

Mysticism and Narcissism

Mysticism and Narcissism:

*A Personal Reflection
on Changes in Theology
during My Life as a Cenacle Nun*

By

Kathleen Lyons

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Mysticism and Narcissism: A Personal Reflection on Changes
in Theology during My Life as a Cenacle Nun

By Kathleen Lyons

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Kathleen Lyons

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8043-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8043-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	ix
More than “memoirs”	
Unfolding of incipient knowledge	
Reflective writing	
Heuristic approach	
Feminist theology	
Feminism and the psychoanalytic	
 Part I: From Monastic to Apostolic	
Chapter One.....	2
Pre-Vatican II Church	
1945–62—My Experience of Cenacle Religious Life	
Modernist crisis	
Imposition of Neo-Scholastic theology	
Control by Canon Law	
The power of the Roman Curia	
Chapter Two	26
Vatican II Church	
1962–72—My Experience of Cenacle Religious Life	
Nouvelle Théologie	
Dei Verbum—“Revelation”	
Vatican II and Women	
The function of scripture	
Authority and experience	
 Part II: Contemplatives In Action	
Chapter Three	50
The Post-Conciliar Church	
1972–1982—My Experience of Cenacle Religious Life	
Interpreting the council	
Feminist theology and Catholicism	
Authority and education	
Cenacle community and change	

Chapter Four	73
Relationality	
1982–1992—My Experience of Cenacle Religious Life	
Relational theology	
Inter-subjective theory	
Repairing relationships	
Matrixial trans-subjectivity	
Part III: Everyday Mysticism	
Chapter Five	96
Christology	
1992–2002—My Experience of Cenacle Religious Life	
“Who do You Say That I Am?” (Matt. 16: ¹⁵)	
Embodied spirituality	
Divine and human becoming	
Everyday mysticism	
Chapter Six	119
The Marian Key	
2002–2012—My Experience of Cenacle Religious Life	
Born of a woman	
Mary in the cenacle at the birth of the Church (Acts 2)	
Mary as “privileged”	
“Blessed is the fruit of thy womb”	
Chapter Seven.....	142
Conclusion	
Authority and experience	
Ecclesiology	
Everyday mysticism	
Mary “as the air we breathe”	
Mysticism or narcissism	
Notes.....	152
Church Documents	176
Scripture References.....	177
Bibliography.....	178
Index.....	193

PROLOGUE

It is our spiritual duty to become human; this “becoming human” is not a task we set ourselves to achieve, rather it is a task given us by divine life.

—Terry Velling¹

My purpose in writing this is to test my proposition that the narcissism of patriarchy in the Roman Catholic Church runs counter to the Pentecostal vision of Acts 2. I examine the implications of the changes in Roman Catholic theology during my 65 years in the community of the Cenacle. A correlative is that Mary of Pentecost is an instance of the “full humanity of woman.”² What justifies this claim is a life-time of contemplating the mystery of Pentecost, and trying to respond to its implications, while experiencing a sense of exclusion from full participation in the institutional Church. My claim is that fundamental to the Christian life is a tension between mysticism and narcissism, and that this tension can best be resolved within a Christian community. I argue this within the context of the Cenacle Congregation. I specify “Christian” while being aware that much of what I say might be claimed or denied by other Religions, but Roman Catholic Christianity is my context and is what I know and write about. In this prologue I relate the background information that sheds light on my argument, for example information about the community to which I belong and the influences that have shaped it. I argue for a unifying anthropology that avoids the dualisms in the understanding of Christology and I seek to avoid a male-centred anthropology, which conceals the part played by a woman in the mystery of the Incarnation.

This is the preface to a narrative that is all about change—change in society, in the Church, and in Religious life. More significantly, it is about the reasons for the changes. I examine these changes by weaving together several different perspectives, including feminism, relationality and community. Paul Ricoeur refers to the science of narrative “as second order discourse, which is always preceded by a narrative stemming from the creative imagination.”³ I am, of course, inserted into the Christian narrative by reasons of birth, but I embrace it by reasons of choice—“creative imagination” is still needed to understand and accept the gift of faith. Furthermore, I have assented to interpret the Christian mystery according to specific symbols and stories within the tradition that give

coherence and continuity to my life. One lens I use for analysis is that of the female “I.” To substantiate my claim that the tension between mysticism and narcissism is best resolved within a faith community, I draw on my own experience within a Congregation constituted within the Roman Catholic Church. I have at my disposal the annals of the Congregation, the history of its beginnings, and the archives that capture the intention of the founders. I also have records of the chapters that are assembled every six years, with delegates from each province,⁴ to make decisions and elect leaders. These records are documented and kept for reference.⁵ I draw on some writings of the history of the Church, especially those of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century, concerning the events and documents pertaining primarily to the Vatican Council (1963–5).⁶ It is 50 years since the close of the Council so there is a proliferation of writing and analysis of its meaning.⁷ In fact, there have been attempts to re-interpret some documents. For instance, John O’Malley describes the debates between Cardinal Ruini and the “Bologna school” whose principal, Guiseppe Alberigo, referred to the Council as an “event” with a “before and after,” an interpretation derided by Cardinal Ruini.⁸

My research is ultimately concerned with Christian feminist spirituality, a postmodern discipline which is interdisciplinary both in the manner in which it formulates its projects and in the methodologies it develops to analyse them.⁹ My understanding of postmodernism is that it declares the essentialist view of human nature a fiction, because it serves to cover up its social, historical and linguistic construction “death of the subject.”¹⁰ It refutes the idea that there is a natural logic or order to random historical events (“death of history”) and denies the idea that there is a “real” that is external to the knower (“death of metaphysics”).¹¹ The nihilistic potential of postmodern deconstruction, in its refusal to respect boundaries or play by the rules, is liberating and exciting, allowing space for development within the once totally unified discourse of Catholic theology.

