell me before, because I am not just the little child saying ‘I want that!’and He only says yes or no you can’t have that...he can say look this is going to happen. I mean you’ve got to wait....and he can say, you’re not going to know. And he knows he can say those things. (very quiet, almost inaudible) And I think he is very pleased when he can say things to you that are hard, but you can have a grown up talk....yes(Change of pace) Because sometimes there are quite hard messages.....’(Cancer treatment)</p> <p>God suddenly said ‘No’ ‘if you step out into that flow you’re going to drown...I’m going to have to carry you. It’s going to get so bad...you can’t walk’(tearfully)...and that scared me.....that really scared me. But I knew he was going to carry my and....I mean...that’s what...that’s what he was telling me. There are times when you have to let go and be completely out of control but at those times I will be carrying you....so it doesn’t matter.’ I like to be very much in control. I am not very good at letting go...(inaudible)’</p>	<p>was still doing QT on my own (she had hoped husband would want to study and pray together)...I went through a very dry period, I found it a chore.’</p> <p>Growth about moving from blind obedience to a dialogue: ‘...in some ways it’s quite difficult for me because I’m like, you know to be good you’re given a set of clear rules and then you keep the rules and then you’re good. Now that is about the mentality of a 5 year old and I do need really to grow up and so it has to be the ‘No...you listen...and we’ll explore <i>together</i>.’</p> <p>Language of journey facilitating new growth – should be moving on, can’t stay where you are – facing anger, taking responsibility</p> <p>Breaking away: ‘It was meeting other individuals...finding other people, just you know, single odd conversations over the years...and having the courage to break away. You know, starrng to read books that weren’t in...you know...the church book stall, ...reading books that weren’t necessarily ‘approved’ evangelical ones, but ones that I thought looked interesting.’</p> <p>Needing to confront a received, immature way of approaching growth: need to take responsibility, church can’t provide all you need, difference is OK...’in some ways its quite difficult for me because I’m like, you know, to be good you’re given a set of clear rules and then you keep the rules and then you’re good. Now that’s about the mentality of a 5 year old and I do need really to grow up and so it has to be the, ‘No....you listen...and we’ll explore together.’ Move from rules/models/ a system that governs to an accompanying God who is with you as you explore.</p> <p>Role of tears in spiritual growth: unblocking repressed self tears as manifestation of Spirit: healing, cleansing, refreshing, grief, release: letting go. Wants to feel safe to cry at church.</p> <p>Learning curve about yourself and how you connect with God – denying more than half of who she was with her received/adopted processing style: need to take responsibility to grow beyond her comfort zone – unlikely to happen in boundaried relationships at church. Need safe place within church or stimulus from without.</p>
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Table 3: Interviewee Problems/Solutions

Interviewee	Problems	Solutions	Special Issues
001	<p>Parents never spoke of spiritual things Church felt ‘alien’ Isolation in marriage – disappointed expectations, loneliness No permission for emotions at church –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blocked off – ‘I got very, very emotional. I was weeping...at the end of that which embarrassed all my church and they all shuffled off wishing I hadn’t done it, but it didn’t embarrass one of the other groups that was there so they all came over, they were all women...and they comforted me. ...so again that was an opening up I think...of...the emotions that I had just blocked down and shut off.’ Dryness: ‘going through the motions’ Loneliness – QT ‘So I was still just doing it on my own’ – husband not wanting to share spiritual life. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church: ‘...nobody spoke to me at church. Walk in, sing the hymns, say the prayers listen to the sermon, walk out again, I didn’t speak to anyone...didn’t get very much from it and just go home again, which is what you did...’ Husband stopped attending church, ‘the fact that church let him go and didn’t talk to him...a lot of people stopped talking to me because they didn’t want to have to face up to the fact that he wasn’t going any more and didn’t want to deal with that...just made things harder...it was more grit your teeth and try and carry on...’ feeling people feel pressure to try to ‘sort it’ – led to silence. <p>Lack of ‘spiritual food’ – doesn’t define what that is – except by alternatives ‘...the only feeding I really got was preparing the Scripture Union meetings for the children and using the material from Scripture Union for that...preparing for them and giving them was where I got my sustenance as well...’</p> <p>Not hungry because she ‘I don’t think I was hungry because I think I</p>	<p>In response to church feeling ‘alien’ – started search for ‘something else’ in school library</p> <p>Went to church on her own, of her own initiative.