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The Beatification of Mary MacKillop

What it Reveals of Experiences of Women in the Contemporary Australian Catholic Church

Anne Tormey

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Edith Cowan University

Faculty of Arts
June 1998
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
Abstract

The Christian faith in its Catholic expression continues to give meaning and direction to the lives of many contemporary Australian women. Nevertheless, for many women conscientised to the reality of patriarchal sexism the experience of belonging to the church is one of recurring struggle. Mary MacKillop in the nineteenth century co-founded the Sisters of St Joseph to address the educational needs of poor children in isolated areas of Australia. Her tenacity in maintaining a degree of autonomy for her institute led to her excommunication and to subsequent painful experiences of opposition from male ecclesiastics. In her lifetime she was regarded as a saint. Her beatification in Sydney by Pope John Paul II in January 1995 was a national, as well as a civic and religious event. My thesis is that her beatification mirrors even as it appears to contest the marginalised place of women in the Australian Catholic Church.

This study approaches the beatification of Mary MacKillop through the interpretive lens of feminist philosophy and Christian feminist theology. In exploring the ways in which the event reveals both subtle and overt forms of patriarchal sexism operative within the contemporary Australian Catholic Church it utilises qualitative research methods. An analysis of the interview data of Catholic women selected from varied backgrounds, from different parts of Australia is central to the study, because the experience of these women constitutes a key theological resource. Written and visual documentary accounts of the event are also analysed. This research identifies some of the major sites of struggle for women in the church. It also signals that there is a gap between papal conceptions of Christian womanhood and women's actual experience of what has been and what continues to be influential for them.

The evidence reveals that this national, civic and religious event was primarily due to the agency of the Sisters of St Joseph. It raised awareness within their institute of the difficulties and challenges for women in the church and of the wide concern with spiritual issues within Australian society. The public liturgy to celebrate the beatification of Mary MacKillop conveyed powerful but conflicting messages for many women. Women interviewed in this study vary in their interpretation of the beatification. Many have major difficulty with the whole concept of sainthood, the processes of canonisation, the publicity and commercialisation associated with the beatification and the role of the Pope within it, given his theology in relation to women. Their resistance however was restrained by the desire not to diminish in any way Mary MacKillop in the past, nor the Sisters of St Joseph in the present. Most of them concur that overall the promotion of this woman was for the good. For most of the women in this study, their role models are not saints, but contemporary women, or women they have known through mutual relationship. Their awareness that patriarchal sexism constitutes a major distortion of the gospel of Jesus Christ leads some women to question their own forms of collusion. Many women seek new ways to express their faith and to deepen their spiritual search, while continuing to claim their Catholic identity.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature.

Date 14 December 1998
Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I am indebted for their contribution to this thesis. I have greatly valued the support, encouragement, patience and inspiration of my supervisors: Cynthia Dixon at Edith Cowan University, Carmel Leavey from the Institute of Religious Studies, Strathfield, and Elaine Wainwright from Banyo Seminary, Brisbane.

I am deeply indebted to the Sisters of St Joseph. Firstly, to Sr Mary Cresp for her initial openness to this project and to the community in South Perth for conversation and the loan of resources in the initial phases of this research. To archivists, Sr Benedetta Bennett and Sr Philomena Kalmund at the Archives of the Sisters of St Joseph in North Sydney I owe a special thanks. I am particularly grateful to the sisters who agreed to be interviewed, and who commented on drafts of this thesis. Without the assistance of the Sisters of St Joseph this project would never have become a reality.

I am also indebted to the other women subjects of this study for agreeing to be interviewed and, as well, to many of them for reading drafts of this thesis and for their helpful comments and suggestions. I also thank other women and men who were involved with the beatification and who shared their impressions with me. Many women who have formed part of the weekly meeting on women and theology here in Perth over the past few years have sustained me through their faith, commitment and insight, for which I am appreciative. I thank those who read chapters of this thesis and give me their responses.

Anne Paull willingly and generously gave me assistance with word processing on many occasions for which I sincerely thank her. I am deeply grateful to my family, for their interest, encouragement and support.

I am grateful to Edith Cowan University for financial assistance provided through a postgraduate research scholarship, and a research grant.

Last but not least, I wish to thank the sisters of my community, the Perth Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, for the time, space, resources, and opportunity to pursue studies on women and religion - for making it all possible. I am indebted more than I can ever say to women in this community with whom I have lived, worked, struggled, prayed and celebrated, to those in the present and to many who have died.
Table of Contents

Abstract 1

Declaration ii

Acknowledgements iii

Introduction 1-16

   Genesis of the Thesis
   Methodology
   Significance and Limits
   Thesis Outline

Chapter One:
Women and Experience: Feminist Theological Perspectives 17-37

   Women as Subject
   Women's Experience
   Women's Agency and Resistance
   Feminist Hermeneutics
   Feminist Hermeneutic of the Thesis

Chapter Two:
Women and Sanctity: Preliminary Considerations 38-78

   Saints and their Canonisation: An Historical Perspective
   Sanctity within a Feminist Perspective
   Mary MacKillop: Biographical Outline
   Mary MacKillop and the Process of her Canonisation
   Mary MacKillop: Historiography
   The Context of her Beatification

Chapter Three:
Women and Ecclesial Authority: The Experience of Mary MacKillop and of contemporary Sisters of St Joseph 79-123

   Ecclesial Authority
   Mary MacKillop and the Conflicts she experienced with Father Woods, Bishops Sheil, James and Matthew Quinn, and Bishop Reynolds
   The Sisters of St Joseph: Preparing for the Beatification
   Sisters Reconsideration of their Role within the Church
   The Relationship between Mary MacKillop's Experience and that of contemporary Sisters of St Joseph
Chapter Four:  
The Beatification Event: 18-19 January 1995

Issues of Difference in Interpretation
- Who was being Celebrated: Mary MacKillop or Pope John Paul II?
- The Nature of the Event: Civic or Religious?
- The Nature of the Publicity: Acceptable or Problematic?

Women's Resistance
- Morning Prayer in St Mary's Cathedral
- The Beatification Mass at Randwick
  - Symbolism of the Eucharist
  - Preparation for the Mass
  - The Celebration of the Beatification Mass

Women's Interpretation of the Beatification: Some Further Reflections
- Women who Participated
- Women who Chose not to Participate or who were Disinterested.

Chapter Five:  
Women and the Church

Women's Experiences of the Church in Australia
Women's Difficulties with Traditional Liturgy
Women's Efforts to Effect Change within the Church
Pope John Paul II's Teaching on Women within the Beatification Event
Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology
- Pope John Paul II’s ‘Letter to Women’
- Women's Perceptions of Real Role Models for them as Christian Women

Chapter Six:  
Women and Spirituality in an Australian Context

The Spirituality of Mary MacKillop
The Spirituality of Contemporary Sisters of St Joseph
Spirituality, Art and Nationality
  - The Mary MacKillop Art Award
  - Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney

The Spiritual Experience of Women in this Study
Spirituality within an Australian Context

Conclusion

Appendices

Bibliography
Introduction

The beatification of Mary MacKillop, co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph, was celebrated in Sydney on the 19th of January 1995, in the presence of Pope John Paul II. This event was televised nationwide in Australia, publicised in all the national newspapers, and marked by a special debate within both Houses of the National Parliament. During her lifetime, however, Mary MacKillop had been excommunicated and had suffered opposition and denigration from ecclesiastics, because in a complex set of circumstances she had chosen fidelity to her conscience over uncritical obedience to ecclesiastical authority. In the public ceremonies approving her as a role model for emulation there was a remarkable silence about this aspect of her struggle, and its pertinence for today. This doubly paradoxical aspect intrigued me and prompted me to ask how contemporary women within the church in Australia interpreted the beatification of Mary MacKillop.

While the beatification of Mary MacKillop could at first appear as a recognition of the central role of women in the Catholic Church in Australia, my claim in this thesis is that the beatification event actually mirrored the marginalised place of women in the contemporary Australian Catholic Church. Therefore my main concern in this study is with the politics of meaning inscribed within this event. In critically analysing the religious and political processes of difference and domination refracted within it, I focus on both socio-symbolic and political-structural dimensions. I intend to address the question: what does the beatification of Mary MacKillop reveal of the experience of women in the contemporary Australian Catholic Church.¹

¹ Throughout the text of this thesis when I am speaking for myself as writer of this study I will generally use the first person singular. On those occasions in which I include myself with the reader in the development of thought or argument, I will use the third person plural.
The place of women in society and in religion has been highly contested within Australia in the latter part of the twentieth century. This contest reflects the widening concern in relation to the status of women within contemporary societies worldwide. I maintain that within this distinctively Australian event of the beatification of Mary MacKillop the agency and resistance of women in the church, the place of the sacred, the place of Aboriginality and of multiculturalism in the church and Australian society are readily discernible. I rely substantively on the interpretations of the beatification held by women, drawn from different social locations within the Australian Catholic Church. I also articulate some of the theological challenges of Australian Catholic women to Christian theology and to the contemporary Catholic Church which stem from their historical-religious and political struggles within the church. Furthermore, I consider that the paradoxes of papal recognition of women and papal theology in relation to women; the assertiveness of religious women, and the imminent death of many religious communities, merit serious examination, as do the issues of popular religiosity and spirituality within a so-called secular context.


Strongly apparent in the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, 1994, and the Fourth International United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995, both of which were attended by a delegation from the Vatican. These Conferences provided the Vatican with further impetus to reflect on the role of women in society and constitute part of the context for the beatification event which is positioned between these two International Conferences. The Vatican Delegation to the Cairo Conference was intent on upholding the central role of the family in society. It was criticized in the world press for the acrimonious diplomacy of its spokespeople and for their overt collusion with Muslim fundamentalist societies. The Vatican Delegation to the Beijing Conference was chaired by a woman, Mary Ann Glendon. At the Conference the Vatican emerged as a strong supporter of resource allocation for women's programmes and for a total life span approach to women's health issues. The definitive declaration by the Vatican, in 1994, of the inadmissibility of ordaining women to the priestly ministry provoked reaction within and beyond the church. It constitutes part of the political and ecclesiastical context of the beatification event.

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The Genesis of this Thesis

The genesis of my interest in such a research project goes back a long way and is strongly related to my membership of a religious community of women within the Roman Catholic Church. The early years of my life in religious community date from the period prior to the reform legislated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), when norms for religious community living were standardised across the world following the revision of the Code of Canon Law in 1917. The resultant highly routinised and regulated pattern of life left only a small measure of autonomy to most women who were not in leadership roles. In large measure, feminine religious life from then on did not correspond to the vision of its foundresses/founders. Furthermore, the role of clerical men as sacramental celebrants and spiritual guides structured religious women’s dependence on them in day to day life. It was also reflected in a whole patterning of deference and respect, and in a certain rarification of the individual incumbent of a clerical role. An ‘aesthetic of submission’, through which the central images, symbols, metaphors, narrative interpretations, rituals of Christian practice explicitly and implicitly coach and tame women to surrender to patriarchal and kyriarchal prerogatives, was predominant in women’s communities. This explains why most women did not question women’s virtual absence from the Second Vatican Council, nor the meagre extent of women’s involvement in the enunciation of church reforms.

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5 2,500 of the world’s bishops attended the Council. During the first two sessions of the Council the topic of women was virtually ignored. Both within Europe and in the United States by the autumn of 1964 women’s exclusion from the Council caused considerable comment. At the third session twenty-three lay and religious women were invited to join the auditors. Executive Secretary of the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate in Rome, Australian Rosemarie Goldie was one of them. They moved beyond the prescriptions of their role, spoke in their own voices. Banned from the Commission on Religious Life, they were active in the Commission on the Laity. They were the first women in history to participate in an ecumenical council. See Helen Marie Cernick, ‘Cracking the Power: Women at the Second Vatican Council’, in Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski, eds., Women & Theology, 40. The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 62-82.
This period also coincided with the post war influx of European immigrants to Australia, which stretched the existing Catholic schools to breaking point and led to the movement for state aid to private schools. Later, I came to realise that initiatives of religious orders, taken to respond to the requests of the bishops to provide Catholic schooling in the post-war period, actually deflected the goals of religious life. Enormous strains were placed on religious communities. Sisters were often poorly prepared, heavily overworked, sometimes completely unsuited to teaching. Nevertheless, without their efforts the Catholic school system would not have survived.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the renewal of religious life, the coming of state aid for Catholic and Independent Schools, and the advent of lay teachers were to effect a great liberalising of institutional life. Gradual change to ordinary dress, more flexible community arrangements, opportunities for religious renewal, education and travel, reconnection with members of one's family and membership of a variety of networks were some of the results. In experiences of spiritual renewal designed to put sisters in touch with the sources of the Christian life, many came to experience the loss of self, loss of voice, the disconnection from the body and from deep feelings of anger, grief and resentment which their effort to live conventually had entailed.

My coming to critical awareness of the place of women in the Church dates from 1980, when I was studying in France. I heard then a Belgian theologian, Peré de Loch't, and Marie Therese van Lunen Chenu, President of the European Association, Femmes et Hommes dans L'Eglise, speak of struggles for women within the Church. Peré de Loch't, formerly a member of the commission appointed by Pope Paul VI to advise him on the issue of contraception, spoke of his personal experiences. Firstly, of his earlier conviction that the Pope would pronounce in favour of the practice of contraception; then, of his personal crisis of faith after the publication of the encyclical, Humanae Vitae; and of his subsequent struggle to be faithful both to his experience of life as he knew it from pastoral practice, and to the magisterium of the church. This European association emphasised the partnership of women and men in the church. To this day it remains one important voice of feminist theology in Europe. In the United States I met numerous women in religious communities. Their advocacy of a reconsideration of women's role within the church had brought prominent members of religious
communities into conflict with the Vatican, and resulted in their less than successful attempts to initiate a new form of dialogue with Rome. Later, I had the opportunity to pursue women's studies, with a particular focus on women and religion. My experience as a student of women theologians was very significant for me. Scholars such as Sarah Coakley, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Margaret Miles demonstrated painstaking commitment in unweaving political, doctrinal, devotional and sexual strands within the Scriptures and the tradition; while Chung Hyun Kyung made me more aware of struggles of women within the so called Third World. It is my struggle to understand what it means to be a woman in the Catholic Church at the end of the twentieth century which has given rise to this thesis.

Hence my research perspective is one of a feminist scholar of religion. It is informed by a critical appreciation of women's scholarship in religion over the past thirty years. Women theologians within the Christian Church have sought to bring about an immense shift from the dominant hegemonic paradigm, in which women's subjectivity and agency are largely effaced, to a new paradigm inclusive of and life enhancing for both women and men. This new paradigm, designed to counter prevailing dualisms and dichotomies, is rooted in a vision of authentic relations and balanced well-being, not only between people but between people and the earth. Hence it emphasises equality, mutuality and interdependence. Many women scholars in their serious critique of the theological tradition maintain that in essence the Christian tradition is neither patriarchal nor androcentric. By retrieving and reclaiming the central role and agency of women in the early church, and women's largely effaced, but significant contributions throughout historical Christianity, they have revisioned symbols, myths and the language of the tradition, asked new questions and opened new horizons.


feminist perspective, pluralistic as theology now is generally, draws on multi-disciplinary perspectives. Some feminist theologians have moved away from Christianity. Most Christian feminist theologians stand within the tradition of liberation theology.

Methodologically, these women scholars despite their diversity acknowledge historical consciousness, the value of ideological criticism, and the importance of contextuality and situatedness in the interpretation of human experience. They utilise women's experience and activity as a resource and as an evaluative norm for their theology. They also recognise that throughout the history of Christianity the predominant pattern of relationship between men and women has been one of dominance and submission, based on a belief in women's essential inferiority and in the value of male hierarchy. Hence they are concerned to promote the human flourishing of women. Since the 1980s this has alerted them to oppressive patterns of relationship which also occur whenever some people are dominated by other people on the basis of class and race or any other form of positionality. They are that these forms of injustice not only intersect, but that they can be multiple in their impact.


9 Notably Mary Daly, whose early work, The Church and the Second Sex (New York: Harper and Row, 1968) identified sexism as a major systemic problem within the Church. Her subsequent book, Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) traced her rejection of Christianity. She radicalised the symbol of God the Father and argued that there is an interrelationship between a masculinist symbol system, and masculinist power structures. Thus she identified the exclusively male imaging of God within Christianity as a major issue. Daphne Hampson articulates the incompatibility for her between feminism and Christianity in Theology and Feminism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). See also, Daphne Hampson, ed., Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity (London: SPCK, 1996).

9 Liberation theology emerged in Latin America in the 1960s. There are now Asian, African, African-American as well as Latin-American liberation theologies, all concerned with the 'non persons' of history. They all take as their starting point the revelation of God which comes through the experiences of men and women in situations of oppression. Liberation theologians believe that all theological reflection should lead to action for justice, which in turn should lead to further theological reflection. God for them is always the God manifest in the scriptures who is on the side of the poor and the rejected. However, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues that 'because Christian symbols and thought are deeply embedded in all patriarchal traditions and sexist structures, and because women belong to all races, classes and cultures, the scope of feminist theology is more radical and universal than liberation theology'. Discipleship, 68.
Methodology

My feminist perspective influences all aspects of the design of this research. Feminist research as such entails explicit acknowledgment of the commitment, standpoint and conscious partiality of the researcher. It also involves a deliberate effort to replace the dominant perspective with the perspective of marginalised women. Therefore symbols, concepts, rhetoric, systems and structures are analysed and assessed in terms of their influence on, and relation to, the historical reality of women. Additional requirements of feminist research include a commitment to praxis-based and change-oriented research, to interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives and to the ethical requirements of respecting the subjectivity of research participants. However, to validate the heterogeneous experiences of women does present an ethical dilemma in feminist research. On the one hand there is the challenge to understand and to respect women's experience and on the other, the need to question and to challenge women's 'taken for granted' experience.

Within this project in feminist theology, I draw from the disciplines of history, sociology and theology to contextualise the beatification event. My main primary source in interpreting the life and work of Mary MacKillop is her own reflection on her life experiences contained within her letters, and her circulars to the sisters. Some of these are available in published form. Mary MacKillop has been the subject of a number of biographies, both popular and scholarly. I attend to the historical circumstances which give rise to them, as well as to the social location, interests, values and intended audience of the authors. Each text has its own shape and meaning. I also examine the social construction of sainthood in different historical periods, utilising historical, and theological resources. Thus I explore the 'world behind the text' of the beatification event. Official church documentation, feminist theological literature, as well as mainstream theological literature, form part of the reference material.


12 The original letters are available in the Archives of the Sisters of St Joseph in Mount Street, North Sydney.
Apart from the letters of Mary MacKillop, I rely on the five other main primary sources, the interview data, the actual television documentary of the beatification Mass, other audio-visual documentation, newspaper and journal articles, and documents authored by Pope John Paul II. Given my focus in this thesis on the experience of women in the contemporary Australian Catholic Church, I make particular use of the transcripts of interviews with twenty four women. For me they constitute a key theological resource.13

Most of the interviews with these women were held in 1995, in the year of the beatification event, the others as ongoing processing of the data suggested the need for additional interviews. The selection of interviewees was guided by a need, firstly, for a significant number of Sisters of St Joseph because of their responsibility for organising and publicising the event and because of its obvious implications for them. However, besides interviewing sisters who had key roles, I interviewed sisters from different social locations within the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph. Then I tried to ensure diversity among the remainder of my interviewees. They represent women from different social locations, Catholics either practising as Catholics, some of whom would have attended celebrations either in Sydney or elsewhere to mark the event, women no longer strongly affiliated with, or disaffected from the church. They include single, married, divorced, remarried and religious celibate women. They range in age from the early twenties to seventy; most of them are between ages forty and sixty. Some were recommended by Sisters of St Joseph. Some women themselves recommended other women. Three men were also interviewed, two of them clerics significant in the beatification proceedings. The third was a lay member of the beatification task force set up in 1993 by the Sisters of St Joseph. These interviews were unstructured and were not recorded. They were undertaken to widen understanding and for the purpose of validating emerging insights.

Given both my understanding of key issues in feminist theology, and the actual composition of the contemporary Australian Catholic Church, I saw it as important to

13 See Appendix I
include women of colour so that their voices could be heard, their point of view presented. I was also aware that it was important for me not to try to appropriate their experience, nor to assume I could ever truly understand it. More than a quarter of the women are from ethnic backgrounds other than Anglo/Celtic and comprise four Asian Australians (born overseas); and two Aboriginal women. Two women are European born. Several women have immigrant parents. Most of the women are tertiary educated. Professionally they are involved in journalism, public relations, research, social work, adult education, community development, university lecturing and management. Many of them have been teachers. One is unemployed on an invalid pension, another has known a significant period of unemployment, while still another is a university student. They are all women of faith, committed to the integration of their spiritual lives, to working for greater justice within the community, now, or in the past, within the Catholic Church. While only three would describe themselves as 'feminist' they would all support feminist values, such as the right of women to personal self-determination, opposition to discrimination based on sex, class, race and ability; the importance of reciprocity, mutuality and connectedness in human relating. While they are drawn from Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, many of them have spent time living in rural communities. Many of them have lived in different cities, in different states of Australia.

In the process of interviewing, as well as in the analysis of interviews, I have utilised methods of qualitative research in the human sciences. These are consonant with principles intrinsic to feminist research and suit the heuristic nature of the study. The interviews followed structured questions, but opportunity for free flowing dialogue

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14 Qualitative research tends to generate questions about the process by which different phenomena or events contribute to an outcome; to ask questions about the meaning of events to the people involved in them and about the social context on these events. In attempting to understand events and situations this method develops theories about them during the research itself. It involves an ongoing process of data collection and analysis relying heavily on narrative/contextual analysis. It does not try to eliminate the influence of the researcher, but to understand it, to make it explicit and to use it effectively.


16 See Appendix II.
was provided when it was needed. The questions relate to the women’s experience of
the event; their estimation or otherwise of its significance for the country as a whole,
their identification with Mary MacKillop, their identification of significant role models
for them as Christian women, their experience of the contemporary Australian Catholic
Church, their perceptions of criticism of the event, and of ways in which it had affected
them, if at all, negatively. All participants were provided with a transcript of their
interview to amend in whatever way each saw as appropriate. Subsequently, each
woman, among those who were available to be contacted, was asked to respond to my
(mis)interpretations of her experience and to the use of her words in the text of this
thesis. A number of women kindly read and commented on drafts of this thesis. I
returned to Sydney in the latter phases of writing to consult with members of the Sisters
of St Joseph and to enable them to comment on the draft text.

After an initial open and an axial coding of the interview transcripts, I analysed the
interviews of the Sisters of St Joseph, because they supply data in relation to their
intention, their message, their choice of media to present their message and the
audience they sought to reach in relation to the beatification. The sisters refer to the
principles of simplicity, hospitality, reconciliation and inclusivity which they had
collectively decided as being revelatory of the spirit of Mary MacKillop. These were to
be mandatory guiding principles in their preparations for the beatification. However,
early in 1994, after the announcement that Pope John Paul II would visit Sydney in
January 1995 to beatify Mary MacKillop, Cardinal Clancy, Archbishop of Sydney,
appointed a Papal Visit Office to organise the event. The struggle of Sisters of St
Joseph to retain their autonomy and their initiative in relation to processes and events
they had already set in place for the beatification of their foundress becomes apparent in
the interview transcripts. Several other women among those who were interviewed also
adverted to their awareness of this struggle. Several sisters refer to Mary MacKillop’s
struggle with particular ecclesiastics in interpreting their own struggles with the
ecclesial authorities in preparing for the beatification. Interrogation of this emerging
pattern led me to turn to both primary and secondary sources to examine the gendered
struggles of Mary MacKillop in the past. These reveal the enormity of her sufferings
and the strength of her resistance. The absence of any reference to, or recognition of the
nature and extent of her suffering and of the quality of her resistance in the official ceremonies posed a real question for me.

Discussion with individual Sisters of St Joseph in relation to the first draft of this thesis revealed differences in their perceptions of struggle with male officials of the Papal Visit Office, prior to the beatification. Each of them, however, concurred with the interpretation that the struggle between the sisters and male officials was real although their perceptions of the reasons for the struggle and of the nature of the struggle differed. This led me to review and to nuance my interpretation of the conflict. These sisters also stressed that their focus in presenting Mary MacKillop had been on her legacy, on her solidarity with ordinary people, not on her resistance and the suffering entailed in the process. One of them said by way of explanation: 'it is normal for women to suffer in the church'. Nevertheless, it is this aspect of Mary MacKillop's life which her biographers in the past and in the present examine at length, and which the media, the politicians and the public noted. While her obedience, and charity under provocation, established her heroic virtue in the process of canonisation, her resistance to unlawful claims of authority and her rejection by notable ecclesial authorities helped her to fit the myth of the Australian hero/ine. The nature of her struggle, and the suffering it entailed, is of obvious interest in research undertaken from a feminist perspective. Besides Sisters of St Joseph who had positions of leadership and responsibility in relation to the beatification, all of whom were Australian born of Anglo-Celtic origins, I interviewed sisters who were migrants, working with migrant communities. For each of these interviewees, the beatification was a double celebration, a celebration of her heritage as a Sister of St Joseph and of her societal inclusion as an Australian Catholic of migrant background. It can be argued that the identity of the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph in relation to the church and Australian society has been subject to evolution through the process of preparing for and celebrating the beatification of their foundress.

Other women interviewed consisted of those who had been actively involved, either as organisers or as participants, in one or more of the events; women who had taken an interest in media representations and women who were indifferent to, or had
deliberately resisted taking an interest in the event. In relation to the Mass at Randwick the interview analysis identifies women’s agency in pushing the boundaries of existing liturgical norms so that people traditionally marginalised, such as Aboriginal people, representatives of migrant communities, and women in general would be more truly represented. In order to appreciate better these initiatives, and women’s appraisal of them, they will be considered in relation to the liturgical texts, the ABC televised documentary, newspaper accounts, and texts of the Pope’s homilies. Women who had participated were positive in their evaluations of the experience as a joyous, festive, religious experience. Some evaluate it in terms of what it meant for the country, for women, for the Aborigines, for multicultural Catholics. Aboriginal women involved in the smoking ceremony, which replaced the incensing within the traditional Roman beatification ceremony, spoke of what it meant for them as Aboriginal Catholic women. While several women comment on the spontaneity and warmth of the Pope, many women considered that the focus on Mary MacKillop was eclipsed by his presence. There was ambiguity surrounding the presence of John Paul II - symbol of unity within the church, central focus of the liturgy; and defender of a theology which continues to exclude women from governing, sanctifying and official teaching roles within the church.

Most of the women interviewed referred to their experience of belonging to the church as one of difficulty. Many of these women spoke at length of their life experience within the church. I considered the diversity within the responses in relation to age, culture, ethnicity and marital status. Many of these women spoke of the prescriptions they have experienced within the church in relation to ideal behaviour for them as women. In Chapter 5, I juxtapose interpretation of their experience as women in the church with an interpretation of the Pope’s homily on women during morning prayer in St Mary’s Cathedral. The original homily, drafted within Australia, was based on the Scripture readings for the occasion and emphasised the themes of justice and righteousness. However, in Rome this text was replaced by a homily which emphasised papal teaching on the consecrated life for women religious, and summarised Pope John Paul II’s previous teaching on women. The Pope both emphasised the equality of women, and stressed the complementarity of the roles of men and women, of their make
up and meaning as persons. In Chapter 5 I further interpret the contents of the Pope’s homily on women within the hermeneutic of this thesis, which I will explain in the following chapter. I examine his statement that ‘a mistaken anthropology is at the root of the failure of society to understand church teaching on the true role of women’ by referring to feminist theological perspectives on theological anthropology.

The Pope emphasises the role of motherhood, and the significance of Mary of Nazareth, the Virgin-Mother of Jesus Christ, as exemplar of the true Christian concept of femininity. Analysis of the responses of the women interviewees as to whom they considered as having been strongly formative of their own understanding of Christian femininity, shows that it is ostensibly living women, or women whom they have known personally. Many women refer to their own mothers, not the saints, nor Mary the Mother of Jesus. Only three women refer to Mary of Nazareth positively. One woman reflects: ‘Mary is presented by men as a female authority but I don’t know a woman who thinks Mary is an authority figure...The men sentimentalise her and the women don’t like her’. (Caroline).

Women, other than the Sisters of St Joseph, are mixed in their responses to Mary MacKillop. Many speak of their capacity to identify with aspects of her life, her strength, courage, her ordinary life, her commitment to the poor, to education, her ‘being bigger than the situation she was in’ (Andrea), her suffering, particularly as a result of her conflicts with ecclesial authorities. For a number of women she is not a heroine, nor a woman, nor even a saint who would have immediate attraction. One woman comments: ‘It seems as though everything about this woman and the beatification has been controlled to such an extent that I’m wondering whether there is another side to her, and how I could find the true woman, rather than the image of the woman we have been presented with’. (Stephanie) Some women’s awareness of needing to interpret her for themselves has been assisted by visiting the museum and chapel in North Sydney; several women spoke of their totally unexpected experience of the numinous while praying near her tomb.
Many women differentiate between spirituality and religion. They speak of their spiritual search often through experiences of difficulty such as divorce; of estrangement from the church; of trying to make sense of other religious traditions. They often refer to their concern to deepen their spirituality, to understand its relationship to changes in their life cycle, to their being in the cosmos. The Aboriginal women speak of their own spirituality; Asian Australian women of encounters with the great Eastern traditions, particularly Buddhism. There are numerous references to an Australian spirituality by the Sisters of St Joseph, as well as within the discourse of the actual beatification event. The Pope for example, considered that, 'In Mary MacKillop all Australians have a sign of the flowering of holiness in their midst'. This helps to explain why Chapter 6 on Women and Spirituality emerged as part of this thesis.

Within this project I also take account of the difficulties women experienced with the beatification. For some of them it was the sense of irrelevance in the performing of a medieval ceremony in post modern Australia. For many women the male-dominated bureaucratic procedures, the processes of canonisation, the searching for miracles, the connotations of elitism, the sheer time, effort and expense of the whole proceedings presented major difficulties. Furthermore, within Australia a number of people had difficulty with the publicity, the advertising and the commercialism associated with the beatification event. For some women there was a questioning as to what the church should be on about, as to whether canonising saints is a distraction from more urgent tasks associated with proclaiming the gospel, as to whether canonising Mary MacKillop masked the church's failure to respond to the real needs of women in the present. Despite their difficulties the overall assessment was that the beatification was for the good, that if Australia had to have a saint it was better that it be a poor woman than a powerful man. This research indicates that Mary MacKillop and the notion of an Australian saint have entered mainstream Australian cultural reality.

**Significance and Limits of the Study**

This research will contribute to the on-going reflection about the life and experience of women in the contemporary Australian Catholic Church. By revealing subtle and overt forms of oppression operative for women in the church it will contribute to
consciousness raising of both women and men. At the same time, in reflecting something of the diversity among women in the church, it will alert people in the church to the need for diverse pastoral strategies to address women’s needs in different socio-political contexts within and beyond the church.

While this study will draw heavily on the experience of Sisters of St Joseph, it is not a study of their institute neither in the present nor over time, nor of its contribution to Australian society. Nor does it attempt to assess the continuing impact of Mary MacKillop nor does it directly attempt to assess the impact of the event on the church hierarchy and clergy. However, given that the Australian Catholic bishops in 1996 commissioned their own study of women in the Australian Catholic Church, ‘The Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia’, my study could serve to highlight some of the complexities which shape the rhetoric and multiple identities of women in relation to the church.

Thesis Outline
In Chapter 1, the concepts of ‘women’s subjectivity’ and ‘women’s experience’ which are interrelated and central to this thesis, are examined from a feminist theoretical and a feminist theological perspective. This chapter also includes a discussion of feminist hermeneutics and an outline of the feminist hermeneutic I intend to utilise in this thesis.

In Chapter 2, issues foundational to this project - sainthood and the identity of Mary MacKillop - are considered. The social construction of sainthood within the Catholic Church is interpreted within a feminist theological perspective. This is followed by a survey of feminist theological perspectives on sainthood. I also include a succinct biographical account of the life of Mary MacKillop and a brief history of the process of her canonisation, then critically consider historiography which relates to her. Finally, I describe the political, social and ecclesial context of the beatification.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to a comparative assessment of the experience of Mary MacKillop, and of contemporary Sisters of St Joseph responsible for organising the
beatification event, in relation to their conflicts with authorities and their experience of
dominative power within the Catholic Church in Australia.

In Chapter 4, the focus is on the beatification event. The proceedings of 18th and 19th
of January 1995 are described and considered, and the intentionality of the organisers
and women's interpretations of the event are assessed.

Chapter 5 deals with women's experience of the contemporary church, and the ways in
which it mirrors or resists the official church's current and traditional discourse on
femininity.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the issue of spirituality for women in an Australian context.
It includes a re-examination of the spirituality of Mary MacKillop, a consideration of
that of contemporary Sisters of St Joseph, and of the spiritual insights of women in this
study. I compare them with the insights of contemporary men and women writing on
spirituality within an Australian context. I also examine the Sisters of St Joseph's
endeavour to have a continuing impact on spirituality within Australia through the Mary
MacKillop Art Award and the Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney.

Finally, I present the conclusions of the study and recommendations for further research.
Chapter One

Women and Experience: Feminist Theological Perspectives

The interrelated concepts of women's subjectivity and women's experience are so central to this thesis. In this chapter I intend to examine how feminist theoretical debates in relation to them are mirrored in the work of feminist theologians. Furthermore, as the concepts of women's subjectivity and women's experience are so closely linked by Christian feminist theologians with that of women's liberating activity, I will also consider the experiential categories of women's agency and women's resistance. Finally, because my hermeneutic in this thesis is a feminist hermeneutic, I intend to discuss what I consider to be critical hermeneutical issues and outline my particular hermeneutic.

Women as Subject

The concept of woman as subject is highly problematical because throughout history women's ability to name and articulate their own experience has been denied to them. Men were subjects, whereas women were considered objects, 'other than', outside the sphere of the rational; 1 reduced, in the opinion of Rosa Braidotti, 2 to the role of spectators in the theatre of [their] own destitution. 2 Their experience was most often subsumed within the generic human, or its representation was influenced by men's perceptions and definitions of women, and of women's lived experience. Within historical Christianity, despite women's ongoing involvement, the reality was no different. Women's role reflects the subordinated position of women in society. Hence Anne Carr contends that women within the church are the recipients of a contradictory tradition, and that it is the 'strange history of women's position in the church [that]...is central to the understanding of the experience of Christian women today'. 3

1 See Susan J. Hekman, Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism (Oxford: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 94. The first clear statement of the problem of subject/object dualism and an analysis of the effects of this dualism for the position of woman is to be found in Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 1972. Today despite the fact that her essentialist humanist epistemology is repudiated this book remains highly significant in the development of feminist theory.


3 Anne Carr, Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience (San Francisco: Harper
Early second wave feminists in their categorisation of woman as subject emphasised women's freedom, autonomy, equality and common experience of oppression. In the 1980s this categorisation was strongly contested, initially by African-American feminists, then by mulheristas, Asian, African, and lesbian feminist theorists. They resisted implicit assumptions that all women have similar experiences of oppression and exposed the exclusivity and ethno/heterocentricism of white, Euro-American, middle class women. Such effacement of different ways of being 'other' resulted in a questioning of gender as the single most significant analytic category. This new awareness of the importance of history, class, race and culture in the shaping of heterogeneous subject identities was then reflected in the deconstruction of the category 'woman' into 'women'.

Feminist theorists have been influenced by postmodernism, which contests the idea of an essentialist human subject and of the generalised human. For the poststructuralists among them, influenced by Foucault, 'woman as subject' is not only a fictional concept, shaped by social discourse which reflects mechanisms of oppressive power, but it becomes 'the production of struggle'. Hence for them the female subject, constituted by desires and fears forever in flux and by conflicting linguistic, social and political forces, is without a stable or an essential identity. Yet, some theorists would argue that the female subject can resist constitution by discourse and create new modes of

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7 For poststructuralists all knowledge, because it is discursively constructed, can be deconstructed. The omissions, silences and ambiguities of discourse provide the openings for questioning the dominant discourse. See Chiswile Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987)

The postmodernist shift from a common women's experiences to a plurality of women's experiences, reflective of the diversity of women's historical and social locatedness, and the differentiation of each woman's interiority, leads to a focus on the category of difference. The category of difference is much debated within feminist theoretical literature. Not only sexual difference, but the different experiences of diverse groups of women, the determinants of the differences, and the difference that difference makes— including the difference feminism makes to the understanding of the subject, of knowledge and of politics, have been the focus of much feminist

The postmodernist subject, of knowledge and of politics, subjectivity. Among some of them there is as well a new emphasis on embodiment, on the bodily rootedness of subjectivity, on the body as the site of interaction of material and symbolic forces.

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9. Helman, Gender and Knowledge argues that an explicit attack on man as subject is central to both the feminist and the postmodern critique, but that the latter fails to reveal the gendered nature of man the subject. The feminist critique, on the other hand, both reinforces and extends the post modern critique in arguing that not only have women been excluded as subjects, but they have also been excluded as knowers in the subject oriented epistemology of modernity. Thus feminist theories argue for an epistemology inclusive of women. Many of them are concerned with redefining what it means to think and how thinking relates to theoretical reason. Rosi Braidotti refers to this concern as 'a new kind of nomadism, or a set of interrelated "situated knowledges"' in Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy, translated by Elizabeth Gould (Oxford: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell, 1991), 278.

10. See Rosi Braidotti, Patterns of Dissonance, 282; Nomadic Subjects, 4; Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

11. Hierarchical dualism within Western thought has meant that difference implies difference from, so that feminine difference has traditionally connoted inferiority and negativity. Postmodern theorist, Derrida conceptualises difference not in terms of polarities, but in terms of multiplicities and pluralities in his effort to displace the binary oppositions of Western thought, the most significant of which is rooted in the masculine/feminine opposition. He uses the term difference to denote that which always escapes. In French feminist scholarship there is an emphasis on sexual difference and its association with theoretical and linguistic structures. See for example Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), xvii.

12. See for example, Jean Scott who argues that the oppositional pairing of equality and difference hides and misrepresents the notions of both terms because the political notion of equality depends on and includes the notion of difference, yet the antithesis of difference is sameness. She maintains that women need to insist on differences, to attend to how they operate to exclusions, inclusions and hierarchies. Yet they need in the end to privilege an equality that rests on differences. 'Experience' in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., Feminists Theorise the Political (London: Routledge, 1990), 22-39. Elizabeth Grosz, draws attention to bodily difference in arguing that the body is 'an object of systems of social coercion, legal inscription, and sexual and economic exchange', Volatile Bodies, 18. For her power functions directly on bodies through interdisciplinary practices, not just through ideology. Rosi Braidotti in arguing for 'a new figuration of subjectivity in a multidifferentiated non hierarchical way' examines how this nomadic condition intersects with sexual difference, Nomadic Subjects, Ch 8.

13. See Braidotti Patterns of Dissonance, 209.
theorising. Nicholson argues that how we describe 'the differences that make a difference' is itself a political act. 14

However, the postmodernist notion of subjectivity, given that feminism is a political movement as well as an academic discipline, is controversial. Many feminists are highly critical of strands within postmodernism and of feminists’ uncritical adoption of them. They argue that postmodernism negates the authority of the subject, denies the subject’s self reflexive capacity and thereby undermines the basis of feminist politics. Nancy Hartsock asks:

Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic. 15

Teresa de Lauretis argues for the reconstruction of the subject through ‘our political, theoretical, self analysing practice’. 16 She emphasises the agency of the subject and repudiates the view that language is the sole source and locus of meaning. Linda Alcoff also focuses on the agency of the subject. 17 Sandra Harding and Seyla Benhabib criticise the incoherence of the relativist direction of postmodernist thought. 18 Anna Yeatman argues for retaining the democratic potential of postmodernist thought, while emphasising the patriarchalism reflected in relativist disintegration. 19 They refuse to cede that there are some criteria to distinguish between true and false claims to possess knowledge. Mary Hawkesworth critiques postmodernism’s ‘retreat to the text’. She sees ‘an unmistakable escapist tendency in the shift to intertextuality’ and takes issue with disregard for the effects of institutional structures and practices. 20

14 Nicholson, Feminism/ Postmodernism, 10.
15 See Nancy Hartsock, ‘Foucault on Power: A Theory for Woman’ in Linda Nicholson, Feminism/Postmodernism, 163.
18 See Nicholson, Feminism/ Postmodernism, Chs. 4, 5, 83-130.
19 Ibid, 294
Bacchi argues that politics dictate that women give definition to women, while Vandana Shiva deplores ‘reductionist constructionism’ and calls for the reclaiming of the notion of a global sisterhood, to counter powerful ideologies and institutions in the current context of economic globalisation.

These debates among feminist critical theorists in relation to women’s subjectivity are mirrored within feminist theology. The emergence of feminist theologies from women of colour have also been critical in contesting the perspectives of white Euro-American and Australian academic theologians. African-American feminist theologian, Shawn Copeland, contends that theology from a feminist perspective advanced the liberation of women from the nexus of white patriarchy and white racist imperialist discourse, [but drew on theories which] continued to render the experiences of red, brown, yellow and black women passive, and, sometimes to erase these women and their experiences.

She calls for:

an inclusive critical Christian theology of liberation in differentiated feminist perspectives [that]...would stand with and engage the victims of history and embrace the oppressed as necessary partners in mutual liberation and would disclose the lineage and effects of oppression mediated through inhuman relations in a global context.

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25 Ibid, 10.
Within Australia, Aboriginal Anne Pattel-Gray influenced by womanist theology is strong in her critique of Australian Church feminism. She argues that Australian Church feminism limits the freedom of Aboriginal women because it is so heavily influenced by racism and classism.

However, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues that to be in touch with the suffering of women across the globe is to be aware of the commonality of women in spite of their diversity. Earlier she conceptualised patriarchy as 'a male pyramid of graded subordinations and exploitations', that is of interlocking systems of sexism, racism, property class relationships and other forms of exploitation that can be multiplicative in their effects. Given that there are also critical differences among men who oppress women, she replaces the term patriarchy with the term kyriarchy, dominance by an elite. In her later work, she calls for a steadfast focus 'on women who struggle at the bottom of the [global] socio-cultural and economic-political pyramid of domination'. Her spelling women as '“wo/men”' seeks to underscore not only the incoherent, destabilised character of the term "woman"/"women", but also to retain the expression "women" as a political category. She also intends it as an inclusive expression, rather than an exclusive universalised gender term, reflective of the reality that the kyriarchal structures that determine women's lives also affect men in subordinate positions, though in a different way. As advocate for numerous women across the globe, she sees the woman theologian as needing to be rooted in a community beyond the academic institution to enable her to exercise a prophetic vocation. These women theologians subscribe to an idea of women's subjectivity that takes account of contextualisation, agency and connection, particularity and difference.

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26 African-American women theologians designate their theology as womanist to differentiate it from feminist theology which they consider as reflective of the perspectives of white middle class women.