My story shows how the Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II) opened a space for Religious women to move from the Medieval to the Modern era, and to catch up to the postmodern within 30 years. If, as a Christian feminist, I still identify with the Roman Catholic tradition and remain within the institutional structures of the Church, it is because I take seriously the Church’s self-understanding expressed in its assertion of the principle of incarnation, that “divine revelation is only given in human, cultural and societally conditioned language.”¹² This “Incarnational Spirituality” demands a feminist hermeneutic, directed toward a critique of the Bible, tradition and Church structures, to the extent that they contribute to the oppression and domination of women in a patriarchal and sexist

culture and religion.¹³ It is as a woman that I search for my place in the Christian narrative and only slowly and gradually uncover the truth—not simply that the woman has a “place” within “salvation” history, but that she is its foundation.

Historical background

The Cenacle Congregation had its origins in post-revolution France. In 1826 in the Ardèche region of France, a priest named Stephen Terme, with Thérèse Couderc and a number of other young women, set to work to provide a place for the pilgrims who came to the shrine of John Francis Regis, a seventeenth-century Jesuit saint who had worked with great zeal among the people. It was through the brilliant intuition on the part of Stephen Terme and Thérèse Couderc that the group committed itself to giving the “Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius” to women. This was a bold move on their part; the Jesuits had been preaching “retreats” for two hundred years, but this was to be different, with women doing what had been traditionally the privilege of priests. The struggles of these inspired founders have been told in detail in the “Annals of the Congregation,” where we read that the relationships among the first leaders were fraught.¹⁴ Through it all, the amazing figure of the foundress shines out. The faith, hope and charity of Thérèse Couderc are recognised to have been of heroic degree and the Church celebrated it in 1970 when she was proclaimed a “Saint.” Her spiritual stature as a woman with a profound mission has been shown to be an inspiration for contemporary women.¹⁵ Her influence on my life has been as an image of what it means to be a Religious woman, while her influence on the Congregation is constructed around her text *Se Livrer*. In this script, Thérèse surrenders herself unreservedly to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She inherited the spirituality of the “French School,” developed as an alternative to dogmatism during the years 1575–1716, and was a spirituality imbued with an apophatic understanding of mysticism through Rhineland, Flemish and Spanish influences.¹⁶ The French school “Christianised” an otherwise Neoplatonic abstract mysticism by stressing the humanity of Jesus—that Jesus had come from God and was returning to God (Jn. 13: 4). This spirituality focused on Jesus’ return journey to the Father as a journey that we too are to make, in the power of the Spirit.¹⁷ The strand within this school that I pick up as significant for its influence on Thérèse is the spirituality of a little-known Jesuit, Louis Lallemant (1567–1635). His *Doctrine Spirituelle* complemented the writings of Pierre de Berulle (1575–1629) and Francis de Sales (1567–1622) through the significance he placed on the Holy Spirit as the

indwelling presence of God. Lallemand calls for a human response in terms of discernment and contemplation.

At the heart of the *Doctrine*, in order to work that radical reform, there is the spiritual discernment which commands all of the thought of Lallemand, as it commands all of the advance of the *Exercises*. One is not able to comprehend Lallemand, we believe, if one does not place at the centre of every interpretation of this discernment this “guidance of the Spirit” which leads to the “service of Christ.”¹⁸

At the start of Henri Bremond's fifth volume of *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, he has this to say:

More integral, more original, twenty times more sublime, twenty times more austere, more demanding than Port Royal, the school we are going to study has made little noise. Its contemporaries scarcely suspect that it existed ... Its founder, the Jesuit Louis Lallemand died in 1635 without having written anything.¹⁹

This doctrine may give rise to a suspicion that when the person of prayer abandons herself to God once for all, she is dispensed from any further effort. However, for Lallemand, as for Thérèse Couderc, the apostolic life given to the service of others in Christ required contemplation as a necessary component for a life given over to the building of the reign of God.

The title chosen for the congregation was adopted about 15 years after its foundation in 1844, and attests to its special character, spirituality and mission. “Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle” offers its members a model of a Religious community in that first assembly of the early believers united in one heart and soul around Mary in the upper room (Cenacle, Acts 2).²⁰ The mystery of Pentecost is there in the background as I examine the attitude of the Catholic Church in relationship to women. Mary is at the “birth” of the Church at Pentecost, but there was no woman at the centre of the Church when it assembled for the “new Pentecost” at Vatican II.

The symbolisation of this Cenacle mystery is the context of my years as a Religious woman. In it is offered an icon of beauty and goodness in the person of Mary, as she appears in the upper room, surrounded by the disciples awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). This mystery is the inspiration of our mission as we too, with the women of our time, “await” the coming of the promised Spirit. However, I have discovered so much more about this woman called Mary and the real significance of her place in “salvation history.”

The other influence to which our Congregation is indebted is the Spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), who was a contemporary of Martin Luther (1483–1546) whose role within the Church was linked to a response to the Reformation. The charges made by sincere people against Jesuit Spirituality are many—it is individualistic, rationalistic, semi-Pelagian, introspective.²¹ But the Ignatian approach to prayer was attacked in its early years for the opposite reasons—it was too mystical and affective, insufficiently ascetical and rational, and gave a dangerous prominence to the Holy Spirit. Many were fearful of “mysticism” and inclined to assume that discursive meditation was the normal way of prayer. This tension is addressed more fully in the body of the work where I explain the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises. Suffice it to say here that after the death of the founders, the Jesuits undertook to form the little group of French women, through the Spiritual Exercises, so they could minister to the women of the post-revolution. The Ignatian practice of the “discernment of spirits” is the foundation for enabling and identifying, through experiences of “consolation” and “desolation,” those desires that give life (mysticism) and those that are life-destroying (narcissism), such is the “everyday mysticism” I claim to be the core of Christianity. The Holy Spirit is the integrating link in each of the above tenets that make up our charism—Mary’s surrender to the Spirit at the Annunciation and Pentecost, the *Se Livrer* of Thérèse Couderc, and the discernment in the Spiritual Exercises.