</p> <p>CU group – went out of academic interest after being invited by (non-Christian?) friend, found ‘safe place’</p> <p>Teacher – bible study, church, trainee leader Ways to access emotional life outside church: Carberry – women who let her weep, Iona – place of growth/liberty</p> <p>Para-Church nurture - preparation for school SU group was what really nourished her – SU materials were only food Language of Journey: – associated with ‘liberal Christians’ – liberation of book loaned by pastor, ‘...I read it to get insight to what (husband) was going through and what was going on, but (the author’s) search and his talking with the liberal Christians that he was surrounded with whom his movement would have said were not Christians gave me the language of journey...of growth. And that’s where that started....(see <i>anger</i> quote)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> of growth – Margaret Silf – ‘I don’t know who started me on reading the likes of em....Silf... and people like that. That’s when things started really, really starting to grow and really going into journeys...’ <p>Picture of Journey and Courage to break away: brought Ruth a new appreciation to freedom from guilt and an urgent sense of her own personal responsibility to explore previously forbidden, uncharted waters: ‘...your Christianity is a journey and you should be moving on and you can’t stay where you are...that was very releasing...apart from feeling the anger that I’d spent...wasted a decade or two...and was not going anywhere...but it was very releasing and very</p>	<p>Importance of acceptance in CU school group: belonging before believing</p> <p>Processing groups becoming self-selective – not attractive to conservatives.</p> <p>Courage to break away</p> <p>Releasing</p> <p>Anger at wasting decade or two – not going anywhere</p>

<p>had switched everything off, I was just...I knew there were things lacking...I wasn't enjoying my job and church was nothing and my life was really quite empty, but I just well that was it, that was life you just had to get on with it and cope' – default setting to 'cope'</p> <p>Anger – '...and that started a period of being extremely angry with the church for never mentioning any of that...and then finding out that women in the church were in different places and different areas of going elsewhere for that feeding and being very angry with them because they'd never said it and they still wouldn't say it.... They were just so used to keeping it hidden and down and buried and away from the church that they didn't even tell you when you wanted to know...because they didn't want to rock the boat and they didn't want to get into trouble and they didn't want to be thrown out of the church I would think.'</p> <p>Resistance to discussing hard questions at church</p> <p>Looking for 'new levels of being church': different ways of praying, listening to God, ministering: emotional closeness, honesty.</p> <p>Desperate need for community but: real, honest, connects with your 'real self' not the one that would be acceptable to the subculture – hence needing the Heretics group to survive in trad. Church: 'I(pause)...feel called to....try and be part of the church, but only when I can be true to myself. [...]I'm no longer going to try and be fitted into their mould. [...] If they have problems with that, that's their problem....and I want to share with others, I don't want people in church to go through what I went through of not knowing there is this other...of not telling them....but of course most of them don't want to listen...so....that's where our house group, we try to operate on a very different level...'</p> <p>[...].. 'And....for it to be a place where you can be complete honest and you don't need to wear any masks. I so want not to have to wear a mask, to be who I really am and when I'm not happy I can say I'm not happy and I can say why I'm not happy and the fact that nobody else in church can necessarily say or do anything about it not be a problem....they can just give me a cuddle and a cup of tea and that would be fine.....they don't have to sort it.'</p>	<p>freeing...because it was like, wow! I'm not a failure. Em...and its not my fault that I'm not getting much out of it because...I've got a long way to go.</p> <p>Other resources: Carberry Iona Heretics Group</p> <p>Breaking away – see growth models entry</p> <p>Need to take responsibility: 'I had to take more responsibility for myself, I couldn't just sit and expect the church to do it for me....but they'd never told me that....or at least I'd never picked it up. Which I suppose is not the same thing...'</p> <p>Exploring who she is: 'I knew it wasn't because I had no imagination because I know nobody has...but mine was so atrophied...so cut off, not used, so blocked down that it to all intent and purposes wasn't there. And doing this made me realise that this was the way to work on that other side of me which....which ...is, in fact I think actually denying more than half of me, I think it is denying a lot of what is really me.'