29 Schussler Fiorenza, and Copeland, Violence Against Women, x.


31 ibid.
Having discussed the contentious nature of ‘woman/women as subject’ within feminist theory, mirrored within feminist theology, I will now examine the inter-related and equally contested concept of ‘women’s experience’.

Women’s Experience

Methodologically paramount for all feminist theologians, is a focus on women’s experience, for as Margaret Farley argues:

Until a theology based on women’s experience is developed, traditionally assumed claims for a theology based on men’s experience will continue to render inaccurate if not inadequate the major formulations of religious belief.

Before I subject this contention to further analysis, I will unravel meanings connoted by the concept experience.

Experience refers to the concrete, the immediate, the lived, the embodied. Hence it involves the senses, feeling as well as thought, acting as well as perceiving, connecting to others as well as to the self. It reflects stimuli from the outside, interacting with inner instinctual fears and desires, biological needs, internalised world views, bias and commitments. Hence it is never raw, never theoretical, always located, historically, socially, culturally, and politically. Always mediated through language, it is affected by the limits and the selectivity of language. Therefore, it can be mis-interpreted, or easily distorted. Although there are dimensions of experience which are incommunicable, in the process of communicating experience can be clarified. Which is why women insist on the importance of articulating their own experience. Women

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23 The efforts of women theologians to insert women’s experience into the life and theology of the church date from Valerie Saiving’s article, ‘The Human Situation: A Feminine View’ (1960). She queried the applicability of the writings of male theologians to all human persons and suggested that considerations of sin as pride and will to power, and redemption as negation of the self were reflective of male experience and not women’s experience. Since then women have subjected the whole of the religious tradition, scripture, history, doctrine, ritual, symbol, language, myth, and ethics to scrutiny. Initially, to critique it, then to reclaim women’s experience, then to reconstruct it from the perspective of women’s experience. Their constructive efforts have resulted in academic theological treatises, as well as different theological styles and genres, such as poetry, song, ritual, liturgy and prayer.


talking to each other about their experience, 'breaking the silence', 'giving voice',
'hearing each other into speech' has been key in the process of consciousness raising.\(^{35}\)
In articulating their experience women come to understand what their isolated experiences hold in common, are able to identify differences, and to establish a starting point for theorising women's experiences of shared suffering. Voice and power are clearly tightly associated.\(^{36}\)

Judith Grant considers that the concept of women's experience first emerges among radical feminists. She refers to the manifesto of one of the earliest radical feminist groups:

> We regard our personal experiences and our feelings about that experience as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all the products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalisation and accept none that are not confirmed by experience.\(^{37}\)

Experience in this understanding provides the raw material for analysis, and thus cannot be discounted in the production of knowledge. Feminist empiricist epistemologists claim that objectivist epistemology has excluded women's experience, traits normally designated feminine and women's ways of knowing. These theorists' claims, however, become problematic when it is assumed that knowledge is given directly by experience, that experience is transparent, that knowledge can be produced directly without reference to theory and that only that which can be experienced is to be valued. For this is to overlook the cumulative nature of knowledge, and the fact that 'there are some hidden aspects of oppression that no amount of direct struggle will reveal'.\(^{38}\)


Feminist standpoint epistemologies, which assimilate the Marxist claim that the knowledges of subordinate and marginalised groups are more complete than the knowledges of dominant groups, also raise the issue of the relationship between theory and experience. They claim that women are able to bring an 'outsider's' perspective to the understanding of male-dominated societies, that they are less interested in maintaining the status quo and more able to critique sexist policies and practice. The limitation of such epistemologies is that they assume the commonality, and disregard the differences among women associated with multiple and interstructured forms of domination. However, in their search for the hidden determinants of social relations, these feminist theorists seek to go beyond women's experiences; therefore for them knowledge is not directly given by experience. 39

While women's experience is key for feminist theologians, they interpret it differently. Anne Carr contends that women's experience may be used to designate women's bodily experience, socialised experience, feminist experience, or to refer to women's historical experience, or again it may refer to women's unique individual experiences, or to their specifically Christian experience. 40 Ann O'Hara Graff, who also recognises that there are multiple forms and dimensions of women's experience, locates them within social location, language and the quest for human wholeness. She sees women in diverse experiential locations struggling with the shared narratives, symbols and rituals of Christianity. 41 For her experience is the best place to begin to recognise revelation and to practice discernment. 42 Katherine Zappone, on the other hand, argues that:

39 Grant, Fundamental Feminism, 91-125. Feminist theorists such as Lorraine Code, What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991) and Sandra Harding, Whose Science? Whose Rationality? Thinking from Women's Lives, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) do not claim that women's experiences by themselves constitute knowledge. They attempt to negotiate a position in between objectivism and postmodern relativism. For them, not all knowledge claims are equally valid. They contend that not only should women's experiences be respected, but they also should be critically assessed.

40 Anne Carr, 'The New Vision of Feminist Theology', in Catherine Mowry La Cugna, ed., Freeing Theology, 22-23. Anne Carr acknowledges the influence of twentieth century Catholic theologian Karl Rahner who emphasized that it is precisely within human experience, not just human religious experience, that the divine revelation with its call for a response occurs. Experience is thus both starting point and continuing resource for theological reflection.


The universal aspects of women's different experiences provide the base to assert 'this is the way things truly are’. The cumulative analyses - not the scattered interpretations of different experiences - have the power to challenge the dominant discourse.43

Here she contrasts the discourse which represents the analysis of women's cumulative experiences with the dominant white, Western, male, universalising discourse which has effaced women's experience. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, reflecting poststructuralist influences, argues that the use of women's experience is connected to an account of power that is inadequate for the situation of all women, and that a whole way of thinking about power, gender and language is implicated in the appeal to women's experience. She advocates a shift of focus from women's experience to the ways subjects are constructed through social relations which mirror forms of oppression.44 For her the theological task involves attention to women's faith practices in discursive totalities.45 For Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza women's experience is always an ideological-rhetorical construct shaped by the cultural languages and theoretical framework of particular historical moments.46

Thus the tensions among feminist theorists in relation to the use of women's experience as a category are also reflected in its use by women theologians. Some theologians have methodological and epistemological difficulties on account of the social and historical character of women's experience and the problems this creates for claiming a normative status for feminist theology. Sheila Davaney for instance, considers the 'limits to women's experience',47 while Lonergan scholar, Paulette Kidder, argues that


45 ibid., 106.

46 Schussler Fiorenza, Jesus: Miriam's Child, 26. Many women theologians use analogies drawn from women's experience to re-examine central Christian symbols. In this text Schussler Fiorenza is concerned with re-visioning Christ as a result of her feminist explorations in biblical christology. Elizabeth Johnson and Sally McFague are other feminist theologians who re-examine the central symbol of God. These and other feminist theologians believe that the projected gender of God and Christ as masculine has been highly influential in shaping and limiting the religious experience of women.

47 See for example, Sheila G. Davaney, 'The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience' in Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance Buchanan and Margaret R. Miles, eds., Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture. The Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series, 2. (Ann Arbor:
Lonergan’s cognitional theory, because it addresses questions of metaphysics, could help feminist theorists develop an alternative to both objectivist and relativist epistemologies, and ‘add some precision’ to the considerations of women’s experience. In this thesis I use women’s experience as a pragmatic rather than as an ontological category, influenced as I am by Sharon Welch. She argues that the enunciation of specific experiences has enabled many women to speak, and as other women recognize the limits of their experience, they are able to dissent in ways that are ‘politically transformative’.

Women’s Agency and Resistance

In this study of women and women’s experience, because women’s experience is so closely associated in feminist theological literature with women’s active liberating practice (praxis), I will focus on the categories of women’s religious agency and religious resistance. While attentive to the effects of language in the constructions of the self, and hence to possible conflicts and contradictions in the ways in which women as subjects in this study constitute themselves discursively, I maintain that women are capable of self reflectivity, creativity and principled action. I also acknowledge that there are many divergent positions possible within all stances of agency and resistance. Thus I intend to examine the ways in which women’s religious agency is exercised, made possible, sustained, restricted, denied or nullified and to examine also, women’s active and passive practices of resistance.

Traditionally, women have been confined to male defined, delimited and approved roles. They have been barred from exercising public teaching or governing roles within the church. They have had to be dependent on men, for until recently, all theologians, spiritual directors, retreat givers, were men. Men continue to be sole dispensers of key sacraments. They make all the rules, interpret them and apply them - they also set the


50 The Sacrament of Marriage is the notable exception. In cases of extreme need Baptism may be dispensed by the laity.
criteria by which judgements as to people's pre-eminent sanctity were made. Throughout the centuries women have been socialised into conformity to pre-determined roles, to obedience, humility and selfless devotion. So often this has limited their capacity for self direction and for autonomous action, and has made it difficult for women to come to human and spiritual maturity.\(^{51}\) Australian theologian Patricia Brennan argues that 'sexual, intellectual and religious subjugation work together almost to guarantee that women never find their way to autonomy'.\(^{52}\) Traditionally, as I will indicate in the following chapter, women's religious agency has derived from the experience of their own interior relationship with God, from the desire to be and do what they believe God would want them to be and do, and from their association with other women. And I will argue that this provides the key to understanding the religious agency of Mary MacKillop, which enabled her to make choices which did not merit the approval of powerful male ecclesiastics.

Women's religious agency is about women's choices in the midst of their struggle to live creative and fulfilling lives within religious institutions whose structures and discourses reflect androcentric and patriarchal/kyriarchal ideologies. Not only does their agency involve self-determination, but it involves women's capacity to name their own experience; to speak for and to represent themselves, to participate in negotiating the terms of interaction and in so doing, to counter the public representations of women.\(^{53}\) It entails remembering that 'women are and always have been actors and agents in history'.\(^{54}\) Often, their agency has been 'created through the situations and status conferred upon them'.\(^{55}\)


\(^{52}\) Patricia Brennan, 'Loosed and Bound: Women's reform and the question of God', in Confoy, Lee and Nowotny, \textit{Freedom and Entrapment}, 84.

\(^{53}\) Margaret Miles argues that public representations of women can be introjected and become the dominant self images of women and that in consequence there is a need to analyse what those representations posit as the truth about women. To decide what needs to be said about women involves creating the language and imagery in which to say it. See, \textit{Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 10-11.


\(^{55}\) Joan W. Scott, 'Experience', in Butler and Scott, \textit{Feminists Theorize the Political}, 34.
Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's, *In Memory of Her* is an attempt to reveal and recapture the religious agency of women in the first century of Christianity. She argues that women have always constituted an *ecclesia*, which has provided, and which continues to provide, a discursive space in which 'individual women might shape their own stories in conversation with the stories of either contemporary, historical, or biblical women'. On the other hand, Sharon Welch argues the experience of sisterhood is:

an experience of resistance and liberation, an affirmation of an identity that is different from that imposed by the dominant patriarchal structures. The experience of resistance is itself a denial of the necessity of patriarchy; it is a moment of freedom, the power to embody momentarily a different identity.

She maintains that the practice of resistance should be strategic, particular and specific.

In this study I consider Mary MacKillop as a prototype of women's agency within the history of the church in Australia. She inspired hundreds of women in her own lifetime to commit themselves to religious community in the service of the educational and pastoral needs of children and the families they belonged to in remote areas and difficult conditions. While she resisted the repeated attempts of ecclesiastical officials to define her project, to circumscribe her responsibility and to erode her authority, she revealed a remarkable capacity to take up the position of 'another'. Her amazing charity empowered her to take risks, in an effort to maintain relationships. Although the full story of women's agency and of their resistance within the history of the church in Australia is yet to be told, histories of women within the Australian Church are now emerging which illustrate that Mary MacKillop was not alone in her creative initiatives, and in her resistance to clerical abuse of authority.

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56 Schussler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, 349.
58 Ibid., 59.
Nor is it just the story of women belonging to religious institutes. Sally Kennedy's illuminating study of five Catholic lay women's movements in Sydney and Melbourne (1925-1955) is testimony to both the dynamism of the movements and to the ambivalence and resistance they encountered on the part of the hierarchy. Women have been the major contributors to education, health and welfare services of the church within and beyond the parish structures. They have been largely responsible for the catechising of successive generations of Catholics, though the extent of their contribution is effaced, or subsumed by others in the official histories which rather focus on the activities of men.

In recent decades increasing numbers of women have become professionally theologically educated. Many now subscribe to a feminist theological discourse; some participate in autonomous organisations such as WATAC (Women and the Australian Church Project), which dates from 1983; Women-Church, whose publication, *Women Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* dates from 1987; and two associations concerned with the issue of ordination, "The Ordination of Catholic Women" and "Women of the New Covenant". Probably the most striking contemporary example of the practice of resistance by women in the contemporary church is the struggle for sexual self-determination manifest in the non-compliance of many women with papal teaching in relation to reproductive sexuality. Another manifestation is the disappearance of many women from formal church structures, or

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formal church participation, despite their continuing commitment to Catholic Christianity.

While the focus of this project is on the agency and resistance of women, it will inevitably involve consideration of the ways in which Australian Catholic women are accomplices in their own oppression, and contributors to the religious oppression of other women. Furthermore, it will also reveal something of the fragility and contingency which according to Sharon Welch can typify women’s practices of resistance.63 I maintain that women are not a unitary group within the contemporary Australian Catholic Church and I argue that many women suffer, as well as experience reward, as they collaborate in perpetuating prejudiced mindsets and exploitative social structures within the church. Furthermore, I will also argue that women’s intellectual, spiritual and practical contributions can be co-opted and adjusted to serve systems of domination within the church. While I believe some measure of collusion is unavoidable for women both in the church and in society, it should be guided by ultimate fidelity to personal conscience and respect for personal integrity.

Feminist Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a theory which deals with the understanding and interpretation of texts. However, by text may be meant an image, symbol, event, ritual or person, something in the past which is to be interpreted by a reader in the present, in such a way that it has a bearing on the future.64 Traditionally, hermeneutics has been gender blind and gender

63 Welch, Communities of Solidarity and Resistance, 39.

64 In hermeneutical theory the interpreter enters the process of interpreting with pre-judgements because the interpreter is shaped by the historical, social, cultural and religious traditions in which she stands. Interpretation involves a dialectic between the horizon in which the interpreter stands and the horizon of the historical text. The place of language is crucial in the interpretive process, because meaning is mediated through language. Paul Ricoeur emphasises the place of literary critical, historical critical, semiotics and structuralist methods in an effort to understand the context in which the text emerged and how it produces meaning. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation, edited, translated and introduced by J.B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Chs. 2, 5, 6. Hans Georg Gadamer likens the process of interpretation to a ‘game of conversation’, in which the question which emerges in relating to the text, is key in the interpretive process. For him, all understanding is contextual rooted in prejudices and historically grounded. See Truth and Method 2nd rev.edn. Translated and revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1994), 270-277; 293-300. Habermas, concerned with the ways in which the language of tradition and the interpretations of tradition can be distorted by the will to power, advocates the use of various hermeneutics of suspicion in the interpretive process. Psychoanalysis, including critical self analysis, ideology critique, genealogy and a hermeneutics of retrieval can thus assist in the
neutral. I intend to approach the beatification event as a text and to read it within the framework of feminist hermeneutics. As I have already indicated, women scholars who stand within the Christian tradition, conscious of women's contemporary concrete, particular socio-historical experiences of exclusion, subordination and marginalisation, question out of their present context the whole tradition of historical Christianity. They scrutinise its texts, the ways they have been interpreted, 'the rules, practices and procedures of the whole socio-symbolic order'. In so doing, they seek a fusion between their horizon in the present and the horizon of actual historical women in the past, whose voices were muted, or silenced, but who also were resilient in their struggle for wholeness and freedom. In order to open up possibilities for transformation in the present for all who are marginalised, most feminist theologians privilege a hermeneutics of suspicion in their work of retrieval and reconstruction, although there are diverse approaches among them.67.

This diversity is reflected for example by considering the feminist hermeneutic of particular feminist theologians. Rosemary Radford Ruether considers that feminist hermeneutics 'works out of the dialectical tension between truthful accountability to past tradition and new creativity in response to the ethical and theoretical challenges of present times.' For her, the evaluative norm in feminist hermeneutics is the unmasking of illusion. See John B. Thompson, Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 71-111. David Tracy draws from the hermeneutic tradition five steps of interpretation applicable to religion. Firstly, choose a genuinely religious phenomenon to interpret. Allow it to elicit a claim to serious attention, to provoke some fundamental questions. Then because of its otherness let it evoke acknowledgement of existing pre-understandings. Then, as the questions become the interpreter's questions and the subject matter of text and interpreter becomes common to both, enter the conversation in greater depth. Finally, as a corrective, apply explanatory methods and utilise various hermeneutics of suspicion. See 'Hermeneutical Reflection in the New Paradigm' in H. Kung and D. Tracy, (eds.), translated by Margaret Kohl, Paradigm Change in Theology (Edinburgh: Tant T. Clark, 1995), 34-62.

65 Erin White, 'Figuring and Refiguring the Female Self : Towards a Feminist Hermeneutic', in Joy and Magee, Claiming Our Rites, 135-156.


67 See for example, Schussler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, 15-18; But She Said, 52-53; 57-62.

correlation of women's experience with the liberating prophetic tradition of the biblical canon. She sees this tradition as destabilising oppressive systems as a result of promoting social justice. For Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza the critical evaluative norm in feminist hermeneutics is women's concrete experience of liberation from patriarchal oppression in the present. She asserts that this reflects the ongoing nature of revelation which occurs within the community of women in the present, *the ecclesia gynaikon* and not in the words of the biblical texts. While Schussler Fiorenza privileges a hermeneutics of suspicion she also advocates the use of a hermeneutics of remembrance, of evaluation and proclamation and of creative imagination and ritualisation. She argues that feminist hermeneutics has to

find ways to break the silences of the texts and to derive meaning from androcentric historiography and narrative. Rather than understand the texts as an adequate reflection of the reality about which they speak, [feminists] must search for rhetorical clues and allusions that indicate the reality about which the texts are silent. 69

Rebecca Chopp, espousing a theology of proclamation, argues for a hermeneutics of marginality, in which biblical texts are read from the margins in terms of their 'credible claims of freedom'. She advocates dialoguing with the texts, interrogating them to see where and how God is acknowledged by the marginalised, or represented as condoning the oppression of women. 70

In the previous pages of this chapter I have argued that the experience of women as interpreted in a feminist perspective is starting point and theological resource for feminist theologians. I have also argued that they privilege a hermeneutics of suspicion in their critical and constructive task of exposing the systemic distortions of power which lead to the disparagement and disempowerment of women. This is part of their 'commitment to the vision of a different church and world'. 71 I will now explain my own feminist hermeneutic in this thesis.

The Feminist Hermeneutical Framework of this Thesis

To answer the central question of this thesis is I utilise a feminist hermeneutics of

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69 Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 112.
70 Chopp, *The Power to Speak*, 43.
71 Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus Miriam's Child*, 11.
suspicion and a feminist hermeneutics of diversity and difference as tools of analysis. The beatification event itself is composed of many interrelated texts. However, because my focus is on women's experiences, particularly of religious agency and resistance, I rely heavily on the interview data of women from multiple subject positions within the church in Australia. These provide a source of theological data not available elsewhere. I recognise that my interpretation, shaped by my socio-historical situation as a late twentieth century Australian, white, Anglo-Celtic, middle aged, middle class woman, is but one of many possible interpretations. Therefore, it is open to question and critique from people whose subject positions differ from mine.

To use a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion in considering the beatification event, is to read not only with, but against the grain of the event; it is to resist the dominant readings. It is to search for rhetorical clues which indicate silences; it is to search for what is not in the text, that is for evidence of repression, distortion and exclusion. Therefore, it is to attend to how the beatification event speaks as well as to what it says, to the effects it produces and to how it produces them. It is to question, to interrupt and subvert the patriarchal/kyriarchal and androcentric order. To pursue a hermeneutics of suspicion in this thesis, is to engage the following questions: How did Mary MacKillop in the past, and how do the Sisters of St Joseph and other women in the present, deal with oppressive practices and structures within the whole ecclesial socio-symbolic system? How have they sought to liberate themselves from androcentricism and patriarchy within the church? In what ways does Mary MacKillop reflect and in what ways does she contest patriarchal forms of womanhood, and how have different groups of women either mirrored or resisted the discourses of womanhood perpetuated by the church?

I also intend to use a feminist hermeneutics of diversity and difference, because I am interested in the complexities and contradictions of women's experiences of religious agency and resistance arising from their different subject positionalities. How, given their different subject positions, do they engage with the beatification event? How,

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72 A research project: The Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia is currently being conducted for the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference by the Bishop's Committee for Justice, Development and Peace; the Australian Catholic University; and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (1996-1998).
given the values and claims of their situation, do they respond or resist? I therefore examine these women's experiences in their diversity, interrogate them, name them, compare them, search for emerging patterns, try to understand what is common, as well as what is distinct. I agree with feminist historical theologian, Margaret Miles in her contention that:

Although the concrete pluralism of Christian traditions has been denied by a universalising rhetoric, Christianity is and historically has been pluralistic in beliefs, creeds, and liturgical and devotional practices in different geographical settings over two thousand years of its existence. Yet... because Christian traditions have not accepted pluralism, differences among people within communities, individualism has resulted. It can only be countered by pluralism, that is by acceptance of, respect for, and delight in, the differences of perspective and concern among Christians. 73

However, she would not have in mind an easy pluralism. Ann O'Hara Graff sees that acknowledgement that revelation is received 'under conditions of diversity' calls for new structures for ecclesial discernment as an international conversation. She argues that this is an imperative if the pitfalls of univocity and equivocity in struggling with the truth claims of the Christian tradition are to be avoided. 74

The argument of Georgia Warnke, that a feminist hermeneutics needs to recognise a diversity of interpretive perspectives and that there are criteria to which an appeal can be made to differentiate between better and worse perspectives has also been influential. 75 As has already been explained, the differences between women and men, differences associated with the positionalities of class, race, ability among women as well as men, and the differences which exist within women. are variously seen as significant. Poststructuralist feminists as I have previously mentioned, associate difference with multiple centres of power, with the meanings of words, interpretations, identities and desires; with power as pervasive in all social relationships, as part of daily experience. 76

73 Margaret Miles, Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality, (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 181.


76 See for example Hartsock, 'Foucault on Power', 168-169.
However, while not ignoring their claims, my own emphasis is on the significance of power relations viewed systemically.

From the hermeneutic perspective, the beatification event is constituted by many texts. These comprise: the discourses of the Sisters of St Joseph, the official promotion of the event; the journalists' accounts; the dramatic and liturgical presentations; the papal discourses within them; the interview transcripts of women; theological, sociological and historical texts of reference. I am aware that they are produced by people having different subject positions within the church and in the society. Therefore I need to analyse the ideologies within them and to be attentive to the ways in which they construct the female gender. In the production of the text of this thesis they intersect. Hence in my analysis I propose to utilise the literary tool of intertextuality, which is also used by Scripture scholars in the interpreting of biblical texts. French feminist theorist, Julia Kristeva argues, that 'each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read.' For her as a result of this intertextuality, the rhetorical effects of texts are never 'single nor complete', 'but always plural, shattered and capable of being fabricated'. She is reliant on Bakhtin for whom each utterance is related to the utterances of other authors in a relation of 'dialogism'. His theories of dialogue between different voices when the different power perspectives encoded in language are taken into account, is helpful in analysing the intersection of patriarchal perspectives and other perspectives which are resistant to them. Clayton and Rothstein draw attention to the use of intertextuality by Foucault. It is he who insists that analysis needs to include both 'the role of power in the production of textuality' and 'of textuality in the production of power'. For Foucault:

77 See for example Elaine Wainwright, 'Shall we Look for an/Other: Engendering Reading and the Matthean Jesus', unpublished manuscript, 1997.


where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always 'inside' power, there is no escaping it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned. 32

I also recognise the different subject positions of women in their reception and interpretation of the beatification event, itself composed of many texts. I examine the ways in which these texts construct the female subject and how the ideology in these texts intersect in the new text. As reader and interpreter, I too have been shaped by the intersection of many texts and by many social codes. My own feminist perspective affects the choices I make in my interpretation of texts. The text of this thesis represents the intersection between my life experience and the many texts I examine.

In this chapter I have examined the central analytic categories of women's subjectivity and women's experience from both a feminist theoretical and a feminist theological perspective and discussed the concepts of women's agency and women's resistance, expressions of the first categories, which are central to the analytic framework of this thesis. I also explored the issue of feminist hermeneutics, including that of a Christian feminist hermeneutics, and outlined my own hermeneutic, which incorporates a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of difference and diversity.

Chapter Two

Women and Sainthood: Preliminary Considerations

In this chapter I intend to open up the world behind the text of the beatification event.\(^1\) Firstly, within the hermeneutical framework of this thesis, I will examine the social construction of sainthood within historical Christianity, the processes involved in the ‘making’ of saints, and sainthood as it emerges in a critical feminist theological perspective. Then I will give a brief factual account of Mary MacKillop’s life and work. I will trace the history of the process of her beatification and explore the politics of meaning manifest within it.\(^2\) I will also examine the ways in which historians and journalists have interpreted Mary MacKillop and the ways in which these interpretations reflect the influences of gender, politics and social institutions. Finally, I will consider the socio-political-ecclesial context in which the beatification event is situated.

Saints and their Canonisation

The nature and the extent of the current interest in saints can come as a surprise to many people. Since 1980, not only historians and theologians, but sociologists, philosophers and specialists in folklore have been interested in saints and their lives. Feminist theologian, Elizabeth Stuart, argues that this interest is reflected in the burgeoning literature on saints; the global fascination (negative as well as positive) with ‘living saint’, Mother Teresa, and the saintmaking of John Paul II who, during the period 1978 to 1995, canonised 272 people and beatified a further 271.\(^3\) For contemporary historian, Kenneth Woodward, saints:

\(^1\) Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980), 97-131. She draws on Paul Ricoeur’s distinction between the world behind the text and the world in front of the text. The application here, is to factors which give rise to the event and with the relationship of these influences to the event itself.

\(^2\) I do not see it as essential for my purposes here to analyse comprehensively and in depth the life and work of Mary MacKillop.

invite us to conceptualize our lives in terms other than mastery, usefulness, autonomy and control. As free instruments of a higher grace and vehicles of transcendent power, they provide a vision of life that stresses receptivity and interaction.

There have been attempts within this period to relate the lives of saints and the concerns of postmodern philosophy. Elizabeth Wyschrod explores parallels between the non-conformity of saints and postmodernism; for her:

[Saints'] lives unfold in tension with institutional frameworks that may nevertheless later absorb them. Not only do saints contest the practices and beliefs of institutions, but in a more subtle way they contest the order of narrativity itself.

Furthermore, she draws other parallels: saints lives are communicated in and as texts; the narrative of the saint's life is an impetus for reflection and action; saints lives are often concerned with the body and the need to control and transform it; the lives of saints are grounded in reality; they interpellate the reader. Postmodernism for Matzko on the other hand, constitutes a time in which 'saints who emerge from local traditions and communities can have a renewed force in creating human community'.

The word saint is derived from the Latin word 'sanctus'; the word 'holy' from the Germanic word meaning 'whole'. Jesus is for Christians the holy one of God, the revelation of God in human form, the source and the measure of holiness. In the New Testament there is frequent use of the term in the plural to designate members of the church; for example, Paul designates those to whom he writes as 'the saints'.

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6 Ibid.
7 Cited by Stuart, Spitting at Dragons, 5
8 John Chryssavgis considers that there are similarities in the roots of the words used for saint in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and English. 'In Hebrew that which is holy or saintly (keduscha) is separated, consecrated, unapproachable. It induces in us and invites from us an inner disposition of purity, piety and morality (hadasht). In Greek, 'holy' (theou) is applied to everything that is the object of healthy shame - particularly areas of sacredness, sacrifice and even sexuality ...the idea of sacrifice ...and the idea of purity ...are closely related as in Hebrew. In Latin, what is sanctified (sancium) is what is sacred (sacrum) as opposed to what is profane and it is again related to the victim of sacrifice. 'The Making of Saints An Orthodox Reflection on the Beatification of Mary MacKillop' in The Australasian Catholic Record, 72 (1) (January, 1995), 34.
9 See for example, 2 Cor. 13:12; Eph, 1:1.
God in Christ and through him with one another, their lives are filled with the power and goodness of God.  

In the first centuries of the church martyrdom was considered to be the supreme form of sainthood. Christians believed that although the Christian martyrs' transition to eternal life in Christ was immediate they remained united to people in this world. Therefore, the gravesite of the saint became a holy place, because of the belief that the power of Jesus Christ, through the saint, was manifest there for the sake of those still living. It was customary as part of the cult of the martyrs who had witnessed to Jesus Christ to celebrate the Eucharist at the burial site. 

Among the women martyrs, perhaps the most famous are Saints Perpetua and Felicity. Perpetua's autobiographical account of their imprisonment and impending martyrdom is included as part of the Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis (c. 203). Heffernan argues that this text, part autobiography, part encomiastic biography, together with commentaries by male writers, such as Augustine, helped constitute a convention for female sanctity which was to exercise enormous influence in the following millennium through the liturgy, popular preaching and liturgical art. Conventional features include 'redefinition of ideas of kinship; freedom from the Pauline notion of 'sexual indebtedness'; the importance of prophetic visions; and the change from virgin, wife, or widow to sponsa Christi.'

By the middle of the second century, the commemoration of all who had died became an integral part of the Eucharist. It was a manifestation of belief in the communion of saints; by the fourth century this belief was formalised in the doctrine of the


14 Ibid., 185.
Communion of Saints. By then, martyrdom no longer represented the ideal imitation of Christ, for the emphasis had shifted to the interior martyrdom of ascetics, virgins and monks and to the confession of faith given by bishops, teachers and missionaries.

In its literal sense ‘to canonise’ means to place someone’s name in the list of saints, to be included in the celebration of the liturgy and the church’s calendar. During the middle ages the cult of the saints grew in popularity. Development of the sanctoral cycle in the liturgy, pilgrimages to the tombs or shrines of saints, belief in the power of the saints to perform miracles, and recognition of relics were characteristic expressions. However, the practice of canonisation within dioceses by a local bishop was often associated with superstition, questionable cultic observances and abuse of power. The need for some form of regulation led to a decree by Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) that while local bishops could acclaim saints, the Pope alone could canonise them. From then on, who would count as a saint would be determined not only by the popular acclaim of those who knew the person, but by the power of the church authority. Thus sainthood for women would be more patently defined, controlled and determined by men in positions of power.

By the middle of the twelfth century virginity, privileged over martyrdom, became key in the constitution of sainthood. As a result, the history of the early church was rewritten to reflect this; in the hagiography of the period, the martyrdom of the early saints was eclipsed by their virginity. Implicit in this ideal for women was an imputation of female inferiority, overcome only by transcending both body and female nature.

In England, for example, virginity became the dominant literary concern in the vernacular sacred biographies which belong to the period from the late eleventh to the

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15 ibid., 130.
17 Stuart, *Spilling at Dragons*, 23
18 In 993, Ulric of Augsburg (d, 973) became the first saint to be canonised by a Pope John XV
mid fifteenth century. The audience for such narratives was mainly illiterate, the context for the most part an oral one. The archetypes in these stories were consistent and unambiguous: renunciation and the testing of the sexuality of virgin women by male antagonists. This testing always involved suffering and forms of sexual abuse, such as ecorching, and mutilation. Physical mutilation features in dozens of the lives of the virgin martyrs, as part of the process of their transformation from virgin to bride of Christ, to spiritual mother. Their effort to achieve sexual autonomy from men provokes male violence. In reflecting on the body/soul dualism which permeates these stories Heffernan comments:

If the congregation did receive some degree of titillation from the depiction of the sufferings of the...lives of the female virgins then this pleasure could only have been derived from a narrative which maltreated the desired but forbidden object, the naked maiden.

Daniel Bornstein contends that it was during the period of the Avignon papacy (1309-1378) and the Great Western Schism (1378-1417) when the male hierarchy was in disarray and the validity of any particular religious authority was placed in question, that women were able to exercise a profound influence on ecclesiastical institutions. The most influential woman in the public life of the Church in this period was Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), mystic and reformer. In the mid 1370s she involved herself in the struggle to end the exile of Pope Gregory XI in Avignon. The following extract from one of her letters, part of her copious correspondence to him, is indicative of the authoritative tone she assumed in relation to her correspondents as she urged them to fidelity to the gospel:

Once vice has been rooted out, virtue is planted by putting this cross in the hands of good pastors and administrators for holy Church. And if in fact there aren't any such, he wants you to see that those who are chosen

20 Heffernan, Sacred Biography, 252-253.
21 ibid.,282.
23 Catherine vowed herself to virginity at the age of seven, resisted subsequent pressures to marry and lived as a Dominican tertiary, for a time as an anchoress in her own home; later she was involved in compassionate service to those in need. Her involvement in activity to reform the church was associated with her mystical experiences. She was noted for her strength of personality and attracted many followers. Bornstein considers that there were many women, who as Dominican terriaries were prominent in the reform of the church in medieval Italy, who later became the object of local cults.
are good and virtuous people who are not afraid of physical death. God
doesn’t want you to pay attention to their worldly status or grandeur or
prestige (for Christ has nothing to do with such things). Be concerned
only with the wealth and grandeur of their virtue. (Letter 80).^{24}

In the medieval period, preoccupation with death and with life after death, led to
the teaching of Pope Benedict XII that the saints see God ‘in an intuitive vision face to
face’ (the beatific vision).^{25} There was a renewed interest in mysticism; many women
mystics were later canonised.^{26} Many were associated with the Beguines.^{27} Some lived
as anchorites.^{28} They were women with spiritual and prophetic gifts, who claimed the
only religious authority available to women, that of their own mystical experience.^{29}
This they transmitted to others in revelations, prophecies and spiritual commentaries,
often relying on a male scribe. So often these reflect an affective spirituality and the use
of female God language. They also indicate that many of these women internalised
gender stereotypes identifying women with food, the flesh and suffering service.^{30}
Jantzen argues:

The identification of women with the flesh, and with the suffering
humanity of Christ, meant that the religious symbolism which went most
depthly into the psyche was a role which placed women to men in the role
of suffering servant.^{31}

Women mystics, however, were subject to harassment and to accusations of heresy and

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^{24} Suzanne Noffke, The Letters of St Catherine of Siena I. Medieval Renaissance Texts and Studies.
(Binghampton: University of New York, 1988), 243-245.

^{25} McBrien, Catholicism, 1112.

^{26} For example, Gertrude of Magdeburg, Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa, Clare of Assissi

^{27} The Beguines were leading a religious life without rule or permanent vows, singly or in
community, who supported themselves and were engaged in prayer and roles of charitable service.
The movement flourished, particularly in France, Belgium, Holland and parts of Germany in the
thirteenth century. In the fourteenth many of the beguines were subject to accusation of heretical
mysticism and to persecution. Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282) whose writings are of
current interest experienced a time of persecution.

^{28} See for example Julian of Norwich (1343-1423)

^{29} See for example Hildegard of Bingen (1098); Gertrude the Great (1256-1301); Catherine of Siena
(1347-1380); Julian of Norwich, (1343-1423)

^{30} Medieval historian, Caroline Bynum, has examined the use of symbolism and of female God language
used by men and women mystics. The preferred images of women mystics were those of bride, or
lover of Christ, or child of Jesus. See Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High
Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1982; Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The
Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley: University of California Press.
1987)

their numbers declined as a result of the witch-hunts.\textsuperscript{32} The texts of their writings in which they claim the authority of their own spiritual experience are replete with rhetorical strategies in which they proclaim allegiance to the church and its teaching.\textsuperscript{33} Most of the mystics were at pains to acknowledge their identification with the church. Women were important as leaders of heretical movements, such as the Waldensian and Albigensian movements, although Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin argue that until the sixteenth century it was women within the church acting from a stance of ‘radical obedience’, or loyal dissent who exercised the most powerful leadership roles.\textsuperscript{34}

Sixteenth century Reform movements provoked profound theological debate in relation to concept of sainthood. Calvin and Luther, repudiated the practice of venerating saints, ostensibly because it has no explicit foundation in Scripture.\textsuperscript{35} As part of the Catholic reform, the practice of sainthood was reaffirmed, although there was recognition of the need for greater control of the canonisation process. The Council of Trent (1545-63) with its renewed emphasis on the importance of the sacraments, including auricular confession of sins, and on catechesis, enhanced the spiritual authority of the clergy. Ahlgren argues that the theological debate involved a very clear delineation of male and female roles. Women were denied all forms of teaching authority, the clausation of nuns was enforced, and as part of institutional concern with orthodoxy, vernacular expressions of internal religious experience were highly suspect.\textsuperscript{36} In the aftermath of the Council many new religious orders of men and women emerged; the men’s orders,

\textsuperscript{32} The prosecution of witches began in the fourteenth century and became more prevalent under Pope Innocent VIII (1484). The debate in relation to witchcraft was intensified by the publication in 1486 of the treatise, 
\textit{Malleus Maleficarum}. The witch-hunts attained their peak during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{33} See for example, Julian of Norwich. \textit{Revelations of Divine Love}; first translated into modern English with an introduction by Clifton Wolters. (London: Penguin Books, 1966). Beguine, Marguerite of Fontes, burnt at the stake in Paris in 1310, perhaps the most famous heretic of the period, was unusual in that she refused to recant her unorthodoxy and resisted until the end.

\textsuperscript{34} Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, ‘Women’s Leadership in Jewish and Christian Traditions: Continuity and Change’ in Ruether and McLaughlin, \textit{Women of Spirit}, 19.


the Theatines, Lazarists and Jesuits were orders of priests. Institutes of women, founded by Angela Merici, Louise de Marillac and Mary Ward, intent on public, mobile and active charitable service roles for women emerged as an alternative to the monasticism.37

The most famous woman saint of this period was Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), canonised forty years after her death. Ahlgren claims that she 'shattered sixteenth century assumptions about gender'. He also claims that:

[T]he Roman Catholic hierarchy promoted her hyper feminine traits in order to establish a model for women that was consistent with the Counter Reformation's orientation towards masculinity. Though women did need to overcome 'womanhood' in order to advance spiritually, they had to do so in 'womanly' ways. Women's religious lives were secure only with the explicit recognition of their social and theological inferiority; humility and obedience were the yardsticks of women's conformity to this law.38

Teresa's vocation was that of a mystic, a reformer of the Carmelite order, and through her writings, a teacher of mystical doctrine. She was able to survive the Inquisition with whom she had several encounters, because in her writings she was adept at using rhetorical strategies of 'feminine subordination', disassociating herself from her own will, professing humility and obedience, and claiming to be an instrument of God. She was a defender of women and their right to pursue a life of prayer. In the original manuscript of The Way of Perfection, after acknowledging Jesus' respect and compassion towards women and his awareness of their faith and love, she asserts:

For we can do nothing in public that is of any use to You, nor do we dare speak of some of the truth we weep over in silence, fearing You may not hear our just prayer. I do not believe this, Lord, of your justice and goodness for You are a righteous judge and not like judges in the world who, are sons of Adam, and, after all, men, so that there is no virtue in a woman they do not consider suspect... I see that the times are so bad that it is not right to reject virtuous and strong spirits even if they be women.39

37 They attracted male opposition. Mary Ward was excommunicated, condemned as a heretic and her institute was suppressed by papal order in 1629. In 1770 in modified form it gained recognition. Louise de Marillac guided by Vincent de Paul had her followers take simple vows which they renewed annually; in this way she evaded male clerical opposition.

38 Ahlgren, Teresa of Avila, 170.

Elizabeth Stuart argues that canonisation in the post-Reformation period reflects the Church's reaffirmation of the role of the hierarchical male through its endorsement of episcopal and clerical authority, and priestly sacramental celebration. In the sixteenth century, no one was canonised between 1523-1588; the reform of the Divine Office (1568) and the Missal (1570) reduced the number of saints' celebrations to 158. Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) divided the work of the Roman Curia, making the Congregation of Rites responsible for the identification of saints; Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) decided that all canonisations would occur at St Peter's in Rome, to symbolise the unity and universality of the church. By then processes for canonisation which entail the search for evidence, the accounts of eyewitnesses, the use of advocates and miracles, the trial, verdict and proclamation had emerged. Thereafter, the lives of the saints became more central and strategic in the canonisation process; they also served as vehicles for mediating the dominant theological, moral and political culture.

What is most striking when we consider the lists of those who were canonised down to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) is the predominance of popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, and male religious, who either defended or furthered the church; and the restricted numbers of women, who were almost all members of religious institutes. One of the most celebrated of these women was Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897). This French Carmelite nun was canonised twenty eight years after her death and became known throughout the Catholic world through her spiritual autobiography, The Story of A Soul. She emphasised a 'little way of spiritual childhood', in which God could be found through the ordinariness of life when it is lived in love. There is only one reference to women in her autobiography. Unlike her famous namesake she did not challenge the place of women in the church, but merely reinforced it:

I still can't understand why it is so easy for a woman to get excommunicated in Italy! All the time, people seem to be saying: 'No you mustn't go here, you mustn't go there, you'll get ex-communicated'. There's no respect for us poor wretched women anywhere. And yet you'll find the love of God much commoner among women than among men and the women at the Crucifixion showed much more courage than the Apostles, exposing themselves to insult and wiping Our Lord's face.

40 Stuart, Spitting at Dragons, 31.
41 Madigan, New Dictionary, 848.
I suppose he lets us share the neglect he himself chose for his lot on earth; in heaven, where the last shall be first, we shall know more about what God thinks.  

While the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the legitimacy of venerating the saints, it issued a clear call for all Christians to grow into the fullness of holiness, according to criteria elaborated in Lumen Gentium the Document on the Church (1964), and Guadium et spes, The Church in the Modern World (1965). McBrien considers that Vatican II changed the model of the relationship between the saints and the living, from one of benefactor and supplicant to one of communion and solidarity. This reflected representation of the church as a communion of disciples, a communion of saints, transformed by the grace of Christ, a communion which extends beyond death.

However, an analysis of the revised universal calendar of saints (published in 1969) reveals that there are serious issues still to be addressed, for:

European saints make up 66 percent of the list, while some entire continents are unrepresented. Vocational universality is invisible, as well as proportionate gender occupancy. Celibate white male saints with ecclesial rank are overwhelmingly dominant. The few women saints are virgins, martyrs or religious. There is an overabundance of socio-economic middle and upper class saints. Saints of colour, saints who were economically poor, and saints whose holiness grew through married life are invisible as saints of universal significance.

Following the Council, the actual process of canonisation was greatly simplified. Much was prescribed to take place at diocesan level. Further revision of the process was instigated by the present Pope in 1983. Nevertheless, the officials remain ostensibly male and clerical, and the costs involved are still considerable. No doubt the reforms have assisted Pope John Paul in his unrelenting programme of canonisation. Nevertheless, the women among them are for the most part still virgins, martyrs and foundresses.