However, this is all very orthodox and disembodied, so in order to formulate my proposition that mysticism liberates women from the oppression of the phallic, I deconstruct “mysticism” from the tendency to see it as manifesting unusual gifts. I note that what was allowed to count as genuine mysticism was in fact a product of struggles between gender and power.²² I draw on philosophy to expose some of these traps, especially the work of Grace Jantzen²³ and Luce Irigaray²⁴ because both of these writers are concerned with the feminine divine—Jantzen in terms of social construction and Irigaray with her belief in irreducible sexual difference. I include the psychoanalytic because the “unconscious” has a large part to play in Christian humanism, although “psychology” has not received the same respect in the academic world as theology and philosophy. I trace the development of psychoanalytic theory from Freud to the “object relations” school, and to the recent insights of “matrixial trans-subjectivity.”²⁵ This supports my belief that the source of relational theology is rooted in the psyche, in the experience of every human being in the later stages of pregnancy in the womb. I address the issue of narcissism in the context of theology, seeing it as a refusal or inability to

relate to the “other.” I follow the route of the autonomous subject of the Enlightenment, and draw on Jessica Benjamin’s theory of inter-subjectivity,²⁶ until I discover the matrixial trans-subjectivity of Ettinger.²⁷ I claim that Mary, in giving birth to her son, enables Incarnation because as the “word became flesh” so female flesh became divine. It takes a reflection on seven decades of experience, using the different lenses of theology, philosophy and psychology, to substantiate the above claims.

More than “memoirs”

The manner in which I approach this task is not simply to write a testimony to a life of piety—I deal with more than my own subjective memories. I am concerned with the life of faith in a comprehensive way and so use different literary genres. I am sometimes descriptive, sometimes analytical and often argumentative. To make the case for my proposition, I begin by reflecting on the decade before Vatican II, which covers my first years as a Religious woman in the vowed life. It is important to describe the kind of Church it was, not simply to record forgotten history, but to show how we lived within restrictive ecclesial circumstances and yet had the capacity to carry out our mission of serving others. During this decade, “Feminism” was not an issue for those of us who aimed at “sanctity.” Such was the nature of our spirituality we believed everything was “grist for the mill”; we read the lives of the saints and saw how they turned everything to the great advantage of knowing only Jesus Christ. I describe the ways the Catholic Church resisted “modernism” by insisting on “Neo-Scholastic” theology to be taught in all schools and colleges. I call it Neo-Scholastic because it was not authentic Thomism (a framework for the study of philosophy in the form of twenty-four theses by St Thomas Aquinas), but rather an adapted version, with “clarifications” offered by sixteenth-century commentators.²⁸ Meanwhile, what John O’Malley calls the “long nineteenth century” was gathering momentum and we were at the cusp of change.²⁹

In the next decade I show how Catholic women, including Religious women, were becoming conscious of the disparity between men and women in the Church and society. I describe the change from living a semi-monastic life to that of being a student of biblical theology in a college at a distance from the Cenacle community, symbolising a move from medievalism to postmodernism. I outline the significant decrees of Vatican II and the themes of “authority and experience” are the focus of my interest. In the documents, “Experience” is no longer a “taboo” subject—it even has theological content. Women’s experience is

acceptable so long as it stays within the bounds of marriage or celibacy. I address issues related to women in the Church and note that not a lot has changed since the Council in terms of government in the Church. There was (and is) a degree of disappointment as “collegiality” was not implemented and Religious education was not in keeping with the principles of adult learning. I am obliged to face the “shadow” side of human development in myself and others; I needed to face the negative feelings I relegated to the unconscious, because they seemed incompatible with the “Christ-like” image I wished to project. I appreciate Sigmund Freud,³⁰ in spite of his misogyny, because he offers an alternative to the self-sufficient subject of the Enlightenment. I will substantiate my claim for “relational theology” because it is integral to my interpretation of mysticism. “Intersubjectivity” is introduced and I try to show convincingly (in keeping with classical theology) how and why to be human is to be in need of “atonement” in the repairing of relationships. With the important question of “how can a male Christ save women?” my focus becomes feminist Christology. I distinguish between the “body of Christ” and the “body politic” in order to find space for women in the Catholic Church. I dare to return to “Chalcedon” to examine theories related to humanity and divinity by stressing the message of Incarnation in a unifying anthropology. I look at the doctrines of Incarnation and Christology, stripped of their metaphysical overtones, to see what they yield for women. If we are to become free and autonomous, and not simply the “other” of the ideal male, we need to add “divinity,” the missing ingredient for women.³¹ This trajectory culminates in the “Marian Key,” which brings together the different strands of feminism. I avoid naming the Spirit as the feminine face of God, or aligning the Spirit with Mary as the maternal face of God. I am more radical than that. With the insights of Karl Rahner, interpreted by Philip Endean, I argue that Mary is more than the perfect disciple and explain why. Endean summarises a profound theological argument:

Christ transforms us, by giving us in his person, his message, his death and resurrection, God's assurance that what we call sin is overcome. In so far as he is essentially dependent for his very existence on Mary, she too is not merely the most perfect recipient of redemption, but rather part and parcel of its proclamation.³²

Part and parcel of this Christian proclamation of the “Good News” is the fact that it is first revealed in the feminine. This “matrixial” precedes gender, it is where all life begins, and Mary is privileged to embody this message in her person.³³