</p> <p>God rather than church, companion in growth</p> <p>Heretics Group – willing to test the boundaries of their faith Self selective as a group -</p> <p>Courage to break away – books not necessarily 'approved' evangelical ones ' this was really finding other people, just you know, single odd....conversations with things over the years...and having the courage to break away. You know starting to read books that weren't in....you know...the church book stall, you know, you'd go to....to the church of Scotland bookshop I think in those days....Wesley Owen...and reading books that were not necessarily</p>	<p>Switching everything off</p> <p>Realising not a failure – not her fault she wasn't getting much out of church</p> <p>Sustenance through preparation for talks/experience in other Christian communities</p> <p>Lack of responsibility due to lack of permission???</p> <p>Atrophied, cut off, blocked down</p> <p>Denying more than half of herself</p> <p>Role of God/Church in growth</p> <p>'Fitted into their mould' Testing boundaries Breaking away Operating on diff level</p> <p>Dreams of church place without masks place you can be yourself no pressure to get 'fixed' – not something 'wrong'</p>
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<p>Denying imagination – ‘other side of me’ – blocked, cut off, not used</p> <p>Not able to be true to herself – operate on a different level</p> <p>Struggles with lack of acknowledgement of different processing needs, particularly for the contemplative:</p> <p>‘I do have difficulty with the fact that I’m not given time to do anything about it. You know, occasionally they’ll say we’ll have a moment of silent prayer...and it’s a moment!’ (laughing with exasperation) you’ve hardly drawn breath and its because they’re not happy with it...and I do...struggle with not being given time and space...particularly as when I come home I’m not given time and space either. [...] Generally speaking by the time I get home I’ve forgotten the sermon. ...and I know that...for me, I’ve got to have time and space, its got to become part of me if its to stay...otherwise I’m going to forget it and its lost.... And I don’t want to lose what God tells me...I do try... to write...but I don’t really think the preacher would lie to look at my sermon notes!’</p> <p>Problems with evangelicals/evangelicalism/ self-definition</p> <p>‘I don’t know, I have problems with that. I mean.....there was a period when I was looking at other people and everything when I did have a problem... because my beliefs were definitely straight down the line evangelical, but all the Christians I admired who I felt were living the Christian life weren’t ...and I didn’t like the way...because they’re hard.... They’re judgemental, they’re hard and I didn’t like that. So I had problems with that. Then came along the ‘Post Evangelical’ and I was like ‘Oh am I a post-evangelical?’ but I wasn’t quite sure and I didn’t really fit. Em....then I ended up in this house group where we were all sort of....you know... survivors of (her church) the heretics group.....yes....(laughter)...So...although I do have problems with that...but my....on....beliefs, I am evangelical. So....em.....an evangelical who has problems with other evangelicals.....</p> <p>Loss of voice: conversation with man at national church meeting:I don’t feel I do use my voice in church.....at all I’m not a militant feminist and...I’m a (denomination) Woman – ie: invisible, silent, not fair.....um.....now the (denomination) Church has come on a long way and women <i>do</i> take part and women <i>do</i></p>	<p>‘approved’ evangelical ones, but the ones that I thought looked interesting. And then....that’s....I don’t know who started me on reading the likes of...em... Margaret Silf and people like that. That when things started really, really starting to grow and really going into journeys.’</p> <p>Growing through recollected pictures not just facts and words – <i>emancipation</i> through creating personal space.</p> <p>‘...if, when someone’s talking you get a picture then that is something that I can keep with me and that is something that God is speaking to me and its in that that I’m growing, its not in words. I’ve had too many words. I know the facts...and the facts aren’t, weren’t enough, they weren’t affecting me. Not really....and it’s the pictures, I’ve started exploring journaling... I put what I want because its my book and nobody else is going to read it anyway and I can put what I want....em...and sometimes its not words, sometimes its pictures...symbols...and those are often more the important times....because that’s how God...can reveal more clearly, because words are so limited’</p> <p>Real presence: ‘I’m singing a song or I’m reading something and then suddenly there is a picture there and it just stops me in my tracks and the picture is there. Or ...the word will be there and I hear him....I hear him talk...it’s not a voice, I’m not hearing with my ears...but....its straight into the mind. It’s is...it’s is a voice....em...often with the voice I will sense Him coming beside me and putting his arm around me because he is going to tell me something. The pictures just come as pictures, they’re just...out of the blue....sometimes they’re...just there...’</p>	<p>Denying imagination</p> <p>Journeys and growth</p> <p>Different ‘processing’ needs esp. for contemplatives</p> <p>Growing through symbolic and visual – ‘pictures’ - interactive, dialogical</p> <p>Growing BUT NOT IN WORDS</p> <p>Journalling - <i>emancipation</i></p> <p>Tensions in sense of personal Evangelical identity</p> <p>Real presence – interactive, imaginative recollection of God – spurs dialogue</p> <p>Post Evangelical??? <i>Does it really fit her experience??? - she is unsure</i></p> <p>Pictures</p> <p>Loss of ‘Voice’</p>