Stuart, *Spilling at Dragons*, 33.
All of this demonstrates the need for a more rigorous analysis of the theology which sustains the practice of canonisation. The fact that 70 per cent of those on the calendar of saints are men is a major cause for disquiet, given that women’s eligibility for holiness of life as distinct from call to priestly ministry has never been denied. The virtual absence of individual lay people, as distinct from groups of them also presents a problem of a different order, given the church’s stance on holiness as a universal call and the overwhelming preponderance of the laity as church members. Furthermore, those conscious that in an ecumenical and multifaith world, holiness is to be looked for beyond the Roman Catholic Church, also have significant problems with current practice. There is need for constant reminder that in the discernment of sanctity

the role of the institution (of the church) is not definitive or decisive, but proclamatory and celebratory...the church merely proclaims locally or universally the saintly characteristics perceived in a particular person by the communal conscience or consensus. 46

Sainthood within a Feminist Perspective

My aim here is not to focus on holy women within the Bible, while not denying their importance as role models for women in the past and in the present. Neither am I concerned here with the insights emerging from feminist biblical scholarship. Rather, I intend to examine the work of critique and retrieval by feminist historical theologians working within the history of the Christian tradition, who utilise a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of retrieval. Because hagiographers in most instances were men, the recovery of the voices of women from within the tradition has entailed reading hagiography against the grain of the text. Men’s depictions of women’s lives are often misrepresentations, whose encoded messages have been influential in the construction of the subjectivity of the women who heard or read the stories, or who viewed the visual images to which they gave rise. The critique of women scholars has centred on the categorisation of women, the denigration of women’s sexuality and its implications, on saints as feminine role models and on the politics of sainthood. While the work of retrieval is still in its infancy, I will also examine what feminist scholars see as future directions for research in relation to women saints.

46 Chryssavgis, 'The Making of Saints', 36.
Feminist scholars take exception to the almost exclusive categorisation of women saints in terms of sexual 'purity'. These saints are described as virgin/virgin martyr, or non virgin. There are no male saints listed as non virgin. The metaphor most often used for women ascetics and martyrs, whose conscious choice constituted a transgression of the norms for women in their societies, is that they had 'become male'. For example, St Augustine in one of his sermons on the martyrdom of SS. Perpetua and Felicitas writes:

Truly towards these women a manly courage worked marvellously when beneath so great a burden their womanly weakness failed not ...And how proper that women should cause the fall of that enemy who through a woman originally caused men to fall...On the same day courageous men also suffered and conquered, but their names do not commend this feast to us. And this was so not because women are to be preferred before men for their courage and deserts, but because the weakness of women made the vanquishing of the ancient enemy even more marvellous.

Not only do men in their accounts of the martyrdom of women extol them for their manly courage, but as I have previously illustrated they also include graphic descriptions of suffering inflicted on women's naked bodies. Margaret Miles also refers to the text of the *The Martyrdom of SS Perpetua and Felicitas*. She considers Perpetua’s body represents “‘male’ heroism, commitment and courage even while it remained an object for the male gaze”. As indicated earlier, virginity was later privileged in relation to martyrdom; privileged too, over marriage, while rape was presented as a fate worse than death.

Hagiography is replete with instances of women’s internalisation of sexist scorn of the body which led them in their pursuit of holiness to inflict savage penances on their bodies. Sara Maitland in her analysis of women’s hagiography argues:

*Women flagellate themselves, starve themselves, lacerate themselves, kiss leper’s sores ..., deform their faces with glass, with acid, with their own fingers, they bind their own limbs, carve up their bodies, pierce, bruise, cut and torture themselves. The most highly praised mystical writings use metaphorically imagery from these acts: women speak of Christ’s rape of them, they abase themselves, abuse themselves.*

47 Stuart, *Spitting at Dragons*, 17.


49 M. Miles, *Cornal Knowing*, 51.
She asks:

What the hell is going on here? What can possibly lead women to believe that they are more 'conformable', more lovable to the God of creation, love and mercy, bleeding, battered and self mutilated, than they would be joyful, lovely and delighted?²⁰

Feminist theologians argue that the hierarchical church has continued to condone this sado-masochistic relationship with God in its official rhetoric. The classic example is virgin martyr, Maria Goretti, who died in 1902 and was canonised in 1950. The message conveyed to generations of Catholic women was death rather than rape, and if rape, then guilt by association.²¹ Moreover, Maitland considers this rhetoric 'also gives a subliminal justification to every wife batterer, every rapist, every pornographer and every man who wishes to claim "rights", the right to abuse, over women.'²² A similar attitude is reflected in Mary Daly's savage critique:

Surviving, moving women can hardly look to the masochistic martyrs of sadospiritual religion as models. Since most patriarchal writing that purports to deal with women is pornography or hagiography (which amounts to the same thing), women in a world from which women identified writing has been eliminated are trying to break away from these moulty 'models', both of writing and of living.²³

The issue of meaningful role models for women in a patriarchal church is of paramount importance to contemporary Catholic women as this thesis will reveal. Nevertheless, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza speaking of herself and her contemporaries as young women highlights the difficulties which women saints' lives have presented for women concerned with their own religious agency:

The lives of saints presented more of a hindrance than a help in finding our own self identity. These stories stressed suffering, sexual purity, submissive outmoded piety, and total obedience. They were anti-intellectual and anti-erotic; they told about many nuns and widows and some queens, but rarely did they speak about ordinary women. While

²¹ E. Slenzel, 'Maria Goretti and the Politics of Sainthood', in Schussler Fiorenza and Copeland, (eds.), Violence Against Women, 91-98.
²² Maitland, 'Passionate Prayer', 128.
we desired our own independence and love, the glorification of the saints
 demanded humble feminine submission and fostered sexual neuroses. 54

Eleanor McLaughin asks in relation to medieval saints: 'What does one do today with
the obedience, passivity, contemplative enclosure as flight from the world, and the
apparent loss of self in the pilgrimage toward dependence on God? ' Many of the
women whom I interviewed for this thesis also speak of the difficulties they have in
identifying with women saints. That saints are not role models for some contemporary
Catholic women is one of the findings of this thesis.

A major difficulty to which I have already adverted is the manipulation of the lives of
women saints for political purposes. 55 I have referred to Ahlgren's argument that the
rhetorical strategies adopted as a form of self-protection by St Teresa were later used to
rewrite aspects of her life and work so as to construct her as a model of Counter
Reformation sanctity. Clarissa Atkinson, in examining the differing male
interpretations of St Monica (d.387), within the subsequent history of Christianity,
argues that they reflect the development of men's ideologies in relationship to
motherhood. She claims that 'saints are multivalent symbols, used at different times by
different persons for totally different ends'. 56 Closer to home, Katherine Massam
describes the multivalent readings of St Therese of Lisieux by Catholics in Perth and
Adelaide between 1925 and 1965. She claims the message of St Therese, who lived a
life of intense prayer and devotion apart from the concerns of the world, 'simply
permeated the existing order and structures' of a church reacting to what it perceived as
alienating forces within modernity. 57 Stenzel in her study of twelve year old Maria
Goretti concludes that:

54 Schussler Fiorenza, Discipleship of Equal, 40.
55 That it is not just the church who utilises women saints for political purpose is well illustrated by Eric
Jennings in his article 'Reinventing Jeanne': The Ideology of Joan of Arc in Vichy
56 Clarissa W. Atkinson, 'Your servant, my mother': the figure of Saint Monica in the ideology of
Christian motherhood', in Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret Miles,
Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality. (Boston: Beacon
Press, 1985 ), 151.
57 Katherine Massam, Sacred Threads: Catholic Spirituality in Australia 1922-1962 (Sydney: University
ecclesiastical polemics about saints are shaped with one purpose in mind: to promote as moral one set of values and behaviours and to condemn others as immoral. What is at issue is the nature of politics at work in the thought and practice of the canonising church."58

Feminist difficulties with the concept of sainthood also arise in relation to its hierarchical, elitist and dualist connotations. Stuart argues:

The whole feminist project is built upon mutual empowerment, dependence upon a mutual exchange of positive energy and action for justice for the purpose of forming, maintaining and developing true community based upon solidarity and mutuality.59

In this process Carter Heyward would argue that women need helpers not heroines.60 There is resistance to a perceived idealisation, romanticisation and trivialisation of women. There is as well a suspicion of an emphasis on an afterlife which can detract from passionate engagement in this life, and of the dualistic connotations of an emphasis on miracles. Sarah Boss succinctly summarises feminist theology’s difficulties with sainthood:

First it tends to place a negative view of women’s behaviour before us - women are beatified for suffering violence at the hands of others or for inflicting violence on themselves or for passively enduring social and physical injustice. They also often exhibit disturbed behaviour. Secondly, feminist theology does not acknowledge the hierarchy of worth which sainthood implies, nor does it honour the bureaucratic process that feels able to dispense this worth. Further, the notion of intercession to find favour with God confiscates personal integrity and worth and underlines the unworthiness of humans.61

Nevertheless, many women would see the need to continue to engage with the lives of the saints in order to decipher stories of women’s creativity and resistance, as well as of oppression, and to become more aware of the friendships which existed among women saints. To neglect them would involve 'leaving these religious images in command and

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58 Stenzel, ‘Maria Goretti and the Politics of Sainthood’, 93.
59 Stuart, Spilling at Dragons, 112. She also cites Cardinal Newman’s verdict: ‘They do not manifest a saint, they mince him into spiritual lessons’, 28.
control of Catholic women’s psyche, not to mention in the command and control of the male hierarchy which interprets their meaning for women. 63

The work of reconstruction is however, still in its infancy. Manzanan argues that for women in communities within the so called Third World the memory of the saints, the holy ones who have suffered and died within the history of their own culture, as well as within the biblical story, exist as a ‘subversive memory’, empowering women in their resistance to oppression and injustice. 63 Ursula King, emphasises the emergence of basic ecclesial communities’ liberation struggles against economic and political oppression in the Third world. 64 Here commitment to solidarity with their people empowers women and can lead to their martyrdom. Irene McCormack, Australian Sister of St Joseph working in Peru killed by members of the guerilla organisation, the Shining Path, is a recent example. Morny Joy argues that attention should be given to the heretical imperative ‘as a more apt aspiration for women today’. 65 Heresy originally designated the making of an ‘act of free choice’. Over time an increasing pre-occupation with orthodoxy as defined by the hierarchy of the church led to the denigration, and often to the persecution of those believed to have deviated from authoritative teaching. It also led to the silencing of many voices and actively inhibited people from listening to their own experience. Certainly, heresy could provide a fruitful avenue for research into women’s religious agency and their history of resistance within women’s religious history.

In the light of this overview of sainthood and the making of saints, I will now summarise the life and work of Mary MacKillop. My own text is an instance of intertextuality in which I draw from the many scholarly and popular studies of Mary MacKillop to create a new text. I will examine historiography in relation to Mary MacKillop as the chapter proceeds.

62 Schussler Fiorenza, Discipleship of Equals, 40-41.


65 Morny Joy, ‘Sainthood or Heresy: Contemporary Options for Women’ in Joy and Magee, Claiming Our Rites, 128.
Mary MacKillop (1842-1909)\

Mary MacKillop co-founded with Father Julian Woods in 1866 the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph, the second Australian religious institute of women, in response to a clearly discerned social need:

the Institute of the Sisterhood of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart was established to meet the many wants of the Australian colonies. The first care (of the institute) indeed the great work of the Sisters, being the education in a strictly Catholic manner of the children of the poorer classes; it becomes necessary for those interested in such a work to understand the general position of persons of this class... the peculiar nature of the Sisters vocation... what would seem out of place in Europe, is still the very reverse in most parts of Australia. It is an Australian who writes this, one brought up in the midst of many evils she tries to describe, who has... heard pious Bishops and zealous priests sadly deplore a state of things which they could not remedy...[who] declare that in the peculiar spirit of the Sisterhood they saw the answer to their frequent sighs and prayers. ('The Necessity of the Institute', London, October 1873).

By the time of her death in 1909 there were 650 sisters in schools and welfare institutions established in South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and New Zealand. Already Mary MacKillop was being spoken of as a saint because of the quality of her courage, her generosity and compassion, and her

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67 The first Australian Institute of religious women, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, later re-named the Sisters of the Good Samaritan was co-founded by Archbishop Polding and Sr Scholastica Gibbons in Sydney in 1857.

68 Modystack, 268.
unwavering commitment to the educational and pastoral needs of children and adults, particularly those in isolated situations.

The daughter of Gaelic immigrants from the Scottish Highlands, she was born in Melbourne in 1842, the eldest of eight children. Her gifted, educated, yet erratic father was often unemployed, so the family knew impoverishment. From the age of sixteen, Mary accepted responsibility for assisting her family. Initially, she worked as a governess, then as an assistant forewoman with the stationers, Sands and Kenny in Melbourne. Two years later, at the age of eighteen, she went as a governess to Penola Station. Here she met Father Julian Woods whom she accepted as her spiritual mentor. In 1862, Mary left Penola for Portland, returning in 1866 to take charge of a school in a converted stable. In the 1860’s, to be Catholic, almost exclusively was to be poor and marginal. Within South Australia, the government, intent on promoting secular education, had restricted state aid to denominational schools in 1851. Julian Wood’s vision for founding an Australian order of sisters, who would be willing to provide an education for children of Catholics living in isolation without access to schools and far removed from church or priest, coincided with Mary’s desire to commit herself to God through service of the poor.

In 1867, when Woods became Director of Catholic Education for the diocese of Adelaide, he asked Mary to come from Penola to Adelaide. On her arrival she opened her first school and later in the year made her religious profession as Mary of the Cross according to a rule of life drawn up by Tenison Woods. The rule stipulated that the institute would be autonomous, beyond direct control of clergy and bishops with the sisters free to respond to need as they perceived it. They were not to own property, nor to charge school fees, nor to teach instrumental music, but to provide a basic education for children of the poor. The institute was to be egalitarian, open to women from all classes. The class distinctions which characterised traditional European orders of the period were not to apply. The sisters were to wear a distinctive simple dress. Not only did Mary and her companions take charge of schools, but of an orphanage, a refuge for distressed women and a providence for those in need. Theirs was a radical project even in comparison with existing religious institutes of women of the period. Their rule of life was endorsed by Bishop Sheil in 1868. By 1869 there were seventy-two sisters.
conducting twenty-one schools around Adelaide and in country districts. Knowledge of their work soon spread. In response to the request of the Bishop of Brisbane, Dr James Quinn, Mary and five of her companions left for Brisbane at the end of that year.

Within three months they were operating three schools in Brisbane. Mary's adamant refusal to accept government assistance for the schools and to teach instrumental music brought her into conflict with church officials, intent on interfering with the rule of the institute. While she was away things fared badly for the sisters in Adelaide under the directorship of Julian Tenison Woods. Two of the sisters, obsessed with preternatural phenomena, formed a strong alliance with their director, who showed a remarkable lack of good judgement in their regard. This led to tensions among the sisters and to criticism from the clergy. Furthermore, Woods contracted substantial debts in relation to the works of the institute and further alienated a number of the clergy, already opposed to his stance to refuse government assistance for schools. Bishop Sheil returning from the first Vatican Council in Rome had to address clerical complaints in relation to the sisters. He decided that there should be a new rule for the institute and that he should replace its current director. He offered the sisters the alternatives of obeying, or of leaving to follow their calling elsewhere. Mary indicated that if the rule were changed she would choose the latter option, revealing the lucidity which was to characterise her approach to dealing with ecclesiastics. Ordered to leave Adelaide, she asked to see the bishop before she went. Her request was interpreted as disobedience. For the bishop it constituted sufficient reason to excommunicate her, on September 22nd, 1871, even though Mary knew that his action was invalid. At this time, forty seven of the sisters were either expelled from, or dispensed from their vows and left the institute.

While the Bishop revoked the excommunication before he died the following year, Rome appointed a Commission of Enquiry to investigate the affairs of the Adelaide diocese. Tenison Woods was replaced as director of the institute by a Jesuit, Fr Tappelmer. Mary was advised to go to Rome without delay to obtain provisional approval of the rule for the institute. When she departed for Rome alone in March 1873 she was thirty one, without financial resources, dependent on the charity of others. In representing herself and the sisters, and in not relying on male mediation, she fully
assumed her own agency and the agency of her community. Well received by Pope Pius IX, eventually she obtained ratification of a modified version of the original rule, which retained governance of the institute by a single general superior directly accountable to Rome (central government). However, the provision which related to non-ownership of property was intentionally omitted. At the first general chapter of the institute (1885), held on her return, Mary MacKillop was elected as the first superior general. The removal of Woods as director was confirmed. He refused to accept the new constitution. He held Mary responsible for the deletion of the restriction on the ownership of property, interpreted her acceptance of the modified rule as a betrayal of his vision and severed relationship with her.

Mary MacKillop's struggle with episcopal authorities continued. Both in Brisbane and Bathurst, dioceses under the bishoprics of Irish brothers, James and Matthew Quinn, she was to experience unwavering opposition to a religious institute not under diocesan control. She refused to concede. The sisters had taken their vows in an institute based on central government and she was not prepared to abrogate their rights. In 1876 she withdrew the sisters from Bathurst, and in 1879, decided on the final withdrawal of the sisters from Queensland. However, the supportive attitude of Archbishop Vaughan led to eight foundations in the Sydney Archdiocese in 1880. In the following year she was re-elected to leadership of the sisters. Her troubles were far from over, for in 1883, Bishop Reynolds, the Bishop of Adelaide, appointed a commission of enquiry to investigate the institute in South Australia, claiming he had been authorised to do so by Rome. Mary was deposed from leadership and ordered to leave Adelaide for Sydney. Here a new novitiate was opened. Bishop Reynolds tried to prevail, though unsuccessfully, on the Sisters in Adelaide to become diocesan despite their constitution. Many of them left Adelaide as a result.

In 1885, Cardinal Moran returning from his investiture in Rome brought a directive that Mary was to cease to be mother general, as her election four years previously was held to be invalid. He was to appoint a replacement until the next chapter. However, the cardinal's nominee was to remain in office for seventeen years, despite the constitution and the wishes of the sisters. In this way Mary was kept from leadership. In November 1885, the bishops met in plenary council in Sydney and voted 14 to 3 that the Sisters of
St Joseph be subjected to diocesan control. However, in 1888 a Decree from Rome constituted the Sisters of St Joseph as an approved regular congregation with a mother house in Sydney. Where sisters existed under diocesan control they were to become distinct congregations under an altered habit and rule and to have the approval of their bishops. This decree finally resolved the struggle over central government.

Further foundations took place in New Zealand, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia and Queensland. Mary spent time in New Zealand, was re-elected as superior general in 1899, and again in 1905. She died in 1909. At the time, her institute comprised 109 houses, 117 schools educating over 12,000 children, many of them in rural and remote areas. Her vision of educating and assisting people suffering poverty and in need was not limited by state boundaries, nor by religious difference. Some of her greatest supporters and the institute’s greatest benefactors belonged to other faiths, or other Christian confessions.

Mary MacKillop’s life was one of unyielding commitment despite intense physical suffering, dissensions within, financial and administrative pressures, rejection by Woods and continuous conflict with church officials. While respectful of the nature and scope of the authority of ecclesial representatives she was well aware of its limits and of her institute’s rights within church law. She exhibited enormous lucidity and determination; she assumed responsibility for her own choices and acted with courage, self-reflection and self-assertion. Her charity towards her detractors in the face of charges of disobedience, inept financial management and intemperance, never faltered. She was caught in the tension of needing approval from the appropriate male religious authorities to work within the church while resisting the encroachments of undue control. Her story reveals discrimination based not solely on gender, but on ethnicity and class. She was a colonial, her ethnic heritage was Scottish, not Irish. Although she had friends from other religions and other social classes, she was not interested in upward social mobility, nor in material success. From a feminist perspective the religious violence to which she was subjected raises many questions which I will consider in the next chapter.

69 Modystack, 269.
Mary MacKillop and the Process of her Canonisation

The acclaim of Mary as a saint did not diminish with her death, neither among the sisters nor among the wider public. As her reputation for holiness of life began to take root, it led, in 1914, to the erection of a memorial chapel in the motherhouse of the Sisters of St Joseph, North Sydney. Here her remains were interred before the Lady Altar. The sisters at the institute’s general chapter in 1910 decided to gather materials pertaining to the life and work of their foundress and have her story written. They were compiled within the year, as The Life and Letters of Mary of the Cross (MacKillop) for circulation among the sisters. In the following year, the provision within the Code of Canon Law which restricted the discussion of the life and virtues of one of the faithful until fifty years had elapsed from the time of their death was revoked. As a result, the Sisters of St Joseph appointed Father F. X. O’Brien to be the postulator of the cause of Mary MacKillop’s beatification.

The official process of enquiry into her life commenced in 1926. Tribunal hearings, in which many of the sisters gave testimony, were held between 1926 and 1931. However, the hearings were suspended because existing documented evidence to refute the charge of intemperance against Mary MacKillop could not be located in the Adelaide Archdiocesan, nor in the Vatican archives. The Cause was reopened in 1951, because the then Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Gilroy, believed the suspension in 1931 was not justified and that the process should proceed. He was able to acquire, from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, documents pertaining to the Adelaide Commission of 1883, pertinent to the charge of alcoholism. These clearly exonerated Mary MacKillop from allegations of intemperance. In the opinion of the Cardinal:

The charge would never have been heard of but for the action of Father George O’Neill SJ who, in the judgement of his colleagues ‘had a penchant for unearthing historical scandals, but lacked judgement in weighing testimony’.

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71 Cited by Gardiner, Postio, 1, xxii.
Interestingly, Cardinal Gilroy in his letter to the Roman Postulator of the cause comments:

they [the sisters] communicated to my Tribunal that, if Mother Mary’s exoneration would bring discredit on Archbishop Reynolds, or any of his priests, they would prefer that the Cause of the Servant of God should be abandoned.\(^22\)

He gives as a rationale for this, the tradition established by Mary MacKillop of never speaking ill of a priest. The Tribunal hearings continued and the resulting documentation was forwarded to the Roman Postulator. The Holy Office approved the introduction of the Cause in 1952. The decree approving Mary MacKillop’s writings was issued in 1954.

Requests from Rome for explicit proof as to the nature of Mary MacKillop’s heroic virtue led to a new round of Tribunal hearings in Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide, from 1959-1961. A series of postulatory letters from members of the hierarchy in Australia and New Zealand, from former Apostolic Delegates from Rome to Australia, and from many prominent citizens, petitioned Pope John XXXIII to introduce the cause for Mary MacKillop’s Beatification. The transfer of responsibility from the Sacred Congregation of Rites to the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 1969 was to lead to the formulation of a new set of procedures and the hastening of existing causes. In 1970, as part of his visit to Australia, Pope Paul VI went to the Memorial Chapel and prayed at the tomb of Mary MacKillop. In response to Australian requests, he brought forward Mary MacKillop’s name for more immediate consideration and encouraged the writing of a Roman positio of her life and virtues based on diocesan evidence. After the verdict of a special Congregation of Cardinals, approved by the Pope in 1973, the Cause of Mary MacKillop was officially introduced. The document granting the introduction of the Cause was presented by the Papal Legate and read during a mass for religious during the International Eucharistic Congress in Melbourne, in February 1975. From 1975 to 1983 Father Aldo Rebeschini, secretary to Australian Cardinal Knox, working in Rome, researched many of the complex issues surrounding the life of Mary MacKillop.

New specifications issued in 1983 required the writing of a new positio reflective of critical historical study at diocesan level. The Sisters of St Joseph engaged Fr Paul Gardiner SJ, an Australian historian and theologian, for this task. During the period 1984-1989 he worked in collaboration with the sisters under the supervision of Fr Peter Gumpel, SJ, the appointee of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints as relator for the Cause. Mary MacKillop's relationship with four bishops: Bishops Sheil, Matthew Quinn, James Quinn, and Bishop Reynolds given uncertainties that had arisen, and her estrangement from Father Woods, were the subject of his intense research. The Positio examined by ten theologians of international repute, selected by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, established Mary MacKillop's heroic virtue. The theologians conveyed their unanimous judgement to the Pope, who declared Mary MacKillop venerable on 13 June 1992. On 6 July 1993, Pope John Paul II declared that a miracle had been worked by God through the intercession of the Venerable Mary MacKillop. An Australian woman suffering from myeloblastic leukemia had been inexplicably cured in defiance of medical prediction.

Thus the path to her beatification had been cleared. The announcement that Pope John Paul II would visit Sydney for the beatification ceremony for Mary MacKillop on the 19 January 1995, was made on 10 February 1994. Beatification is recognition of the saintliness of the acclaimed person. Canonisation requires further evidence of miraculous intervention. It confers recognition of the person in the catalogue of saints of the church.

Mary MacKillop: Historiography

Here I will consider not only the scholarly biographies written by historians, but the different genres utilised by journalists intent on revealing the story of Mary MacKillop to different audiences as part of the promotion of her beatification.

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73 A major challenge for many historians of individual women is the paucity of source material. This does not apply in relation to Mary MacKillop, for she was both a prolific letter writer and the recipient of a copious correspondence. The survival of thousands of her letters to members of her family, sisters of the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph, friends and ecclesiastics affords insight into the actual experiences of Mary MacKillop at key moments of her life. Her early biographers, however, did not have access to letters and documents later discovered in the Archives of the Vatican, in the Archives of the Scots and Irish Colleges in Rome and in Australian Diocesan Archives.
The first biography, *Life and Letters of Mary of the Cross (MacKillop)*, by a Sister of St Joseph, was published in 1916, to commemorate the golden jubilee of the institute. It was distributed among the sisters as ‘their first printed record of the life and work of their founder, substantiating the oral heritage they had received from the foundation Sisters’. While the text follows the chronology of Mary MacKillop’s life, it is substantially composed of letters or extracts from letters she wrote or received, or of extracts from newspapers and periodicals which refer to her work or to the work of the sisters. Even in their edited form they enable the reader through Mary’s reflections on her experience of events and personalities to trace the early history of her institute from its beginnings. She reflects on her vision for the institute and defines its spirit:

*This spirit ...is one of unbounded generosity in the service of God, and humble, unpretending Poverty, united with entire submission to the centre of unity - the Mother House - and together with that, its great head and centre-Rome.*

She also reflects on her constant struggle to maintain the unity of the institute through its centralised authority in the face of episcopal opposition. The letter from Cardinal Simeoni in Rome, conveying the final approbation of the rule of the institute is also included.

Her letters to the sisters reveal the strong affective bonds which existed between them. She writes to them as a community, as well as to individual sisters. More than a quarter of the book is devoted to her voyage to Rome and travels in Europe, to the correspondence which passed between herself and the sisters, between herself and ecclesiastics. Not only does she share her own experiences, her joys and struggles, her experiences of loneliness, weariness and physical sickness, of kindness, and encouragement with the sisters. She educates them to awareness of their place in the church, and she helps them to understand the scope and limits of their own freedom within the church. She exhorts them to courage, to trust in God, to love one another, to bear with one another. So the reader can observe the foundress at work creating a

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74 Kathleen Burford, ‘...Always a Saint’, 9.
75 *Life and Letters of Mary of the Cross (MacKillop)*, Chapter 13: Aims and Objects of the Institute.
76 Ibid., 310-311.
77 Ibid., 377-378.
78 Ibid., See for example, Ch XX: A Long Letter from London.
collective identity among the sisters. Her letters to ecclesiastics reveal her intelligence, lucidity, forthrightness and respect. In listening to her own voice we can be attentive to her language patterns and use of metaphor. So many of her expressions, so much of her spirituality and its accompanying theology reflect her nineteenth century social location. One of her dominant metaphors is the Cross. She emerges as a strong, sensitive, intelligent, courageous, yet highly obediential, loving yet enormously suffering woman. Her letters reveal the daunting task for a woman trying to carve out a sphere of autonomy within a patriarchal church, given her own introjection of some of its patriarchal and androcentric bias.

The substantive biographies of Mary MacKillop reflect the gendered views of clerical historians, socialised to ecclesiastical sexism, implicated in one way or another in the process of Mary MacKillop's canonisation. In order of chronology, they are those of the Irish Jesuit, George O'Neill (1931), Passionist priests, Osmund Thorpe (1957), Daniel Lyne (1983) and Jesuit historian, Paul Gardiner, postulator of the Cause of Mary MacKillop's beatification. His research culminated in the three volume Positio (1989) an integral requirement for the process of beatification, and in the authorised biography (1993). Adelaide diocesan priest, William Modystack, who researched issues pertinent to the libel suit in which Mary and her sisters were involved in Adelaide, for the Office of the Causes of the Saints, wrote a popular biography of Mary MacKillop based on her letters (1983). In addition to these biographies, I will consider the representation of Mary MacKillop which emerges in Marie Therese Foale's history of the foundation and early years of the Sisters of St Joseph (1989).

The biographies and their representations of Mary MacKillop contribute to the making of Mary as saint. They help to construct her as spiritual heroine, as someone who is larger than life. Their research is undertaken to establish that she was a woman of heroic virtue, who conformed to the norms of humility and obedience, which apart from theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, were pre-eminent requirements for the

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79 See for example her letter dated 10th October, 1871 to Bishop Shell.

80 Her circular letters to the sisters were published as, *Mother Mary's Circulars to the Sisters* (North Sydney: Sisters of St Joseph, 1976). They are arranged in chronological order, from 1870 to 1909, and enable the reader to understand something of her relationship with the sisters and to follow the vicissitudes of her life.
canonisation of women. They are written from the perspective of the elite, male clerical writer.

Paul Gardiner's study, the most exhaustive of them all is based on meticulous examination of all available evidence. It is written according to the specifications of the Congregation of Saints: 'The touchstone of what was included in the Positio was relevance to what Mary MacKillop did and endured.' Obscurities which still existed in relation to Mary's controversial relations with Bishops Sheil, Matthew Quinn, James Quinn, Reynolds, and Father Woods were part of his investigation. He attests:

Each encounter has been examined in the Positio, to show what Mother Mary endured and to clear her from charges that she was a self-willed woman given to contestation. The evidence shows that she was never anything, but selfless, dutiful, and charitable...

although she never yielded a point where her duty to God and obedience to higher authority were involved, she maintained the utmost respect for those who applied pressure to induce her to neglect this duty and ignore the injunctions of the Holy See. After the event she made allowances, sought excuses, and spoke kindly to those who confronted her. The evidence is overwhelming that she never breathed a word against them, and never allowed any other Sister to do so.

Paul Gardiner's authorised biography, An Extraordinary Australian, Mary MacKillop, is based on the three volume Positio (1989), but it is a different genre, written for a different audience, not a specifically Catholic audience, within Australia. This helps to explain the difference in rhetoric between the two studies. Nevertheless, it is based on the Positio and is 'substantially identical with' it. Its meticulous attention to detail and its heavy juridical emphasis reflect the earlier study. While Mary is depicted as a great Australian, as an ‘authentic modern woman’, hopefully to be recognised ‘as an inspiration and a friend for future Australians’, Gardiner’s enthusiasm for her is patently apparent. In the third volume of the Positio, a treatise on the virtues of Mary MacKillop, on her faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude and

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81 Gardiner, An Extraordinary Australian, 5.
82 Gardiner, Positio, 3, 47-48.
83 Gardiner, An Extraordinary Australian, 5.
84 ibid., 6.
devotion to the Cross he quite clearly establishes her as a saint, as an heroically virtuous woman. (Among the ten theologians who subjected the Postilo to intense scrutiny there was not one dissenting voice.)

For Paul Gardiner she was "a lovely person, warm and kind, and interested, gracious and self effacing, very intelligent but not parading it, very determined but only when the rights of the defenceless were at stake".\(^{85}\) He refers to Cardinal Moran as 'rubbing shoulders with a living saint. It took him some time to realise it, because people who were not saints had been busy with their tongues, but the evidence was eventually too clear to ignore.\(^{86}\) Interviewed within the documentary film produced by John Sexton, The Cause of Mary MacKillop, his enthusiasm for her is obvious. He exclaims twice 'What a woman!'. He is quick to discount claims that Mary was a feminist- 'she was broader than that'. While the term is not appropriate for Mary who did not share nineteenth, or late twentieth century understandings in relation to gender, Gardiner's comment reveals something of his own interpretation of feminism.\(^{87}\)

O'Neill (1931) examines her 'long and bitter struggle for the unity of the Institute' and considers that her struggle with opponents whom she would wish to have been her friends entailed violent inner conflict, such that in his opinion her life was a 'martyrdom'.\(^{88}\) He too emphasises her obediential spirit: 'for her it was a joy to live in obedience, joy to respect superiors, joy to venerate the Church's hierarchy, joy to venerate Christ in the humblest of priests.\(^{89}\) He considers that her greatest suffering came from having to contest the injudiciousness, inappropriateness, or untruthfulness of their actions and interventions.

\(^{85}\) ibid., 483.

\(^{86}\) ibid., 483-484.

\(^{87}\) Nor did Mary refer to women with the specificity of Mary Ward, seventeenth century foundress who also battled with Rome to maintain central government for her order: 'I would to God that all men understood this verity, that women if they will be perfect, and if they would not make us believe we can do nothing, and that we are but women, we might do great matters'. Mary Ward cited in Kanft, Patricia, Women and the Religious Life in Modern Europe (New York: St Marks Press,1996), 128.

\(^{88}\) George O'Neill, Life of Mother Mary, xi. The theme of martyrdom and its association with sainthood which characterised early Christianity thus reappears.

\(^{89}\) ibid., 128.
While conceding that "[i]t would have been pleasant to write only pleasant things concerning all men especially those who are of the household of the faith", he found it necessary to examine the actions of ecclesiastics. There is a similarity between himself and Gardiner, who maintains that the "less edifying aspects of the characters and activities" of certain clerics must surely be considered essential elements in any account of what she endured. Neither of them views the actions of ecclesiastics in systemic, nor in gendered terms. They constitute for them only the aberrations of individuals. They are at pains to emphasise that there were other bishops and clerics who were supportive of Mary MacKillop. The political import of these biographies, obvious in the case of Gardiner's, is well illustrated by that of O'Neill's. His lengthy consideration of Mary MacKillop's use of brandy for medicinal purposes, which gave rise to allegations of addiction to alcohol during the Commission of Enquiry in 1883, engendered a doubt which was to halt the process of her canonisation for twenty years.

Osmund Thorpe's more concise biography, *Mary MacKillop: The Life of Mother Mary of the Cross, Foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart*, was published in 1957, shortly after the process for canonising her had been resumed in 1951. He was engaged in the analysis of documents for the Tribunal, and was instrumental in the recovery of missing documentation which exonerated Mary MacKillop from the charge of intemperance. Although he claims to present a factual history, he presents an idealised portrait of Mary as heroine and saint. Chapter 15 is entitled 'Mary, The Woman'. It manifests both the political and gender biases of this very readable biography. He portrays Mary's virtues in glowing terms, for instance:

No sister could resist the slow cadence of her voice, her smile that swept away fear, and her eyes, still so large and luminous, that spoke instantly to the heart. Like one placed on a pedestal she was observed from every angle and yet there was nothing but praise for her. The sisters could not but perceive the depth of her faith, the joyousness of her hope, and the breadth of her outstanding charity. Prudence was evident in all her dealings, her justice something that one could never doubt, her temperance a model seen and admired from morning to night, and her

90 Ibid., xi.
91 Gardiner, *Positio*, 1, xlvii.
fortitude a stay in the midst of their own troubles, difficulties and sufferings. 93

Mary is beginning to suffer the fate of the Virgin Mary, idealised and rarefied, the object of male projection. Elsewhere, he describes her as ‘candid, trustful with a sort of sublime simplicity that belongs only to great souls, and wholly wrapt up in the affairs of God’; ‘there was not an atom of pride in her’; ‘by word, but most impressively by example she taught a doctrine of utter selflessness in all that concerned the welfare of others’. 94 Her pioneering spirit, which he is intent on revealing, has a male resonance: for example, he refers to her as ‘a warrior home from the wars and desirous of practice in the arts of peace’. 95 The image of the institute as an edifice, which for him is a scriptural image, is one of the organising metaphors of his book. In chapter headings he refers to its foundations, to the questioning of its design, to the new specifications, to its reconstruction and to its taking final shape. This is reminiscent of so many of the official histories of the Catholic Church in Australia which detail the ecclesial building achievements of clerical men. There could be more appropriate metaphors to convey the dynamism of this community of women whose organisation Mary herself never viewed in hierarchical terms. His bias is also revealed in his comment on the Vatican decision accompanying the decree of 1888, which recognised central government for the institute. This decision ignored the provision in the constitution with regard to the election of the Mother General:

In what must be regarded as a praiseworthy endeavour to make its decision acceptable to the many bishops who would naturally be disappointed at it, the Holy See aware of Mother Mary’s great virtue confidently set her aside and confirmed the acting Mother General in office for ten years from the decree. 96

Daniel Lyne’s well documented study, Mary MacKillop: Spirituality and Charisms (1982), originally written as a thesis at the Gregorian University in Rome, provides a key to understanding Mary MacKillop’s spirituality. It differs from the other biographies in that it is a study in historical theology with a focus on the religious life of Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph, through the lens of Vatican II’s theology.

93 Thorpe, Mary MacKillop, 171.
94 Ibid., 47, 147, 212.
95 Ibid., 210.
96 Ibid., 209.
of the religious life. In examining the religious experience of Mary MacKillop, Lyne considers the unity of her life as foundress of an institute, with a rule of life which gives expression to, and helps to preserve, the particular charism of the institute in the life of the church. In the absence of any personal systematic reflection on her spirituality and religious experience, Lyne draws extensively on her letters. Because of the significant influences of her father and Julian Tenison Woods on her spiritual life, and her particular use of language in her correspondence, he considers that her spirituality reflects that of the French School. This emerged during the seventeenth century and its influence was pervasive in many parts of the church well into the twentieth century. Dominant characteristics of this school of spirituality for him are, emphasis on the transcendence of God, on the creaturehood of human persons, on the imitation of Christ, not merely in terms of his outward actions, but in terms of his interior attitudes, particularly towards God. Emphasis on the priesthood of Christ which forms part of such a spirituality was reflected in a special reverence for the priest in the Christian community. This helps to explain Mary MacKillop's reverence for the priesthood, her desire to conceal, as well as to forgive, the offences she suffered from individual members of the clergy, and her willingness to seek extenuating circumstances to explain their behaviour.

Lyne considers that constants of the spirituality of Mary MacKillop are an emphasis on the Fatherhood of God, on seeking and living in communion with the will of God, on imitating Christ through the acceptance of the Cross, (acceptance of the sufferings of life in imitation of Christ, in the spirit of reparation), and poverty, both spiritual and material. These were expressed in her devotional life through an emphasis on eucharistic worship, devotion to Christ through the symbol of the Sacred Heart, to the Blessed Virgin and the saints, particularly St Joseph, who symbolised humility and

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97 This school of spirituality is identified with Cardinal Berulle (1575-1629). It grew out of the Catholic Reformation, with its emphasis on the renewal of the clergy; and a renewal in biblical and pastoral studies. It was theocentric, christocentric, promoted devotion to Mary, and while committed to neoplatonic view of the church and the ordained priesthood, did have a sense of the priesthood of the faithful and of the universal call to holiness. See, for example, William M. Thompson ed., Berulle and the French School: Selected Writings. Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Chestlyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Rambold eds. The Study of Spirituality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

98 Lyne, Mary MacKillop, 162.
detachment for her. They were also expressed in her mission to address particular needs within Australian society. Lyne is conscious, in the absence of her clear articulation, of the tentativeness of some of his conclusions. Writing in 1983 he does not advert to the influence of gender in this study. 99

While he argues that changes in the church’s understanding of itself, reflected in its theology, and in the faith experience of the believer, obviously influence the contemporary interpretation and expression of the Josephite charism, he does not advert to the fact that women’s religious life has traditionally been framed, governed and interpreted by men. In many ways this study both reveals and helps to continue the interpretation and shaping of female religious life by men. Ironically, too, it suggests that biographies of Mary MacKillop may help to perpetuate theological understandings which have now been reconsidered, such as her particular understanding of the theology of the Cross.

William Modystack’s popular biography (1982), a selective biography, based solely on primary sources, presents another idealised portrait of Mary, ‘a woman before her time’. Mary, the young Australian woman who committed herself to God and the service of the poor at the age of twenty four, by the time she is thirty three has been to Rome, met with the Pope, and obtained provisional approval for the rule of the institute. He considers that the written rule was ‘the guiding light in her own life’. She exhorted the sisters ‘to study the rule and to observe it’.100 The picture that emerges of Mary is that of an able administrator and leader of the sisters, in constant negotiation with Rome, resisting the encroachments of episcopal authorities on her legitimate sphere of influence, travelling ‘thousands of kilometres to secure the peace and unity of the institute’.101 Later in the book he evaluates her years of leadership:

99 Medieval historian Caroline W. Bynum has discovered that in the medieval period even when men and women have used the same symbols ‘they have invested them with different meanings and different ways of meaning’. See ‘Introduction: The Complexity of Symbols’ in Caroline W. Bynum, Stephen Harrell and Paula Richman, eds., Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 16. Josephite Sister, Ann Gilroy, ‘Mary MacKillop and the Challenge to her Daughters’ in The Australasian Catholic Record, 72(1) January 1995: 61-72, begins to explore the symbols of the Sacred Heart and the death of Christ on the Cross and to reread them from a woman’s perspective utilising insights from Julia Kristeva.

100 Modystack, Mary MacKillop, 181-182.

101 Ibid., 145.
In just over sixteen years she and her Sisters had done much for the poor whom they loved, but at the cost of tremendous personal suffering, injustices and misunderstandings. For all those years she had carried the burden and responsibility of being the Sister Superior and being ultimately answerable to the authorities for the working of the Institute. 102

Within twenty five years of the foundation, there are sisters in the Adelaide and Port Augusta dioceses, in Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and New Zealand. He quotes Mary MacKillop in her circular letter to the sisters for this anniversary as saying; 'Ah, my Sisters, God has done wonders for us. He has tried us sorely and comforted us wonderfully.' 103 It is a selective biography which emphasises the achievement, as well as the trials and suffering of Mary MacKillop and presents her as somewhat larger than life.

Marie Foale's study, The Josephite Story. The Sisters of St Joseph: their foundation and early history 1866-1893, sets Mary MacKillop within the context of the institute of which she was co-founder. Foale considers that its history can be told in terms of conflict, and that

The sisters struggle for autonomy in a male dominated hierarchical Church touched upon and reflected many of the conflicts then wracking the wider Church in Australia and overseas. These included its struggle against the secular liberalism of the day, its members' attitudes to social class and mobility and its struggle for survival in a pluralist society. 104

However, while Marie Foale acknowledges the uniqueness of this Australian order, the fact that it was derived from European orders meant that, 'its founders' thinking was not as adaptive as it might seem at first glance because tradition dies hard in a new country.' 105 She also refers to a characteristic of clerics of the period, 'little consideration for, or understanding of the needs of religious women.' 106 The conflicts in Adelaide in 1871-1872 she considers in terms of conflicts over power and money and issues of race and nationality. She claims that the survival of the institute was due, not

102 ibid., 184
103 ibid., 245
104 Marie Therese Foale, The Josephite Story, xi.
105 ibid., 57
106 ibid., 91.
just to the agency of Mary MacKillop, but to the determination, tenacity of purpose and endurance of the sisters. She reveals how the sisters in Adelaide after 1883 felt abandoned and upset because ‘in spite of all they had suffered during the visitation of 1883, Mary MacKillop scolded them soundly for their part in the troubles between herself and Reynolds.’ She indicates that feelings of hurt and bitterness persisted for fifty years. Her evaluation of Mary MacKillop is more nuanced than that of some of Mary MacKillop’s male biographers:

Mary has generally been presented as a strong woman, the one whose faith never wavered, even under great pressure, and who always stood out in front, giving sure leadership to the Institute. However, during the 1880’s she was often tired and ill, and hence, unable to control the course of her own, or the Institute’s life as she would have wished. As well she lacked business acumen and, in her anxiety for the spread of the work, allowed it to fall into serious financial difficulties. Yet in spite of these difficulties most of the sisters remained loyal to her.