Unfolding of incipient knowledge

I need to define my terms, because I am writing in a situation where the “Christian Church” includes the “Anglican Communion.” I write as a woman whose identity is mediated through the symbolic narratives of the Roman Catholic tradition. I refer quite often to “the Church,” meaning the institutional Church as distinct from the body of the faithful, depending on the context. When speaking as a Cenacle woman I capitalise “Religious” to refer to those who are in the vowed life. However, my arguments require an interdisciplinary approach, the use of different philosophical, theological and psychological discourses for the various claims I make. Each of these fields of learning is constituted by unique issues and methodologies. There are problems with this. I am not an expert in the sense of one who dominates the subject matter and controls the literature in all of the disciplines. I do, however, have sufficient knowledge of each to respect their variable concepts in my use of them. Also, this research project is self-implicating. I am not neutral or detached about what my research generates and this has alerted me to the dangers of skewing the methodology to produce the desired results, so I aim for a more rigorous honesty in my search for meaning. Sandra Schneiders points out the danger of “methodological narcissism,” reminding me that personal anecdotes, no matter how interesting and supportive of prejudices, do not constitute evidence.³⁴

Reflective writing

During my time in America I attended workshops in which I learned to use Ira Progoff’s “Intensive Journal” method,³⁵ which was significant in forming my practice of reflective writing. The workshop was conducted in a silent reflective atmosphere in which the participants used a workbook divided into numerous sections. For example, after a period of quiet reflection on “time spells” a section on “stepping-stones” would be written. Another reflection was a section on “dreams” and their meanings. A section might be written as from a “sub-personality” to give a distinct perspective on a period. There was a “life-history log” and a section on “roads not taken.” Each exercise was used with specific procedures that evoked the memories of a person’s life in a process that stimulated inner perceptions and movements of energy. Intensive journal writing evokes stronger forces of energy than simply writing a diary, although I have also done that from time to time. There is a flow in the intensive journal method that enables the past, present and future to point to the different

elements of life and to reveal “who I am.” Progoff describes this form of journal as:

An instrument ... capable of drawing together the multiplicity of contents of human life and compressing them into a more manageable space while not losing the quality of movement and change that is their essence.³⁶

I use “a period log” approach in this thesis to reflect on my life in periods of ten years, considering each decade as a distinctive whole, with events and feelings associated with that time that are different from other periods. This allows me to stand back and take a wide view. It is described as one of the methods of “theological reflection” because it can transform heart-felt inner experience, when recorded in journal or spiritual autobiography and other forms of creative writing, through which it “turns life into text” and becomes a living human document.³⁷ In the practice of “reflection” we are looking beyond the limits of the personal. “Reflexivity,” on the other hand, can be defined “as an acknowledgement of the significance of the self in forming an understanding of the world.”³⁸ Reflexivity may seem to be overly individual, however the self and identity are formed through interaction with others, a claim I make in my thesis. St Augustine’s *Confessions*, written in AD 394, are an example of a classic piece of reflexive spiritual writing that reveals an intense relationship with God, encouraging readers to view their own lives with similar reflexivity.³⁹ Teresa of Avila (1515–82) is a spiritual writer who is profoundly reflexive in her description of an ever-deepening experience of God and the nature of the human person. Her writing continues to inspire others as she describes her techniques in prayer, and in so doing defends the authenticity and authority of contemplation as a way to know God.⁴⁰ Teresa of Ávila’s writings are both reflexive and reflective; she illustrates for us how reflexive activity (attention to oneself in a particular situation) is often closely linked to reflective processes (an awareness of the present context). My writing is primarily reflective because I am looking beyond the personal to the context of my experience.

Heuristic approach

According to Karl Rahner, the personal experience of the self is the personal experience of the history of God; the personal history of the experience of God signifies over and above itself, the personal history of the experience of the self.⁴¹ This heuristic approach is the most appropriate with which to validate the claims I make, and it supplies much of the data for my findings. I reflect on each decade of lived experience in a Religious

community, followed by an analysis of the reasons for the dramatic changes in theology and psychology that have occurred.⁴² I set out my thesis against a theoretical framework of constructive narrative theology because this allows me a broader perspective. There is a considerable body of material within modern theology claiming the category of “narrative,” so for conceptual clarity I draw on Alasdair MacIntyre’s work which recognises many different uses of the term “narrative,” some of which support my research, especially in relation to community. In his consideration of morality, he says:

It is essential to be embedded within a tradition that provides a coherent narrative that frames the beginning of our story and moves us towards the ending ... there is no such thing as universal objective morality outside of human experience. Moral goods can only be discovered by entering into those relationships which constitute communities whose central bond is a shared vision of and understanding of goods.⁴³

In an essay designed to analyse MacIntyre’s conception of narrative, Gregory L. Jones explores the constructive implications of this theory. Jones expands MacIntyre’s conception of community—the two indispensable poles to a community are communion and hospitality.⁴⁴ “Hospitality” is the relationship that prevents the communion from becoming enclosed. It is through hospitality that friends acknowledge their openness to the stranger and welcome them as a friend. The work of retreats has involved a great deal of hospitality requiring relationships that reach out to the “other,” thus keeping narcissism at bay. Furthermore, Jones claims that a community is an “alternative” community when it makes a counter statement to society’s values. We need, he concludes, modern community that can challenge the institutional Church in its complicity with oppressive structures.⁴⁵

How far the Cenacle community has challenged or colluded with these structures is a question I explore through its narrative. Elaine Graham describes “constructive narrative theology” as being built upon two fundamental convictions. First, that human beings create our world through the process of telling stories and therein find our own sense of self. Second, that Christians worship a story-telling God, and the work of theological reflection is as a consequence the “task of bringing our own narratives into relationship with the narrative of God.”⁴⁶ The biblical narrative of the mystery of “Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle” is the inspiration for our community as a “discerning body” (Acts 1: 12–14, 1–4).