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<p> speak but...I still...I don't have a voice. I don't....no I find, again it is a paradox and a conflict...I would like to take a church service....I would like to take a whole service and preach and em...but no – nobody's ever suggested it, nobody's....ever done that and...no I can't – because I can't take it on but....if I'd been a <i>man</i>....I would have been brought on in that...but I wasn't, I was a woman... <i>nobody</i> considered....would I want to be encouraged and brought on with preaching and teaching and....so I feel that voice has gone....apart from at House Group..... </p> <p> Parallel life of being a 'scary' person – not presenting as who you know you are: '...so there always has been the paradox so I will join a group and I will want to be really part of that group, really involved in it but I won't...accept all their rules and their norms...I just will not...I just don't do that. So as I was saying, you know, what do you do to fit into a crowd like.....Idon't....do....that....I go home and cry because I don't fit in the crowd...I am scary to people, they think I'm a scary person because I seem so self assured, so self confident because of my non-conformity. That gives the image of someone who doesn't seek intimacy, who is self sufficient because they look their own person, they look their own way, they won't fit into everyone else em...whereas I think they should all be seeing the desperate little girl who's really, really, really will do anything to want company, who is really very nice and won't hurt anyone. But they <i>don't</i> see that em....and that paradox has been part of my life as well as part of my spiritual development....all along. </p> <p> Dealing with stress by shutting-down emotionally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pushing God and others away: 'I tend to only spot the symptoms when I am fairly well down the path.....em....one of the symptoms is....I'm beginning to learn the state which I go into which is, I've got too much to do, so I will just get on with it, I will just <i>do</i> what has to be done, I will just get through this period, I'll do what's got to be done and do it...and....I shut everything else off and just....and I <i>know</i> that I am shutting everything else off....and it is just sheer determination will get me through...and...I...it's not good, that is <i>not</i> good and I shouldn't be doing that. And I am aware because then I </p>	<p> Vision of church as family: but then (my husband) at one point took me up, because I was having some long winge about the church....and he said, the church is family....and I said, 'Yes, yes! The church is family.' And he said, 'No! Church is FAMILY' that's your family. And I realised of course family the ones you hate and love at the same time and can't get on with but have to....family....its not family as in ideal family...cosy family, the sort we dream about, it is like family as in the real world families. I would like the church to....see that it's a family and realise like a family that you do not expect everybody in the family to enjoy the same things all the time.to allow us all to have different ways of expressing....to allow the church to be a big group but meets in little groups and does different things in different ways and that's fine. </p> <p> Growth about moving from blind obedience to a dialogue: ...in some ways it's quite difficult for me because I'm like, you know to be good you're given a set of clear rules and then you keep the rules and then you're good. Now that is about the mentality of a 5 year old and I do need really to grow up and so it has to be the 'No...you listen....and we'll explore together.' </p> <p> Looking for 'new levels of being church': </p>	<p> Transitional/non-conformist people frightening for rest of church - 'Scary' people. </p> <p> Ecclesiology: church as family – allowing difference and disagreement </p> <p> Non-conformists: Taking responsibility for own part in alienating others? </p> <p> Taking responsibility for adult way of knowing God – two way exploration together (part of the journey motif) Vs Victim mentality </p> <p> Vision of church </p>