Apart from these scholarly studies there are popular interpretations of Mary MacKillop using different genres - film, audio tape, as well as print - by women writers and journalists, most of whom worked in close collaboration with the Sisters of St Joseph in the years immediately preceding the beatification. Their political intent is not to prove the heroic virtue of Mary MacKillop, but to represent her as an Australian woman, who despite her nineteenth century setting, and her calling within the Roman Catholic Church, is someone with whom contemporary women and men can identify. Part of their intent is to counter stereotypical contemporary representations of nuns as childlike, submissive or banalised figures. These women journalists represent a gendered consciousness and utilise contemporary narrative as well as historical sources in their intertextual constructions.

Journalist, Lesley O’Brien’s biography (1994), symbolically entitled Mary MacKillop Unveiled was written with the full cooperation of the Mary MacKillop Secretariat as part of the promotion for the beatification. The back cover includes an advertisement for the film Mary, produced by Kay Pavlou. O’Brien utilises Mary’s letters and diaries

\[^{107}\text{ibid., 192.}\]
\[^{108}\text{ibid., 93.}\]
and includes many photographs. She represents Mary as an Australian woman who contributed to the redefinition of woman in both society and church, for example:

A woman of Mary’s power and strength was something of an enigma in a country founded on a spirit of mateship and grounded in chauvinism. In its own way the Church embraced the ethos...in challenging powerful Church figures like the Bishops Quinn, Mary helped redefine the role of women, not only in the Church, but in society. She believed she was called by God to perform a task and if she offended the sensibilities of some powerful men, then so be it. 109

English journalist Felicity O’Brien’s Called to Love, is a short biography which follows the organisation of Paul Gardiner’s Positio. She acknowledges her debt to him and to Peter Gumpel, SJ. Her intention was to provide a brief, yet accurate introduction to a woman whose agency is revealed in her portrayal of authentic love, described by St Paul in the Epistle to the Corinthians, 13, 4-7. The final section of this book includes extracts from Mary MacKillop’s letters.

Clare Dunne prepared and presented a script, first broadcast as a two-part radio programme on ABC Radio National’s Helicon series, not innocently entitled Mary MacKillop: No Plaster Saint: A Pioneering Woman for Our Time (1991). The promotion on the back of the ABC recording states:

Mary’s letters and documents of her time reveal simply and movingly how this remarkable woman dealt with institutional power, women in the Church, spiritual values and personal integrity - issues as relevant now as they were then.

The audio-tape allows for the dramatic interaction of many voices, both those of contemporary clerics, such as Paul Gardiner and Paul Collins, Sister of St Joseph, Kathleen Burford, and those of historical figures, including Mary MacKillop, Julian Tenison Woods, Bishops Sheil, Quinn and Reynolds, the voices of a number of individual sisters, as well as that of the narrator. The tape dramatises the many experiences of conflict Mary MacKillop experienced, such as her conflict with Woods, her influence in having him dismissed as the Institute’s Director, her conflicts with the bishops. The narrator comments on her struggle with Bishop Reynolds: ‘At issue was

109 Lesley O’Brien, Mary MacKillop, 160.
more than one woman's fight with an individual Bishop. The battle was that of institutional power - who had ultimate control of whom in the Church and how they went about getting it.\textsuperscript{110}

Dunne also acknowledges the generous sense of charity of Mary MacKillop which meant that she emerges as a more magnanimous character than the men who opposed her. She presents Mary in relation to her community, 'surrounded by a spirited band of women.'\textsuperscript{111} Sister Kathleen Burford acknowledges that the women Mary placed in charge of the foundations in Brisbane, Bathurst and Adelaide, Josephine McMullen, Theresa MacDonald and Monica Phillips, who were unswerving in following both her direction and their rule, were involved in Mary's conflict with the bishops.\textsuperscript{112} She acknowledges the sisters' capacity for resistance. In the conflict with Bishop Reynolds she notes that all but four of the sisters petitioned Rome to remove the Mother House to Sydney and that one hundred and seventy five of them petitioned Rome against the 1888 recommendation of the Australian Bishops' synod that they be reduced to diocesan status.\textsuperscript{113}

The Film Mary, written and directed by Kay Pavlou and produced by Rosemary Blight, represents another genre used to promote the life and achievement of Mary MacKillop. This film utilises both drama and documentary in its attempt to retrieve Mary MacKillop from her past and to interpret her significance in the present. The intended audience was both a specifically Catholic audience and a general Australian audience. The director wanted

people to have a spiritual experience during the film. I didn't want them to stay at arm's length from someone who was having a spiritual experience, for them to be seen to be having spiritual experiences by themselves without the audience travelling with them.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{110} Clare Dunne, Mary MacKillop: No Flatter Saint: A Pioneering Woman for Our Time, (Crow's Nest, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1991), 53.

\textsuperscript{111} ibid., 58.

\textsuperscript{112} ibid., 49.

\textsuperscript{113} ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{114} Peter Malone, 'Mary: Interview with Writer Director, Kay Pavlou', Compass Theological Review (Summer, 1994): 36-38.
While the use of drama and documentary in this film helped to convey the story of Mary MacKillop to a wide audience throughout Australia at the time of the beatification, it probably works against the lasting significance of this film, as a film with other than limited appeal. The story is conveyed by the dramatic representations of events in Mary’s life; the commentary of interviewees, notably Clare Dunne, two Sisters of St Joseph, Marie Therese Foale and Margaret MacKenna, and Jesuit, Peter Gumpel; the use of quotations from the letters of Mary MacKillop and some of her contemporaries, photographs and music. So there are multiple texts at work in this new text. Lucy Bell portrayed Mary as spirited, assertive, attentive, respectful of authority, connected to her own inner depths, suffering yet attuned to the needs of other people. The commentary advances the story, but sometimes I experienced it as a disjunction in the flow of the film. The distinctiveness of the Sisters of St Joseph - their egalitarianism, simplicity, mobility and independence - is emphasised. The producer tried to achieve a balanced portrayal of the conflicts with ecclesiastics and the contribution of the sisters to the needy in Australian society. While the portrayal of conflict is dramatic, it is plausible and there is an attempt to evaluate personality as well as contextual pressures which help to explain why certain people acted as they did. Mary is represented as a woman of enormous spiritual strength and serenity, as ‘a plain saint who had been through the mill’, as someone who remained open to life, bigger than the circumstances in which she found herself, down to earth, but intimately connected with a world beyond this one.

Finally, Mary MacKillop Place, the museum, advertised as ‘[m]ore than a Museum, its a Miraculous Journey’, opened in January 1995 to coincide with the beatification, is another attempt to interpret Mary MacKillop’s contemporary as well as historical significance. Beth Gilligan critiques its lack of historical accuracy, its theatricality, the strange disconnection of Mary MacKillop from her socio-economic, political and cultural context. She sees the origin of the museum in the collaboration between the Sisters of St Joseph Congregational Leadership Team, Elisabeth Fowler, senior curator, who wrote the exhibition brief, designer, Peter England, and Wintergreen a production company headed by Tony Sattler. The caption of her article ‘Thoroughly postmodern

Mary' conveys something of the variety of texts and genres which constitute the museum. The advertising brochure presents it as '[a] most unusual, amazing museum about Australia's first saint! She was called a troublemaker, a stirrer, and that 'infuriating nun', 'Mary MacKillop, the battler who became our first Aussie saint'. As it constitutes a memorial to Mary MacKillop and incorporates her tomb, I will give a more nuanced description and assessment of this museum in Chapter 6 when I consider the contribution of the Sisters of St Joseph to spirituality within an Australian context.

Because I am concerned to unravel the politics of meaning inscribed in the beatification of Mary MacKillop, I next intend to examine, though briefly, the context in which the event is situated.

The Socio-Political and Ecclesial Context of the Beatification

The beatification of Mary MacKillop, the first woman and the first person in Australia to be acknowledged as a person remarkable for the goodness of her life by the Roman Catholic Church, occurs in the aftermath of Australia's bi-centenary in 1988. The bi-centenary manifested the ambiguity and complexity of Australian identity. It also revealed a society in process of transformation. In the 1990s, rapid economic, social, political and technological change is leading to redefinition of cultural institutions and behaviours. Despite the celebration of the cultural diversity of its citizens, there is confusion in relation to the place of the Aboriginal people in Australian society, after the Supreme Court's 1992 Mabo decision in relation to Aboriginal land rights. There is uncertainty in relation to multiculturalism, twenty five years after the abandonment of the white Australia policy. Free market economic policies widen the economic gap between the rich and the poor, lock the country into a high level of unemployment, lead to the commercialisation and privatisation of essential services, precipitate a crisis in the rural sector, and thus contribute to widespread insecurity within Australia.

There are enormous implications for women within the society in all of these changes. The women's movement has had a profound impact on Australian society in the past thirty years, both intellectually and politically. Despite its plurality, complexity and contradictions, it has been particularly influential in the area of social policy since the
1970's. In part this is due to an increasing feminisation of the bureaucracy. There has been a questioning of the whole concept of private/public interface. Women's childrearing and domestic responsibilities have been recognised through policy relating to child care, women's health, women's refuges, new community services and employment opportunities. Women are more visible in public life and a fundamental redefinition of gender roles, of marriage and of family life is in process. Nevertheless, in a climate of economic rationalism many of these gains stand to be lost and women are far from having achieved parity in wages and salaries for their work.

Australian feminist theorists emphasise the complex interstructuring of gender, class and race, and the feminisation of poverty within the country. There is growing recognition of the complicity of women and feminism in white Australian racism. These emphases mirror the global structuring of injustice and violence against women, highlighted during the United Nations Conference on Population in Cairo, in May 1994, and by the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in August, 1995.

The Catholic Church, given the influx of migrants from Europe, the Middle East, Asia and South America is now the largest of the religious denominations in Australia. It includes thirty one dioceses, one hundred and twenty eight religious institutes, over one thousand four hundred parishes and many lay organisations. However, it has not come to terms with the change in its cultural composition and much that was normative in its Anglo-Celtic past is still entrenched. The strong social, political and religious cohesion which once typified Catholicism in this country no longer exists. Great internal diversity has led to the blurring of identity. Many exist on the margins of the church and many have left it. Over the past thirty years the number of priests and members of religious institutes has declined from over 20,000 to upwards of 12,000 and as the average age of both groups is high, further serious decline is inevitable. The issue of abuse on the part of priests and religious has been devastating in its effects on the

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116 See for example, Grieve and Burns, Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives; Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought and Calne and Pringle, Transitions: New Australian Feminisms.

whole church. Among Catholic women there has been a marked decline in church attendance; from 60% in 1967 to 36% in 1985: the decline for men in the same period was from 42% to 32%. Robert Dixon argues that: 'People are reassessing and redefining what it means to be Catholic, and they are defining it on their own terms, not by reference to official positions'.

Historically, the Catholic Church in Australia has been an "hierarchically and clerically controlled church". Patrick O'Farrell depicts it in recent decades as fragmented, conservative, absorbed in its own affairs; as experiencing the erosion of the independence of its institutions through their absorption into the financial frameworks of the state; as led by conservative and unimaginative bishops who resist the widening of their decision-making power. The church in Australia is also influenced by tensions which beset the universal church, a reaction to the reform programme of Vatican II, to its heavily European culture when the majority of the membership is composed of African, Asian and Latin American people, to its a policy of renewed centralism manifest in the manner of appointing bishops, the choice of conservative candidates and the failure to engage in consultation with the local churches.

What then is the significance for the Roman Catholic Church of proclaiming a nineteenth century co-founder of an Australian religious institute as worthy of emulation by the faithful? Is it merely a ritualising of what was significant in the past? A form of distraction from the major issues which confront the church in the present? An attempt to convey a political message about women in a changed historical moment? Or part of John Paul II's over-all strategy of evangelisation?

111 ibid, 447-448.
In this chapter, I have introduced the reader to Mary MacKillop, examined the representations of her life and work by historians, explored the social construction of sainthood and examined the issue of sainthood from a feminist theological perspective. Against this background I have traced the history of the beatification of Mary MacKillop and considered the context in which the proclamation of her beatification occurs. In the following chapter I intend to focus initially, on the church in nineteenth century Australia, and to examine the major conflicts Mary MacKillop experienced with members of the clergy and hierarchy as she tried to shape and preserve the identity and direction of the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph. This should illuminate her capacity both for agency and resistance. Then having examined her experience with church authorities, in the second part of the chapter I will examine the experience of Sisters of St Joseph whom I interviewed, and their experiences of conflict with representatives of the official church in preparation for the beatification of Mary MacKillop. This will enable the reader to explore the correspondences and differences between their experiences and that of their foundress in their different historical settings.
Chapter Three

Women and Authority: the experience of Mary MacKillop, and of contemporary Sisters of St Joseph

In this chapter my focus is the critical issue of women and authority within the framework of the Roman Catholic Church. Mary MacKillop through her beatification is proclaimed as an authority in relation to the practice of Christian virtue. In the preceding chapter I have already intimated that authority in the church, including its textual expression, has traditionally been the preserve of men and of the male voice. Women, excluded from official teaching, governing, and liturgical roles, confined to the private sphere, could only lay claim to the authority which came from their own inner experience of the sacred. Mary MacKillop, I will argue, did not differ from other foundresses of active religious orders for women in the post-Tridentine period who were only able to negotiate relative spaces of freedom for women with enormous difficulty.

In the first part of this chapter, after a brief consideration of the meaning of authority in general and of ecclesial authority in particular, I propose to examine the major conflictual experiences of Mary MacKillop with key clerics and bishops. I am interested in why they occurred, what they reveal of the extent and limits of her agency and power to resist, and how they might be interpreted within a feminist hermeneutical framework of suspicion and diversity. I will argue that Mary MacKillop’s adherence to the principle of central government, enshrined in both the original and the approved text of the rule of institute, constitutes her key strategy of resistance; and that her agency is motivated primarily by her faith in God. I also propose that Mary MacKillop in her own understanding and practice of authority subscribes to what feminist political theorist, Kathleen Jones, designates as ‘compassionate authority’, characterised by an imaginative taking up of the position of ‘the other’.

In the second part of the chapter, for which the first is a necessary hermeneutical
preliminary, I argue that the consensual, participative and egalitarian leadership practices of the Sisters of St Joseph in their organisation of the beatification reflect both the practice of their foundress and post Vatican II theology of religious life. I consider their argument that the persistence of an understanding of authority as domination within a male command obedience structure was the root of the conflicts they experienced with male clerical officials in the lead up to the beatification. I argue that the Sisters of St Joseph were intent on exercising a public leadership role in their hermeneutical task of retrieving, proclaiming and celebrating the life and achievement of Mary MacKillop. In their respect for the principles of diversity and difference they promoted the generation of multiple 'texts' on Mary MacKillop. I examine their hermeneutical strategies, together with their strategies of resistance in relation to the initiatives of officials of the Papal Visit Office. Finally, I will examine some of the similarities and differences between the experience of Mary MacKillop in the nineteenth century and the experience of leaders of the institute at the end of the twentieth century, mindful that these experiences and the language in which they are expressed are indissociable from the socio-historical context in which they are located.

Ecclesial Authority

The word 'authority' is variously defined. It derives from the Latin noun auctor, author, and from the Latin verb augere, to augment. Correlatively, it is associated with the concept of power, derived from the Latin agere, to act, to catalyse. Authority is in fact legitimised power. Feminist political theorist, Kathleen Jones, argues that traditionally in Western political theory authority is understood as the rightful governance of human action by means other than coercion or persuasion. All authority is weakened by the abuse and misuse of power. Its rightful use requires that its limits

1 Richard McBrien, Catholicism, 739-779. He makes the distinction between de jure authority, supported by the power of office and de facto authority, authority which is effective as a result of personal inspiration, or persuasion, 739.
4 Foucault differentiates between 'strong power' which draws through stimulation and attraction and 'weak power' which is reliant on threat, force and disciplinary action.
be both recognised and respected. Within the Christian tradition all authority, including civil authority, is perceived as coming from God, the original author of everything created. Jesus, in the New Testament demonstrates that authority is rightfully exercised as service to the community. The apostles and their successors emerge as the authoritative presiders, regulators, adjudicators, teachers, and preachers, charged with the governance of the Christian community in the Spirit of Jesus. Initially an 'ethos of co-equal discipleship' prevailed. However, with the granting of legal status to the church within Greco-Roman civilisation, (with the conversion of the Constantine in 313 C.E.), the church structure increasingly replicated the hierarchical, patriarchal governance of the Roman empire. McBrien argues that 'the classical, juridical, papal, hierarchical concept of the church was fully established by the thirteenth century'.

It is my intent to trace the development of authority within the Roman Catholic Church only in so far as it has a bearing on authority in the Church in Australia. I have already indicated in the previous chapter that in the wake of the Reformation new emphasis was given to the governing power of the Pope, bishops and clergy. In the nineteenth century this was to culminate in the definition of papal infallibility during the first Vatican Council (1869-1870) and to lead to greater centralisation of the Church in Rome. In the nineteenth century the Catholic Church in Australia was heavily shaped by Irish bishops, many of them educated in Rome, accustomed in Ireland to geographically contained dioceses in which they wielded enormous power. On arrival in Australia they had to govern local churches often of scattered, impoverished people, in a religiously pluralist society. Reliant on priests who were not always well educated and who had to

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5 The association of authority with service in the New Testament was reclaimed by the Second Vatican Council. Pope John Paul II sees himself as 'the servant of the servants of God'. However even authority envisaged as service can mask the power relations operative within it.


adjust to the rigours of colonial life, they tried to control their personal lives and ministry by imposing strict disciplinary rules. From 1870 many, but not all, of the Irish bishops and priests subscribed to an authoritarian and intransigent form of Romanised Irish Catholicism associated with Cardinal Cullen, most clearly in evidence in the sectarian disputes in relation to education in Australian colonial life.

Bishops in nineteenth century Australia were often not cognisant of church law which distinguished between congregations existing within a diocese, serving that local church, and those found across dioceses, designated pontifical, because they related directly with Rome. Furthermore, many ecclesiastics were ignorant of the conditions for the validity of religious vows in church law, such as their being taken according to the terms of the written constitutions of the institute in which the religious person professed them. For the first fifty years there were no religious communities of women in Australia. In 1838 the Irish Sisters of Charity, a centralised institute under papal jurisdiction, made a foundation in Sydney. The Irish Sisters of Mercy made the first of their many foundations, in Perth in 1846. They, however, were to be self contained within a diocese under the local bishop. The first Australian institute, eventually designated as the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, was co-founded in Sydney by Archbishop Polding, and Irish Sister of Charity, Scholastica Gibbons, in 1857. All of these were active institutes in which the members took simple vows. They were distinct From cloistered communities of nuns with solemn vows. Rosa McGinley argues that it was only From 1749 that Rome had given tacit approval to institutes with simple vows. From the mid nineteenth century on more and more women's institutes received papal approbation, but clear recognition of the juridical distinctions between pontifical and diocesan institutes did not emerge until 1901. These new understandings were incorporated in the revision of the code of canon law in 1917.

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10 McGinley, A Dynamic of Hope, 104, 124.
The revised code also legislated for many aspects of religious life, including the supplanting of earlier egalitarian models of religious governance by command obedience patterns of authority.\(^{11}\) Henceforth, a hierarchical mode of exercising authority characterised religious institutes within the Roman Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council. Calls to adapt the way of life to the demands of the modern world emanated from Rome from 1950 on.\(^{12}\) However, Australian religious orders were so entrenched in keeping the school system going that they were only partially able to heed them. Finally, the Second Vatican Council mandated the reform of religious life.\(^{13}\) As well as emphasising a participatory inclusive model of church and the priesthood of all believers, it also described the character of ecclesial office and of all ministry as one of service. With a view to the renewal of religious life the Council mandated the convening of special general chapters of religious institutes for the purpose of revising their constitutions. Women's institutes responded vigorously and examined every facet of their lives. The renewed constitutions came to place greater emphasis on authority as a collegial activity, involving dialogue and such participatory processes for decision making as consultation, collaboration, consensus and accountability. Care was taken to replace hierarchical and dehumanising forms of government which accentuated dominative power, blind obedience, suspicion and distance, by accentuating the enabling, facilitating and empowering dimensions of leadership.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{11}\) The most egalitarian model was the Benedictine where the single autonomous house elected its own leaders. This was the pattern for communities of sisters with solemn vows who came to Australia, such as the Benedictines and Carmelites, and for sisters with simple vows, such as the Sisters of Mercy who chose it. The centralised model followed by some simple vowed communities of women from the seventeenth century became established as the model for simple vowed communities from 1850 onwards. It is the model spelled out for active, simple vowed communities in the 1917 Code of Canon Law.

\(^{12}\) The first International Congress of Religious was held in Rome in 1950. The move to consider adapting religious life in the light of changed social conditions reached Australia through a series of separate congresses for Sisters and Brothers of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, the first of which was held in Sydney in 1955.

\(^{13}\) *Perfectae Caritatis.* The Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, Austin Flannery, ed., *Documents of Vatican II,* 611-623. In this document the Council gave five principles to guide the renewal of religious life: recognition of the gospel as 'final norm' of religious life; recognition of the Spirit inspired diversity of religious congregations; recognition of the need for social renewal; promotion of an understanding of the needs of humanity and the modern world; and recognition of the need for spiritual renewal.

Elisabeth Johnson considers that within this process of renewal women religious:

began to notice the systemic absence and silence of women in church policy-making bodies and ministries, its obvious connection with gender, and the resulting pressures on how they lived their lives. While Mary Jo Weaver, also reflecting the American experience, argues that the post conciliar renewal process revealed the powerlessness of nuns within the institutional church, given that their own decisions if in conflict with male authority could easily be dismissed. An emphasis in the post Vatican period has been on greater mutual respect and understanding, closer collaboration and co-operation between bishops and the leaders of religious institutes, in accordance with the spirit of the document, Mutatis Relationes, published jointly by the Congregations for Bishops and for Religious in 1978. However, Doris Goetmoeller would consider that the document 'has been more honoured in the telling than in the doing'. The pontificate of Pope John Paul II, through its increasingly centralist, patriarchal policies and processes, has also eroded much of the optimism of the earlier post-conciliar period. The Synod of Bishops on the Religious Life in 1994 was preceded by worldwide consultation of both men and women religious. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the United States argued for women's need to represent themselves:

In many ways the synod, like other official church convocations, stands before the judgement of the church's women, and other women as well, in an age that finds the practice of exclusively male groups making decisions for women incomprehensible. We therefore believe we speak for all women in the church when we ask to be included in formal sessions of the synod in order to speak for ourselves and for the future of the religious life for women.

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18 Austin Flannery, ed., Towards the 1994 Synod: The Views of Religious. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1993), 132. At this synod held in Rome in 1994, 59 of the 348 participants were women, although worldwide there are 615,000 religious women and 224,000 religious priests and brothers.
Mary MacKillop’s experiences of bishops and priests in Australia and in Rome were mixed. Some of them, for example Cardinal Vaughan, and Bishop Torreggiani, were consistently kind. Others, for example, Tenison Woods, Bishop Reynolds, and Monsignor Kirby in Rome, were good Father friends who later became her enemies. From still others, she experienced religious violence and personal abuse. Most of the bishops were threatened by her desire for a legitimate sphere of autonomy. She challenged all their perceptions in relation to the submissive obediential role of women within a patriarchal church where women traditionally were without power.

Mary MacKillop was single minded in relation to authority. Authority acting in terms of its legitimate powers was respected by her as the will of God. When it exceeded its legitimate exercise she was prepared to contest it. Her own and Julian Tenison Woods’ visions for the Sisters of St Joseph were not limited by geographical boundaries. They saw the needs of children ‘of the poorer class’ within rural Australia as a whole. They also believed that a central government under a single leader best suited the pastoral needs of a mobile group of women living in twos and threes, in remote places, in primitive conditions, in the absence of priest, or parish church. Thus central government was a constitutive element in the rule of the institute drawn up by Tenison Woods and approved by Bishop Sheil, in accordance with which the sisters took their vows. For Mary MacKillop and the sisters the issue of central government was the major source of conflict with the four bishops, Sheil, Matthew Quinn, James Quinn, and Reynolds.

Mary MacKillop and the conflicts she experienced with Father Woods, Bishops Sheil, James and Matthew Quinn and Bishop Reynolds

The relationship between Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison Woods was highly significant for each of them yet, as a result of serious misunderstanding, they experienced a long period of estrangement. 19 Mary, already animated by a desire to

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live for God and by a keen sense of the needs of people struggling in poor circumstances, encountered Tenison Woods on her first visit to Penola as governess in 1861. He was ten years older, English, a newcomer to Australia, knowledgeable about religious community life, enthusiastic, personable and zealous. Before coming to Australia he spent nearly four years, first as a novice with the Passionists in England, then with Father Faber and priests of the Oratory, then as a novice and student for the priesthood with the newly formed order of the Marists in Fatherance, where he also for a time was directed by Julian Eymard. Thus he had been exposed to a variety of religiously formative experiences before coming to Australia. He was ordained to the priesthood after study with the Jesuits at Sevenhill in South Australia, in 1857. In Fatherance, during his travels as a student of natural history in the Auvergne, he encountered sisters living in rural areas, in small groups, in simple circumstances, caring for peasant girls, instructing them in the faith and equipping them with practical skills. They were to be the inspiration for the congregations he was to establish in Australia. Julian became for Mary MacKillop 'my first Father and teacher in the spiritual life'. She would later write to Bishop Sheil in 1871:

I went to open a school in Penola under Father Woods who gradually unfolded to me his idea of endeavouring to do something in the same way for the neglected poor children of South Australia. The way in which he described their wants so completely agreed with all my previous desires that when he asked me whether, provided he got the Bishop’s consent to commence an Institute to meet these wants, I would remain and become one of his first children in the work, I joyfully consented.


21 The founder of a religious institute who was later to be canonised.
22 Press, Julian Tenison Wood, 42.
23 Mary MacKillop to Monsignor Kirby, November 13, 1873.
24 Mary MacKillop to Bishop Sheil, September 10, 1871. Lynne considers that Mary MacKillop always referred to Julian Tenison Woods as the founder of the Institute. However, Father Reynolds, in his letter to Monsignor Kirby, on her visit to Rome refers to her as foundress.
In 1867 Julian was appointed Director of Catholic Education in Adelaide. He drew up the first rule for the Sisters of St Joseph which was to guide the institute until the first chapter in 1875.\(^{24}\) He invited Mary to Adelaide and she took her vows as a religious, assuming the name of Mary of the Cross.\(^{25}\) The early growth of the sisters was quite phenomenal, the services they were offering to poor families, often with illiterate parents, were in great demand. In 1867 there were four sisters; by December 1869 there were seventy two sisters conducting twenty one schools in the diocese.\(^{26}\) Besides teaching in the schools they visited the sick and the gaol, established an orphanage, an asylum for destitute women and a house of providence for the elderly. At this stage Mary did not see herself as the foundress, though later in life she refers to herself as the foundress on at least four occasions.\(^{27}\)

The rapid growth of the institute was attended by many problems. These were associated with the securing of living and teaching accommodation, with finance and the contracting of debts, with initiation into the religious life - with no role models as provided in existing established orders, with leading the emerging community. Many clerics and Catholic laity had difficulty with this new and different model of nun. Directed by Julian Tenison Woods at the request of Bishop Sheil, Mary led the first party of sisters to Brisbane at the end of 1869, and was not to return until 1871. This period of separation from Julian Tenison Woods was quite crucial to her emergence as spiritual leader of the sisters and to her assuming responsibility for her own spiritual life. In taking responsibility for the work of the sisters in the schools and in negotiating with the uncooperative administrator of the diocese, Dr Cani, in relation to the issue of government grants, the pastoral care of the Sisters and central government, she came to see herself more clearly as the leader of the institute.\(^{28}\) Absent from Adelaide she began

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\(^{24}\) The rule was approved after a few minor changes by Bishop Sheil on December 17, 1868. Gardiner, *Positio*, I, 243.

\(^{25}\) On August 15, 1867.

\(^{26}\) Gardiner, *Positio*, I, 236.

\(^{27}\) Lyne, *Mary MacKillop*, 105.

\(^{28}\) Bishop James O'Keefe was absent during the whole of Mary's time in the Brisbane diocese, 1870-1871, but Dr Cani had been left specific instructions as to how to deal with the sisters.
to have severe doubts about Julian's ability to direct the sisters. Greater self-possession enabled her to be more assertive in her relationship with him. Her letter to him from Brisbane on April 6, 1870 reflects awareness of her own subjectivity, deeply rooted in God, which she had now assumed:

In weak moments of temptation and fear of what you would think I did not clearly say to you how much I felt it necessary that I should fully share in every cross and anxiety of the Institute. This was a presumption, a something I cannot now even describe, the idea of putting myself on this footing with you in the work of the Institute which always held me back. It seems to me now that our good God gave me great graces for the position to which He called me. I see them all and I see how shamefully I wasted them. My own dear Father, there is some strange almost wonderful change in me for which I cannot account ... it seems to me now as if our dear Lord's will ... will always be beside me when I am talking with you, the Bishop, or anyone else about the Institute or the Sisters, and thus enable me to speak all clearly without regard to the strangeness of my position, or what my motives may appear in the eyes of those to whom I am speaking.29

Julian Tenison Woods' enthusiastic encouragement of sisters pre-occupied with visions and miracles alienated many priests not only from Woods, but also from the sisters. They were already having to contend with his favour with the bishop, his influence over the schools and teachers of the colony, his opposition to the receipt of government grants, his contracting of substantial debts, with his English difference from Irish clerics30 and, given the nature of his scientific and scholarly pursuits, his ever widening circle of fatherliens in colonial public life. Major defects in the character of Tenison Woods seem to have been his trust in his own judgement, an unwillingness to take advice, a certain tactlessness and a profound lack of prudence and common sense.31 The priests demanded his removal. Their opposition towards him was also directed at the sisters.32 Early in August 1871, in poor health and under the strain of possible

29 Mary MacKillop to Julian Tenison Woods, April 6, 1870. In a letter to him a year later she writes: 'I know well that you understand what it costs me to write some of them, what it costs me to think as I do on some things, and I know how much you suffer in consequence'. December 12, 1871. Rossi Braidotiti refers to the connection Simone de Beauvoir established between a woman's coming into writing, her becoming as a subject, and her political consciousness. Braidotiti, Patterns of Dissonance, 158.

30 Poste, The Josephite Story, 74.

31 There are many instances in Mary's MacKillop's letters to Julian Tenison Woods in 1870 in which she urges him to be prudent. See also Gardiner's evaluation, Piafia, 1, 328.

32 Though there were priests who supported the sisters, for example, Fathers Smyth and Reynolds.
proceedings for bankruptcy, he left Adelaide to spend time with Bishop Matthew Quinn in Bathurst. On August 30, 1871 Mary wrote to him:

I am quite sure many are now our enemies who would not be so had we not given them some cause...I am not uneasy...but whilst I am not, I look for my Father Director to be prudent, and not to leave too much undone with the view that God will work his way without him. God does do all, He has done all that is good in the work. He willed the rule, but He used an earthly instrument in making it known, and He still wills that the same instrument should use the power He has given him with a holy prudence that he has not at all times observed.  

Her letter reflects a tone of spiritual authority and suggests a reversal of their early roles.

Bishop Sheil, recently returned from the Vatican Council in Rome, in poor health and in debt, was confronted with clerical complaints against the sisters and demands for the removal of Tenison Woods. By early 1871 there were one hundred and twenty seven sisters in thirty four schools. Sheil appointed a commission of three clerics to examine the sisters. In so doing he continued to ignore Mary in her office as Guardian-General. The commission recommended that a number of the sisters should be reduced to the status of lay sisters under an altered rule in which the Bishop would become the sole superior, and each convent should become autonomous under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the parish priest of the district in which it was situated. The original rule, egalitarian in emphasis, had deliberately avoided distinctions among the sisters based on class and exclusionary practices such as the payment of a dowry. Central government under one leader and the non-ownership of property were other characteristics of this institute designed to address the particular social conditions of Australia. What was at stake was the governance and the identity of the institute.

Mary MacKillop on her return to Adelaide in April 1871 was directed by Tenison Woods to visit the convents and schools in the country. She wrote to Bishop Sheil, September 10, 1871:

33 Mary MacKillop to Julian Tenison Woods, August 30, 1871.
34 Gardiner, Postide, I, 336.
On your Lordship's return from Europe in 1868, I was with another Sister present when in your presence Father Woods went over each chapter and point of our rule previous to its getting your entire approbation. Upon that occasion my Lord you made some remarks about the wording of some of the sentences to which Father Woods attended, and in the end you kindly approved our rule as it now is.

From that time I looked upon it as sacred, and you cannot blame me, my Lord, if I do so still. I know you can withdraw your approbation from it, and if our Good God so wills it I am resigned. But, oh, pardon me, my Lord, if I say I cannot in conscience see the rule altered and remain as a Sister. I am a child, my Lord, your humble helpless child. I want to please you, but above all to please God and to do His holy will.

If then, in any way it may please Him that you should alter the rule, then, my Lord, I feel that I must take the alternative that you offered and leave the Institute until it may please God to give me in some other place what my soul desires.

Though Father Woods was God's instrument in drawing out the rule, I never regarded the work as a merely human invention. Had I done so I could not be here.55

Here she acknowledges the authority of God, the authority of the bishop and her own authority under God. The use of the language of subordination is coupled with an assertion of her independence. Foale sees that in writing that letter - her first to a bishop, Mary 'achieved full maturity as a woman and as a Sister of St Joseph'.56

As Bishop Sheil was not pleased, Mary told the sisters they must follow the dictates of their own consciences in the matter. He then issued an instruction that Mary leave the city for a country convent and, interpreting her delay so that she could speak with him as an act of disobedience, he visited her and formally pronounced the sentence of excommunication. He forbade the other sisters to communicate with her under pain of the same sentence. Forty seven of the sisters were dispensed from their vows at their own request or were expelled from the Institute. The bishop's action was generally held to be invalid because the grounds for excommunication did not exist and the legal formalities had not been observed. Within six months the bishop nearing death, on the

55 Mary MacKillop to Bishop Sheil, September 10, 1871.
56 Foale, The Josephite Story, 92.
advice of many of the older priests, repented of his action and had the sentence on Mary revoked.

On the death of the bishop an Apostolic Commission was appointed (1872) to investigate the affairs of the Adelaide diocese. While the sisters were reinstated and praised for their exemplary behaviour, two sisters who had been the source of much difficulty were released from their vows. Mary was confirmed as Sister Guardian General of the institute, while Julian Tenison Woods was requested to relinquish direction of the sisters, henceforth to be assumed by Father Tappeiner, a Jesuit priest. Mary was by now disillusioned by Tenison Woods' inconsistency and trust in his own judgement, yet he remained very significant to her and she continued to retain a deep affection for him. Gardiner argues that she believed the Commission's decision in relation to Father Tenison Woods was attributable to her influence: Tenison Woods continued to believe himself the founder, the one most knowledgeable in relation to the spirit and ideals of the institute.

The issue of central government was already a contentious issue for Bishops James Quinn in Brisbane and Matthew Quinn in Bathurst, where a foundation of the institute had been made in July 1872. Mary came to see that unless she attained papal approval for the rule of the Sisters of St Joseph, which would remove them from the direct control of the bishop of a diocese and legitimate their existence by placing them under the control of a Cardinal Protector in Rome, there would be no end to the struggle. Acting on advice of her Director, Father Tappeiner, and of the Vicar Administrator, Father Reynolds, to negotiate in her own person, she left for Rome alone (1873) without seeing Julian Tenison Woods, though he was in favour of her going. It was he who suggested she go before the rule was approved in Rome without central government. She wrote to him on March 27, 1873:

37 A group of Catholic laity had written to Rome in defence of the sisters. See Paul Gardiner, Positio, 1, 373; Marie Therese Feilic, The Josephite Story, pp. 99-100.

38 Gardiner, Positio, 1, 416.
'I am crushed to earth with sorrow at having to leave as I do without seeing you and this when you desired that I should'. She also entreats him:

to deal as much as you can with the Sisters through their Superior and never by your manner towards the latter to place them in false positions, and to give the untrained subject cause to think that the Little Sister etc. may be treated with contempt. If we are to be united we must all work together and in the right way - and the teaching of the Church will, or should be, our guide in this.  

Mary travelled alone during an absence of almost two years, dependent on charity, intent on representing herself and the sisters to the Roman authorities. Foundresses of other religious institutes were doing much the same thing, though none of them from such a distance.

In a letter of introduction to Monsignor Kirby of the Irish College in Rome the then administrator of the Adelaide diocese, Father Reynolds, conveys something of the distinctiveness of the institute:

Since our struggles for Catholic education commenced we (have) had powerful help for our outlying districts where it was impossible to support a secular teacher, by sending two or three Sisters in many places where we cannot give them the opportunity of hearing holy Mass for five or six months...I feel the only hope of securing a Catholic education for our poor is by having this Institute stamped with the seal of the Church's approval of the Rule. The following facts speak for themselves. In this diocese we have twenty eight schools under the Sisters with fifteen hundred pupils; also an Orphanage, a House of Refuge, a House of Providence ...a House of Magdalen ...Besides the above twenty eight schools there are seven in the diocese of Brisbane with over six hundred children and two schools in the diocese of Bathurst with one hundred pupils.  

At this time Reynolds approved of central government and saw it as essential to the flourishing of the institute.  

39 Mary MacKillop to Julian Tenison Woods, March 27, 1873.
40 Cited in Modystock, Mary MacKillop, 111.
41 Gardiner, Postigo, I,416.
Mary had two audiences with Pope Pius IX. Eventually, she obtained provisional approval for a substantially rewritten rule which confirmed the principle of central government. Authority was vested in a General Superior and four councillors, to be elected at the chapter of the institute; there was to be a single novitiate. Chapter 6 of the revised rule spelled out the role and limits of authority of the local bishop in relation to the sisters:

The Bishop of the Diocese cannot change the Constitutions, neither can he take away or lessen the authority which they confer on Superiors, namely, as to appointments of Sisters, visitations, the celebrations of Chapters and other things of this kind. The Bishop of the Diocese in which the Mother House is placed presides in the name of the Apostolic See at the General Chapter; and confirms the election of the Superior General; but he does not possess any authority or jurisdiction over the houses and the Sisters that are outside his Diocese.

The removal of the Superior General from office was reserved to the Holy See as was the transfer of the motherhouse to another diocese. The sisters, exempt from the jurisdiction of the local bishop, were directly subject to Rome. However, the restriction on the ability to own property in the original rule was abrogated. Henceforth, the institute could possess money, lands and income, which provision Mary accepted though she had pleaded against it. These changes were to be presented to a general chapter of the institute to be convened in March 1875. The sisters were advised to work with the constitutions for a period of time. Any changes seen to be necessary could only be effected by application to Rome.

Tenison Woods, whose removal from the office of Director of the Institute was ratified, was outraged by the change in relation to poverty in the new rule, without any consultation with him, for which he held Mary responsible. While she was away he

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42 This was the model which was later given general endorsement in the 1917 Code of Canon Law.

43 Constitutions of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Australia (Sydney: Finn Bros, 1974), 27.

44 Ibid., 20-21.

45 The strength of his conviction in relation to the poverty of the institute is revealed in a letter he wrote to Mary MacKillop, August 23, 1870: My idea is this - The peculiar character of this Institute is
had tried to persuade some of the sisters to be part of the beginnings of a new religious
institute which he was planning to establish. He felt he had been betrayed by Mary,
resented the fact that the Jesuits were to assume direction of the sisters, and refused to
accept the Roman directives. While he refused to have anything more to do with Mary,
he continued to interfere both directly and indirectly with the sisters. Gardiner considers
that the basis of their estrangement was their different understanding of obedience.40
Mary was heartbroken by their estrangement.

The issue of diocesan control and ongoing conflictual relations with bishops intent on
controlling the sisters in their own diocese was to be an ongoing source of vilification,
misrepresentation to Rome, and public controversy for Mary MacKillop and the Sisters
of St Joseph. The matter was finally resolved by papal decree in 1888 which constituted
the institute as a pontifical institute. In accordance with the original rule, provinces had
been established in Brisbane and Bathurst. Bishop James Quinn in Brisbane wrote to
her in April 1875 in response to the decrees of the institute’s chapter:

I am not yet aware of your reasons for appointing Sister Clare Provincial
in my diocese contrary to my wish...I am sure you would not entertain
the thought of sending her as Superior to my diocese in opposition to my
desire and therefore I need not refer to what might happen in such an
event.

I may add that had I never before contemplated withdrawing the Sisters
in my diocese From subjection to the central authority, the reading of
your proposed Rule would have decided me to do so. I hope therefore
that From the receipt of this letter you will cease to exercise any
authority over the Sisters in Queensland and From sending them any
communication which might tend to disturb or distract them in the
discharge of their duties. I will give each of the Sisters who came From
Adelaide the option of returning there or remaining with me, but I
will request of those who decide on going back to stay until I can supply their
places.47

40 Gardiner, Positio, 1, 513.
41 Cited in Thorpe, Mary MacKillop, 161-162.
Gardiner comments: ‘[h]e wanted the nuns to be under his authority and no other, so he said they were under his authority and no other, and apparently expected them to act as if he could change the substance of their vow in this way’. 49 This is an interesting example of what Foucault designates as the role of textuality in the production of power.