I too, like those early believers at Pentecost, speak as the Spirit gives me to speak, and hope that “each will hear in her own language” (Acts 2: 8). Our theological reflection on the Cenacle mystery is a corporate activity; we are a group of individuals with a sense of belonging, and we use biblical and traditional texts, such as annals of the Congregation and letters to and from the founder to her community, to create and sustain our ongoing existence.⁴⁷

I draw on Paul Ricoeur's “hermeneutics of testimony” to recount my history and that of the community, believing it to be revelatory. It is a history that “emerges from a questioning attention to our present life in the light of a particular past, a past seen as generative.”⁴⁸ There are, according to Stephen Crites, stories that lie deep within the consciousness that orient us through time—these are “sacred stories.” There are also mundane stories that we use to facilitate daily living, mediating between the sacred and the mundane. Then there is a third type of story in the form of experiencing consciousness itself:

Consciousness grasps its objects in an inherently temporal way, and that temporality is retained in the unity of its experience as a whole.⁴⁹

I place my experience, and that of the women in the Cenacle with whom I have lived, at the centre of reflection to display the cultural, social and religious constructions that undergird concepts about Cenacle religious life. My thesis is set against a theoretical template developed by Johann Baptist Metz⁵⁰ and utilized by Elizabeth Johnson in her theological reading of the communion of saints.⁵¹ Metz draws together three realities—memory, narrative and solidarity—arguing that these are the basic categories of a fundamental theology. I claim that these categories include pre-natal memories that have a bearing on the psychic life of both women and men. Taken together, memory and solidarity can interpret the love of God in a world where there is conflict and a need of relationality. I consult my own experience as a hermeneutical tool from which to wrestle with the attitude that the Catholic patriarchy has towards women. “Memory,” “narrative” and “solidarity” will together form one tool that, rooted in scripture and liturgy, may reveal the Cenacle community as desiring to promote with all Christian women the liberation that will, according to Sandra Schneiders, “change the direction of salvation for the race and the planet.”⁵²

Feminist theology

As a woman I am called to engage in theological reflection, as is every Christian—but I do so in this context because I wish to support those developing theologies that are strongly holistic. I aim to hold together in creative tension polarities that traditional theology separates—body and spirit; emotion and rationality; individual and community. Feminist consciousness did not surface in the Congregation of the Cenacle until about the third decade in the years of which I write. I use the feminist theological critical principle of the “full” humanity of woman,⁵³ against which to test the insights of more recent feminist thinkers. While Ruether⁵⁴ proposes the idea that there is some compatibility between the feminist critical principle and the Biblical prophetic-messianic tradition, Schüssler Fiorenza prefers to appeal to a critical principle based solely on “women’s concrete experience,” rooted for her in women-church.⁵⁵ This provides the hermeneutical key through which texts are judged as either oppressive or liberating. Schüssler Fiorenza disagrees that the biblical “prophetic-messianic” principle necessarily conforms to a feminist principle of “full humanity” that can be located within the Bible; she claims that it needs to be formulated within women’s struggle for liberation. Schüssler Fiorenza considers “emancipatory praxis” as both the presupposition and goal of feminist theology. Texts and traditions are evaluated in the light of their potential to liberate or oppress women. Schüssler Fiorenza makes this claim on the basis that all theology is constantly engaged in interpretation; but a hermeneutics that merely attempts to understand the Christian tradition and texts in their historical settings does not suffice.⁵⁶

Critical theology has as its methodological presupposition the Christian community’s constant need for renewal.⁵⁷

I utilise both Ruether’s and Schüssler Fiorenza’s principles of arbitration in my thesis—that of “full humanity” and “women’s concrete experience”—as markers for, or signs of, liberation. Ruether contends that what makes feminist theology unique is not the articulation of this critical principle of “full humanity,” but that “women claim this principle for themselves.”⁵⁸ Rather than appealing to “women’s experience,” I choose to work with the category of “women’s discourses” to avoid the notion of “woman” as an abstract, ahistorical concept.⁵⁹ Serene Jones describes the tension between constructivist and essentialist gender theories. While taking note of both standpoints in the debate within feminist theory and theology, I make a choice for “strategic essentialism.”⁶⁰ This choice gives me the flexibility to be a pragmatist in response to the question of the essential character of

woman when I eventually discover her real “construction.” Because “liberation theologians” argue that everyone, particularly women, has a duty to transcend oppressive situations in a just manner, I am mindful of this as I explore the work of women’s liberation.⁶¹ I utilize Foucault's view of history, his linking together of notions of discourse and power that normalize the status quo, and consider his claim that power is a productive force.⁶² Foucault asks:

In what does it (philosophy) consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?⁶³

I wish to think differently about the Christian narrative of salvation and women’s place or absence within it. I will position Cenacle sisters within the “network of relations” within the institution of the Catholic Church to provide a basis for our identity, while critiquing our marginality within the Church but also owning the Church as a source of empowerment and creativity. Foucault's thinking of power and resistance offers a route through the philosophical question of what is “normal” in relation to authority.⁶⁴ For Foucault, power is not only repressive but also productive, insofar as every system of knowledge depends on social arrangements of power for the production and maintenance of that knowledge. His understanding of the power-knowledge relation has implications for re-thinking aspects of liberation theology and religious education.

Feminist theology does not avoid questions of Christology and neither do I, especially the question of identity and difference that “matrixial trans-subjectivity” goes a long way to explain.⁶⁵ I explore a theology that reflects and encourages human relatedness. Tina Beattie puts it this way:

Christianity is essentially relational both in its proclamation of a Trinitarian God and in its celebration of the Incarnation of an event that continuously reveals itself in the space of a creative symbolic encounter between God, Mary, Christ and the Church. So the story of Christ is the story of Mary is the story of the Church is the story of humanity is the story God.⁶⁶

Beattie reminds us that that this vision cannot be expressed by one of these symbols in isolation from the rest.⁶⁷ This means going beyond a narrow Christological focus to an all-encompassing vision of Incarnation that incorporates all of creation, male, female and the whole cosmos.

Karl Rahner does not write specifically about feminist theology, yet I have recourse to his thinking, grounded as it is in the possibility of God's grace infused into the particular experience of the everyday.⁶⁸ Rahner is influenced by the spirituality of St Ignatius and the *Spiritual Exercises*,⁶⁹

and his understanding of what it is to be human and already related to God is the foundation for my claim of “everyday mysticism.” His theological anthropology has been heavily criticised as an “anthropological and subjectivist reduction of theology and Christianity.”⁷⁰ In claiming that mysticism is the gift of Incarnation and available to all Christians, I show my hand as being “anthropological and subjectivist.” I believe, with Rahner, that the mystery of God is always mediated through an experience that is specifically historical, and that the changing history of female subjectivity creates a new situation for language about the divine mystery.⁷¹ A disadvantage to my leaning heavily on Rahner is that it is not possible to present a full elucidation of Rahner's thought and scholarship, which might give space to feminist theology.