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	<p>think...no...I'm just, church is completely nothing, I don't want to go to a house group, I'm reluctant to pray, although the other half of me wants to, I know I really want too but I don't. And I know I am....I know I push God away...[...]...well the more I am just trying to control things goes on, then if I do actually stop and want to listen to God I can't do it....I can't let go. And I think I know its <i>not</i> that God's away from me and not listening to me and not wanting to speak to me I <i>know</i> that I'm just...he's <i>there</i> but he's not going to force his way in and I've not opened up. And I <i>want</i> to be able to open up. And I feel that's partly why I am beginning to get better at spotting it because I'm happier with this state of self control because I don't like the fact that it then means I lose the intimacy with God....and I want that...and I want that <i>more</i> than I want to be in control.</p> <p>Loss of trust in God: 'It is fear of not managing....[...]. It's not the fear of God, it's the fear of everything in everyday life and I don't....trust God...to control that....em.....there was one point...I got a...it was quite a...major step really, because I knew that I don't trust God for the future, I don't trust God with...plans for me. I have big problems with the 'I've got a plan for you and I know where I'm going and everything.'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • honesty, vulnerability, facing change together • prophetic prayer • hearing hard things from God and others <p>Clan Gathering model: safe place for 'scary' emotions 'I find that tears are very healing and cleansing and refreshing. So that.....and that's the way I want the church, I want to be able to cry at church and not...freak other people out or not have them leaping into action and feeling they've got to 'do' something because I'm 'upset' about 'something' whereas I'm just touched by God and....I just want to be able to cry....[...].they're not all, there are the tears of grief...and those are healing, but there are also the tears that just....just release and just of letting go....and those are....really quite happy tears, you know I can smile and cry at the same time....in fact at Clan Gathering I usually <i>do</i>....so....because that's one of the places where it is perfectly OK to cry....I think its <i>sad</i> that people are afraid of tears, because I think there's a lot that can happen through tears.....(silence).....</p> <p>Image Exercise:</p> <p>Frog looking in mirror God sees the real her: I do like...its one of the big comforts of relationship with God is knowing that he sees the me that I think is there...not this one that is in the mirror that everyone else sees. And of course God's the <i>only</i> one who sees that, everybody else can only see what's in the mirror to be seen....mmm...yeah....</p> <p>Dog carried in shopping bag Conformity – church carries people in shopping bag: 'I think a lot of very well meaning people in the church...want us to conform to their rules and things because its like, <i>that's</i> how you're carried along. That's how God carries us all...we do all these things...and we're carried along, and its like, 'But I'm not supposed to be carried around in a shopping bag, I'm supposed to be</p>	<p>Growth through providing safe place for difficult emotions/questions</p> <p>Freedom to weep</p> <p>Undermining of trust in God – alienation in relationship with him.</p> <p>Parallel images of self – 'God sees the real me I think is there, not the one in the mirror that everyone else sees</p> <p>Resisting conformity</p>
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		<p>running alongside....and that...you shouldn't do that to a dog, it's a travesty and that youwe shouldn't do it to each other, we should be allowed to run alongside, not be carried....in a shopping bag.'</p> <p><u>Child holding mother's hand about to jump into pool:</u> 'I think God does...he doesn't carry us in a shopping bag, but I think he lets us have...reins...so that we can <i>know</i> that we won't wander too far because he is...he will keep us back.'</p> <p><u>Baby elephant holding on to mother elephant's tusk:</u> 'And again the baby elephant with the adult elephant and just wanting to hang on to the tusk for reassurance and....the thing with baby elephants...they are so much smaller...than the adult...they are tiny and the adult is <i>huge</i>....and ... thinking...you know, God is so much bigger than us, you know, the person we're holding on to is <i>so much bigger</i> and really <i>can</i> sort everything out, just as this little child thinks the parent can...but....but God <i>can</i> because he is....is so much bigger, and I love these images of just....just holding on....they often hold on to the tail....not the tusk...just walk along and....everybody makes sure they don't get lost, the whole group of adults....look after them...which is nice.</p>	<p>Common image – reins – God giving people space even when it involves doing wrong Space but still limits (reins)</p> <p>Desire for intimacy stronger than desire to be in control</p> <p>Loss of trust – problems with sovereignty and control</p> <p>(Unrealistic expectation God CAN sort everything out?)</p> <p>BLENDING example</p> <p>SECOND NAIVETY ACTUALLY potentially 'DANGEROUS': Blending two pictures of God – trying to have you cake and eat it??</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not taking responsibility for choices. Still putting it onto God
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