The conflict led to Mary’s resistance manifested in the withdrawal of fourteen of the sisters from Bathurst in 1876. 49 One sister remained to help in the formation of a diocesan institute of sisters to be subject to the bishop. After an ineffectual period of compromise, in which Mary had been prepared to leave the sisters if they were allowed to observe their vows and constitutions, the withdrawal of the sisters from the Brisbane diocese commenced in 1879. While Mary found James Quinn, ‘a terrible man to deal with’, 50 he is reputed to have declared: ‘it is impossible for me to accept the government of a woman, or to have a community of nuns governed by a lady from Adelaide. I won’t allow a woman to make a disturbance in my diocese’. 51 The dissension between the bishop and the sisters necessitated Mary MacKillop’s making five trips from Adelaide, between 1875-1879. The situation was made more difficult by the presence and interference of Julian Tenison Woods in Brisbane, as he supported the bishop’s policy. 52 In a letter to the sisters on December 17, 1883 she reflects upon her experience:

Most of you will remember that since my return from Rome I had first, the Bathurst difficulty, then the Queensland one. It took years of anxiety and suspense before things reached their height in the latter place. All these things necessitated frequent absence on my part -now the

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49 Gardiner, Positio, 1, 626.
49 This led to the foundation of a diocesan congregation of sisters, known as the ‘black Josephites’ to distinguish them from those for whom Mary MacKillop was foundress. From this group in Bathurst other diocesan groups were founded; New Zealand, 1880, Goulburn, 1882, Maitland, 1883, Tasmania, 1887.
50 Cited in Thorpe, Mary MacKillop, 164.
51 Cited in Lyne, Mary MacKillop, 147.
52 The Bishops Quinn made very strong representations to Dr Kirby at the Irish College in Rome, claiming that the original rule was diocesan and that Mary had gone to Rome to change it. Gardiner considers that not only did Dr Kirby not refute their assertions but that he corroborated them. Kirby whom she had believed to be her Fatherland had turned antagonist, so Mary appealed to Dr Grant, the Rector of the Scots College in Rome to be her advocate with the Roman Congregation, Propaganda Fide.
matter in dispute with the good Bishops Quinns was - they claimed the
sole right to govern the house in the dioceses by local Superiors -
independent of the Mother House, in short - they would have no central
Government. ...I need not say how we were persecuted, and driven out
of Queensland - how I was denounced from the Altars, and my character
attacked in private as well by the poor Bishop now departed - all of this
many of you should remember. You should also remember how in the
face of all the cruel things said of the Institute and of myself, the late
lamented Archbishop [Vaughan of Sydney] took up our cause, fought for
us, at first single handed defended us with his Priests, and asked them to
try us, raising by his kindness my spirit and hopes which had been nearly
crushed out of me.\footnote{Mary MacKillop to the Sisters of St Joseph, December 17, 1883. Also to be found in Mother Mary's
Circulars to the Sisters. (North Sydney. Sisters of St Joseph, 1976), 124-125.}

What was paramount for Mary was that the sisters had taken their vows in accordance
with their particular rule which could not be adapted to accommodate episcopal
desires.\footnote{Marie Therese Foale appraises the relative positions of both the bishops and the sisters. She considers
that the bishops were within their rights to object to sisters in their dioceses observing a set of
constitutions with which they did not agree. She also suggests that they were less ultramontane
towards Roman authority than Mary. She considers that Mary given her need to attend to the well-
being of the sisters was within her rights to withdraw them. All forty six of the sisters indicated
they were willing to leave the Brisbane diocese. The Josephite Story, 136.} Benedictine Archbishop Vaughan in Sydney was sympathetic to her and ready
to welcome her Sisters to New South Wales, so in 1880 foundations were made in
Sydney and in Armidale where Bishop Torreggiani was favourably disposed to the
institute and its form of government. However, Dr Vaughan died in 1883.

Mary MacKillop's troubles were to be ongoing. In Adelaide many of the clergy were
disturbed by central government and the institute was in debt. At the second General
Chapter in 1881 Mary was re-elected to leadership. She had proposed that she was
ineligible because she had held office for twelve years, but her interpretation of the
constitution was overruled by Bishop Reynolds. In the next year her wise Jesuit
Director, Father Tappeiner died and was replaced by another Jesuit, less wise, Joseph
Polk. Struggle to pay the mortgage on the Kensington property, governance of the
sisters, response to the demands for their services, constant ill-health, and awareness
that several sisters, discontented by the shift of emphasis to developments in the Sydney
Archdiocese, were making representations to the bishop were all part of her experience.
in 1883. Bishop Reynolds, who earlier had supported Mary MacKillop and the sisters and had upheld the constitutions, now became the greatest source of Mary MacKillop’s troubles. Gardiner comments:

Some time in 1883 his mind was won over by Mary MacKillop’s enemies and he became of all those in high places who stood against her the most implacable of enemies. 55

Leading her to believe he was authorised by Rome, he conducted an episcopal visitation of all the convents in the diocese, (July to September, 1883), in the process of which she was accused, among other things, of addiction to drinking brandy and of using monies given for the poor. Determined to have full control of the sisters in the diocese he interviewed particular sisters, swearing them to secrecy. He tried to get them to go against the constitutions. Sisters in their loyal adherence to the constitutions were persecuted by him. He even attempted to change the superiors of the houses. However, he never confronted Mary MacKillop with the charges against her.56 The negative judgements of the commissioners were to contribute to the interruption of her cause for beatification in 1931.57

In November 1883 Mary MacKillop was deposed by Bishop Reynolds and ordered to leave Adelaide for Sydney. The new Irish Archbishop of Sydney, Patrick Moran, was later in the year (1884) to be appointed by Rome to investigate and report on the controversy in Adelaide.58 The sisters then became aware that Bishop Reynolds had exceeded his jurisdiction and had never been authorised by Rome to act as he had acted. Mary MacKillop herself speaks of it as a persecution.59 Early in 1885 Bishop Reynolds announced his intention to establish diocesan government and tried to force the sisters to

55 Gardiner, Positio, 2, 909?.
56 Clare Wright, one of the earliest Sisters of St Joseph, who remained in contact with Father Woods left the Institute in 1881 without dispensation. She was a major source of disturbance among the sisters, and her behaviour was a great trial to Mary MacKillop.
57 Gardiner, 2, 1007.
58 Cardinal Moran strongly supported Mary and the sisters at this time and made them aware of the invalidity of Reynolds’s actions.
59 Gardiner, 2, 1137.
become a diocesan group, an action which led to the exodus of many sisters to Sydney. Both Mary MacKillop and the sisters wrote to Rome, the major strategy of resistance which lay open to them. Later in the same year the Roman Congregation, Propaganda Fide, judged that Mary MacKillop's last election as superior general was invalid and Mary was forced to give up her jurisdiction of the institute. Cardinal Moran was delegated to appoint an interim superior until a chapter could be convoked to elect her successor.

At the Plenary Council meeting of the Bishops of Australia and New Zealand in Sydney in November, 1885, the Bishops voted 14-3 against central government for the Sisters of St Joseph, but Rome was not to uphold their decision. Ninety nine of the sisters sent a letter of protest to the Cardinal Protector. 60 A decree from Rome constituted the Sisters of St Joseph as an approved regular congregation with its mother house in Sydney. The diocesan institutes were to be distinct from the other, to adopt a different habit and rule and to have the approval of their bishop. Foale comments:

[Mary MacKillop] had never wavered in her single-minded determination to preserve unity, regardless of the cost to her personally. The sisters caught her enthusiasm for it and stood by her in her fight for its preservation. 61

Mary's successor as mother general, Mother Bernard Walsh, was confirmed in office for another ten years. In 1897 Propaganda Fide empowered Cardinal Moran to extend the term of office until the next chapter in 1902, so that at the general chapters of 1886 and 1889 the sisters were not able to elect their own superior general. Cardinal Moran preferred diocesan government until Rome decreed otherwise. He then devised a strategy for evading the full implications of central government. Aware that according to the constitutions of the institute, Rome alone had the power to depose Mary from office and that the sisters left to themselves would continue to re-elect her:

he appealed to Rome for a rescript authorising Mary's deposition From

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60 Gardiner, 2, 1152. The Cardinal Protector refers to a Cardinal in Rome nominated to act as adviser to and advocate for a religious institute.

61 Foale, The Josephite Story, 187
office and then presented it to the sisters as an accomplished fact. He informed them that Rome had taken the decision because it found her re-election in 1881 was invalid—four years after the event. As well, he succeeded in having Sister Bernard Walsh, the sister whom the Cardinal had appointed as Mary's successor, remain in office for a total of more than seventeen years and, by so doing, effectively tied Mary's hands for that length of time.62

While Mary accepted the situation graciously it presented her with new trials. She was to write to her brother in 1897 after the superior general's term of office had been extended:

I am truly sorry that the Cardinal has done this as, unknowingly, he has done our poor Institute a great wrong. He simply does not know the utter unfitness for her position of the one he has placed over this widely spread Institute. May our good God help us not to fail in submission. Pray that I at least fail not, that when moments of bitter and painful trial come, I may do my duty, and the 'dirty work' for His sake who has been so good to me... But oh, I do so dread Sydney. You can have no idea of the falseness of my position there... I do not and cannot approve of things I see done, or undone.63

This represented a concerted effort to marginalise and disempower her. In trying to account for this action of the clerical church in preventing the sisters from electing Mary as their superior which is what they wanted to do, Gardiner comments:

It was a fact that Mother Mary's performance of her duty was the irritant that had upset the bishops who wanted to impose their own Rule on the Sisters. Mother Bernard was a more pliant character; she was also Irish, and this would do something to assuage the nationalism of the bishops which was criticised so truculently by Redwood and Luck [New Zealand bishops] after the Synod.64

The bishops were not able to prevail on Rome to deny central government because by this time papal approbation entailed central government; this policy indirectly reinforced the central authority of Rome and restricted the power of the bishops in the

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62 ibid., 177-178.
64 Mary MacKillop to Donald MacKillop, SJ., December 29, 1897. Mary also wrote to Mother Bernard, on the same day. In her letter she writes: 'Do not blame any Sisters who feel hurt at not having an election. Naturally they cannot understand why the Constitutions have been made so little of in so important a matter'.

colonies. However, under Cardinal Moran's leadership they:

cleverly outmanoeuvred Rome and gained a degree of control over the
institute which greatly exceeded that allowed them in its Constitutions. 65

They were able to manipulate the sisters because the sisters believed instructions from
Roman ecclesiastical sources were to be regarded as representative of the will of God.
This is so clear an example of how difficult it has been for religious women to establish
their own sphere of autonomy within the Church. Such practices reveal what Schussler
Fiorenza designates as social, interactive, multiplicative kyriarchal power relations
involving race, class, culture, as well as sex/gender. Mary as a colonial was non Irish;
she was strongly egalitarian, committed to serving the poor, disinterested in upward
social mobility, and she was a woman.

On the death of Mother Bernard, Mary was elected to office at the Chapter in 1899 and
remained the leader of the institute until her death in 1909. In this latter part of her life
she worked assiduously to promote the unity of the institute, visiting and encouraging
the sisters, children and people in different parts of Australia and in New Zealand. The
institute was making a unique contribution to the provision of Catholic education across
in both countries at enormous cost to the sisters, as Mary was to point out to a priest:

Are we not Religious first - Teachers second? I often think that those for
whom we work are too exacting, and in their anxiety for the success of
the schools, forget at what price that success is gained. 66

Their religious identity was not reducible to their mission in the society. So often in the
subsequent history of Catholic education in Australia the goals of religious orders were
to be deflected by the goals of providing Catholic education to the detriment of the
quality of the religious life.

65 Fosio, The Josephite Story, 189.
66 Gardiner, An Extraordinary Australian, 451. Anne Henderson, comments that 'in just over half a
century the "religious orders - that is, the nuns and brothers, who were not part of the clergy
because they did not administer the power of the church" laid the foundations of a united Catholic
community'. However, the contradiction she emphasizes is that in the major histories of the Church
in Australia [written by men] the focus is always on the contribution of the hierarchy and the clergy.
An evaluation within a feminist hermeneutic, of social symbolic, and structural influences

What ideological systemic factors help explain this practice of hierarchical dominance and the highly obediential responses of Mary MacKillop? Her letters are testimony to the intensity of her religious faith expressed in the devotionalism of nineteenth century piety (in the main mediated through an androcentric bias). Ann Taves argues that devotions to the Blessed Sacrament, to the passion of Christ through the symbol of the Cross, to the Sacred Heart, to Mary and the saints, to abandonment to the will of God, generated affective bonds easily extended to papal and priestly figures. In dealing with the same phenomenon in an American context she considers that devotionalism was promoted by the hierarchy to standardise practices within the church internationally, to focus them within the parish church, thereby enhancing the control of the priest to rally the laity to the church and hierarchy in the face of a perceived external threat. She maintains that in this way they helped to promote the hierarchy’s control over the laity.

The emphasis on asceticism, on flight from the world, on atonement, suffering and obedience were internalised by the laity of which members of religious institutes formed part. Extracts from a letter written by Mary to the sisters for St Joseph’s Day, 1893 are revealing in this regard.

He ...has brought us here: Ah - not to become Saints by a smooth, easy path, but by a rugged, steep and tiresomely winding one. He has brought us here to lay the sweet load of the cross upon our weak shoulders, to help him carry His, and to be sharers - humble, sorrowing sharers - in the wrongs of his afflicted Mother. Children of this Institute, He has brought us here to die, to die to all, everything, but hardest of all to our miserable nature-to die to ourselves, to be humiliated, despised, neglected by the world, to be preys to temptation and to many sufferings, to be crosses to, and to receive many crosses from, each other, to be well exercised in patience and charity, and to be cheerfully faithful to the

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62 ibid.
duties of our state; seeking no rest, no reward here but the joy of doing His Holy Will; - and by our perfect suffering, by our unselfish suffering, by our humble perseverance in the discharge of the duties of our holy rule - giving at last to His long waiting and most loving Heart the true service it has so much yearned for at our hands.65

Such emphasis on suffering feminist theologians would consider to be conducive to the self-alienation, the subordination and powerlessness of women. While Mother Mary of the Cross was no passive victim, her life testifies to the enormous constraints within which women have had to fashion their own religious lives.

Feminist theologians, as well as other liberation, and political theologians, repudiate interpretations of Jesus death on the Cross as atonement, as substitutionary payment for sin, precisely because of the sadistic image of God it entails and because of the inherently damaging effects for women of exalting a state of victimisation. 70 They have emphasised the destructive effects for women of certain interpretations of the Cross. 71 Some women theologians, such as Elizabeth Johnson, are engaged in re-interpretations of the Cross and its relation to the mystery of human and specifically women's suffering:

65 Mary MacKillop to the Sisters, March 19, 1893. See also Mother Mary’s Circulars to the Sisters, 173.

70 See for example J. C. Brown, and Rebecca Parker ‘For God So Loved the World’ and Beverly Harrison and Carter Heyward ‘Pain and Pleasure: Avoiding the Confusions of the Christian Tradition in Feminist Theory’ in J. C. Brown and Carole, R. Bohn (eds.), Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1-30; 146-173. They argue that Christianity has been a primary shaper of women’s acceptance of abuse. Anne Carr argues that the passion and death of Christ have been used to ‘legitimate family, church and societal structures that support gender roles for women of non-assertiveness, passivity and sacrifice of self’. Transforming Grace, 174.

71 Mary Grey argues that it is not the symbol of Cross itself but the way in which in certain interpretations it has been identified with death and violence. She sees a need to represent the cross as a constructive symbol, as expression of the Father’s active choice of Jesus, motivated by love for God and other persons. Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and the Christian Tradition (London: SPCK, 1989), 156, 174. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues that it is necessary to dislodge the doctrinal discourses of redemption and salvation from their preconstructed Pauline, Augustinian, Anselmian, Lutheran, or modern Neo-orthodox Fathercomes of meaning. For her Jesus ‘who was executed as the Christ, who was vindicated by God as the Living One, and who is always ahead of us’ calls for a theological discourse which explores the ‘resurrection reality’. She seeks to explore ‘the experiential theologian “reality” inscribed in the narrative textualisation of the empty tomb as a space of resurrection, as a space for affirming the vindication of the Crucified Ones and their agency of possibility of becoming the Living Ones.’ Jesus Miriam’s Child, 107, 123, 127, 125.
The Cross stands as a poignant symbol of the "kenosis of patriarchy", the self-emptying of male dominating power in favour of the new humanity of compassionate service and mutual empowerment.  

A key concept in feminist theology, including a feminist theology of suffering, is that of embodiment, the body-self which includes feelings. Mary MacKillop's correspondence attests to her feelings of anguish, abandonment, rejection, despair, disillusionment, weariness, as well as feelings of peace, contentment and joy. Her physical sufferings were exacting: dysmenorrhoea, headaches, bouts of sickness, in older age rheumatism, and finally, incapacitation as a result of a stroke. In accordance with modern psychology, these illnesses could be interpreted to some extent as bodily manifestations of subjective experience, of denial and repression of anger and pain-associated in her case with the experience of patriarchal, institutional violence and injustice.

The whole tradition of nineteenth century spirituality emphasised the importance of charity, humility, obedience, forgiveness and docility. While in her correspondence with clerics Mary MacKillop was candid and forthright, she was also deferential, respectful and considerate, at pains not to personalise or dramatise her own suffering. Intent on interpreting their actions in a favourable light, she refused to engage in personal invective against them, behaving with charity, concern for unity, and forgiveness. She was also quite lucid. She wrote: 'Bishops and priests have an awful power and terrible in the sight of God must it be if that be abused'. While she was willing to trust them she was also aware that they were capable of turning against her, as they so often did, not only Tenison Woods, and certain bishops, but Monsignor Kirby in Rome, as well. Cardinal Moran too, was capable of duplicity in her regard. In many

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72 Elizabeth Johnson, _She Who Is_, 161. And not only women theologians. For David Tracy, 'The Cross should now be read as the revelation of God in hiddenness, in suffering and struggle, in the endurance and joys of those individuals and groups too often effectively designated as non-persons by the dominant culture; the oppressed and marginalised in all history, in every society, in every church'. _The Hidden God: The Divine Other of Liberation_, in _Cross Currents_ 13 (Spring, 1996): 13.

73 Cited in Lyne, _Mary MacKillop_, 135.
ways Mary MacKillop is a reminder of what feminist ethicist and theologian Beverly Harrison designates as the core of misogyny,

which has yet to be broken open, or even touched,... the reaction that occurs when women's concrete power is manifest, when we women live and act as full and adequate persons in our own right.\textsuperscript{74}

It is also very clear that on a structural, institutional level the politics of dominance and subordination are patently revealed in this early history of the Sisters of St Joseph. The vulnerability of Mary MacKillop and her sisters and their experience of dominative power as both violent and abusive is there in the evidence. Abuse in the name of obedience, in the betrayal of trust, in the systematic devaluing, in the distortion of truth, in the withholding of information, in the intrusive investigations, in the coerced responses, the subtle and not so subtle manipulation, in the calumny, discourtesy and rudeness is there to detect in the records. All of this helps to substantiate the claim that a \textquoteleft[a] dominant-subordinate model \textquoteleft \textquoteleft male relatedness is an inherently violent structure of relatedness'.\textsuperscript{75} Feminist theologian Shawn Copeland refers to feminist theorist Iris Marion Young who argues that:

systemic violence is embedded in those unquestioned standards, symbols, habits, patterns and practices which compose a society or group, as well as in the epistemological, moral and religious assumptions which underlie not only the performance of prescribed social cultural and religious roles and tasks, but also the individual and collective consequences of following (or not) following approved social, cultural and religious codes and rules.\textsuperscript{76}

Finally, what can we say in relation to the incredible life of Mary MacKillop? Certainly it reveals her own agency, her enormous 'self-integrity' and 'other-integrity' which derived from her belief in the personal love of God. Centring her life on God, reliant on God, she committed herself to the service of the poor and neglected, in the company


\textsuperscript{75} Stenzel, 'Maria Goretti', 92.

\textsuperscript{76} Mary Shawn Copeland, \textit{Violence Against Women}, 119.
of other women. Constantly in leading them, while suffering from misinterpretation and resistance from some, she exhorted them by word and example to generous service of people who were struggling, to the practice of kindness, charity and humility, and to hope for a positive outcome in every trial through confident prayer. Her circular letters to them convey her awareness of the ambiguities and the equivocations associated with the exercise of power. She frequently requests their forgiveness. Her exercise of authority is reflective of what Kathleen Jones designates as compassionate authority, demonstrating both a concern for an ethic of justice and an ethic of care. She saw each of the bishops as an individual and was compassionate in her appraisal of factors which helped explain their erroneous decisions and was appreciative of whatever support they gave her.

As a woman within the Roman Catholic Church she encountered the opposition of many ecclesiastics unconsciously animated by a desire for male, clerical, hierarchical dominance and control of women's social behaviours and religious lives. In her relations with them she consistently adhered to principle, including a respect for ecclesial authority. Her experience was not an isolated one in Australia as many histories, including some written from a feminist perspective are beginning to attest. Furthermore, within a feminist historical perspective her struggles appear as part of 'the universal struggle between clerical men and women religious - the contest for control and theological interpretation of the lives of women.'

The Sisters of St Joseph: Preparing for the Beatification of Mary MacKillop

In the second part of this chapter I intend to examine the relationships between the

77 *Jones, Compassionate Authority*.

79 See for example Y.A. McLay, *Women Out of their Sphere*. American feminist historian, Margaret Susan Thompson, in her analysis of the factors responsible for conflict between religious institutes and the hierarchy in the United States identifies generic clericalism, patriarchy, notions of authority within the Catholic hierarchy and ambiguous treatment of women's congregations by Church authorities. All of them would seem to have been present in the struggles of Mary MacKillop to maintain autonomy and initiative in the definition of the sisters' religious lives and religious commitment. See Susan Marie Maloney, 'Historical Perspectives on Women Religious: Implications for Creating a Feminist Theology of Religious Life', in Hinsdale and Kaminski (eds.), *Women and Theology*, 149.

Ibid., 150.
leadership of the Sisters of St Joseph and officials of the Papal Visit Office, in the preparation for the beatification of Mary MacKillop. Certainly, the way in which members of the Sisters of St Joseph interpreted the beatification and wished to celebrate it seems to have differed significantly from views of clerical officials within the church in Australia. The sisters saw themselves as authoring the life of Mary MacKillop. As sisters of her institute they were the authorities in relation to her spirit and charism, and it was important to them that the beatification be both consonant with and revelatory of what she stood for. Not until it was definitely known that the Pope would be coming did the official church in Australia become proactively involved in preparing for the beatification. \(^{80}\) It is the contention of some of the women I interviewed that a hierarchical mode of exercising authority with an emphasis on rights, privileges, duties, power and status was to characterise its interventions in the preparations for the beatification. I intend both to explore and analyse differences in the interpretation and practice of authority between official church organisers and the Sisters of St Joseph organisers of the event.

In 1991 when the Posidio prepared by Father Paul Gardiner was under examination by the ten theologians selected by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the Sisters of St Joseph realised that the process of beatification was now in its final stages. Hence they convened in North Sydney, a meeting of sisters from across the country, including sisters from the federated institutes in the dioceses of Bathurst, Goulburn, Maitland, Hobart and from Wanganui in New Zealand. They decided that the beatification of Mary MacKillop should be significant not only for the Sisters of St Joseph but for the Australian people, for Mary was to be beatified pre-eminently because of the integrity with which she had lived her life as a Christian, not because she was the co-foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph. From this time on their prime goal, and major concern was:

> to make this beatification event an evangelising moment for Australians and the Australian people, to be celebrated in every state, in every diocese, in every parish. (Caitlin)

Having decided that the beatification would be a national event and that they would

\(^{80}\) February 10, 1994.
present Mary as a woman for all Australians, they then decided they would establish the Mary MacKillop Secretariat as the executive arm of the institute leadership to further preparations for the beatification. Two sisters were appointed to work full time in the Secretariat. Intent on interpreting the life and story of Mary MacKillop in a way that would make sense for contemporary Australian people, the Sisters of St Joseph saw the need for diverse modalities of conveying her life and providing for the reception of its meaning. They were also aware of the hermeneutical issues which their belonging to a distinct subculture within the society presented for them.

In retrospect, this is how they reflect on what they saw as central to their understanding of Mary MacKillop, and what animated them in their promotion of her.

She stood for justice and equality, justice through equality....every person was always important to her....her simplicity, her simple attitude to life, her courage, her ability to take a stand when needed, to speak the word of justice regardless of the consequences.(Sally)

Her total God centredness and that great capacity to forgive - with the bishops; mistreated, rash judged, and maligned, thrown out, her heart never harboured resentment. Now that I find a great challenge ....and I often find myself when I'm caught in that situation just sitting with her and saying 'Well good on you Mary'.(Genovea)

Her spirituality was grounded in commonsense, her faith was rooted in reality. (Rosemary)

We really believed that this was an evangelising moment for Australia. We believed in it being an inclusive event, that everybody needed to be included. We really believed we needed to talk in all different ways to our society and we really had to work hard on our language, to drain out of our language a churchy language...and to use a different language...our society being so secular. (Caitlin)

Their emphasis is on participation and communication. They assumed that concern with ultimate values is part of the experience of the Australian people in general.

It challenged us to work out a way of expressing the Christian way of life, of expressing it in ways that are really understandable to our society, because our church uses a form of language that does not communicate. The big challenge is to find the language that touches people's hearts...[that touches] the great depth of spirituality in the Australian
people...[This was] an opportunity ...to look at this person and to be able to translate some of the antiquated language and terminology of beatification, the process, into an understandable, relatable thing—to kind of humanise it, to put it into the everydayness of life; and I think it was to say: 'Yes this woman has something to say to other Australians.' (Caitlin)

Thus the leadership of the sisters was aware that interpretation is both shaped and constrained by the language and media in which it is communicated, and that they 'were undertaking a complex task which would require a high degree of professionalism, coordination and communication'. So From the start, they sought to consult widely with Josephite sisters, their associates and Fatherfriends across Australia and New Zealand, and with other members of the Australian community. They also identified the values of inclusivity, simplicity, hospitality and reconciliation as key to an understanding of Mary MacKillop and hence to their own operation. They were pro-active in their approach to the media:

Well the media just didn't happen because we started off From the word go with the sense of being involved the media. There was a real educative thing media-wise. We were always available and accessible to them.(Eleanor)

Such was some of the rhetoric of the organisers of the event; such was the explicit agenda of the Josephite sisters. Their task was one of persuading both those within the institute and those without, the hierarchy, members of the church, the wider public that this event was both timely and meaningful. For the wider secularised public they emphasised points of association, the Australian character of Mary MacKillop and her work, the way in which she fitted the Australian myth of the Aussie battler, her resistance to the pretension of authority figures, her concern with the down and out. From the evidence it seems that for them it was to involve both a hermeneutic of remembrance and of proclamation.

81 Mary MacKillop Secretariat evaluation notes.
82 See for example Mary Cresp, ' A Saint for Australia', Australian Folklore, 9, 1994, 114-121.
However, within the feminist hermeneutic of this thesis questions arise which relate to the subtexts, for instance, to the dilemmas facing religious women in the church, to the current crises within the church, and within the society at large. Subtexts are there to be discerned and are implicit in the following reflections of leaders of the Sisters of St Joseph:

I was a bit of a sceptic about the whole event of beatification, because I thought we’ve lost the plot. But when we started to plan this event, it just seemed to be absolutely the right time; because there was...is a spiritual vacuum in our country and this whole occasion seemed to provide a stimulus for people and for our own sisters, whom I guess too, were browned off in many ways. It has been hard going trying to be faithful in the dark because of the struggles within the church, and the struggles with apathy, or loss of direction. (Geneva)

The following comment reflects this sister’s social location as a woman within the church; her awareness of need for structural reform and for religious renewal within the church; and her hope for a transformation of the institution of the church.

I think the church has not faced the whole invitation to change. I think one of the gaps is that they’ve never really joined with the heart of the church which is religious life, to really learn from it, how the head and heart together can move this beautiful church on into the third Christian millennium. So I’m saddened by what I see around me. I really feel saddened about what’s happened to priests, that priests are up on charges here and there, and everywhere— and what that’s doing to the bishops. I’m sad that they can’t yet seem to hear that the laity still have no say; they are very busy bees doing lots of things, but they are really not part of the church and that saddens me deeply... because I believe that the God of history reveals God’s self to us at certain times and I think this is a time when God is wanting to reveal truths and insights that lead us on and I don’t think the Church hears them... but I never give up hope, I never lose hope in it, I keep praying that will happen and I have great faith in what religious and women can do for the church. (Geneva)

Another sister speaks of the struggle involved in:

trying to just keep on believing and visioning and listening to the call in that which is very humdrum and non-glamorous. (Rosemary)

The secretariat in conjunction with the leadership team was responsible for preparatory
planning for the beatification. Certain aspects of liturgy, the hymns, the office, the text of the Mass; education, publishing and public relations, were to be directed by a clearly enunciated philosophy based on values espoused by Mary MacKillop in her life and in instituting the Sisters of St Joseph. These values of inclusivity, hospitality, simplicity, and reconciliation are consonant with a collaborative and participative form of religious governance emerging with the reforms of Vatican II. They are also in harmony with recognisable feminist values. There was also provision for a conflict resolution process to deal with the inevitable tensions which would arise given the scope and complexity of the task.

The institute leadership commissioned the secretariat to set about constituting a beatification task force in Sydney.

The make up of the committee was to reflect that Mary MacKillop is not the ‘property’ of the Sisters of St Joseph...[Mary MacKillop] is an Australian, whose relevance supersedes boundaries of religion. She is a daughter of the Church whose spirituality provides for Christians and non-Christians an example of faithfulness, courage and joy. Therefore we hoped the committee would be made up of a variety of people who would ‘own’ Mary MacKillop, and on behalf of all Australians, pool their expertise so that our country could celebrate together the recognition of this woman.83

The task force was composed of people from diverse backgrounds, including religious backgrounds, most of whom had a high profile within the community. They were very willing to be involved - ‘we had no problem in getting people on side. There was tremendous support; we had the most wonderful people’. (Caitlin) Cardinal Clancy, on the request of the sisters, appointed a priest as his representative on the task force. Some sisters consider that it was the decisiveness and the initiative of the task force which was largely determinative of the beatification’s being held in Australia. The Cardinal reiterated to the sisters that the Vatican Secretary of State would not agree to having the beatification ceremony outside Rome. However, the task force suggested that the Cardinal should be contacted while in Denver for an international meeting of

83 Letter From Sister Mary Cresp to Sister Clare Koch, September 29, 1993.
young people, so that he personally might request Pope John Paul II that it be held in Australia. In the letter the task force sent the Cardinal was informed:

We are aware that the Church in Australia and the nation as a whole would benefit in so many ways if this special celebration of the life and holiness of this great Australian woman were held on Australian soil. The view is unanimously held by members of our task force who represent all groups in the Church, clergy, laity and religious, and a whole cross section of society, including politicians, members of the government, the media and the entertainment world.

One sister comments:

He did speak to the Pope.... there was this strong movement within the congregation against going to Rome. That's why we worked with this group to get the beatification here in Australia. (Caitlin)

The beatification task force had been operating for more than a year prior to the announcement the ceremony would be held here in Australia. That announcement which heralded the attendance of the Pope introduced a dramatic change in the proceedings. Cardinal Clancy appointed a Papal Visit Office to be headed by his representative on the Sisters of St Joseph beatification task force. He appointed his own staff through negotiation with Federal, State and private bodies; as it happened all the people appointed to positions, except for one, were men. The role of the beatification task force was automatically superseded; some of its members became members of sub committees; the sisters of the secretariat were not included as part of the planning committee. For the clerics it was probably just common sense that if the Pope were to visit for the purpose of a celebrating a public liturgical event then its organisation was the responsibility of designated church officials.

However, the need to clarify roles and responsibilities led to a meeting between the

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84 Letter From Sister Josephine Mitchell, Chairperson of the National Beatification Task Force to Cardinal Clancy, August 12, 1993. Cardinal Clancy in a letter to Mary Cresp, August 31, 1993, responded thus: 'I am conscious of quite a lot of pressure being generated and encouraged for the Beatification ceremony to take place in Australia. This concerns me somewhat. In the end, it is the Holy Father personally who will make this decision, and I think it hardly proper to harass him on the matter'.

Sisters of St Joseph and members of the Papal Visit Office, prior to the visit of the Vatican Coordinator of Papal Visits and his associates on April 19-22, 1994. The minutes of a meeting on April 7, 1994, between the Congregational Leaders, the sisters of the Mary MacKillop Secretariat and the officials of the Papal Visit Office reveal what were perceived as central issues. These were the nature of the relationship between the Secretariat and the Papal Visit Office; concern about what was to happen in the name of the Sisters of St Joseph, and that the values and philosophy of Mary MacKillop permeate the proceedings; Josephite presence within the sub committees; the visit of the Pope, Chief Pastor, Head of State, official guest of the Commonwealth Government and of the Archbishop of Sydney, and the nature of the protocols it entailed. A further meeting on April 28, 1994 established that the MacKillop Papal Visit Office was accountable to the Archbishop of Sydney and to the Vatican, the Mary MacKillop Secretariat to the Congregational Leadership team and to the Sisters of St Joseph. It also emphasised a need for a recognition of the Congregational Leadership Team and the Secretariat within the Fatheramework of the MacKillop Papal Visit Office based on 'mutuality of understanding, sharing rather than duplicating resources.'

Sisters' Perceptions of these Structural Shifts

Some of the sisters reflect in hindsight on their perceptions of, and reactions to a hierarchical centralised power structure and its efforts to control information and communication. They contrast their perceptions of two different Fatherameworks of authority.

We were really achieving a lot ourselves as women in the whole beatification, (then) the church comes into the scenario and that's when it was just absolutely horrendous, you know the church's notion of just coming in and taking over ... the clerical church, the hierarchical church who just doesn't listen, just dominates, just walks right over and its just impossible for them to work with women... there wasn't even a capacity or a preparedness to do it another way. So in all it was a great struggle...the hierarchical church was so domineering, so controlling. (Eleanor)

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The actual processes of the early negotiations are somewhat obscured in some of the sisters’ reflections on the events. Interviewed within some months of the beatification having taken place some of them reveal the intensity of their feelings in relation to the preparatory processes.

We had a whole lot of structures set up...we had a lot of involvement across the community of community leaders, people in the entertainment industry and money raising industry. Now they were all meeting before the Cardinal appointed... the Papal Office Director. He just came in and disregarded all those people...it was just sheer bulldozing. No thought about sitting down and saying ‘Well look, what have you done? Where are you with this? How do we go on From here together?’ (Geneva)

They make reference to their strategies of active resistance and the strategies of resistance of their antagonists.

That sense of dealing with women, the really put down behaviour. We had a real ecumenical group and the official church, the clerical church did not come out well, it came out very poorly and we tried to address it... in fact we got a facilitator in one day after the church came in and ignored the fact that we already had a mechanism in place, to facilitate the meeting and to really name the issues, so there were some really hard times...I guess it was that sense of saying well, you had to speak the truth otherwise it becomes a farce and we had worked too hard and many people had worked so hard that you don’t short change them. (Eleanor)

The church can mouth the involvement of laity but when it comes to the crunch they are not prepared to be inclusive or relational. We were operating From an inclusive model and a relational model and that’s what I found out, that the hierarchical church for all it says, doesn’t know how to operate on a relational model or inclusive model.... I just don’t think they have the capacity, power and authority goes to the head and they use those old tactics we know so well ...like withholding information. (Caitlin)

We were just tolerated and told what to do; the inability of the male [hierarchical] church to listen is an ongoing struggle. (Geneva)

The sisters were not entirely marginalised, as a Sister of St Joseph appointed as Coordinator of Papal Liturgies for the beatification became a member of the executive of the Papal Visit Office. Her recollection was:

It was a constant struggle for me working in that office, because I was
the only woman decision maker. The way I came to decisions differed from the way the other leaders, all [of the ten] of whom were men came to decisions. I continually needed to consult, because I felt I was responsible primarily to all Josephites (Congregation and Federation) whereas, they were more inclined to make executive decisions. However, in my struggle I felt listened to and was left Fatherree to proceed in the way I proposed... Always the men had a different way of doing things. Men do it differently, lead differently, operate differently. I think my contribution was my ability to involve many people across the nation right from the grassroots and right from the beginning of the process. Several of the men fed this back to me... 'You can't, it won't work. How can you?' (Sally)

In September, 1994 she went to Rome to present prepared liturgies for Vatican approval. It was the first time ever that a woman had assumed such a role. She experienced the Vatican officials as responsive and not resistant to her personally.

What is presented here is the conflict of two different modes of exercising authority. Kathleen Jones refers to the changes which occur in understandings of authority when authoritative roles include female symbolism. She maintains that:

Practices of leadership are altered towards a network model and the relationship between leader and follower shifts from a command-obedience structure based on fear and loss of protection to a more consensual egalitarian model. Leadership and the political action it stimulates moves from efforts to destroy alternatives to those celebrating the birth of alternatives as new beginnings.88

The continuing conflict that ensued between the sisters charged with organising the event and the Papal Visit Office is reminiscent in many ways in its elements of the earlier conflict between Mary MacKillop and church officials. Some of the sisters acknowledge that in their own power relations they were not able to emulate the transparency which typified Mary MacKillop in hers. There was a conflict of vision, a conflict relating to what the sisters perceived to be foundational principles and this provided the basis for conflict in relation to the process and to perceptions of what was intrinsic to the celebration of the beatification. The sisters themselves in their

88 Kathleen Jones, Compassionate Authority, 240.
recollections consistently draw parallels with the experience of Mary MacKillop. Her experience has served as something of a criterion against which they assessed their experience. It has provided them with a motive for resistance. The visions differed:

They saw it as a ceremony. We saw it as a more inclusive, holistic, total event. They really didn't see it as a wonderful moment and a call for conversion for all of us. I believe they saw it primarily as a papal visit... I mean they might have wanted to see it as the beatification of Mary MacKillop, but you know the church as an organisation puts a lot of power in the hands of the Pope, and the Pope can make all kinds of demands on bishops...they would have wanted everything to be right for his Holiness and of course Rome has...all this protocol that goes round the Pope. (Caitlin)

I guess it was rather like the managing director coming for their company, so I suppose they felt they had better do all the sorts of things they do. So they had a whole lot of protocol they were attending to. We kept challenging the fact saying that whatever we do must come up against this criteria (to be open to all people), otherwise its not a MacKillop thing at all. Our experience was very similar to Mary MacKillop's with the hierarchical church - feeling that you were really always having to the challenge them. (Eleanor)

Quite a struggle to hold to the principle of inclusivity about which we were just absolutely determined. It was because of Mary MacKillop this whole thing was happening but this was lost sometimes in the struggle between the[hierarchical] male church and the female members of the church. (Geneva)

Mary MacKillop didn't have a hierarchical way of operating with people, people were precious who they were, but it was very much that whole tight control which really irritated me. From...the church body that did the organisation and that it didn't come from a perspective of her philosophy...inclusive of the little people. We had tokenism, token pieces...it could have been a collaborative model that could have worked really well because so much was done, but it was just cut right off... it was sort of them and us, but we picked up the bill type stuff. (Caitlin)

Specific Sites of Struggle

The sisters in their effort to interpret Mary MacKillop for ordinary Australians, had planned an evening celebratory event at the Domain in Sydney.

We tried to speak through the medium of dance and music and the performing arts to tell Mary's story that way. And that was the Domain
event. We had enormous trouble... that was blocked at every point and nobody would say what their reasons were for not wanting it ... but despite everything we kept plugging away and actually got it. Now I heard a number of people say in feedback ...that there were a lot of people who weren't church people at that and they said they understood Mary best from that Domain event. (Caitlin)

The Papal Visit Office staff seem to have had difficulty in appreciating the sisters' understanding of the importance of using different modalities for communication. People around Australia were asked through the parishes to contribute to the funding of the beatification, but none of the monies went to the sisters who were left to bear the costs associated with the Domain event on their own, despite their awareness that many of the contributors thought they were donating to them.

The Art Exhibition had been a project the Secretariat of the Sisters of St Joseph had been working on for two and a half years. The leadership of the Sisters of St Joseph, was convinced ‘that art touches somewhere into the subconscious, often can be a forward looking thing’, that it could assist in interpreting Mary MacKillop; that it could present images of her that would ‘stand as art, put her further into the future’ and ‘communicate with another group of people in our society and communicate through their way of communicating.’ Considerable efforts were made to obtain sponsors. The Powerhouse Museum agreed to house the Art Exhibition if it were to be included in the Pope’s itinerary. So this had to be negotiated with the church officials in the arranging of the programme, but the Art Exhibition met with strong opposition from them. In the midst of the ensuing struggle an offer of assistance came from a senior adviser of the National Gallery, and through her assistance the sisters were successful in obtaining sponsorship of $180,000 from Optus, sufficient to enable the Art Exhibition to become a touring exhibition. Eventually, it got on to the programme. Sisters’ comments seem to have members of the Papal Visit Office as their referent. They convey an impression that the Vatican officials were more conciliatory towards them.

There was in addition, a conflict in relation to the involvement of children from Josephite schools and the scheduling of their encounter with the Pope. One sister
comments on the Fatherustrations she experienced in dealing with church officials.

In some ways, but not in others, they just dismissed us as they continue to do with women in the church. They have no place, they have no authority, they have no right in many ways. When the Pope came we were sort of removed ...there was no sense you would be part of something, you either forced your way in or you were ignored, you were told nothing about it. It was just the way it operated, its a club, and the things we got we got with real difficulty. We’d organise for example, the Chapel here. Who do you put in it? Well children From across the country. Then we had a whole process of working that out. Then one day ‘we’re having no more of that , that’s not happening’. We said ‘We cannot say no to these children. This is November, so we’re not prepared to’, but we really had a lot of conFatherontation over all those things. (Eleanor)

Representations of Strategies of Resistance

The Fatheramework From which the sisters were coming was so distinctly at variance with the Fatheramework of the official organisers, who appear not to have been sympathetic to the sisters’ desire to celebrate the event through different media, the art exhibition, the gathering of children, the Domain event; nor to their need to be inclusive, to set up consultative processes and to seek feedback. The sisters were not prepared to adapt to another mode of operating which would place them in contradiction with themselves. They wanted to consult about who would be in the choirs, how could the people be involved in the singing, how could people be involved in preparing special hymns for the occasion. They reflect on their own strategies of resistance and their own sense of authority, including their refusal to utilise a rhetoric of submission.:  

If we had been people saying ‘Yes your Eminence, thank you Father, Yes Father, we’re only too pleased to be humble children of the church and servants in all of this’, none of these tensions would have happened. But on the other hand, it would not have been true to Mary MacKillop, we wouldn’t have been true to our own gifting, we would not have been true to the people we worked with, and it certainly would not have had the flavour of inclusiveness that the whole of it had. (Eleanor)

We weren’t prepared to sit down and just take yes or no. To really assert our rights, it was not easy, it was a very difficult thing actually, but at the end of it I have come away very Fatherree From the experience because I did not compromise myself in it. I didn’t have to cover up ...what was said was right out on the table...the very processes that women are dealing with [consultative]) in the church at the moment...and I suppose
it’s ironic that Mary MacKillop is the one being honoured given her track record with the church. (Caitlin)

Sisters’ Reconsideration of their Role in the Church

One of the consequences of their involvement in the preparations for the celebration of Mary MacKillop’s beatification for these sisters was reconsideration of what it means for themselves as women to be so identifiably part of the Roman Catholic Church. They testify to their experience of the liberating as well as constraining factors in church membership, to their commitment to a participative-inclusive model of church, to the church as a communion of people. There is also awareness of the costs of trying to survive within it for women, both in the present and in the past.