One significant change in my post-Vatican II years is the Church's attitude to “experience,” and consequently its greater acceptance of women's experience.⁷² The other liberating aspect of the Council is in relation to “authority”; before the Council the Pope's word regarding faith or morals was to be followed unquestioningly. Now the Council interrupts this praxis to include the Pope and the Bishops together, a “collegiality” to constitute what is called the “Magisterium” for the decision-making process.⁷³ This question is one of the relationship of the centre to the periphery, and is still a burning issue for the Church.

Because “spirituality” is a term used comprehensively to describe so many experiences, I prefer to write of “mysticism,” because it allows me to distinguish between the superficial and the profound, when describing what Karl Rahner called “the mysticism of ordinary life.”⁷⁴ In earlier studies I traced the term “Spirituality” from its biblical roots in the Old Testament as a designation of that which gives life to the cosmos through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁵ How does the Spirit give life and how do we receive life? Sandra Schneider's definition of spirituality is very broad:

The experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms, not of isolation and self-absorption (narcissism?) but of self-transcendence toward the “other” or the ultimate value one perceives.⁷⁶

I prefer the definition of spirituality offered by Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan as “Imagining Wholeness.” The word for “maturity”—*teleios*—is often translated as “perfect” in the New Testament, meaning wholeness or completion rather than moral perfection. “Wholeness” means body, mind and spirit, which must include the psyche.⁷⁷ Catholic spirituality has in the past placed a strong emphasis on renunciation and asceticism, practices often associated with the mystics. Since Vatican II, however, there has been a more holistic view of “human nature,” with God

working in and through human realities. “Finding God in all things” is how Ignatius understands it.⁷⁸

Women need to give voice to and celebrate those aspects of bodiliness that the patriarchy has covered with shame, especially those feminine experiences associated with giving life, such as woman's powers of reproduction. I reflect on how women view “Almighty God,” his remoteness, the understanding of sacrifice and redemption—doctrines that may have different meanings for women than for men. I argue for a theological anthropology that is life-giving and liberating for women, that does not perpetuate “unrelationality” and disgrace.⁷⁹ I explore the issue of “subjectivity” to strengthen my argument for relationality, because the capacity to relate to the “other” is essential for human becoming. The optimism of the Enlightenment was not fulfilled and the Cartesian subject was not the key to the correction and completion of modernity.

According to Habermas, “subject-centred” philosophy is over, and it must be replaced by an inter-subjectivist paradigm of communicative action or understanding.⁸⁰ A more practical definition is outlined in the following chapters especially through the exploration of “developmental psychology,” but two points are worth noting here in terms of theology. Because God's very self is relational, our Creator God creates out of a yearning for the “other.” I show the basic structure of the human person to be relational, and how it is that human/divine becoming can only be achieved through this relationship. As Catherine Keller puts it:

For if I am partially constituted by you even as you partially constitute me, for better or for worse, that is if I flow into, in-fluence you as you in-fluence me, then my subjectivity describes itself as radically open-ended in time as well as space.⁸¹

Feminism and the psychoanalytic

I believe the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the suppressed feelings that surface from the unconscious from as far back as our time in the womb. I know that the application of psychoanalysis to any context outside the clinical is problematic because it is concerned with metaphor, fantasy and analogies; the focus is on meanings and motives that are not easily validated.⁸² But Christians draw on the same repository of wisdom and knowledge within the created order as do secular systems. Both believer and non-believer try to make sense of the same raw material that is human psychology, whilst having different purposes for doing so. The Catholic Church has been cautious on the issue of the operations of grace in psychic terms, claiming that grace can exercise its effects independently of any

psychological considerations,⁸³ and yet “grace” encompasses the psychic processes. There is biblical evidence that God communicates his will through the unconscious and through dreams (Gen. 37: 5; Matt. 2: 19). I am assuming that evaluation of the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective is unnecessary, because although Freud bequeathed us a rich legacy in terms of the unconscious, we recognise that his vision had its limits and was conditioned by its cultural context.⁸⁴ According to the classic psychoanalytic view defined by Freud,⁸⁵ narcissism is an infantile psychic disposition that persists as a lifelong opposition to “object relations” because the libido chooses love objects that resemble themselves, or an ego ideal, rather than the “other” (object) in order to feel loved.⁸⁶ Finding psychoanalytic theories that do justice to the complexity of relationality is crucial, and that is why I propose the provocative and revolutionary idea of Bracha Ettinger's “matrixial” theory.⁸⁷ My original contribution to knowledge is the application of matrixial theory to relational theology revealed through Incarnational Christianity. This theory shows feminine difference as a radical otherness that functions on its own terms beyond the world of the phallus—that is beyond language and gender, as it is presently constituted. Maternal symbolism is a valid but seldom explored avenue to understanding the divine. I hold with Bracha Ettinger that the first stage of “human becoming” is within the womb when a process of “I” and not “I,” emerging in coexistence, shows subjectivity to be more than a single subject.⁸⁸ Ettinger has dared to speculate about the potential significance of “subjectivity as encounter” to open up a dimension of subjectivity that is formed in a relationship rather than under the phallic logic of abjection of the maternal.⁸⁹ Griselda Pollock says:

Neither Irigaray nor Kristeva fully resolves the problem of thinking beyond the phallic dimension as radically and creatively as Bracha Ettinger, whose purpose is not merely to define the shape of phallogocentrism but to allow a feminine matrixial shifting/supplementing of its hegemony.⁹⁰

I explore the implications of Ettinger's matrixial theory in relation to “Mary” and her relationship to the baby in her womb during the later stages of her pregnancy and argue that she is an instance of the “full humanity of women.” It is not enough to concede that the Son of God was born of woman or that in a complex configuration of esoteric doctrine Mary figures as mother/daughter/wife of God.⁹¹ According to Maaïke de Haardt, Mary is a polyvalent figure—she is not just full of grace, she is above all full of meaning.⁹² I believe there is a depth of meaning in the prayer “Blessed is the fruit of thy womb.”

I examine Mary's role in the mystery of the Incarnation and contrast her place in *Lumen Gentium* chapter eight, that affirms her unique role in salvation history while portraying her as intimately united to the Church.⁹³ Later in my study, I will devote a whole chapter to the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church.

The picture of the Church painted by Luke in the Pentecostal scene (Acts. 2: 1-13) was glimpsed at the Second Vatican Council, but Mary, who was so central at Pentecost, was now placed within her history as an “ordinary” woman. This theological, historicizing and biblical Mary presents a sober, sensible and real person. But the devotions, the prayers and pilgrimages, the “religious practices” and lived faith, testify to so much more. As regards methodology, the anthropological assumptions that guide me are those that try to overcome male-centrism and dualism. I invoke Ettinger's theory which portrays those anthropological assumptions that are human centred, unifying and realist to be our divine-human origins.⁹⁴

The marvel of Mary's physical maternity in early patristic writings is not so much that it makes her motherhood transcendent, but that it makes God immanent. Catholic theology has retained the symbol of mother but lost the association with the flesh, “the idea of Mary's motherhood being seen as a ‘metaphysics of femininity’ destroys its significance, because the whole point of insisting that Christ was born of a woman was to show that there was no longer any possibility of a pure metaphysics once God had become flesh.”⁹⁵

Notes

¹ Velling, Terry, “Becoming Human,” *The Way* (March 2013).

² Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *Sexism and God Talk* (London, SCM Press, 1983).

³ Ricoeur, Paul, “On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation,” in *Life in Quest of Narrative*, edited by D. Wood (London & New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁴ The Congregation is international, so it is divided into geographical regions called “provinces.”

⁵ Cenacle Sisters, (Acts of the Chapters and Annals of the Congregation of the Cenacle 1825–1856).

⁶ Flannery, Austin (ed.), *Documents of Vatican II*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Costello, 1975).

⁷ Faggioli, Massimo, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Rome: Paulist Press, 2012). See also, Corkery, Jim, Mulligan, Suzanne & O’Hanlon, Gerry, *Repairing the Harvest: Fifty Years after Vatican II* (Co. Dublin: The Columba Press, 2012).

⁸ O’Malley, John W., “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006), 5.

-
- ⁹ Schneiders, Sandra, "Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline 13. Minding the Spirit," in *The Study of Christian Spirituality*, edited by M. B. Dreyer (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005).
- ¹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969).
- ¹¹ Flax, Jane, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 39.
- ¹² Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes* no. 64, 903.
- ¹³ Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM, 1983).
- ¹⁴ *Annales de la Société de Notre-Dame du Cénacle ou de La Retraite (1825–1856)*.
- ¹⁵ Stogdon, Katharine M., *The Risk of Surrender*, Unpublished thesis, University of Manchester (2004).
- ¹⁶ Buckley, Michael J., "Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, edited by Louis K. Dupré, Don E. Saliers & John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 28.
- ¹⁷ Thompson, William M. (ed.), "Berulle and the French School: Selected Writings," *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).
- ¹⁸ Buckley, "Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality," 54.
- ¹⁹ Bremond, Henri, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1930).
- ²⁰ The Cenacle, from the Latin *cenaculum*, is first of all a room for the *cena*, the supper room. It has come to signify the gathering place of the disciples at key moments in their history with Jesus.
- ²¹ Heiding, Fredrik S. J. *Ignatian Spirituality at Ecclesial Frontiers* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).
- ²² Jantzen, Grace, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- ²³ Jantzen, Grace, *Becoming Divine* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
- ²⁴ Irigaray, Luce, *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- ²⁵ Ettinger, Bracha L., "Matrixial Trans-subjectivity," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2–3) (2006): 218–22; Conference attended March 23–25, 2012 in Dublin, "The Womb/Intra-uterine Complex & the Analytic Encounter: Bracha L. Ettinger's Theory of the Matrixial."
- ²⁶ Benjamin, Jessica, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).
- ²⁷ Ettinger, "Matrixial Trans-subjectivity," 218–22.
- ²⁸ Kerr, Fergus, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 11.
- ²⁹ O'Malley, John W., *What Happened at Vatican II* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008).
- ³⁰ Freud, Sigmund, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74).

-
- ³¹ Irigaray, Luce, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 62.
- ³² Edean, Philip, "How to Think About Mary's Privileges," *Priests and People* 7/5 (May) (2003): 300.
- ³³ Ettinger, L.Bracha, *Woman-Other-Thing: A Matrixial Touch. Matrix Borderlines* (Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1993). "Matrixial" meaning "womb, place in which thing is developed."
- ³⁴ Schneiders, Sandra, "Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," 18.
- ³⁵ Proffoff, Ira, *The Symbolic and the Real: A New Psychological Approach to the Fuller Experience of Human Existence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.
- ³⁷ Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton & Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005).
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Chadwick, H., *St. Augustine: P Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- ⁴⁰ Jesus, T. O., *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila* (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1980–87).
- ⁴¹ Rahner, Karl, *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961–92). Vol. 13, 125; Rahner, Karl, *Spirit in the World*, translated by William Dych (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 129.
- ⁴² Moustakas, Clark, *Heuristic Research* (London: Sage, 1990).
- ⁴³ Macintyre, Alasdair, "Narrative Community and Moral Life," in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, edited by Alasdair Macintyre (Paris: Notre Dame Press, 1984).
- ⁴⁴ Jones, Gregory L., "Essay on 'Narrative, Community and the Moral Life' by Alasdair Macintyre," *Modern Theology* 4: (2008): 53–69.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Graham, Elaine, Walton, Heather & Ward, Frances (eds), *Theological Reflection: Sources* (London: SCM, 2007), 89.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ Ricoeur, Paul, "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Idea of Revelation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Lewis S. Mudge (London: SCM, 1980).
- ⁴⁹ Crites, Stephen, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (3) (1971).
- ⁵⁰ Metz, Johann Baptist, *Faith in History and Society* (New York: Seabury, 1980).
- ⁵¹ Johnson, Elizabeth, *Friends of God and Prophets* (London: SCM Press, 1998).
- ⁵² Schneiders, Sandra M., *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 36.
- ⁵³ Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *Sexism and God Talk* (London: SCM Press 1983), 19.
- ⁵⁴ Ruether, Rosemary Radford, *The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- ⁵⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *Discipleship of Equals* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994).
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁸ Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk*.