I suppose being part of the church is, as it is for everybody, a frustration and a joy. Somehow in my childhood I got a very strong understanding of the body of Christ and my part in the body of Christ, and that we are called to play our part in its building up. While some people might feel that we as women are not able to play a part, I find that a challenge. We keep it going and we keep making it possible. We mightn’t win many battles ...but we do keep it going. Sometimes its discouraging, because you read history and you read about women in the three hundreds and seven hundreds and the thirteen hundreds and seventeen hundreds still trying to say the same thing, and being squashed; and women being straight-jacketed again; and women being their own oppressors in an effort to survive ...which is a contradiction in terms, but that’s what happens. (Rosemary)

They also reflect a sense of urgency in relation to the need for conversion on the part of the church From a patriarchal hierarchical mode of operating, which would necessarily include recognition of the place and needs of women. The sisters sees themselves in some sense as advocates for women.

I think women have to keep their eye on the church otherwise we leave it. We’ve got to keep our eye on the church in its real sense, as the mystical body of Christ, because if we only keep our eye on the hierarchical structure of the church, well I for one would say to myself ‘what am I here for?’. The church has never been perfect and it is always a struggle, but I think in our age this is the golden opportunity to really bring the Church, to challenge the church to something that is more true to itself than what is mirrored in the hierarchical model.

Now I think you can have a hierarchical model that can be true to the
truth of the church - the problem is with the exercise of power, 'power exercised as power over'. The Papal Visit Office was a good illustration where there was only one person to say how this was to be done. (Caitlin).

Oh! with the church if it continues the way it is it will just die out, because people will not continue to hang in the way we hung in and pursued issues, because we believed we were certainly spokespeople for our own group, but for all women as well, and we had a responsibility to hang in there and to keep confounding the issues. It was deaf ears on so many occasions and one of the tactics of dealing with [us] was withholding information. (Eleanor)

Until we have women at all levels then we won't have an inclusive church and I don't think we will have a church, particularly in this day and age, that has credibility. How we break these systems down I don't know, except to do this sort of thing that I and hundreds of others are doing, to take the moment when we are given the opportunity....I think we will have to come to have a totally different leadership structure, a different model of leadership which will enable the people to be involved in the church. (Sally)

For women it's as if we are not equal in the hierarchical church as women. We may be listened to but when it comes to the crunch we are not equal. I'm not an equal. If we talk about the church as people, I think it is really a great experience to be part of the people church. It's really a privilege to be with people and it's also an encouragement that we're all part of that church, that sinning church, that grace-filled church, that gifted church. (Natalie)

The relationship between Mary MacKillop's experience and that of contemporary Sisters of St Joseph

What are some of the points of correspondence between the experience of Mary MacKillop and these Sisters of St Joseph separated by the interval of a hundred years? That there are many is to be expected given their efforts to model themselves on her values and lived practice of religion. Certainly, there is the consciousness of being Australian, of authoring an Australian event, of identifying with the circumstances and the essential goodness of ordinary people. Mary is proposed as 'the Australian people's saint', whose vision of God was of a God to be found in the ordinary.

We stand with the ordinary...and what you call ordinary is one of those evasive terms... yet it does describe a certain element of our Australian
character you instinctively know, but find hard to describe. (Rosemary)

And it is evident from the interviews that the ordinary Australian includes the newcomers to the society and that the sisters value diversity within the society.

The church is a multicultural church today; in those days she [served] the needs of people who were migrants, and we, hopefully, do the same things today....They've got their problems too, and they can see someone they can identify with in the multicultural church....I think it means a lot to us as migrants coming to the country and I think it highlights the church's recognition of a very ordinary person to become a saint. (Natalie)

Their perception of the outcomes of the beatification event also reflects this consciousness:

I think the signification of Mary MacKillop herself has touched into the Australian psyche.... People can identify with that woman, and that kind of woman has become a kind of mythological symbol of some truths about Australia and the people who are here. So that it is not simply bettering yourself, but recognising your God given dignity and being able to claim that dignity for those reasons. It's about not only recognising courage and fortitude ...but it's also then saying, this woman did it, not out of stubbornness, but out of religious faith. So in someway it legitimises people claiming those qualities as God-given and that somehow God is part of life. In secularised Australia God hasn't easily been acknowledged. (Rosemary)

One of the sisters raised the issue as to whether they could be perceived as colluding with the 'hierarchy thing by accepting the beatification'? (Cara) Certainly, commitment to the whole process of seeking beatification for Mary MacKillop and then of celebrating the beatification can be seen as tying them into the hierarchical process. Something of the ambiguity that exists for many members of the church in relationship to the whole metaphor of hierarchy is also evident in the responses of the sisters and in their discourse which contrasts the inclusive and the relational to the hierarchic. It also reflects the great struggle which has characterised religious institutes in their revision of their own internal modes of governance.
However, there is a major difference between Mary MacKillop and the present sisters in relation to authority. While both can recognise male clerical exercise and abuse of power, the present sisters see it as a systemic issue, and given the new consciousness of the place of women within the world as a whole, as an urgent challenge for the church which will not go away. It would seem that one of the effects of the preparation for the beatification event for some of them was heightened awareness of the marginalised place of women in the church, of the reasons for it, and of the ambiguity of their own position. While none of those interviewed described themselves as a feminist each of them would seem to adhere to recognisably feminist values. The Mary MacKillop Secretariat in its post-beatification reflection considered that it is the authority question in the church which challenges the integrity of religious institutes in the Australian Church.

The role of women in the Church is open to debate but the equality of women and men flows from Scripture. It is imperative to claim one's legitimate power/authority as a Congregation of Religious Women at the outset of any project involving the institutional Church otherwise it gets handed away or claimed by others.

While the significance of the beatification for women in the church in Australia is something I will continue to explore in the next chapters, one of the sisters interprets it this way:

With regard to the place of women in our country's heritage, the macho image - the typical Australian has been masculine...the woman has been the silent helper...the fact that the first person to be acknowledged by the Australian Church as having been an example of the Christian life, as being held up as a an example of the gospel having taken place in her, is a woman...is highly significant given our background. In a way it is the sub-conscious as it were coming to be conscious i' us as church.

(Rosemary)

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69 Feminist theologian Joan Chittister argues that the relationship of women's religious life to the women's movement is very key to the future of women's religious communities, but it is not always perceived as such. She argues that if women religious are seen to be co-operating with the rejection of women in the name of the church there can be no real future for them. 'Religious Life: Questions for a New Beginning', Signum, 24(5) (May, 1996): 9.

80 Secretariat Evaluation Notes.
The spirituality of these sisters, now Fathereed From nineteenth century emphases on asceticism and suffering continues to reflect Mary MacKillop’s passion for justice and compassion in this post Vatican period where the struggle for social justice is deemed to be an integral component of spirituality within an ecclesiology of communion. Contemporary sisters have an understanding of structural, systemic injustice born of the massive human suffering which has characterised the twentieth century. Their involvement in the beatification would seem to have heightened, for some of them, the contemporary historical challenge and their own sense of agency:

The question for us today is if we try to be for our time what she was for her time where would we be? What would we be responding to? And the answer isn’t clear, because a lot of what were seen to be answers in that time have proved, historically, not to be answers for our time. For our time the same answers don’t work, so the challenge is always there. (Rosemary)

I think what it holds out to us is the authenticity factor, are we for real? or are we a bit of a sham? When you have Mary MacKillop being quite prominent it really puts a screen over us and we’re in the spotlight. ...it really does put the blow torch on you, and it does challenge us to look at the issues today, just as she did at that time and to really take those challenges on. I think we baulk at it for lots of reasons. I would hope that the whole event has put focus for us into getting into the heart of what we’re on about. It is that whole mission, the whole sense of making a difference, of contributing ... In Mary’s time education was really important, now because of lay people moving in and doing a great job in all of those areas there is always the challenge of becoming very comfortable where we are. Are we on the cutting edge that she was on all the time, or do we sit back comfortably and ah! it moves on? We still need to unfold a lot of what that’s about, what we really are. (Caitlin)

The question is a real one: does the beatification of Mary MacKillop mark a moment which recalls the institute’s contribution to Australian society before it as well as other religious institutes pass into history, or does it herald the awakening of a new thrust within Australian society and church for a new century.

Within this chapter I have endeavoured to demonstrate something of the tension which existed between the male officials of the Papal Visit Office intent on managing the relationship of the Australian Catholic Church to the Vatican and to the Australian
political and civic authorities, as well as to other interest groups, such as the Sisters of St Joseph, and the Sisters of St Joseph intent on communicating with the Australian people, mindful of their diversity. How these tensions influenced the shape of the public ceremonies will also be part of the focus in the following chapter. Here too, the issue of authority will also be in evidence as I attempt both to describe, and to examine within a feminist hermeneutical framework the actual events, and in particular the main liturgical events which constituted the public celebration of Mary MacKillop's beatification.
Chapter Four

The Beatification Event: January 18-19, 1995

In the previous chapter I have explored the conflict and struggle with ecclesiastics which Mary MacKillop experienced throughout much of her life and which Sisters of St Joseph experienced in preparing for her beatification. In this chapter I focus on the events which constituted the public celebration of the beatification of Mary MacKillop in Sydney, 18-19 January 1995. The beatification of Mary MacKillop, captured the headlines of all the major newspapers, was featured by all the major television networks and had been preceded by extensive documentary coverage by both. ABC radio covered the three main events, the welcome to Pope John Paul II at the Sydney Domain, Morning Prayer in St Mary's Cathedral, and the Beatification Mass at Randwick; while ABC television relayed a one and a half hour edited and delayed coverage of the three and a half hour ceremony at Randwick. The celebrations were attended by Australian civic, political and religious leaders. The event was later to be marked by debate in both houses of the Federal Parliament.1 As a national social and symbolic event, it is open to interpretation in many different ways, as this debate demonstrates. It has, for example, been interpreted as national recognition of Mary MacKillop's contribution to Australian social life; it has also been interpreted as the ultimate vindication of Mary MacKillop by the Catholic Church, as vindication of the faith of her sisters and of many ordinary Australians. Initially, I intend to explore major issues of difference in the production

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1 On the 31st of January, the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, moved on behalf of the Leader of the House of Representatives: "That this House: (1) Acknowledges the beatification by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, of Mother Mary MacKillop, founder of Australia's first religious order, the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph; and (2) recognises the contribution to the people and society of Australia by Blessed Mary MacKillop and the beneficent and enduring work of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph," Weekly Hansard, Commonwealth of Australia Parliament Debates (30 January-1-2 February, 1,1995). The debate that ensued was carried over to the next day, with speakers affirming Mary MacKillop's egalitarian, inclusive and ecumenical values, her broad appeal to Australians, her unique contribution to generation of Australian children in rural and remote areas, her identification with the socially marginalised and with the battlers. A consistent theme of the speakers was admiration of her courage, charity and perseverance in dealing with resistant ecclesiastical authority in her struggle for the autonomy of her institute. Paul Keating emphasised that recognition of Mary MacKillop was recognition of all Australian women whose contribution to Australian society had not been adequately acknowledged - that 'message of her life easily translates to our much more sceptical and secular society'.
and reception of meaning, which relate to who was being celebrated, the nature of the event and the nature of the publicity it engendered. Then I will evaluate women’s active as well as passive resistance to the beatification and its celebration. Subsequently, I will describe the Morning Prayer in St Mary’s Cathedral and the Mass at Randwick race course and analyse women’s reflections on their experience of these religious events. The homilies on both occasions were given by Pope John Paul II. Because they reflect and reiterate his teachings elsewhere, they constitute experiences of intertextuality. I will consider them within the hermeneutical framework of this thesis. Finally, I will reflect on the whole event in terms of what it reveals of the agency and resistance of women within the Australian Catholic Church.

Issues of Difference in Interpretation

Who was being Celebrated: Mary MacKillop, or Pope John Paul II?

The presence in Australia of Pope John Paul II for thirty eight hours, expressly for the purpose of declaring Mary MacKillop a woman of ‘heroic virtue’ enhanced the significance of the occasion in the minds of the media and of the public. Pope John Paul II was referred to in the captions in the Australian press as ‘John Paul II, a man of compassion’; ‘A Strong Pope in equivocal times’; ‘A towering figure of the age’. Elected to the papacy in 1978 as the two hundred and sixty third Pope, the first Slav pope, the first non Italian for four and a half centuries, he has become an international figure of immense stature. As ‘pilgrim pope’, John Paul II has travelled more widely than any previous pope, and this, his second visit to Australia as Pope, was part of his sixty fourth overseas trip. Through his particular charisma, and as champion of human

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2 The main events attended by the Pope were the official public and interfaith welcome to Australia at the Sydney Domain, in the presence of the leaders of the various Christian churches and the leaders of other faiths on the evening of January 18. The following day, January 19, he attended morning prayer and addressed the Sisters of St Joseph, their associates and friends at St Mary’s Cathedral; visited the tomb of Mary MacKillop; visited the Powerhouse museum and viewed entries in the MacKillop Art Exhibition; lunched with the Australian bishops and celebrated the Beatification Mass for Mary MacKillop at Randwick racecourse. If the Pope had not elected to come, the Cardinal would have presided at the Beatification Mass, which would still have been a national event. However, it is an open question as to whether Mary MacKillop would have emerged with added significance.

rights and social justice he has made the papacy a force in the contemporary world. He was instrumental in reconciling political and religious powers in Poland and is widely accredited with having contributed to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. He has fostered the spectacular growth of nations wishing to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and has been active in promoting ecumenical and interfaith encounters, and in furthering reconciliation between Christian churches. He has also pro-actively promoted dialogue between religion and the world of science. In 1994, *Time Magazine* pronounced him Man of the Year and featured him on the cover of a December edition; his book, *Crossing The Threshold of Hope*, became an international best seller. In the same year, diplomatic relations were established between Israel and the Vatican.

Pope John Paul II’s opening to the world’s political and religious powers has, however, not been paralleled by a similar openness to the Catholic bishops of the world. He came to the papacy determined to redress the confusion generated in different parts of the Catholic world by what he perceived as misguided initiatives to implement the vision of the Second Vatican Council. The number and nature of his published encyclicals and letters are testimony to the seriousness he ascribes to his role as teacher of the faithful. Within the church, John Paul II has emerged as essentially committed to promoting a hierarchical centralist model of governance, very strongly influenced, if not controlled, by the Roman Curia intent on imposing a centralist Roman theology. During his papacy collegiality has been minimised, the autonomy and the teaching role of episcopal conferences worldwide has been limited, and the scope of bishop’s synods has been restricted, so that they function in an advisory role only within a framework substantially influenced by the Roman Curia. As episcopal sees become vacant they have been most often filled by conservative churchmen, often without consultation with the local churches, sometimes in opposition to their wishes. Significant internationally known theologians have been silenced or restricted in their ability to teach and to publish. There has been a lack of due process in relation to those charged with deviancy. Imposition of disciplinary practices and of older symbolic expressions have led to considerable polarisation and to a credibility gap for many persons of faith and good will, who find it hard to reconcile the attitudes and behaviour of church officials.
with the attitudes and behaviour of Jesus Christ as depicted in the Christian Scriptures. Theologian Christian Duquoc argues that 'The Church has to endure a constant process of contradiction between its gospel perspective and its empirical burden. The contradiction is inevitable and is part of the historical status of the Church'. Consequently, the believer has to grow in awareness that bureaucracy is not part of the essence of the church and that the Spirit can never be controlled.

Many people in the church consider that different key issues for women throughout the world have neither been practically, nor satisfactorily addressed during this papacy. The issue of reproductive self-determination for women, has been vigorously opposed by the Pope throughout his pontificate. He was influential in ensuring that abortion should not be promoted as a method of family planning at the United Nations Conference on Population in Mexico, 1984. The Vatican Delegation under his instigation worked to achieve its elimination as a means of family planning at the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, September, 1994. He has constantly reaffirmed the prohibitions of Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, which has led to almost universal disobedience, and discredit, in an increasingly heavily populated world, particularly in Third World countries.

In 1979, on his first visit to the United States, Pope John Paul II was confronted with the question of women's place and role in the church. The President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Sister Teresa Kane, made known women's aspirations to be ordained as priests and requested that he reconsider the official church position in relation to this issue as it was directly related to the dignity of women. Women's

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5 During his first visit to the United States in 1979, Sr Teresa Kane, President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, called on the Pope 'to listen with compassion and to hear the call of women who comprise half of humankind. As women, we have heard the powerful messages of our church addressing the dignity and reverence for all human persons. As women we have pondered these words. Our contemplation leads us to state that the church in its struggle to be faithful to its call for reverence and dignity for all persons must respond by providing the possibility of women as persons being included in all ministries of our church. I urge you, Your Holiness to be open to and to respond to the voices coming from women of this country who are desires of
exclusion from priestly ministry has debarred them from sacramental, teaching and decision-making power, even on issues in which they have been disproportionately affected. Fifteen years later, in May 1994, John Paul II issued an Apostolic Letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, to the bishops of the Catholic Church in which he rejected any possibility of women’s ordination to the priesthood and decreed that the issue should no longer be open to debate:

I affirm that the church is in no way authorised to bestow the priesthood on women, and that all believers in the church must regard this standpoint as definitive.

So the Pope, this extraordinarily powerful man, arrived in Australia to honour a woman, having decreed that women cannot have a central leadership role in determining the affairs of the Church nor in interpreting the Church’s theology. For many people, this live international male religious leader and popular superstar was the celebrity and not the dead, simple, suffering, and until very recently, largely unknown Australian nun. For many women in this study this constituted a real problem and the interviews reveal their ambivalence:

I was a bit puzzled about the Pope in that attention seemed to be focussed so much on him rather than on Mary MacKillop. But then that could have been because he was in the real and she wasn’t quite so real. *(Andrea)*

It was an event within the Catholic Church. The Holy Father was there and he would have upstaged Mary MacKillop in a sense and people would have gone there to see the Holy Father that day and to be involved with what he was doing. *(Grace)*

*[At Randwick]* although Mary was everything there and it was a most magnificent photo of her, the focus appeared even to me to be on the

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6 Pope Paul VI decided this question with an ambiguous “no” in a statement by the Sacred Congregation of the Faith 15 October 1976. Pope John Paul II considered this decision “definitive” in his apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* May 1994 and called a halt to any further debate. His decision was based not on the alleged inferiority of women, but on the constancy of church tradition. See John McDade ‘Gender Matters: Women and Priesthood’ *The Month*, June, 1994, 254-259.
Pope. I know it was the Pope's visit and it was with Mary, but the whole ceremony I felt took away a little of the significance of Mary. (Joan)

Involved in the preparation beforehand, this woman had struggled to understand where the Pope fitted and put it together in her own mind that he was coming here 'to give a blessing to Mary'. She believed that 'a lot of other Aborigines probably could not combine the two'. There was a sense of contradiction for some women; in the process of acknowledging the agency and autonomy of Mary MacKillop she was being delivered up to become some sort of male controlled icon; something she had avoided in her lifetime:

The incredible juxtaposition of the same Pope beatifying a woman, but also saying women can't be priests. That sounds absurd...beatifying a woman and still a man doing it; still a man running the whole show. (Donelle)

The euphoria he evoked, his star like attraction, the ways in which he was manipulated, his dependence on other people, the contradiction between his stance on women's ordination and his affirmation of this woman, his theology in relation to women, all these elicited comment. The women's ambivalence was not just about his presence in Sydney, but about his significance for the church. At the same time, some felt positively about his spontaneous gestures, his impromptu speeches, his expressed warmth and goodness, and the obvious demand on his powers of endurance at the end of a long trip. Was the event a celebration of the presence of this living, charismatic leader of almost a billion Catholics worldwide, symbol of the unity and apostolicity of the church, or was it the celebration of the holiness of a long dead woman, removed both in space and in time? Cardinal Clancy did not dissociate them. For him 'John Paul II and Mary MacKillop were a winning team'.

The Nature of the Event

Other major differences associated with the beatification were the emphasis on sanctity within a dominantly secular culture, and on Catholicity in an increasingly multi-faith society. One woman speaks of having been interviewed by a journalist from the BBC

on her way in to the Randwick racetrack, in relation to the meaning of holiness, the meaning of this event in the life of Australia, why some people are chosen as saints and others are not. She viewed the event as an occasion of religious significance within the civil society. For her it was 'a significant civil event in the life of Australia' which enabled a rarely held discussion about the sacred. She spoke of having many meaningful conversations with ordinary people in different walks of life about religion, the place of holiness in a person's life. What does it mean? how do you gauge it? It seemed to her as if many Australians were 'good naturally surprised at one of their number being called a saint'. She saw Mary MacKillop 'the simple woman who achieved great things against great odds', as fitting the Australian myth. (Rachel)

Sisters of St Joseph speak of their awareness of the event as something which gripped the nation, was widely reported in the media on, before, and after 18-19 January. They had made a major effort to involve the public, but were however surprised at the response of the media, the politicians, the people as a whole, at instances which conveyed to them that the name Mary MacKillop had passed into public usage. Commenting on the fact that the event had been acclaimed by the Federal Parliament, one sister says:

They were able to articulate that this woman ... had contributed a lot to education in this country, ... to identify with her as an Aussie battler, ... [to identify] the spirit of this woman, the goodness of this woman ... and that goodness was incarnated in so many ways in people they had met and Josephites that they had met ... I believe they articulated this Australian psyche thing ... this thing that's moving in our nation now which says, 'we are a nation in more ways than one', because we do have out of our own soil someone who is universally recognised as a good person. They didn't seem to have any trouble with all this blessed business, there didn't seem to be any shyness at that level... so I think for the nation, it was wonderful. (Geneva)

They see the beatification through the responses of other people and this gives them a sense of pride and of community bonding; their own efforts and the national agenda of Australia as a nation come of age seem to be mutually reinforcing. However, for them
The beatification remains primordially a religious event, dimensions of which were beyond human control.

A totally Australian event that was also a faith event, and I think those two elements combined were important for us as the church in Australia and one that gave a witness that seemed to capture the imagination of the wider society. I was conscious that this was a far bigger event than just one woman, it was God in it. (Rosemary)

This emphasis on the beatification as an evangelising moment within secular Australia was also in evidence at the official welcome to the Pope. Crowds had been gathering at the Domain throughout the day, hoping that the rain would hold off. In all there were fifty thousand people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. The atmosphere was charged with excitement, the place festooned with coloured balloons, streamers and posters; throngs of people milled around food stalls and stalls selling souvenirs. The people were officially welcomed to the Domain by the Premier of New South Wales, John Fahey.

The pageant, *The Legend is Alive: Mary MacKillop*, which preceded the official welcome to the Pope represented the Sisters of St Joseph's intent to tell the story of Mary MacKillop through the visual arts of dance, drama, mime and song. It consisted of seven segments: the legend begins, the legend takes shape, the legend is born, the legend reaches out, the legend on the move, the legend for the world, the legend is known—is alive. Produced by Mary Lopez, musically directed by Tommy Tycho, compered by Bobby Limb, it involved well known local artists, for example, Grace Knight, Genevieve Davis, Julie Anthony, Normie Rowe and David Lemke, as well as musical groups from Josephite schools. Journalist, Geraldine Doogue, read extracts from Mary MacKillop's letters during the course of the production. The pageant was an exercise in intertextuality, actually utilising a hermeneutics of retrieval, a hermeneutics of proclamation and a hermeneutics of actualisation. It was an effort to convey something of Mary MacKillop's foresight in relation to the human and spiritual needs of people struggling with poverty. It was testimony to her determination, resilience and
compassion. It could also be interpreted as a significant attempt to mythologise Mary MacKillop. For women in this study:

The Domain display represented the sisters' attempt to make Mary MacKillop intelligible for a secular audience.

The Domain display was a different kind of non-religious event in one way and yet it combined what is deeply in us in a modern display that portrayed what the heart of the woman was. It was done very beautifully and spoke to a wide range of people. (Rosemary)

The process by which we put the show together was very interesting because it was done very much in consultation with the sisters from all over the place... they were like seven directors and our job was to make it work in an entertainment type venue and theatrically to make it a powerful hit. It really did work, there's no doubt about it. (Angela)

For the sisters it was important that the leaders of religious communities other than Christian, be invited to the welcome to the Pope, because Mary MacKillop's greatest benefactor during her excommunication and its aftermath had been Jewish, Emmanuel Solomon, and she herself was open to embrace people of every faith. One of the sisters in retrospect considers:

The fact that Muslim and Jew and Eastern and Coptic and all the different types of religious expressions we have amongst us, [that these] people could honour Mary MacKillop as a person who did portray something of God's message was astounding to me. (Geneva)

Pope John Paul II when he arrived, appeared to walk with difficulty and undoubtedly wearied by his travels, seemed to draw strength from the jubilation of the crowds, particularly the young with their enthusiastic chanting: 'We love you John Paul II'. He was welcomed by the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Clancy, and by the President of the National Council of Churches in Australia, Archbishop Aghan Baliozian. In his

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8 Leaders of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, of the Anglican Church; Greek, Coptic, Antiochian, Romanian Orthodox Churches; Assyrian Church of the East; Uniting and Lutheran Churches; Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends attended the Domain event.
initial speech he emphasised the purpose of his visit and referred to the drama of the life and work of Mary MacKillop which they had just seen:

Australia needs the kind of commitment of which Mary MacKillop is such a striking example....yours is a society of multicultural diversity. In a world in which unity is increasingly threatened by ethnic rivalry and racist attitudes, you must be firmly grounded in the ideals of harmony and solidarity, based on respect for the inalienable dignity of every human being without exception.... Mary MacKillop's faith and commitment have become part of your Australian heritage.

He acknowledged the historic challenges to the Christian churches of ecumenical dialogue and reconciliation of differences at the beginning of a week of prayer for Christian unity, and reminded everyone present of the part each person has to play in the human and national enterprise, in what is fundamentally a sacred enterprise. Mary MacKillop, 'saintly daughter of the Church' would be their inspiration.

The Publicity Associated With The Event: Appropriate or Inappropriate?

Another issue which gave rise to diverse responses was that of the publicity, advertising and commercialism associated with the beatification. Sainthood, miracles, pilgrimages have been quite unknown in Australia. They were accompanied in this event by much advertisement and by the marketing of memorabilia which led some among the press to comment on 'Marymania', 'holy hype'; 'the national distraction of the month'. There were also opportunities for the tourist industry. The Mary MacKillop Tourist Drive through South West Victoria and the South East of South Australia provided opportunity to visit towns and historic sites associated with Mary MacKillop. Major signs were erected at Penola, Mount Gambier, Hamilton, Dunheld and Portland. The beatification was a major tourist advantage for these towns as well as for the city of Sydney.

The Sisters of St Joseph were aware of the questioning that accompanied the event, which related to the cost, the media representations, the commercialism. One sister refers to a humorous portrayal on television:

You could sit on your Mary MacKillop chair reading your Mary MacKillop book, by the light of your Mary MacKillop lamp...drinking your coffee out of your Mary MacKillop mug, resting it on your Mary MacKillop mat. (Cara)

However, other women among those I interviewed saw it differently. There was strong criticism of the role of the media; of what was perceived as its opportunism; of the way in which the event was somewhat hijacked; ‘of the Hollywood type publicity’. (Donelle) ‘The media picked up things the media always picks up, size first and spectacle, and was not much into depth analysis’. (Christiane). The commercialism associated with the event, also provoked strong reaction.

It’s out of the control of the Sisters of St Joseph as much as they would like to control it... It’s something that has a life of its own and you have lots of opportunists who cash in...[The Sisters of St Joseph] had gone into this with a lot of goodwill and commitment and high ideals; it’s taken off the rails and hijacked by others.... There’s a lot of opportunism there in terms of Mary MacKillop, I don’t know what she’d be saying. (Stephanie)

One woman refers to Gibbon’s explanation of the rise of Christianity and his distinction between primary causes and secondary causes. She considers it is the secondary cause which has to do with modern communication that explains the significance of the beatification of Mary MacKillop: ‘I just thought it was well put together as an advertising campaign. I really am deeply cynical about what attracts the popular psyche’. (Sue) Another woman saw it as: ‘too tainted with all the worst in advertising, self promotion, bureaucracy, and the burden of proof with legalism’. Such interpretations are indicative of the covert resistance which existed among women in relation to the celebration of the beatification. However, there is evidence of active resistance on the part of women as well.

Women’s Resistance.

Here I restrict myself to the evidence of explicit public resistance to the beatification as reported in the media. Later on, when I examine further the interpretation of the women I interviewed it will become evident that resistance was more extensive than could be
concluded from its visible manifestations. A major inhibitor of explicit resistance was
the fact that in this event a woman was being acknowledged and women were anxious
not to be seen, nor to be interpreted as discrediting the person and contribution of Mary
MacKillop, nor that of the Sisters of St Joseph.

Women members of the group, 'Ordination of Catholic Women'\textsuperscript{10} and members of the
Melbourne based 'Women of the New Covenant', chose to participate in peaceful vigils
at the Domain, outside the Cathedral and outside the residence of the Cardinal where the
bishops dined with the Pope. Dr Marie Louise Uhr, spokesperson for the OCW group,
stated their position in a letter to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald:

The Pope's honouring Mary MacKillop... should not be allowed to
cover up the actual position of women in the Catholic Church today.
The Church is a hierarchical structure in which all the decision making
positions and sacramental power are held by ordained men. Although
the Pope in recent public statements has stressed the worth, value and
dignity of women, many women on the receiving end of his words do
not feel empowered. Women in the Church are unable to influence
decisions on issues that concern them and feel that their gifts are
undervalued in this patriarchal male Church...

To alert the Pope and the Australian bishops to the importance of the
ordination of women debate, members and supporters of OCW will be
holding several small, peaceful gatherings at set points on the Pope's
itinerary.

While to avoid any possibility of distracting from the solemnity of the
beatification ceremony we shall not be publicly present at this service,
we shall be joining in the public welcome at the Domain...carrying red,
black and white balloons and banners, and shall greet the Pope at several
points on his Thursday travels. The issue of the ordination of women
will not go away.\textsuperscript{11}

Sister Veronica Brady, prominent educator and social commentator, while rejoicing
with the Sisters of St Joseph at the beatification of Mary MacKillop, did not rejoice at
the Pope's visit. For her, the Pope shows little sympathy for women, has little sense of

\textsuperscript{10} This organisation has a membership of about two hundred and fifty women.
\textsuperscript{11} The Sydney Morning Herald, January 11 1995, 12.
the challenges facing humanity, and seems to assume that women are less human than men, when he ought to be the focus of faith for all people within the church. She took issue with the power of the papacy as symbolic of a model of church as absolute, monarchical authority, representative of a form of Christianity which is a distortion of 'a community of believers called to faith, hope and love, open and compassionate to the needs of the times, especially of the poorest.'

The internationally well known writer, Morris West, in speaking of his disenchantment with processes of exclusion which typify the papacy of John Paul II quotes 'a distinguished nun educator': '[t]hey talk at us and about us, but they don't listen. And who in a patriarchal society understands women anyway? They leave us very lonely.'

These women give credence to Sharon Welch's argument that: 'the experience of resistance is itself a denial of the necessity of patriarchy; it is a moment of freedom, the power to embody momentarily an alternative identity'.

**Morning Prayer in St Mary's Cathedral: The Pope's Discourse on Women**

More than one thousand Sisters of St Joseph from across Australia, New Zealand, Cambodia, Ireland and Peru, joined with their associates and friends in St Mary's Cathedral on the morning of January 19, 1995, to praise 'the Spirit of God in our midst',

*In memory of Mary MacKillop,*

and of all women who have sung praise to God before we were born;

*and in union with all the men and women living today.*

It was a joyful and emotional time for them. The first part of their prayer, included their singing of the hymn, *Immortal, Invisible God,* the psalmody, a dramatised reflection of the song of thanksgiving to God from Isaias Ch 12, 1-6, and the singing of the Canticle of Zechariah from the New Testament. It preceded the arrival of the Pope who had been mingling with hundreds of children outside the Cathedral. He walked slowly down the

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14 Sharon Welch, *Communities of Resistance*, 42.
15 *Morning Prayer*, St Mary's Cathedral, 19 January 1995, 1
main aisle of the Cathedral, greeting people on either side. Then, after praying silently on his knees for some moments, he was welcomed by Cardinal Clancy and Sr Mary Cresp, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph. She acknowledged his leadership, thanked him for it, assured him of the sisters’ prayer and support as ‘you continue to promote and preserve church unity and the collaboration of the faithful in the church’s mission’. She thanked him for joining in Morning Prayer ‘on this, the occasion of the Church’s recognition of God’s blessing to us in this woman’, acknowledged what his being in Australia must have cost him physically and emotionally, and expressed the hope that being here might be enlivening for his own faith.  

The prayer in the Cathedral was the context for his homily to the Sisters of St Joseph. While the original draft of the homily which had been forwarded to Rome had justice as its theme, reflecting an emphasis in the readings, the Pope spoke first on the vocation of religious life, the original charism and example of Mary MacKillop and its implications for the sisters, then on the dignity and mission of women, in the family, in society and in the church, and finally, on preparing for the new millennium. Inside the Cathedral his audience consisted primarily of middle aged, elderly, celibate women; outside women committed to the cause of women’s ordination kept silent vigil. The Pope acknowledged the joyousness of the occasion: ‘Today for the first time an Australian is to be raised to the glory of the altar’.  

However, ‘Mary MacKillop cannot be understood without reference to her religious vocation’. He referred to the recent Synod of Bishops on the consecrated life, and emphasised the primordial importance for them of contemplation and union with God in prayer, if they were to be ‘living examples of Jesus Christ and him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2, 2). He spoke of Mary MacKillop’s distinctiveness which came from her fidelity to her religious vocation, and her

16 The Catholic Weekly, 25 January, 1995, 22-23. The Cathedral was decorated by over thirty colourful banners designed and produced by the sisters in different parts of Australia and New Zealand to symbolise the theme service in ministry. Twenty three sisters in cream dresses and flowing scarves performed a liturgical dance.

17 The text of the homily is reprinted in Pope John Paul II: The MacKillop Papal Visit, 18-21. It contains references to and citations of many texts from scripture and from papal and church documents and represents the interweaving of many texts.
embracing of the Cross 'not as a burden or a scandal, but as an effective means of being united with Christ' 18.In this she provided an example for them, her followers today. He reminded them that Mary MacKillop was deeply sensitive to people's unexpressed longings for God. Therefore people should be able to expect from the sisters that they may accompany them as people who 'are wise in the ways of God'. As Religious what they are is more important than what they do. In so doing, he emphasised the primacy of the mystical dimensions of consecrated religious life, rooted within the trinitarian life of God. 19

Then the Pope addressed the issue of women.

Among the pressing issues facing the people of God in Australia there is need for an understanding of the dignity and mission of women, in the family, in the society and in the Church which is faithful to 'the truth of the gospel' (Gal. 2:14). An authentic theology of woman, based upon a theology revealed in the mystery of the Creation and Redemption, brings to light women's 'originality' and particular 'genius' (cf. Mulieris Dignitatem, 10,30). 20

Women while equal in dignity to men are complementary to them, not only in the roles they perform, but 'in their make up and meaning as persons'. For the Pope, their role is related in a special way to motherhood, both physical and spiritual. Mary, the Virgin-Mother of the Lord, is the pre-eminent model for women of a true Christian concept of femininity. 'The failure of society to understand church teaching on the true role of women is rooted in a mistaken anthropology'. 21 The Pope did not refer to the issue of women's ordination to the priesthood although he spoke of the church as having to face.

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18 ibid., 19-20

19 Myra Poole refers to von Hugel's classic treatise, The Mystical Element in the Church (1923), in which he designates three elements, the institutional, the critical and the mystical as essential to its composition. She argues that religious life is typified by the mystical and the critical, and that in the present time much of what is called religious life is not. She maintains that many contemporary religious institutes are simply arms of the institutional church and have lost touch with their original vision and with the dynamism of their origins. For her the central vows of religious life need to be rethought utilising insights from feminist philosophy, psychology, theology and ethics, so that they might become really liberating for women. See 'Religious Life', An A to Z of Feminist Theology, 203-204.


21 ibid., 20-21.
the challenge of finding fresh and creative ways of recognising and integrating the specific charisms of women, which are essential to building up the Body of Christ in unity and love. 22

Finally, he emphasised the 'new Advent', a time of profound conversion of heart and mind in preparation for entry into the third Christian millennium. He rejoiced that 'in Mary MacKillop all Australians have a sign of the flowering of holiness in their midst'.

The homily was followed by prayers of intercession. The third of these prayers was originally worded: 'Mary suffered misunderstanding, calumny and wrongful excommunication with peace and humility; may we also bear with peace and humility any difficulties we meet in your service.' However, when submitted to Rome for approval, the liturgists were requested to delete reference to excommunication from this intercession. (Sally)

Apart from the leaders of the sisters and the wives of civil dignitaries the Pope did not meet with any women. He spent time alone in prayer at the tomb of Mary MacKillop.

He dined with the Bishops. None of the sisters was invited. In the main event of the beatification, the public Mass at Randwick, women did not receive specific mention.

There was no explicit reference to the suffering of Mary MacKillop at the hands of male clerical figures. It can also be argued that in confining remarks on women to an audience ostensibly of religious women he reinforced the divide among Catholic women which feminist theologians, for example, Schussler Fiorenza, and Brennan, deplore. 23

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22 Ibid. In feminist theological critique, the Pope's theological anthropology is based on a bi-polar and asymmetrical view of the sexes, does not differentiate between sex and gender, makes no allowance for the influence of culture in shaping identity and rests on stereotypical understandings of masculinity and femininity as framed by men. Reconstructive work in feminist theological anthropology is influenced by women's reflection on their own historical, embodied experience and its association with sexuality and human relationship in different cultural contexts. I will examine the issue of theological anthropology, including the Pope's assertion about a 'mistaken anthropology' in the following chapter on Women in the Church.

23 Schussler Fiorenza, Discipleship of Equals, 75-76. Patricia Brennan, 'Loosed and bound: Women's reform and the question of God', in Freedom and Entrapment, 88
The Mass at Randwick- Preparation and Celebration

The Symbolism of the Eucharist

The Mass at Randwick represents the high point of the celebrations; the formal declaration of the beatification of Mary MacKillop by the Pope within a public liturgy attended by more than two hundred thousand of the faithful from different parts of Australia and from New Zealand. The Eucharist (derived from the Greek eu-charistia meaning to give thanks) symbolises the identity of Christians gathered as an ekklesia to remember, celebrate and proclaim the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ritualy, this happens through the proclamation of the Word, the commemorative prayer of thanks and intercession, and communion in the body and blood of the Christ. For the believer, the Eucharist both symbolises and actualises Christ's continuing presence in the church and in history in the body of the faithful, in the person of the minister; in the Word proclaimed and in the eucharistic bread and wine.24

The Second Vatican Council sought to replace a cultic theology which sustained the pre-eminence of the sacralised power of the celibate priest within the Eucharist by a theology of the church which emphasises the celebration of the whole people as a priestly and eschatological people. The participation of the laity is thus seen as integral to the celebration. Since the Council men, including married men, have been admitted to the liturgical ministerial roles of deacon, acolyte and lector. Women continue to be excluded from all of these roles and only recently has it been possible for women to be

24 According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, 'the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all of its power flows' (n.10). It is 'the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church' (n.2). ‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy’, in Austin Flannery, (ed.), Documents of Vatican II. Louis Marie Chauvet considers that in sacramental celebrations such as the eucharist, 'faith is at work in a ritual staging in which each person's body is the place of symbolic convergence- through gestures, postures, words (spoken or sung) and silences - of the triple body which makes us into believers. First the social body of the Church with its symbolic network of values ...[second the traditional body which dwells within this group called the Church and which supports the whole of the ritual, notably through reference to the words and deeds of Christ attested by the apostolic witness of the scriptures. Third, the cosmic body of a universe which is received as a gracious gift of the Creator and from which symbolic elements (water, bread and wine.....are recognised as "sacramental" mediation of the inscription of God by the Spirit)'. Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Experience, translated by Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 152
altar servers. This exclusion for many people reflects an assumed right on the part of men both to determine and to delimit the role and functions of women.

Women also experience their exclusion in the Eucharist through language. The introduction of the vernacular into the liturgy required the revision of liturgical rites and texts and the necessary translation of them, including scriptural texts into English. However, consciousness of the ways in which language can be used to exclude people by virtue of their gender, race, age, ability led to a call for the use of inclusive language. It is seen as integral to active participation, to the honouring of differences which characterises genuine hospitality.

Liturical texts have been the site of much contestation. Many feminist theologians have drawn attention to the idolatrous implications of the exclusive use of masculine language for God. Marjorie Proctor Smith maintains that an androcentric hermeneutic has influenced both the selection and arrangement of texts in what is a key liturgical text, the Catholic Sunday Lectionary. Texts which use female images for God, or which relate stories of women in the Bible are either largely eliminated, or hidden while texts which reinforce androcentric and patriarchal are given prominence. Church practice which does not reflect the experience and embodiment of women in the functioning of language, the imaging of God and exercise of liturgical ministry therefore

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25 This includes a revision of the use of generic terms which in contemporary culture could be interpreted as gender specific.


27 In 1992, the Congregation of Divine Worship confirmed the use of the National Revised Standard Version of the Bible for use in the liturgy. However in 1994, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith rejected an inclusive English language translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, approved by the National Conference of the Bishops of the United States. They mandated the use of an exclusive language version and withdrew the earlier confirmation for liturgical use of the NRSV of the Bible.


29 Rosemary Radford Rether considers that: 'women in the contemporary churches are suffering from linguistic deprivation and eucharistic famine'. Women guides: Readings Towards a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 42
continues to negate the equality of men and women. Despite Pope John Paul II's definitive ruling against priesthood for women, for many women and men the issue is not so much women's ordination, but 'the conversion of the whole church to the discipleship of a community of equals that Jesus initiated, the apostolic churches continued and Vatican II reaffirmed'.

Preparation For the Mass at Randwick

The organisers of the beatification Mass sought to emphasise the Australian character of the ceremony and to enable the active and prayerful participation of an assembly of over 150,000 people, including those marginalised by ethnicity, or other forms of difference. In particular, they tried to minimise the exclusionary processes for women in this liturgy designed to publicly acknowledge a woman. Although this involved 'pushing the boundaries', thereby displaying inherent possibilities within the existing liturgical norms, their own evaluation of what was achieved is equivocal.

The Liturgy Committee convened in April 1994 delineated the following principles to guide them in their work: that the ceremony reflect the spirit of Mary MacKillop, in its inclusiveness, simplicity, spirit of reconciliation, emphasis on the ordinary and the socially marginalised and that it be a celebration of an Australian woman and hence an Australian as well as an international event. Carmel Pilcher considers:

Our collaborative process worked in harmony with our principle of inclusion. It was with considerable misgiving that I asked myself the question: how does one prepare a Roman Pontifical Liturgy that could in any way be inclusive? In retrospect this was probably our biggest challenge. We constantly sought to include all: women and men, children, other cultures and races, disabled, other Christians and other faiths, the baptised and the ordained, from all states of Australia as well as New Zealand.

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30 The Vatican Declaration, Inter Insigniores (1976), acknowledged the spiritual equality of men and women, opposed women's ordination because of 'an unbroken tradition' of ordaining men to the priesthood, and because of a sacramentality of 'natural resemblance'. The maleness of Christ was seen as essential to the theology of priesthood.

31 Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Discipleship of Equals, 240.

32 Carmel Pilcher, '“A Precedent for the World” Mary MacKillop at Randwick', Women-Church 17 (Spring, 1995), 41
An early issue they had to resolve was that of the venue for the Mass. They chose the racecourse at Randwick on account of its size and its accessibility. A podium with a white roof was designed on the lines of the original schoolhouse in Penola. Incorporating the sisters' monogram and somewhat reminiscent of an Australian shed it was large enough to accommodate the bishops of Australia and New Zealand. Some liturgical texts had already been chosen through a collaborative process which involved the sisters, other liturgists and text writers. Additional liturgical texts, prayers and symbols, such as banners of Mary MacKillop to be unfurled at the moment of the declaration of the beatification were chosen through a networking process.

The liturgists struggled with the ways in which women, Aboriginal people and people from other cultures could be significantly involved. Much time was spent consulting with leaders of Aboriginal communities. They struggled with the whole use of symbol, language and ritual so that the liturgy might be 'the sacrament of God in the lives of the community'. They adhered to the use of inclusive language, but left the traditional God language untouched. Carmel Pilcher claims:

> We hoped to push the boundaries, particularly in our inclusion of women in ministries. It was our intention that the congregational leaders of Josephites would stand beside the episcopal leaders of local churches of Australia and New Zealand, in communion with the bishop of Rome. We would invite our priests and women and men to come together as ministers of the Eucharist.34

After Cardinal Clancy approved the proposed liturgy, Carmel Pilcher and David Orr went to Rome to clarify proceedings with the Papal Master of Ceremonies and the English language speech writer for the Pope. They were favourably received, their innovative approach and cultural inclusions were commended.

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33 *Priests were invited to be ministers of communion and to be part of the people. The visual impact would have been very different if there were considerable numbers of clergy, as well as the bishops, on the podium.*

34 *Carmel Pilcher, 'A Precedent for the World', 41.*
The sisters vary in their interpretations of what it had been possible to achieve. Several saw it as significant that one of the sisters had been Director of Liturgy for the Beatification Mass, the first time a woman had functioned in this role; that she had been to Rome, had won acceptance in that capacity and had dialogued with Vatican officials. They considered she had succeeded in pushing the boundaries as far as possible in relation to women's involvement in the liturgy, through their presence on the podium, as readers and altar servers, as participants in the smoking ceremony, as ministers of communion. Others saw the liturgy as a moment of recognition for religious women, for all women within the church. One sister considers that: 'people were happy that this national event had grasped the moment to publicly say we women are a significant part of the church'. (Geneva) However, some were sensitive to the limits of the liturgy:

'It was restricted by a whole lot of clerical bits and pieces and what do you do, end up having the whole male church basically represented, excepting which we squeezed in a few women. It was very token...the official church didn't come to meet the people, but... in the sense the people had Mary MacKillop with them, so what did it matter. (Eleanor)

Liturgists Carmel Pilcher and David Orr subsequently wrote a report on the process of preparing for the Mass. Carmel Pilcher considered:

There were many struggles. Prominent among those for me was reconciling my task, which had been assumed by the Vatican as being filled by a priest, with the fact I was a woman. The Australian church entrusted me with the task and the Vatican affirmed this decision on many occasions. However, there were times when I was subtly overlooked or simply left out of decisions. For some liturgy is still the arena of the priest. While it was accepted I could prepare the liturgy, there was no real place for me in its execution. There were tensions at times too, between the Church and the Josephite community. Some priests were not happy with decisions the committee put forward—particularly in regard to concelebration. There were also, at times; inferences of feminism at work.\(^\text{35}\)

David Orr's reflection on the proceedings is similarly enlightening:

Constantly I have had to confront the pain of belonging to the Church—often not my own pain but the pain of others: the Josephites who believed that they did not own the whole process, the many women who did not know a place of acceptance in the Church, the struggle of many priests to accept a servant role in the Beatification, the constant attraction of power, rather than prayer in many decisions, the difficulty in accepting the powerful political status of the Pope in our society, coming face to face with the dehumanising effect of Church bureaucracy upon its members. 36

The Celebration of the Mass at Randwick, 19 January 37

For the most part, the sisters interviewed in this study speak of their excitement and joy, of their being deeply moved by the whole experience for which they had been intensively preparing for so long a time. As part of a community of women drawn in their numbers from every province within Australia, from New Zealand and from the federated Sisters of St Joseph, they were dispersed among the people, part of the people, identifiable by their special symbol for the occasion, a red and white silk scarf. They experienced celebrating the life, enduring impact and final vindication of Mary MacKillop, as unifying. One sister speaks of it thus:

the excitement and joy of the occasion... I experienced it as very unifying, identifying something in myself that I hadn't adverted to that much, that sense of the heritage that I have integrated into myself as a Josephite... there were hundreds of nuns I didn't know but we all had the scarf and seeing the scarf there was that sense of connection that this was part of our celebration for the event. (Cara)

36 Ibid., 11.

37 In viewing the ABC television documentary of the ceremony I am mindful that liturgical celebration functions as a symbolic whole, as a metaphor, engaging the mind and heart, the senses, the imagination and memory; that as a religious symbol it is polysemic. The documentary conveys many images of the enormous crowd, filling the groundstands, covering the lawns in front of them at Randwick, young and old, people of all ages, formally dressed, casually dressed in variegated colours, hatless, bespectacled, sunshaded in the late summer afternoon with its fresh breeze. People in parish groupings, ethnic groupings, in massed choirs and musical bands, religious and civil dignitaries, faced the large white podium. It was backed with coloured bands of yellow, orange, red and brown reminiscent of the Australian interior and approached by two wide flights of stairs, broken by a landing space holding the desk used by Mary MacKillop. Flags, including the Australian, Aborighinal and Vatican, added to the colour and the movement. The crowd had been waiting for a long time the arrival of the pontiff and the beginning of what was to be a three hour ceremony.
However, their joy and excitement also stemmed from their sense of solidarity with people in all their diversity, Aboriginal, ethnic, ordinary struggling men and women, children and young people, politicians, church dignitaries, for this moment animated by a common purpose.

We were in Sydney and even on the train and bus that took us to the Randwick grounds, people were telling the sisters where to go ...what was good, we were all there together, even though we were strangers there was a common purpose. Even in that crowd...you could go up to anyone because we were on about the same purpose.... It was beautiful to see the joy of the people. We were all there but we were not standing out from the crowd. We were part of it. We were part of the people and that is what she would have liked. (Natalie)

One of the distinctive features of this liturgy, is its incorporation of the Aboriginal people and of Aboriginal ritual. On a previous visit to Australia in 1986, the Pope told the Aborigines at Alice Springs:

You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.\(^{38}\)

The liturgy began with an Aboriginal welcome ceremony which emphasised the cosmic dimensions of the ceremony celebrated in the open air. Twenty six members of the Catholic Aboriginal ministry from across Australia, including a significant number of women, welcomed the Pope to Randwick, ‘to the land, trees, sky, and near-by sea; by people of this land from untold generations’.\(^{39}\) They extended to him a spiritual embrace from Aboriginal Catholics. This welcome incorporated a ritual of the soil, in which soil brought from different parts of the country was mixed, symbolising the sacredness of the land, the regions from which the participants had come, as well as Mary MacKillop’s Australian roots.

\(^{38}\) ‘Pope John Paul II’s Address to the Aborigines in Alice Springs: 1986’, A Spirituality of Catholic Aborigines and the Struggle for Social Justice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Apostolate (Brisbane: Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, 1995), 90.

\(^{39}\) The Official MacKillop Papal Visit Book, 16.
After a fanfare of trumpets, the cantor chanted the invitation to gather around the table of the Lord, to hear the story, to proclaim the living Word, to eat the living Bread and drink the saving Cup, to proclaim the death of Jesus until he comes in glory. In so doing he reminded the assembly in this symbolic space, of the ecclesial tradition: 'the tradition which presents itself as a traditioned tradition ... and is lived as a "traditioning" tradition'. The massed choirs sang: '[s]earch for the Lord who calls you; come to the God who saves you, trust in the Lord who loves you'. Altar servers, among whom were four Sisters of St Joseph-deacons, including the first Aboriginal deacon, Boniface Perdjert, and twelve leaders of the Sisters of St Joseph headed the long procession of eighty mitred, white robed bishops to the podium.

By this time, the Aborigines had lit their fires and placed green leaves on their brasier. As the procession moved through the smoke, people wiped it over their faces to symbolise the purification of their own hearts for worship. An Aboriginal man and woman followed the procession to the altar. Boniface Perdjert placed leaves on the brasier to smoke the altar and the Pope. Others in the Aboriginal community went out into the crowds with their smoking pots to purify the people and the racecourse, in this way symbolising reconciliation, and the spirit of communion intrinsic to true worship of God in the Eucharist. The sisters had struggled for the inclusion of the Aborigines. Rarely before had Aboriginal men and women figured so prominently in an official, Australian Catholic liturgy.

To be intimately engaged in the ceremony was very meaningful for them. There were several reasons for this. Primarily, it was a moment of recognition for the women of themselves as Aboriginal women, Aboriginal Catholic women:

I did the smoking ceremony and we walked up those steps to her [Mary MacKillop's] desk and that was when it really hit me as to what it was all about, who she was and what she had done for this country and how

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42 An Aboriginal Liturgy was celebrated during the Eucharistic Congress held in Melbourne in 1973.
she was a woman... where women in the church had not played a big part, she in some way paved some part of the way for women in this country. And to have so many women doing the smoking ceremony. In Aboriginal traditional time a woman would not be going up on smoking ceremony, but seeing its for a woman, and seeing the Sisters of St Joseph were part of that ceremony and Aboriginal women were involved in it made a point. It made a stand for Aboriginal women within the Catholic Church on that day as well as the Sisters of St Joseph making their stand for what they are doing in the church. That is one of the experiences I felt: well, Mary MacKillop you've done something today, you've shown people that women are part of the church as well as men. And some of the important things that have been done especially for Aboriginal women - just being involved in the smoking ceremony. It is very important for us as Aboriginal women to say as Catholics 'we are here' and not just push our men in front all the time... She made the move and we are following on. We are getting stronger. (Grace)

The Aboriginal women saw the event as communicating not only that women are part of the church, but that they need to be recognised for the work they do.

Not just to say, well they are there, but the men make the decisions. I just feel we do need a little more, it's not power, it's just a little more flexibility in what we are doing, and recognition from the bishops and everyone within the higher power of the Catholic Church that we are there and we are capable of making decisions in the Catholic community. Because we may have been born on Mission and raised on Mission we don't want to be treated still as a Mission Aboriginal from the reserve, as if we can't handle anything. We're strong enough to say, 'hey!, hey!, I know what I'm all about, I've had some education and I know about life and life's experiences. And because I'm a woman don't push me aside and say she's a woman'. I sound like I'm going for women's lib, but I'm not. I'm not doing it for women's lib. I'm doing it for ... I don't think it's respect even, it's regard, it's a word I have to find. Its recognition that we are here and we are doing something. (Grace)

They did perceive the beatification as a moment of recognition for Aboriginal people within the wider society:

I think it was the proudest moment of my life... I said to ---, 'gee mate, here we are part of this historical event, Mary MacKillop, and we're five little black fellas up here on the stage'. And I said 'look out at that sea of white faces, brother, going from one end to the other'. He said 'yeah, and the most important thing the Pope will be up here and all those bloody politicians are out there and we are here'. (Joan)
For them to look down and be able to identify a dozen Koori flags flying amidst the rest was an immense moment of pride for them: 'We're just Kooris and we are up here doing the welcome to the Pope and that in itself, for God's sake was significant for us'.

(Joan) For once it was the experience of being central and not marginal in the society, but also in the church:

I looked him straight in the eye when I was standing up there. I had a very strong gaze with the Holy Father ...I felt that feeling for an Aboriginal woman to be up there and in that ceremony was important. And I think he sort of said, 'yeah, that's o.k.' I got that stare, that feeling when he looked at me, I felt really good. (Grace)

The smoking ceremony itself was not without mishap for the participating Aborigines, because they had to incorporate it within the traditional ritual and to accommodate the unanticipated event of the procession of eighty bishops, with the result that before they were able to begin the actual ceremony their fires began to go out, causing them much anxiety. 'If it ever happens again...I think that should be one of the major things left to the Aboriginal people themselves to handle' (Joan). Which highlights a dilemma of enculturation, the experienced appropriation of cultural symbols and rituals.

After the stirring invocation of the entrance song - a reminder of the presence, power and providence of God, of the fundamental religious virtue of trusting faith - Cardinal Clancy, President of the Australian Conference of Bishops, welcomed the Pope as our 'chief pastor and Christ's Vicar among us'. He assured him of 'our filial affection and our loyalty'. Pope John Paul II led the litany of praise and the invocation for God's mercy prior to the actual beatification rite which included a formal petition to the Pope by Cardinal Clancy. In making it he was joined by Mary Cresp and Mary O'Dea, leaders of the Sisters of St Joseph, and by Father Paul Gardiner the postulator of the cause for beatification. Within the short biographical note read by Mary Cresp, the succinct sentences:

Mary at her profession, became known as 'Mary of the Cross'. Besides poor health, Mary also endured humiliation and misunderstanding. But her sense of God's presence and love gave her strength and courage. Her one aim was to do the will of God. Her love for the church and the
Eucharist was identified with her love of Christ. Mary MacKillop died at Mount Street, North Sydney, on 8 August, 1909. Her heroic virtue and outstanding faith won for her the acclamation of Church and society throughout Australia and beyond.\textsuperscript{43}

both included and occluded her long struggle with the institutional Church.

After the Pope pronounced the formula of beatification, signifying the admission of Mary MacKillop to those formally among the blessed in heaven, her likeness was revealed in two giant sized banners unfurled, on either side of the podium to the joyous applause of the assembly. They portrayed her as a young sister in her brown religious habit with its blue monogram, surrounded by the stars of the Southern Cross. One sister comments:

It touched me deeply. At Randwick I was up in the stands and there was this quarter of a million people or so down on the grounds. And at the solemn proclamation of Blessed Mary, the hush over that whole crowd beforehand, that sense of reverence, that sense of expectancy, waiting. Then to hear those words, to hear the roar of the crowd, and the unfurling of those banners... it was a very simple ritual but people were riveted there, they were focussed and I felt that was the most special moment for me. As an Australian woman I identified with the faith of those people in a very real sense. It was tangible and I don't care whether they're churchgoers, or what they are, they could identify with goodness. (Geneva)

The rousing sound of trumpets intoned the ancient hymn of praise, the Gloria of the Mass. The singing was accompanied by the choreographed movement of more than three hundred children in white shirts, from three states, forming the Josephite emblem in bright blue ribbon, throughout the massed crowd. Simultaneously, thirty girls in bright blue dresses performed a liturgical dance on the steps leading to the podium. Spectacular, simple and again an assertion of the place of women within religious worship, and of the importance of their visible embodiment.

\textsuperscript{43} The Official MacKillop Papal Visit Book, 19.
In the liturgy of the Word which followed, women were once more visible and audible as readers and cantor. The poignant singing of the response from Psalm 71, ‘Into your hands O Lord I entrust my spirit’ by the sister cantor, to me seemed evocative of the spirit of Mary MacKillop. The readings taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah, 40: 3-5, St Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians, 3:12-17 and from St Matthew’s Gospel, 6: 25-34, emphasised the themes of preparation for the advent of God, of unfailing trust, of forgiveness and love, of reliance on divine providence, of the reign of God. The Pope read his homily from the presidential chair surrounded on either side by a bishop. He applied the topographical contrasts of which Isaiah speaks to Australia, its soil and landscape and extended the notion of contrast to include that of culture and of ethnic origin:

These contrasts in peoples and culture make your nation a wondrous blend of the old and the new, such that today Australia is a land of diversity and unity...where this glory[of the Lord] has already been abundantly revealed in Mary MacKillop, and the Church by declaring her “blessed”, is saying that the holiness demanded by the gospel is as Australian as she is Australian.

He referred to the virtues of St Joseph, of justness, trust in providence, striving for the kingdom of God and to their pertinence in the life of Mary MacKillop - who:

boldly prepared the way of the Lord in the most trying situations ...a herald of the Good News among the isolated ‘battlers’ and the ‘urban slum dwellers’.

Mary is further extolled as one who could detect the yearning for God and God’s righteousness beneath the face of human need. Accustomed to suffering as the daughter of an immigrant family:

her story reminds us of the need to welcome people, to reach out to the lonely, the bereft, the disadvantaged, to see Christ in the stranger, to meet him in them and to help them to meet him in each one of us.

44 The MacKillop Papal Visit, p.33.
Further themes were human dignity, the church as upholder of the transcendence of the human person, the call to love as the essence of the Christian vocation, the contribution of religious communities to culture and civilisation throughout the world and within Australia, the presence of Christ in all of reality, the need to strive for the coming of the reign God, for God’s righteousness. The Pope concluded:

The Beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop is a kind of ‘consecration’ of the people of God in Australia. Through her witness the truth of God’s love and the values of his kingdom have been made visible in this country - values which are at the basis of Australian society.47

At the end of his homily he spontaneously addressed the crowd and their response enabled him to break the formality of the ceremony with his assertion: ‘Christ is present in Sydney, Christ is present throughout Australia’, to their resounding ‘Yes!’ The homily was followed by a profession of faith and a renewal of baptismal commitment in the presence of the successor of St Peter who has come to confirm our faith on the occasion of proclaiming Mary MacKillop among the blessed.

Prayers of intercession in many languages led by women and men, some in their national dress, representative of groups influenced in some way by Mary MacKillop, again testified to the Sisters of St Joseph’s intent that the ceremony be inclusive of Australians in all their diversity. Prayers were offered for our Pope, for our leaders, for newcomers to Australia, for those involved in education, for this community, for those who are suffering and for those who have died. These prayers in different languages, English, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tetum (East Timorese) and Maori, were a reminder of the solidarity which the Eucharist is meant to symbolise and to effect, and evidence of the multicultural reality of Australian Catholicism.

For the procession of the gifts, ten Sisters of St Joseph from different localities presented gifts for the altar: the chalice used by Father Tenison Woods, historical...
documents of the Josephite order, bread and wine for the Eucharist. The pontiff, moving with assistance to the altar precincts, pronounced the prayers of offering, surrounded by priests and deacons, including Aboriginal, Boniface Perdjert. The Preface and the Eucharistic Prayer addressed to God the Father, emphasised the incarnation of the second person of the Triune God as Jesus of Nazareth and the sending of the Spirit. So the Pope prayed: 'we celebrate the reconciliation your Son has gained for us as we now fulfil Your Son's commands..... May He fill us with His Spirit: may he take away all that divides us'. A significant moment in the Mass was the sign of peace. After praying:

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles:
I leave you peace, my peace I give you.
Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church,
and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom
where you live for ever and ever. 48

the Pope offered the sign of peace to the two Josephite leaders. This gesture was designed by the sisters as an intentional gesture to symbolise reconciliation of the hierarchical church, at whose hands Mary MacKillop had suffered excommunication, with the Sisters of St Joseph. However, it could be argued that the omission of any explicit reference to her suffering at the hands of the church or any expression of regret for what she had suffered through the agency of members of the hierarchical church in the past, by either the Cardinal or the Pope, emptied this gesture of some of its significance.

For the distribution of communion, a central symbolic moment in the Mass, two hundred and fifty ministers of communion, priests and lay men and women, were chosen from across Australia and New Zealand, reflecting the accent on inclusiveness of gender, race and class. Those who received communion from the Pope had also been chosen from across the two countries. As the ministers moved throughout the large crowd, the refrain of the choir resounded across the racecourse: 'Eat this bread, drink

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48 The Official MacKillop Papal Visit Book, 27
this cup, come to me and never be hungry. Eat this bread, drink this cup, trust in me and you will not thirst'.

In the concluding rite of the Mass the Pope invoked God's blessing on the assembled people and prayed that through Mary MacKillop's example they might learn to recognise God's will for them, trust in God's providence, develop a deep respect for the poor and a passion for justice, and share in her courage, see with her vision and love with her heart. Deacon Boniface Perdjert then bade the assembly 'Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord'. The jubilant singing of the Australian National Anthem followed. Responding to the chants of groups of young people 'John Paul II we love you', the Pope leaning on his crosier, broke into an impromptu speech. He greeted all Australians, beginning with the Aborigines; singling out for special mention among all those who had contributed to Australia's commonwealth, the Irish, the Greeks, the Italians, the Croatians, the Poles, and the Vietnamese; acknowledging that together we praise the Lord. Then he thanked everyone, congratulated Blessed Mary MacKillop and her Congregation, and thanked them for their patience and perseverance. The long procession of bishops headed by the leaders of the Josephites wended its way down the steps from the podium. The Beatification Mass was over.

Certainly it was a joyful celebration of the social and cultural diversity which constitutes the Australian Catholic Church. It was a Catholic ceremony, for although the other Christian Churches were represented it was not ecumenical in its focus. In the midst of the current controversy on the place of women within the church it did celebrate the contribution of Mary MacKillop and by implication that of her institute, of religious women, of all women. Australia's first saint would be a woman. It did enable women to figure more prominently than ever before in a Mass celebrated by the Pope, or celebrated for any public occasion in this country. However, there was no explicit mention of, nor apology for the suffering of Mary MacKillop and other Australian women from the clerical and hierarchical church. There was no mention of women among those designated as suffering from discrimination. It was as if the whole issues of gender and sexism were deliberately avoided, and this at a time when the Cairo
Conference had thrown into relief the massive difference of privilege between men and women across the world, and the definitive no to women's ordination within the Catholic Church had raised anew the issue of women's equality within the church.

The central focus of attention was the celebrating pontiff, doing something to a woman removed in time and space. The visual impact of the long procession of white robed, mitred bishops, seated to the sides of the altar on the podium accentuated the clerical nature of the church, hardly diminished by the presence of the twelve Josephite women among them. While the changes in the liturgy according a place to women, and to socially marginalised Australians were significant, they had been wrought through an unrelenting struggle by the Sisters of St Joseph. So well might the Pope acknowledge their patience and perseverance. However, it is also possible to ask whether they accommodated too much. Were they caught in the impossible bind which has inveigled them from the beginning, of trying to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, to his message of love and reconciliation for all people, while trying to withstand the discrimination of those wedded to the same ideal? Their explicit aim was to make this event a moment of evangelisation for the Australian people, a moment in which people would be motivated to reflect on goodness, on heroic virtue, and on the values and goodness they expressed in their own lives. They emphasised reconciliation, inclusiveness and simplicity in fidelity to the values Mary MacKillop espoused. Their conciliatory strategy, of not unduly antagonising the officials of the church, of working subtly and gradually to effect change could be open to question. However, it could also be argued that it may have influenced the Pope in his decision to issue a Letter of Apology to Women within six months of the event.

Dorothy McRae - McMahon, one of the leaders of the Uniting Church present at the Mass commented:

I found it powerful, deeply moving and beautifully simple... It was good for me to experience the gifts which this Pope brings to his people and to the world. I saw and understood why he is loved by so many. He really does have a great power to bring people together across so many boundaries, to be affirmed in faith and, most importantly to me, to believe that Christ really is in their midst. I saw a simple, homely man
who has great capacity to convey love and warmth. I suppose I also saw that this very simplicity carries with it the potential for producing dangerously simplistic theology and interpretations of what are ambiguous and complex issues for his people and the world.

It was good for me to see both, instead of just one. I was very blessed by the experience and it confirmed for me that the task of the church in this country is to do, as was done yesterday- to bring the people of Australia a hope that we could recognise Aboriginal people, live joyfully in a multicultural society and believe saints can be found, and allowed to rise in our midst.49

I turn now to consider the interpretations of Sisters of St Joseph and of other Catholic women of the beatification event, and their considerations of what unites and what differentiates women within the nation and the Church.

Women's Interpretation of the Beatification: Some Further Reflections

Many women acknowledge the emphasis on the inclusiveness of different cultures within the liturgy. Something of the cultural diversity of those present is clearly in evidence in the television documentary. The sisters saw the Aboriginal ritual as a distinctive and highly significant dimension of the Beatification Mass, symbolic of their recognition of the central importance of Aborigines in the life of the nation, of Aboriginal spirituality and the appropriateness of its expression in liturgical worship for Catholic Aborigines and for Australian Catholics. It also signified the involvement of Sisters of St Joseph with Aboriginal communities in different parts of Australia. Sisters accompanied ethnic groups to the beatification Mass. One sister, herself an Asian migrant working with an ethnic community, comments on her perception of the impact of the event:

We were at the prayers in the Cathedral...I had brought with me a few people, old people; one from China, one from Hong Kong, two from Vietnam and you could feel the throb and pulse of joy and identification with her. (Rosslyn)

The fact that Mary MacKillop was the daughter of migrant parents and knew the struggle of migrant peoples trying to settle in a foreign land has helped migrant people

identify with her. The Timorese community has adopted her as their patron. Furthermore, the Buddhist influence in many parts of Asia has familiarised many Asian immigrants with the notion of the role of a guide leading people towards some one greater. For many people of European cultures, the tradition of prayer to the saints is part of their spiritual practice. Sisters saw the beatification event as helping multicultural Australians to understand that the church is a unity which embraces all races and peoples; that Mary MacKillop is a saint for all Australians. Certainly, the presence of the Pope as symbol of the unity of the church was significant for them. The same sister speaks of the ethnic group of which she was part, which had been seated in the grandstand by midday for the Randwick liturgy: ‘they wished they could be closer so they could see him...they would just have loved the Pope to come round so that they could see him’. (Rosslyn)

One of the dominant impressions I formed from the Aboriginal women involved in the struggle of women within the Aboriginal Catholic ministry, was of how hard they had had to work to make Mary MacKillop intelligible for themselves. They perceived other people as assuming that they as Aboriginal women would immediately grasp her significance. She has come to have living significance for them as Aboriginal women, as a woman who struggled, lived in poverty, knew suffering, and experienced ‘lots of things done to her too that were unjust’, yet kept going. (Grace) On account of their own struggle they can identify with her sadness, discernible in her images, and respect her struggle:

I don’t know where we get our inner strength. We have to keep struggling on and on. Even in my mission days it was a struggle on and on and on. We get knocked down; we get kicked in the guts and we get up. (Joan)

In speaking of their experience of the event these women identified a particular confusing reality for themselves and for Aboriginal people.

Why was she put out and why was she put back in again? How can this woman be a saint?... How can she be a saint if she was thrown out and brought back in again? What was she thrown out for? (Joan)
Only a minor part of the ceremony was televised, an Aboriginal woman and man were visible smoking the Pope, but the nature of this coverage seems to have been a disappointment for the Aboriginal people, reflective of their marginality in the society. These women are able to consider the transitory nature of the event for many of those who participated. However, for them Mary MacKillop continues to be significant. One woman speaks of her sense of identification:

As a woman I look at her face. I identify with a lot of her sadness. When I am alone her photo is near my desk. I relate to her sadness with her on a personal level. I feel sadness in her face and I carry lot of sadness myself. (Joan)

She speaks of her new understanding of sisters as persons, of now being able to communicate very freely with them and to understand what they are trying to do working with the Aboriginal community. Another woman speaks of her sense of closeness to Mary MacKillop as having come three months later after spending time at the Mary MacKillop museum, in the Chapel, visiting Mary MacKillop's tomb, ('that's where you get it'), having time to think and reflect. She keeps several quotations by Mary MacKillop in her diary and refers with approbation to her saying 'Never expect perfection and bear quietly with the defects that from time to time come under your notice' and struggles with making sense of this woman, who as she is dead can only be known through peoples' interpretations, about which she has to make her own decision:

She didn't judge people. It doesn't matter what their faults were she still accepted the person, and we as a people don't always do that. So we as a people say always if we find a fault in someone, 'they're no good' because they have that problem. So we pass on to the next one. Judging by some of the things, she wasn't like that at all. Whether that be real or not, I don't know. (Grace)

Other women who participated in the Mass accentuate the festival, carnival atmosphere of the experience at Randwick, the goodwill and good fun and excitement engendered by a crowd coming together to celebrate something other than a sporting fixture. They speak of the experience of coming by public transport, of the smoothness of the organisation, of the activity in the grounds, of the rain that had fallen earlier in the
afternoon, of the crowds assembling, of people picnicking, of the multicultural groupings, of the colour and energy, of the singing organised by groups beforehand, of the technology involved. The involvement of women on the altar, the Aboriginal reconciliation ceremony, the participation, the singing, the overall simplicity and creativity, the choreographed movement were spoken of appreciatively. They saw it as a national event, as a 'spiritual high moment for the nation'. One woman comments: 'It was an extraordinary time because I picked up there was such a huge amount of goodwill'. (Andrea) Despite difficulties they experienced in coming to terms with saintmaking these women would feel that the whole event was for the good.

However, a religious sister, not a Sister of St Joseph, present at the Mass, had spoken with many religious sisters who were quite sceptical, even cynical about the event; who considered the process of beatification 'outmoded, driven by the male church, irrelevant in this age, and she herself would not have wanted it.' They were not interested in attending the Mass. Although she admires Mary MacKillop for what she did, she does not see her as having great relevance for her life today, which she depicts as: 'an urban life and a very professional life and a post Vatican II life with a lot more complex questions about the church and about spirituality and about being a religious'. (Rachel)

On the other hand, a lay woman involved in the preparation for the beatification had come both to admire Mary MacKillop and to perceive her as an immensely attractive woman, a genuine role model for Australian women, because while becoming powerful, and effecting significant change in her time, she yet remained able 'to keep herself in perspective'. Her idealism, courage, her ability to take risks, her to ability to act, her pragmatism, she found arresting. She refers to Edmund Campion's thesis that within Australia we have worthies and heroes and that our heroes are those we genuinely admire because somehow they have thumbed their nose at the system; our worthies we keep in a separate compartment. She saw the beatification events as an attempt to 'somehow get Mary from the worthy status to the hero status' and that it half happened. Mary came to be seen as more than a good and holy woman, as someone who was oppressed by some strong and powerful men, 'who'd gone bush, tackled the
big land, who quintessentially represents the egalitarianism of Australian life’. However, she believes that for some people Mary MacKillop remains a nineteenth century fossil who never really came alive. Thus she poses the question of her perceived relevance for contemporary people. She also considers that for some people the whole ceremony had overtones of the church triumphant, of a certain smugness, at a time when clerical and religious abuse has severely affected people’s faith in the church, so that this was for some people a real offence. For her, however, both in Mary MacKillop’s time and in our own, the Catholic Church is a great entity within Australian social and cultural life. (Caroline)

Women who Chose not to Participate in the Events, or who Distanced Themselves from them.

These women include some living in Sydney who chose not to be involved, who were not sufficiently curious, or who believed they would not be nurtured spiritually by going; some outside Sydney who if they had been there would not have gone; and others in Perth, who have minimal awareness of the television coverage, or who considered the event as totally irrelevant for them. For instance:

I don’t know anything about the beatification event. I know nothing about it except that it happened, that the Pope came, that there was an alternative protest by some women in Adelaide, I think, to do with women in the church and that’s about all. I don’t know anything about it and I can’t really comment because I took no interest, because it really meant nothing at all to me. If I wanted to learn about Mary MacKillop that’s not what I would be focussing on because... I think some of it was hijacked by a whole lot of other people not interested in supporting, or thinking about, or participating in any way in that sort of happening. (Stephanie)

There was some perception of its being an event of national significance: ‘There are spiritual high moments for nations... I think that quality was there’, (Marian); ‘it was like being there when your country goes to the Olympics’ (Christiane); ‘I think it did raise questions about the soul of the nation’(Marian); ‘I think there’s a tinge of nationalism that has been struck by this whole event of Mary MacKillop’. (Stephanie)

Many perceive the beatification event as a Catholic event: ‘a sort of almost club event or
a tribal event'; 'to be Catholic was to be there'; 'it puts us on our own Roman Catholic map' (Christiane); 'the institutional church made a big deal about it' (Stephanie); 'it presents us as worthy people who have worthy people'. Several of them raise the question about what it would have conveyed to the non-Christians in Australian society, to Muslims, Buddhists and Jews.

One woman comments that the crucial issues facing the Catholic Church and possibly other Christian churches are not about providing examples of holiness because we already have them, but about:

finding appropriate ways to make the gospel more relevant in the light of people today, a whole rethink of the ministries of the church in terms of the mission of Jesus, and a whole rethinking among other things...of priesthood, and of Pope, popery and episcopal power, and the role of all these things in terms of the gospel in the world. (Christiane)

She would question the level of awareness of the promoters of the beatification as to the actual irrelevance, even scandal the church is for so many people at this point in time.

Another woman sees the contextual issue differently. For her the social and ecclesial situation has changed dramatically in the past thirty years because of the massive shift in cultural consciousness. This has implications for the church: standpoints, expressions of spirituality, devotional practices which once were all of a piece no longer hold together, people have difficulty in identifying with them. 'The church in its whole social dimension has reached an impasse of some kind'. She queries the inner congruence of an earlier church ceremony of beatification, even with adaptation, being applied on a specific national level, while she acknowledges the sensitivity and commitment of those responsible for the ceremony. (Marian)

The notion of beatification and sainthood, and of the process of canonisation is seriously critiqued by other women for different reasons. There are different views about the notion of singling out people for conspicuous virtue. For some there is acknowledgement that this is a natural, even desirable phenomenon; another woman
who acknowledges the importance of people's historical contributions attests: 'I really am sceptical of the metaphysical things around saints...and the idea of someone being certified as in heaven there's a level at which I think that's ludicrous'. (Sue) Several women have difficulties with the connotations of elitism associated with sainthood; and do not subscribe to the notion of formal sainthood. For them saintliness is part of everyone. We need to be greeting the God in each other and be more connected with the saintliness, the holiness of our whole life and of each person. (Danelle) One woman asks: 'do you need to make a big fanfare of somebody's life when others probably have had similar lives that have never been recognised?' (Fiona) Another exclaimed: 'beatified! what a word in the 1990's'. For several women it is the sense of a communion of saints which has greater validity.

Their critique of the whole process of canonisation relates to the process of seeking depositions, obtaining and validating miracles, to the time, intellectual effort and expense involved. They see that it is so distinctively a process designed and implemented by men, by the hierarchical establishment 'on the other side of the world'. Those with the money and the political know how are perceived to have the advantage in being able to work the system. For them, the proliferation of beatifications and canonisations by Pope John Paul II raises anew the question of their meaning. Those and the irrelevance of beatification for the life of Mary MacKillop were recurring issues. Their critique mirrors in many ways the critique of the feminist theologians in an earlier chapter.

As to the impact of the event on those who participated, there is a fairly common belief that it was momentary and consequently superficial. The environment, the meeting, the spectacle, the colour, movement, and the vitality of the crowd rather than the content were seen as being significant. It was compared to other public ritual events such, as the grand final of the football, or the opening of the Olympic Games. While some women acknowledged the significance of public ritual in national life, they felt that this event did not have lasting religious significance for those who participated. This judgement is somewhat substantiated by the personal accounts of those who testify to their real
understanding of Mary MacKillop as having come from their personal study of her life, or through their experiences in the Chapel at her tomb. Others see that it brought religion into prominence for the time and that it was renewing for them: ‘whether you were Catholic or not, ...it gave religion a higher profile’; ‘it was a renewal of my own faith’; ‘a certain renewing of something that maybe is not tangible all the time’. However, this for them too, was not to be dissociated from the Pope’s visit, which ‘kind of overshadowed a lot of what was happening at the time’. One woman conscious of the diminishment and aging of most religious orders across the country considered that it might signify

the sunset glow before the sun goes down, of the country acknowledging this group of women before they die out...she becomes a symbol of that way of life which is now over and it’s kind of beatified and recognised before it disappears.... I took it as the last sort of gasp of the system. (Lucienne)

So, was it in their opinion a good thing that Mary MacKillop was beatified? In relation to this there is considerable ambivalence.

Being canonised means that you’re a kind of football people can kick around for their own ends....I don’t want to sound entirely negative because if we have to have a saint I’m glad it was a poor woman rather than a cleric or a powerful man. She’s been done over, rather than being allowed to appear.... she’s become a symbol and symbols can be manipulated for people’s own ends. (Lucienne)

The example of Maria Gorelli’s attempted rape and death used as a medium for conveying clerical attitudes to women’s sexuality was cited by several women. One woman argued that many religious women from different orders were to be found in country towns, educating the rural poor, living in conditions not dissimilar from the Josephites. They too were battlers. Some of their members also suffered at the hands of the hierarchy. Still others consider that given the invisibility and silencing of women it was good to see a woman promoted:

I think it was significant for women to see a woman and an Australian woman and a woman who had bucked the system to be beatified. Yes. (Donelle)
Many of these women comment on what they perceive as strong contradictions within the event. For example, the institutional church which would not recognise the woman while she lived, which oppressed and persecuted her, now wanting to put her on a pedestal. The Sisters of St Joseph in order to have her acknowledged submitting themselves to the process established by the institutional church; the Sisters of St Joseph wanting this to happen 'I'm not sure whether they want it to happen, but they've fund raised, they've done all these things to try to make it happen, I don't know what for. (Stephanie) An Anglican woman comments: 'I'm sure it was a wonderful time for Catholic women, but I didn't see it as wonderful. I saw it as tragic and I wanted Mary to rise up from the grave'.

Did these women identify with Mary MacKillop? Several had studied her life in some detail; others knew very little about her; one would like to read her letters; another is conscious that if she were to read the authorised versions of her life she would have to do a lot of her own editing. Still others can identify with aspects of her life, her family situation, her ability to be true to herself, to hold fast to her own dream, her being a woman, a religious, her concern for education, for community, her frustrations with the church, her being misunderstood and 'her capacity to read changing social, political and religious situations'. (Christiane) One woman respects her 'for holding two incompatible truths together while she allowed it to emerge how they could possibly be understood together'. (Sue); another sees her as a fairly obediential person and would not identify with her in that; (Christiane) neither would another with her 'put up witness'. (Andrea) Several see her as a woman of extraordinary ability who depending on how she was presented could speak to modern women. One woman considers that to read her letters 'is to read the letters of a deeply sensitive, loving, feeling woman who often felt crushed inside... who could express herself with great fluency'. However, she would consider that there is a limit to which modern Christian women can identify with Mary MacKillop and this because:

the convent life in which she was situated is something with which modern women today would find it very difficult to identify. I can only feel that that way of life, I don't mean its basic inspiration, has run its course. Maybe we need more time yet to see it in its full dimensions. (Marian)
In this Chapter, I have focussed on the national, public, ritual events, in particular the beatification Mass, attended by Pope John Paul II, which constituted the major public celebration of the beatification of Mary MacKillop. I have examined diverse interpretations of the celebrations. I have considered the ways in which the organisers sought to contest patriarchal, ecclesial frameworks of domination and to empower women, as well as theological and cultural resources they used in the development of the rituals, and why they used them. The phenomenon of resistance, both overt and covert, to the beatification invited unravelling. I have also attempted to assess the meaning and significance of the beatification event for the women in this study, both for those who participated and for those who could not, or who chose to distance themselves from the celebration. In the following chapter, I will explore something of the diversity of these women’s attitudes to the church, juxtapose them with Pope John Paul II’s teaching on women and critically examine the differences and points of similarity between them.
Chapter Five

Women and the church

In this chapter, I intend to examine in greater depth the church experience of the women I interviewed as part of this study. I will focus on the agency and resistance of young women, of Aboriginal and ethnic women, of all of the women in relation to the liturgy, and on their efforts to work for change in the contemporary Australian Catholic Church. Then I will proceed to analyse the discourse of the Pope on women, both during his visit to Australia in the context of the beatification of Mary MacKillop and in his official teaching on women. Subsequently, I will critically consider these women's perceptions of formative influences on their own understanding of Christian womanhood, and the ways in which their constructions of Christian womanhood correspond with or diverge from that of Pope John Paul II.

Women's Experience of the Contemporary Australian Catholic Church

These women articulate their experience of a Church affected by the reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which constituted a break with the medieval, post-Tridentine, counter reformation, anti-modernist conception of the Church. However, Vatican II was minimalist in its consideration of women. While women were almost totally excluded from its proceedings, one of the twenty three women auditors present at the third session of the Council, Australian Rosemary Goldie stated in response to a patronising attempt by bishops to counter the discrimination of women: 'All that women ask for is that they be recognised as the full human persons they are.

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1 Hans Kung, translated by Peter Heinegg with Francis McDonagh, Reforming the Church Today: Keeping Hope Alive (New York : Crossroad), 1990, 3.

2 The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World recognised the 'new social relationships between men and women' (n.8); noted that women are demanding equality with men in law as well as in life (n.9). Article 29 deals with the issue of discrimination: Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, or colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must be regretted that the fundamental personal rights are not being universally honoured. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognised for men.
and treated accordingly. For women in this study, recognition of them as full human persons is still to be afforded; despite the Council, very little has changed for women in the church. In the wider society, globally, women's equality with men has become more widely accepted and acknowledged in law. As a consequence, many women in the church in the intervening years have grown in feminist consciousness.

Two of the Second Vatican Council's most important documents, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and *Gaudium et Spes*, The Church in the Modern World, relate precisely to the nature of the church. The first provides images of the church as mystery, as sacrament, as a communion of God's people, united in Christ, journeying in history towards the ultimate fulfilment of creation in the reign of God. It thereby de-emphasises the almost exclusive focus on the institutional dimension which had so typified ecclesial life in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. This renewed vision of the Church as 'koinonia', as communion with its implications of communication and participation, as pilgrim people of God has been powerful. It reflects the biblical understanding of the church as a discipleship of equals in which all are called to holiness. Yet it has not led to significant change in the structures of the church which remain patriarchal, hierarchical and clerical. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza in her feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins argues that tension between the democratic-charismatic and the patriarchal-hierarchical understanding of the church has been part of its history since the first century of the Christian era.

Many theologians see this systemic problem of the church's 'patriarchal, monarchical structure' as the real obstacle to profound reform.

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3 Helen Marie Clempic, 'Cracking the Door: Women at the Second Vatican Council', 74.
4 In 1972, Pope Paul VI issued an Apostolic Letter, *Ministeria quasdam*, which stated that women were excluded from the new lay ministries of lector and acolyte. In 1976 he approved and confirmed the declaration of the Congregation for the Faith, *Inter insigniores*, which debarred women from priestly ordination. These ministerial arrangements remain in force. Women are still excluded from decision making in matters that affect them, such as issues of reproductive sexuality. The use of inclusive language in official church documents, and very often within the liturgy has consistently been resisted. On the other hand, the need to end discrimination against women in society has been consistently acknowledged.
6 Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*.
7 Edward C. Bianchi, 'A Democratic Church: Task for the Twenty-First Century', in Edward C. Bianchi
Gaudium et spes, The Church in the Modern World, the second conciliar document on the church, constituted a dramatic revision of the church’s fearful and reactionary stance to the world. It rearticulated the mission of the church as a mission within the world, through involvement in the massive transformations that characterise contemporary cultural and social life; the split between the mission ad intra and the mission ad extra was in theory dissolved. A later document of the Synod of Bishops, Justice in the World (1971), states that action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are ‘a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel’. Liberation theologians, and critical feminist ones among them, who identify with the struggles of people in the so called Third World, have been prophetic in their critique of the massively unjust political, economic and social structures that oppress the majority of the people in the world.