⁵⁹ Jones, Serene, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 22.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Isherwood, Lisa (ed.), *Feminist Spirituality: An a to Z of Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 121.

⁶² Foucault, Michel, *Afterword; the Subject and Power; Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd. ed. edited by H. Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁶³ Bernauer, James & Jeremy Carrette, *Michel Foucault and Theology; the Politics of Religious Experience* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Foucault Michel, *The Use of Pleasure* (London: Penguin, 1984), 9.

⁶⁴ Foucault, Michel, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1972).

⁶⁵ Ettinger, "Matrixial Trans-Subjectivity."

⁶⁶ Beattie, Tina, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation* (London: Continuum, 2002), 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Rahner, Karl, "The Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations* vol. 20 (London/New York: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961).

⁶⁹ Endean, Philip, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Kerr, Fergus, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 91.

⁷¹ Rahner, Karl, "Experience of Self, Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations* vol. 3 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961–92), 135.

⁷² Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II, Dei Verbum* para. 8, 754.

⁷³ Ibid., *Lumen Gentium*, 374–6.

⁷⁴ Rahner, Karl, *Mystics in Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroads, 1988).

⁷⁵ Lyons, Kathleen, "Creator Spirit in Modern Theology," Dissertation submitted for B.Ed. degree (Nottingham University, 1972).

⁷⁶ Schneiders, *Beyond Patching*, 73.

⁷⁷ Isherwood, Lisa & Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 149.

⁷⁸ Puhl, Louis, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951). Contemplation to obtain Divine Love, 101.

⁷⁹ Delgado, Teresa, "This is My Body Given for You," in *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology*, edited by Susan Abraham & Elena Procaro-Foley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

⁸⁰ Habermas, Jürgen, *Theory of Communicative Action; Reason and the Rationalisation of Society* vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

⁸¹ Keller, Catherine, "Seeking and Sucking," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology*, edited by Rebecca S Chopp & Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 58.

-
- ⁸² Meissner, W. W., *The Psychology of a Saint: Ignatius of Loyola* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).
- ⁸³ Egan, Harvey, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis Mo.: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976).
- ⁸⁴ Wulff, David M. (ed.), *Psychology of Religion*, 2nd Ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 306.
- ⁸⁵ Freud, Sigmund, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* vol. 14, translated by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1914).
- ⁸⁶ Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*, 355.
- ⁸⁷ Ettinger, "Matrixial Trans-Subjectivity," 218–22.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid.
- ⁹⁰ Pollock, Griselda, "Thinking the Feminine," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 (1–5) (2004): 35.
- ⁹¹ Beattie Tina, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London: New York: Routledge, 2006).
- ⁹² de Haardt, Maaïke, "The Marion Paradox: Marian Practices as a Road to a New Mariology," *Harvard Theological Review* 19 (2) (2011): 177.
- ⁹³ *Documents of Vatican II, Lumen Gentium*, 413.
- ⁹⁴ Gebara, Ivone & Maria Clara Bingemer, "Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor," in *Liberation Theology* (Tunbridge Wells UK: Orbis Books, 1989).
- ⁹⁵ Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 99.

PART I:

FROM MONASTIC TO APOSTOLIC

CHAPTER ONE

PRE-VATICAN II CHURCH

1945–62—My Experience of Cenacle Religious Life

By the time I joined the Cenacle community in Grayshott in 1945, the fifty sisters who made up the community formed a self-subsistent society, economically sound. All vegetables were grown on the premises, carefully cooked and skilfully reheated if any were left over. Everything we wore was made by the sisters, including shoes. There was great economy practiced sometimes called “poverty.” Lights were not to be left on and must be dimmed at night. The restrictions on the use of water that prevailed during the war still pertained. No daily baths. If there was a retreat of 20 or 30 women, everyone was extremely busy, especially in the kitchen and dining room. Potatoes and vegetables were to be peeled and cut, dishes and pans to be washed. Community meals required two sittings—“second table” was first so that some sisters could serve “first table” community and the retreatants. I preferred to read aloud during meals to the community or retreatants or even to serve at table, in preference to helping in the kitchen or washing pans; but everyone has to take her turn at these tasks, and the rota changed every week. Some tasks carried the aura of humility—I would never say I hated certain jobs because such strong negative feelings had no place in the psyche of a prospective saint! As far as I was concerned, this spiritual ambition was the highest I could aim for as a baptised Christian. To be a “saint,” that is to say to achieve intimate union the God, was my ambition. No-one ever mentioned “mysticism,” as that suggested strange phenomena that smacked of heresy.

However, I was happy with the many spiritual exercises that filled the day, starting with meditation at 6.00am. I did not like getting up at 5.15 am or taking my turn to call each sister. Mass was at 7.15 am. The Choir Religious said “Lauds and Terce,” hours of the Divine Office, while the rest of us were busy with our domestic duties. I was always delighted when sometimes given two half hours of adoration—it quite literally “made my day.” Also, I was pleased when we could attend the retreatants’ mass in addition to the earlier community one. Quite often, the priest who was