The women I interviewed in this study speak of their experience of the contemporary Australian Catholic Church. They reflect on their experience of its institutional and community aspects, of the experience of affiliation which characterises their belonging, of their mission within it and of their own sense of agency. Often they speak at length of their ecclesial experience over time. While many were profoundly shaped through their education in Catholic schools and their belonging to parish and, or, religious community life prior to the Council, for some of the respondents all of their church experience is post conciliar. I will illustrate something of their diversity by first considering the experience of young women and of Aboriginal and ethnic women. Then, as so many women refer to their experience of liturgy as key to their experience of marginalisation, I will focus on their liturgical experience. Subsequently, I will examine how they speak of their efforts to work for change, of their sense of agency as women within the church.

Young Women

Two women I interviewed, both in their early twenties, from immigrant families, and educated within Australia, testify to their struggles as young women. One of them, in Sydney, who has remained a churchgoer, is conscious that none of her friends, neither those from her former convent school, nor the ones she has made subsequently at university go to church. Her churchgoing is for them 'a bit of a joke'. She attests: 'I still feel so alone in it'. She is conscious of the mixed messages she has received and perceives a difference between her own time and the time in which Mary MacKillop grew up. Educated to think for herself, to carve out a career for herself as a woman, 'to go out and be a strong woman, go and take on the world', within the church she is conscious that she is in second place, and in discussions with friends she is reminded that '[the church] is giving a message, that women are not equal, women are not capable, women are not special enough'; of 'negative images, of women being kept down, ...of contraception and the Third World'. She finds 'sometimes some of the readings when you're in church, the way they're interpreted by the priest, I find it at odds with how I've been brought up'. She sees herself as marginally involved in the church. Yet in some ways for her it as if she were at the beginning in the times of the early Christians, because of the absence of reference to religion in daily life, in the movies, in the soap operas. In her opinion, the most important influences for young Catholic women are the images they receive from magazine articles which tell them of their opportunities and possibilities, or from pop music. They search for meaning through their music, through their friends, maybe through drugs. She sees that a differentiating factor in her own socialisation has been having a much older mother deeply committed to traditional Catholicism. (Florence)

The other young woman speaks of her awakening to feminist consciousness at university and of her failure to connect her new understandings with the church, until she encountered Patricia Brennan.8 When she spoke of her commitment as a young

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8 Dr Patricia Brennan was leader of the Movement for the Ordination of Women in the Anglican Church in Australia and in that role, because she was as a very articulate spokeswoman, she attracted widespread publicity. The ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church became a reality for women in 1992. Subsequently, Dr Brennan was involved with a foundation for the study of feminist theology.
person to working for justice, but of not feeling oppressed within the church, she says
Patricia Brennan responded: 'If you don't feel oppressed that shows just how oppressed
you are'. As a result she started to read and to question. Subsequently,

I... began to get sicker and sicker as I attended Mass. I'd get to the point
that in the Eucharistic Prayer every week, my eyes would be welling up
with tears and I felt bad about being there, really sick, like a physical
pain in the stomach. And I felt angry, but much more sadness than anger
and that was because I was saying the same words I had always said and
I was going through the comfortable ritual routine, but was suddenly
seeing it as if I was an outsider, as if I was coming from Mars. I was
suddenly noticing all the male language. I suddenly looked up at the
altar and saw the little boys and the young men and an old man in a
dress, giving stupid sermons unconnected to real life and saw us in the
congregation, like a terrible dryness and black fuming. I saw our
isolation from each other and from general society.

Later she stopped going to Mass and started to explore alternative prophetic parts of the
church and began to identify with the Catholicism of women such as Dorothy Day and
Elisabeth Johnson. 10 Then she went to the Philippines where she attended many
Masses to be in solidarity with the people, including Masses celebrated on the picket
lines. This led her to reflect on her need to be able to tolerate diversity and pluralism
within the church. So she started going to Mass again. As a young person she feels

I'm either in the church with other young people I don't want to be with,
or I'm out of the church with people whose political and cultural views
I'm aligned with but who don't have much spirituality, so that's not
nourishing me either. So as a young woman staying in the Catholic
Church is quite lonely.

However, she is determined to remain because for her it is necessary to understand her
own roots within the tradition if she is to be able to be fully receptive to people from
other traditions. She cites Gandhi as her example. (Donelle) To belong to the church
for each of these women is to experience loneliness.

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9 Dorothy Day (1897-1983) founder of the Catholic Worker movement in the United States is regarded
as the probably the greatest activist for social justice in the North American Catholic Church in the
twentieth century. For details of her life see: Robert Ellsberg, (ed.), Little by Little : The Selected
Writings of Dorothy Day (Melbourne: Dove, 1989).

10 Elisabeth Johnson is an American feminist theologian. She is best known for her attempt to weave a
bridge between classical theological and feminist theological discourse on God. See The Mystery of
God in Feminist Theological Discourse.
Aboriginal and Ethnic Women

For the Aboriginal women who belong to the Aboriginal Catholic ministry, belonging to the church is 'hard, and difficult, in the sense that we still live under the domination of the male'. (Grace) And this in a double sense, both from Aboriginal men within the ministry who are the leaders, and from priests and the hierarchy in the Catholic Church. Many changes have occurred for Aborigines within the church since the visit of Pope Paul VI in 1970, who called for respect for the integrity of Aboriginal culture and for support that it be maintained. Aborigines are now encouraged in many places to have their own liturgies which incorporate Aboriginal rituals and symbols. However, these women both as Aborigines and as Aboriginal lay women consider 'We still have a long way to go before we have a good strong voice within the Catholic Church in Australia'. (Grace) While churchgoing is now more comfortable, than going to ‘white churches’ where they felt shut out, there is still the issue of harmonising their Catholicity, their Christianity, with their Aboriginality. Joan considers:

I don't think we should split. We shouldn't have ours and you have yours. It is a new thing. We have to crawl before we can walk...the contemporary way...it's good. We are writing our own liturgies. We are having Aboriginal ceremonies, Aboriginal symbols and we take our Aboriginal flag into church. It's not in conflict with Catholic. We are still Catholic. I think it's about time the bishops and priests came our way a little as Aborigines. Just because we are Catholics, we are Aborigines, we shouldn't be going their way... I can't say I'm not Christian, but I'm a very Aboriginal Christian person. To me the word Christian...I haven't come to terms with it.

They identify spirituality as a major issue which separates Aboriginal Christians from white Australian Christians and are concerned about how they are to blend their Aboriginal spirituality with the Catholic faith. Joan sees that the key to greater understanding lies in the linking of spirituality and justice and in communicating personally. She speaks of her own agency within the Church:

Talking in a personal sense to whomsoever we get the chance; to talk to people in Catholic community churches about how we are, how we feel, how we perceive you as being a white Catholic. 'If we really want to practice our spirituality in your church, how do you really perceive us?'

However, these women are conscious of a major discrepancy in that their efforts to make themselves intelligible are not always reciprocated. They perceived television
accounts of the beatification ceremony as giving minimal coverage to Aboriginal participation. Furthermore:

we educated ourselves to the awareness of Mary and the Pope, but everything was on the Pope and Mary which was good, but again ... it would have been wonderful to have this Aboriginal thing built into Mary... there really wasn't any news about how we felt about Mary. To me this would have been breaking down barriers before: 'How do you feel about Mary? Who’s Mary? What did she do?... Where did she come from?' (Joan)

This incorporation of Aboriginal ritual within the Mass for the beatification also highlights the quality of care that has to be taken so that such incorporation may be more and more an authentic action, an authentic involvement of Aboriginal people, not an appropriation of their culture and their rituals.

The issues of class, race and culture as well as gender also exist for Asian Australians whose experience of socialisation into Catholicity within a still markedly Irish Catholic church differs considerably from their religious experience in their countries of origin, with their multifaith traditions. The experience of one woman is:

My father had a Methodist background, my mother was brought up in a convent. We had a lot of priests staying with us to recuperate when we lived up in the hills. We had a lot of religious people impacting on my life subtly. I picked up my mother’s fondness for a lot of them and for the stories that were related to us... prominent things... My father had brought out the coolie bishop and he didn’t come with fanfare, he travelled on trains and had nothing in his house.... When I came here with all the hardship of trying to settle down, at first my parents didn’t go to church. I think they were put out because they did ask the church to help, they thought it would be similar... There was no help here—like could you help point out a good place to live?... they wrote back and said: ‘no’. So father got the bank to do it instead. And I think because of their hardships learning the ways of Australians and trying to adjust to us, he got tricked out of his money. So they didn’t go to church. The children went to church, but we didn’t go religiously either. I didn’t have anyone at my first communion, no fanfare, no parents even, someone a stranger took me there... so it’s something I won’t forget. (Fiona)

Later as an adult woman she returned to Sri Lanka as a visitor. She reflects on her religious experience in returning:
I saw a different church, I saw a different spirit in Sri Lanka compared to what's here. A different kind of worshipping. I don't know whether the influences were the poverty and desperation, but when I got back I got a feeling of freedom to worship that I hadn't here... Something inside of me was freed. There was great devotion and it wasn't just in the church, it was in the society. (Fiona)

Another Asian Australian woman ministering to an Asian Australian community, many of whom were formerly Buddhists who have become Christians, speaks of people's questions in relation to women anointing the sick, women being ordained, euthanasia, annulment and divorce, young people's questions in relation to pre-marital sex, euthanasia, life after death, and reflects: 'I suppose our society has moved so fast and the church seems to be lagging behind'. (Rosslyn) And still another Asian immigrant woman in ministry with Asian Australians comments:

I feel like screaming at times when we are trying to move things along. And even the people themselves are really bound up by rules and regulations by what the hierarchical church is saying... for them to grow out of that into the knowledge that God is in them too, they've got a conscience, the ability to think for themselves... Going to the parishes, I'm there to be a bridge between the two cultures, not there to say you are wrong, I am right. Who is wrong, who is right? It can be like walking on eggshells sometimes. (Natalie)

These comments reflect the laity's exclusion, as a whole, women as well as men, from decision-making about moral matters which directly affect their lives, and of their need for self-determination grounded in their ability to discern the appropriate response to God within the context of their own lives and their critical reflection on church teachings. They also reflect the diverse and conflictual issues women ministering as pastoral carers have continually to confront, particularly within ethnic communities within the church.

Other women's experiences of discrimination and alienation

Other women in this study reflect on their diverse experiences of church. Some have remained practising Catholics throughout their lives; others have had periods of disaffection, of alienation, when they would have described themselves as ex Catholic, or lapsed. Several women have had to struggle with refinding their identity within the
church as divorced and remarried women. At least one person has seriously thought of joining another denomination. A number find or have found membership of alternative groups either within, or beyond the church spiritually supportive. In one way or another they have all experienced their membership of the church as alienating. They relate the source of this experience to the structures of the church which give leadership in ministerial and liturgical roles to the priest and which exclude women from decision-making roles. They speak of their experience of dominating, excluding, or irrelevant behaviours of priests, of their experience of disconnection within liturgical worship and of their effort to make their own continued belonging to the church an intelligible act.

A number of women speak of their sense of agency within the church. They believe that they are the church. So they have decided to invest their energies meaningfully. For them this means concentrating on the church’s mission in the world, not in efforts to change resistant structures which are rendered futile, nor in angry fixation on resistant attitudes and behaviours of groups within the church. Three of these women speak of the significance of the beatification for their own sense of belonging to the church. Two of them divorced and remarried have been inspired by Mary MacKillop: one by her ‘faith of possibility’ lived from within the church; the other to realise that if you have leadership qualities you can be a leader and need not be limited by an immigrant background, nor a failed marriage, in finding a way of ministering within the church. Several women have found a deepened sense of meaning and of belonging through their relationships with Sisters of St Joseph, both before and after the beatification event.

Women’s Difficulties with the Traditional Liturgy of the Official Church
Most women refer in one way or another to the liturgy and the ministry of the priest within it. In the liturgy, both the structural and the systemic, symbolic dimensions of ecclesial reality come together. The distinct separation of powers between clergy and laity within the church was not addressed by the Second Vatican Council despite its imaging of the church as the people of God, and its emphasis on the universal call to holiness. The exclusion of women from the altar has also been reinforced by the admission of only lay men to the ministry of deacon, lector and acolyte. The stricture on women altar servers was only lifted after the synod of bishops on the laity in 1987.
Women speak of their experience of the maleness of the liturgy with distress, as something they find, 'so terrible and so sad' (Donelle), or of their experience of the liturgy's irrelevance to their lives. The following comments illustrate this:

In our local situation here we have three clergy who would be totally unaware of what we think about the liturgy and the way in which the liturgy in this church has become more and more priestified. Before we had a fairly low key liturgy in the hall and the acolytes and Father... would sit side by side. But now that the church has been revamped, the altar has a significant role on the sanctuary... the only person who sits on the sanctuary is the priest, the acolytes now go down three steps and sit behind the sanctuary. So it's what I call the priestifying of the liturgy... which to me is totally against the idea of a praying community where the priest is sent by the laity... Now our priests have no consciousness of that, in fact the young man just ordained will thank the people for joining him in this liturgy: 'Thank you for joining me'... magnifying the role of the priest at a time when you would have thought that the whole rethinking of the priesthood was a matter of urgent concern. (Christiane)

In that setting we're a lost cause... doing the ritual stuff of the altar and back to the acolytes and that all male world. I see the feminine as a circle, as full connection, as a symbol of community. The priest, the male who knows all the wisdom, there's no real sharing... I don't find it very impressive at all, we're still lost. I think all of us, there's no real value of the feminine or the masculine in their proper places. There's no encouragement, you don't feel it's great to be a woman in the church... It's not a supporting factor, it doesn't help your self-worth as a person. You really wouldn't call it a grace that would help you grow and be bonded. (Fiona)

I find it really boring and if I could get more out of it I would go more often... I think a lot of the priests are old fashioned, fuddy-duddy, so full of their own importance... they need to get real, there are real things out there— aids, homosexuality, single parenthood, people lost, poverty, things that really matter to people. (Marisa)

Another woman speaks of the unnecessary discomfort of sitting in the pews as associated for her with multiple forms of exclusion: the physical environment of the church, the ritual of the Mass, the male celebrant, the exclusive language, and exclusion in the sense of non-recognition of the women who are present:

the lady who washed the linen, the lady who's arranged the flowers, and helped to polish the floor and cleaned the pews, of those who serve as eucharistic ministers and catechists working with children and families
...that I find offensive...if these things had happened in the church in another era where the whole society tended to ignore women ...I could understand that. (Stephanie)

For all these women their experience of exclusion, of implied inferiority, of non-recognition of their giftedness and agency, represent a failure of clerical men within the church to recognise women as fully human and equal, as fully participating members of the church.

Some women have had other liturgical experiences, particularly those who have travelled overseas, or those who belong to alternative communities which afford a contrast and which enable them to experience the effects of liturgical worship when women are recognised as equal, or more equal, participants. One woman speaks of an experience in a retreat house in Canada:

The Jesuits there have really made a point of being inclusive in terms of the feminine and one priest in particular ...would begin Mass saying 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit of the God who created us, the God of Abraham and Sarah'. He included half a dozen [phrases] that include both male and female, and when you practise it is very powerful. It presents a balance. They were very particular that you prepared readings to ensure they were inclusive... when you were around the altar you were there the whole time. There was the president, but the only time he was obvious was during the canon and he was assisted by two people who could be feminine...After the consecration, they held the host and the chalice, which was very inclusive. (Cara)

The experience of belonging, of being part of a community is central to so many women's religious experience. Sue refers to the liturgical experience of being part of a procession of simple peasant women in the evening twilight at Lourdes, some twenty or thirty years earlier, as the reason why she still goes to Mass, even though she cannot bring herself to say the Creed. She testifies to the experience of many people, that faith in ultimate mystery is something caught in the process of belonging, in the sensing of continuity and that holds her despite her struggles with meaning.

Women's Efforts to Effect Change

Women speak of the efforts they have made in the past to help improve the parish life and parish liturgy and of the resistance they encountered which led them to desist. One
woman tells of her effort in the 1970s. She wrote a letter to the priest responsible for preparing the Sunday Liturgy sheets with their commentary on the readings for the day, suggesting that if the gifts of people in the community were utilised they could be much improved. She received an angry letter from him saying that if she thought she could do better she should arrange to do so. In response to this challenge, she contacted and secured the cooperation of some significant Australian Catholic writers, including poets and theologians, to prepare the Sunday Liturgy sheets. One of them supplied a poem which she sent to the priest. Receiving his response that the faithful wouldn't understand this otherwise quite significant literary contribution, she realised she was fighting a hopeless cause; 'at that point I decided I was going to pull out, I wasn't going to try and reform the Catholic Church, or reform the liturgies, or the parishes, or whatever'. So she and her husband decided to form their own group, only to find such a group as they envisaged already in existence which they were able to join. This group has now been going for fifteen years. For the first eight or nine years a Catholic priest was always invited, then sometimes a minister of another denomination officiated, but gradually the group members themselves came to take it in turns to lead the Eucharist in their own homes. (Lucienne)

Another woman who in the past was a member of a parish council, and a parish school board, and who tried to organise groups within the parish, without real support from the parish priest, says: 'I simply gave up on the parish stuff, because it was quite clear you couldn't [succeed], and I tried hard...I've given up any attempt to be helpful'. (Sue) Women's involvement in the parish has traditionally been one of doing the domestic tasks associated with the church; cleaning, flower arranging, or doing domestic services for the priest. One woman comments: 'the ordinary everyday things you'll see the priest getting the women to do their house and their cleaning, but when it comes to groups you meet a lot of opposition, so you're sort of kept in your place.' (Fiona)

So much for some of the descriptions of their experience. How do they analyse the reasons for the continuance of their exclusion? Not all of the women analyse their experience. One woman sees it as clerics' refusal both to recognise and accept their own human agency. Because they assume male dominance and hierarchy, they assume
that their authority and control is divinely sanctioned. Hence they fail to recognise their own projections: that the God to whom they ascribe such actions looks like:

'the little fellow inside the mind you are projecting out...' So its spiritual dominance or control and they've cornered the market haven't they by setting up all the structures that draw the power to themselves so nobody can have it. (Stephanie)

Her perception is substantiated by a report in the Adelaide Advertiser prior to the beatification event, which relates that Archbishop Faulkner of Adelaide saw the beatification as not speeding up the process of ordination for women, but of enabling women:

to see more clearly that even without ordination they have a very significant role to play in the church. 'Mary MacKillop had a lot of influence, but she was not interested in power.'

Power by implication is something evil that women should not aspire to, while the male hold on legislative, judicial and executive power is so much 'common sense' that it warrants no examination, that is, it is an assumed good. The irony in the comment seems to escape the speaker's detection. For another woman 'the church in its whole social dimension has reached an impasse and it's going to require a lot of clear headed, courageous thinking and acting to get past that'. Priesthood as it currently functions is intrinsically associated with hierarchy. Priesthood in the communal church she would wish to see emerge, has to do with 'the sensing of a spiritual reality of some kind'. She sees a need for attending to what 'it means to actualise the presence of Christ within the Eucharist' before there can be greater clarity in relation to the future of the priesthood for either men or women. (Marian)

So, while a number of women see that much needs to be dismantled within the church, they clearly perceive that it is the inevitable surrender of power involved in radical change which accounts for the resistance to change; for resistance to really recognise women as equal. One woman speaks of:

[Their extraordinary failure to plan for change. It's unbelievable that you could have an institution which is losing its manpower and it still

sticks to the old model, it's almost inconceivable that they could be so blind. (Sue)

Furthermore, it is the complexity of the system, its whole unwieldiness, the magnitude of the cultural shift needed, and in the wider society already in process, that leads these women not to anticipate real change in their own lifetimes. As Marian expresses it:

We are caught up in changes so big it can be a temptation to pin point specific agencies, even something as global as the rather fuzzy term church and vent our anger on that. I wouldn't see things in that perspective.

So what options do they perceive themselves as having?

Many of them have decided that they will not allow themselves to be consumed with frustration, anger or despair; that they will not participate in their own personal self destruction. Some of the women religious see it thus:

I take [the church] for granted and ride on it. I don't get terribly involved in fights to change it. I've got better things to do in my life...I get angry and I get angry personally and I get angry for others at the overlooking of, the slighting of, and the diminution of women in the church. But at the same time, I'm not involved in trying to change that much, I can't be bothered. I think it has always been like that and a lot of women if they get enough of that treatment walk away. I think other women who are fighting to change it, that's probably a good thing. But I think some of them are extremely reckless and ill-informed the way they go about it and they make more enemies than friends, particularly among other women. While I appreciate you've got to do something about it, or nothing will ever happen, in a strange sort of way it's not that important to me...Hoping it will collapse one day but not doing much about it....The male dominated church seems beyond me I don't want to condemn myself to futility and bitterness in fighting a very set system. (Rachel)

I've decided that if I can't do anything about it, I'm not going to bother with it. So I find myself trying to create wherever I am...within a limited framework, a zone of truth there... I try in whatever way I can, to come to terms with who I am, and who the group is and where the group is and to find ways that we are honest with each other. (Christiane)

I think there are many people in the church and I'm one of them, I suppose, as much a constituent of the church as some archbishop or pope...to what extent have I unconsciously contributed to attitudes that would change or should change? (Marian)
She raises the issue of complicity. However, in the obscurity of the present she sees that women can:

call on a sense of integrity, a sense of listening, a sense of sensitivity, to be open, to hear what people are saying, without manipulation, without defences, without privileges to defend.

On the other hand, agency for some lay women involves recognising their double, sometimes their multiple discrimination in the church as women and lay women, divorced, or ethnic women. For example, one divorced woman who refuses to ‘tell the lies required for annulment’, at peace in her own conscience, sees herself without status in the church, ‘not interested in bagging the church, but interested in contributing to the church.’ (Caroline)

Another woman is aware of double levels of discrimination as ‘lay person’ and ‘woman’, of her own agency which stems from her strong belief that we are all one in Christ, and of her need to resist complicity:

[As a woman and a lay woman ... my agency comes from there and I want to stand up and demand to be treated as equal. I have a right to be treated as equal and my place is not to be running round in the institutional Church... I really believe my place is right in the world wherever it is ... I don’t want to be seen running around on a parish council ... As an oppressed person in the church I believe that I need to stand up and say ‘Well I take my own agency, and this is my role ... and I’ll let you in the hierarchy know’ ... because if we don’t give them feedback, if we don’t let them know, I will be as responsible for my own oppression if I just keep quiet about it. (Stephanie)

With theological understanding of the conciliar teaching, she recognises the need for a new understanding of ministry within the church, of the need for a whole rethinking of the role of the priest, of leadership within the church, not just the ordination of women, so that people’s gifts can be realised in service to the community. She images the church as a jewel covered over with layers of barnacles that have accumulated over the centuries. She images her own agency, as chipping away at a corner of a barnacle, doing what ‘I have to do in my little spot’. In relation to the future of the church she sees herself as realistic in not expecting those in power to surrender their power, but she trusts in the power of the God, that goodness will prevail. Probably, by way of oblique
reference to the current scandals involving people in the church, she is hopeful that the Holy Spirit 'will make sure there is egg on lots of people’s faces'. While it is not up to her to say how the Spirit will work she refers to chaos theory in her recognition of her own need to 'get on with it' to 'get on with life' and 'not to get caught up getting angry’. (Stephanie)

Certainly, the involvement of the clerical church both in Australia and overseas in a mass of litigation regarding child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct has been part of the history of the hierarchical church in past decade, evidence of failure to address fundamental issues in its own internal structure which seriously affects its credibility.  

Actual practices, as well as accusations of denial and evasion, in an effort to protect the official church’s public image and its finances have raised questions about issues of accountability and have seriously engendered mistrust among the laity. This contemporary issue raises anew the issues of power, authority and sexuality for the church and questions which it will be difficult to continue to evade, not the least being the disjunctive alignment between sexual desire and desire for God within the tradition, and a cultic understanding of priestly ministry at odds with a rhetoric of ministry as service to the community. For example French Dominican theologian, Christian Duquoc, would see the practices of clerical celibacy and the non ordination of women and of married men as stemming from the same root cause, a perceived conflict between liturgy and sexuality, and as constituting a major obstacle to ecumenism.

Despite the dysfunctionality of the system, some women value the experience of belonging to a community of faith and the vitalisation associated with it. For example, one woman speaks of her experience of:

[H]aving a ball in the contemporary Australian Church because I’ve found my own group within it. I don’t touch the institutional church very much at all. I go to Mass every week, I read once a month. I now

12 Hans Kung, Reforming the Church Today, 193.

13 The first of the 1998 series of the ABC’s religious programme, Compass was a revisiting of a theme explored ten years previously - The Shifting Heart, an exploration of change in the Catholic Church in Australia. Compared by Geraldine Doogue the current programme emphasised the enormous impact that sexual abuse by clerics and religious, and official church response to it, has had on the perceptions of ordinary Catholics.

belong to a voluntary group, Spirituality in a Pub. The actual group, is called 'Catalyst for Renewal', set up by John Menadue .. for clergy and lay people to try to sponsor a new conversation within the church. We meet every six weeks, in a pub, free. We invite two speakers, one's a leader from the church, who might be seen as representing the dilemmas of the modern world, and we come up with topics such as euthanasia, welfare, power, things like that and they've been very successful. We have fifteen minutes a speaker, then an hour of questions. (Caroline)

These women however, do substantiate the fact that within Australia, neither among religious women, nor among lay women, has there been any real challenge to the hierarchy of the contemporary Catholic Church in relation to the position of women which parallels that within North America. Australian feminists in the secular arena, on the other hand, are to be found in the different levels of government, particularly the public service, and have been instrumental in effecting quite significant reform in legislation affecting women's lives. Within the Church this may in part reflect the limited opportunities for theological education for women that have until recently existed within Australia. The emergence of Australian women scholars of religion is still in its beginnings. Most historical research on women and religion has been conducted from within secular universities. The first centre for women's studies in religion at Griffiths University has only recently been established. Hitherto, there has been no provision on the part of an academic institution within the church for contributing a Christian perspective towards the current discourse on women in an Australian context, for contributing to the forging of a new relationship between men and women in the Australian Church. Not until the 1980's when the 'Women and the Australian Catholic Church' project was sponsored by the Australian Conference of Major Superiors of Women and Men was there any concerted action for reform. While this has remained a strong association in New South Wales elsewhere it has had a variegated history. At a recent national WATAC Conference (August, 1996) in which women spoke of the issues about which they experienced great passion, one woman involved with the project since its beginnings, noted that virtually nothing was named that related to the church. She asks:

15 Norma Greve and Alisa Burns, Australian Woman.
Have we to a certain extent exhausted our passion on that subject? Do we feel we have said it all? Have we lost some of our hope? Is it a sense of frustration? Or am I only reflecting my own feelings?¹⁶

The Australian Bishops Conference initiated its own research project, The Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia, in 1996. It is to be conducted by the Bishops Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, The Australian Catholic University and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes. It offers an opportunity for women's voices to be heard. As to whether it will lead to real change in the situation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia is another question.¹⁷

Pope John Paul II: His Teaching on Women within the Context of the Beatification Event.

During Pope John Paul II's visit to Australia for the beatification he spoke of the place of women in the church within his homily at Morning Prayer in St Mary's Cathedral, in the presence of the Josephite Sisters, their associates and friends. He spoke first of his understanding of the religious life and of Mary MacKillop as an exemplar of Christian discipleship. Then he recapitulated themes which are developed at some length in his apostolic letter, Mulieris Dignitatem, On the Dignity of Women, 1988 and in his apostolic letter, Ordinatio Sacerdotalis, On Priestly Ordination, 1994. This is the text of this section of his homily which substantially reflects understandings enunciated in prior texts:

Among the pressing issues facing the People of God in Australia there is the need for an understanding of the dignity and mission of women, in the family, in society and in the church, which is faithful to 'the truth of the Gospel'.


¹⁷ Written submissions were invited and public hearings across all Australian states have been held in relation to four questions: What are the ways in which women participate in the Catholic Church in Australia? What assistance and support are currently offered to women to participate in the Church in Australia? What are barriers to women's participation in the Church? What are some of the ways in which women's participation in the Church can be increased? For an analysis of the research design of this project see Chris Christensen, 'Honourable Intentions? - The Bishop's Research Project into the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia' Women - Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 21 (September, 1997): 23-27. See also, Michael Costigan, 'Women in the Catholic Church in Australia', Women - Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 22 (April 1998): 16-17.
An authentic theology of woman, based upon an anthropology revealed in the mystery of Creation and Redemption, brings to light women's feminine 'originality' and particular 'genius' (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem* 10, 30). Women who seek a true Christian concept of femininity can look to the free and active role assumed by Mary of Nazareth, the Virgin-Mother of the Lord. In her, all women can discover 'the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement' (*Redemptoris Mater*, 46).

It must be clear that the Church stands firmly against every form of discrimination which in any way compromises the equal dignity of women and men. The complete equality of persons is, however, accompanied by a marvellous complementarity. This complementarity concerns not only the roles of men and women but, also, and more deeply, their make-up and meaning as persons (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 50).

For that reason I am convinced that a mistaken anthropology is at the root of the failure of society to understand Church teaching on women. That role is in no way diminished but is in fact enhanced by being related in a special way to motherhood - the source of new life - both physical and spiritual.

The church therefore faces the challenge of finding fresh and creative ways of recognising and integrating the specific charisms of women, which are essential to building up the Body of Christ in unity and love.\(^\text{18}\)

In this excerpt from his homily we find his particular theology of the person, with its emphasis on women's equality of personhood with men, and the complementarity of men and women, in their nature and in their roles. Here too, he parallels his teaching on women with his teaching on Mary the Mother of Jesus. Before examining the Pope's teaching and the significance of this text within the context of the beatification, I will explain what is meant by theological anthropology, and I will examine feminist approaches to this theological issue which mirror feminist theoretical debates in relation to women's subjectivity and experience.

**Theological Anthropology**

Theological anthropology is so central a theological issue because it deals with such questions as: What does it mean to be a human person? What is the relationship of the

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\(^{18}\) *Pope John Paul II, Telegraph Mirror*, 20-21.
human person to the divine? What does it mean to be a human person in the context of Christian revelation? In our time there are further questions to be considered. What are contemporary philosophical influences which impinge on classical understandings of what it means to be a human person? What does full personhood mean for women? What does it mean for women in the church? Obviously, premises about the answers to these questions surface in debates about women's ordination, the redemptive efficacy of Jesus maleness, reproductive rights, homosexuality, reproductive technologies, ecological issues and other issues.

The root metaphor for the Christian understanding of the human person has traditionally been 'image of God'. The biblical text, *Genesis*, 1, 27 describes God as creating Adam in the 'image of God'; 'male and female he created them'. Yet it is an ambiguous metaphor as it has been used within the tradition to subordinate women, to discriminate against them, to render them inferior and unequal to men. The story of the creation of woman in *Genesis* 2, particularly as interpreted by Paul in *1 Corinthians* 11, led Augustine to conclude that woman only images God when she is joined to her husband. Man alone is fully in the image of God. Aquinas was influenced by Aristotle's conception of the female as a defective male and by his erroneous biological ascription of passivity to the female and activity to the male in the procreative process. So he concluded that God's image is found in man in a way that it is not found in woman. Mythologically, too, woman has been identified with Eve, and consequently with sexuality and with sin - both as temptation and as the embodiment of sin. The 'mythic counterpoint' of the immaculate Virgin Mary has also been an ideological influence within the Christian tradition in support of patriarchy.

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17 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1q.92, a1, ad 1 and III, q.39, a.1.
18 See Mary Daly *Beyond God the Father*; Rosemary Radford Ruther, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 64-47.
Contemporary theologians interpret the creation accounts in Genesis in an egalitarian sense; they affirm that both women and men are made in God's image and likeness.\(^1\) However, Ruether contends that most of them are unaware of the history of the asymmetrical reading of the key Genesis text, 1.27.\(^2\) Furthermore theological recognition and proclamation that human beings are created in the image of God necessarily implies the fundamental human dignity of every person, and provides the basis for claims to human rights. It also calls for imagination and concrete ethical action in pursuit of them within society and the churches.\(^2\) Nevertheless, the major issue in the contemporary Catholic Church continues to be that its internal structures do not reflect this. While people are proclaimed to be spiritually equal, they are distinctly unequal socially and politically; the laity has little voice and women are largely invisible.

Among contemporary philosophical influences which influence classical understandings of the human person is the 'turn to the subject', and the ascription of consciousness, autonomy, self-constitution and historicity to the human person has been influential.\(^2\) This has been accompanied by a new emphasis on human experience.\(^2\) Within the


\(^2\) 'The turn to the subject' reflects the influence of the philosophy of Enlightenment thinkers, such as Kant, on classical understandings of the human person. See for example, Francis Schussler Fiorenza, 'Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods', in Francis Schussler Fiorenza & John Calvin, (eds.), Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives. (Minneapolis : Fortress Press), 1991, 36-40.

\(^2\) The emphasis on human experience dates from the nineteenth century Protestant theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, (d.1834). William James also raised the issue of human experience in relation to theology in The Varieties of Religious Experience, 1902. Twentieth century Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan using divine revelation as their starting point introduced the category of human experience within theological anthropology; for them, all human experience is already graced experience.
Catholic and Protestant theological traditions this development is reflected in the shift from Adam as the paradigmatic human to Jesus as the paradigmatic human who concretises the image of God in the human person. Human persons are seen as oriented to God, as standing in a relationship of radical dependence on God. The Second Vatican Council's emphasis on the universal offer of salvation, the dignity of human persons, and its recognition of world religions mirror this development.29 Interdisciplinary reflection on the human person within the social sciences is also shaping contemporary understandings of theological anthropology. Postmodernism in its questioning of Enlightenment rationality, its emphasis on otherness and difference, on personal reflection on experience in concrete historical contexts provides another influence. Women, the poor and marginalised in diverse contextual settings, in reflecting on their own experience of what it is to be human, challenge androcentric and kyriarchal anthropological assumptions.30

For many twentieth century male theologians, for example Schillebeeckx and Rahner, the idea of human nature as a fixed essence is no longer tenable. Schillebeeckx identifies the following ‘anthropological constants’ as constitutive of the human person within social culture: relationship to the body, to nature and to the ecological environment; interpersonal relationship to others; relationship to social and institutional structures; historical and geographic conditioning; the interrelationship of theory and practice; relationship to the divine- for the Christian to God, revealed in and through Jesus as source and goal of human existence; and the need for all of these to be held together.31 Rahner emphasised the importance of human freedom, decision and praxis and their influence in determining the human person in the process of their development.32 In referring to the position of women in society and the church he

32 Karl Rahner. For example: ‘when freedom is really understood, it is not the power to be able to do this or that, but the power to decide about oneself and to actualise oneself.’ Foundations of the
argued that women themselves will have to determine their future in society and the church on the basis of their own experience. 31

Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology

Feminist theologians in their reconstructive work in theological anthropology have to contend with the inherited language, concepts and structures of traditional theology. Their critique dates from the 1960s, when both Rosemary Ruether and Mary Daly argued that the absorption of Greek philosophical dualism in the nascent stages of the church provides the basis for an ontology of inferiority in relation to women. 34 It led to perceptions in which man, mind and spirit were juxtaposed to woman, body and nature, seen as secondary in importance. Ruether claims that hierarchical dualism is "the fundamental flaw in traditional Christian anthropology." 35 Both Ruether and Daly called for a renewed understanding of what it means to be human, rooted in Jesus prophetic preaching of the reign of God.

In 1975, Mary Aquin O'Neill synthesised visions of what it means to be human appearing in secular feminist literature. She identified three: The first assumed a polarity between the sexes, the second advanced an androgynous mode of being, and the third, a unisex ideal. 36 Feminist theologians reacted to the universalist and absolutist representations of masculinist/patriarchal theological anthropology by advocating that

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*Christian Faith.* (New York: Seabury), 1978, 38. See also 24-89.

31 Cited in Ann Carr, *Transforming Grace,* 132. David Tracy considers that feminist thought (more than any other contemporary hermeneutic of suspicion on models of human rationality) has challenged three central defects in standard accounts of modern concepts of rationality, the separation of thought from feeling and experience, of content from form, of theory from practice. He sees feminist and womanist theologies as clarifying the contextual nature of experience, and the contingency and masculinity of the separation of thought from feeling; as challenging the separation of form and content; as insisting upon the need to link praxis and theory, including the praxis of ethical political action with concrete spiritual practice. See 'Concilium Roundtable: The Impact of Feminist Theology on Roman Catholic Theology' in Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland (eds.), *Feminist Theology in Different Contexts,* 98.

34 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Becoming of Women in Church and Society", *Cross Currents,* 17 (Fall, 1957): 418-26. These ideas are more fully developed in her later text, *Sexism and God-Talk; Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex*


women's concrete experiences be taken into account in the shaping of theological anthropology. Their own need to be self-critical which emerged in debates over women's experience led to a new respect for difference and for the diversity of women's social locations.

Feminist critique of the anthropology of the tradition escalated with the publication of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's document *Inter insigniores*, The Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood in 1976. 37 This document stated that the Church had no authority from Christ to ordain women as Jesus only chose male apostles and disciples, and furthermore, that women are ontologically incapable of being ordained as they cannot image Christ. Ruether argues that such a claim reveals a disjunction between the framers' theological anthropology and their christology, between 'the natural, created order and the sacrament-priest-Christ relationship'. 38 Women who are as equally able to image God as men, are not able to image Christ.

Among the several critiques of this document was that of the Catholic Theological Society of America. 39 This examined the underlying anthropology of the document using two heuristic models, obtained by collapsing O'Neill's androgynous and unisex models into one category. The first is the dual nature model, which assumes that sex role duality is part of the created order, with women different, equal yet complementary. It equates sex and gender, thereby ignoring the influence of culture. The second is an androgynous single nature model in which there are no pre-ordained roles associated with sex. For a time these models despite their individualist and idealist orientation, their marked distinctions between nature and culture, and their devaluing of human finitude seemed pertinent. They highlighted confusion of the categories 'sex' and 'gender' - which represents characteristics considered to be masculine or feminine, learned within a specific culture. However, they have been superseded in favour of a

37 *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* (*Inter insigniores*), Vatican, October 15 1976, 37.


transformational person-centred model advanced by Mary Buckley, who critiqued the first model for its hierarchic elitism and the second for its assimilationism. The aim of this new model is to transform and transcend previous gender roles and social structures, but its limit is that it eclipses the sexual differences associated with embodiment. It also remains anthropocentric and does not reflect the need for an interdependent relationship with the earth in an ecological age.  

Elisabeth Johnson, strongly motivated by a desire to overcome the dilemmas which the maleness of Christ poses for theology and church practice, has tried to address the issue of 'difference' without focussing exclusively on sex.  

Committed to the view that there is only one human nature, she draws on the six anthropological constants enunciated by Schillebeekcx, to propose an anthropological model, 'of one human nature instantiated in a multiplicity of human differences of which sexuality is but one'. This model upholds connection in difference rather than ensuring identity through insistence on opposition or uniformity. However, Mary Aquin O’Neill critiques this model in which bodily differences are not paradigmatic, in terms of its application to the church. 

She argues that the outcome is an androgynous Jesus, and that if Jesus represents all humanity, then priests too it can be claimed do so as well, so that arguments for women’s ordination can only be advanced in terms of fairness and justice. 

She also critiques attempts of the Communio school represented by Francis Martin to defend the traditional church teaching on complementarity and argues that in their dependence on traditional christology and the practice of the church in relation to office, they cannot escape an implied inferiority in relation to women. 


42 Ibid, 108-116


44 Ibid: 734-735. She makes reference to an untitled excerpt from a lecture of Janet Martin Soskice on 'Blood and Defilement: Feminism and Atonement', published in the Harvard Divinity School Bulletin 24 (1995), 7-8. Soskice considers that 'It is a paradox that feminist theology which lays so great a stress on particularity and embodiment should end up with so featureless a Christ'.

45 Communio is a periodical which publishes articles by conservative or traditional theologians. Francis Martin is a contributor. His book, The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of
Her own reconstructive theology promotes an anthropology of mutuality in which the male/female difference becomes paradigmatic of human limitation and possibility and in which being like God can be achieved only by the gift of self to others and the reception of the gift of self from others. 46

She also assesses the implications of such a reconstruction for the Church:

If we correct the inherited subordinationist reading of the creation and reinterpret it as a story of reciprocity between the man and the woman, both in original goodness and in the mutual responsibility for the incursion of evil, then we should be suspicious if there is no evidence of such a reciprocity and mutuality in the story of the redemption. Moreover, if the body is indeed a revelatory text, then the truths revealed by the interdependence of man and woman in the creation of new physical life cannot be ruled out when it comes to a second birth of life within the ecclesia. Finally if a certain incompleteness vis-a-vis the sexually differentiated other is a dimension of our humanness, then the humanity of Jesus must be incomplete as well...that would mean that Jesus alone could not accomplish the redemption of all humanity. 47

For her this would imply a rethinking of the role of Mary, difficult because it would mean that women would have to realise 'the distinctness and irreplaceability of our being embodied in the world' 48 which the dominant theological discourse obfuscates. Theological anthropology thus remains an area of exploration for feminist theologians who are in process of moving beyond their primary concern for gender issues. Nevertheless, distinctive elements in these women's perspectives on persons can be clearly discerned, such as:

- developing a more holistic approach to the body; affirming the formative influence of culture on persons, especially on the gendering of persons;
- rethinking autonomy and relations as interactive rather than separate;
- refusing to separate theology and ethics; and incorporating the metaphor

The inadequacies of his particular assessment of feminist theology are critiqued by Elaine Wainwright in her review of this book in Pacifica, 4, 2 (June 1997): 249-258. She lists his failure to listen to, or dialogue with feminist theologians, his rephrasing new questions in the language of the male voice, his decontextualising of ‘feminist theology’ and the Christian tradition, his enacting of the ‘very paradigms and theologies which feminist theologians have critiqued from many different and nuanced positions’. 49

Mary Aquin O’Neill, 'The Mystery of Being Human Together', Freeing Theology, 139-160.

Mary Aquin O’Neill, 'The Nature of Woman and the Method of Theology, 736.

Ibid, 737,
of transformation into an understanding of persons in process. Some feminist theologians sensitive to ecological issues call for a model which incorporates an understanding of the interdependence between human persons and nature to supersede models of 'kingship' and 'stewardship'. Elisabeth Johnson develops the idea of a kinship model based on the interconnection of human persons and the rest of creation, in which every element is appreciated in terms of the flourishing of the whole of reality. She argues for connection in place of separation, respect for diversity in place of dualism and mutuality in place of hierarchy. Feminist theologians in their reconstructive work in theological anthropology are reluctant to advocate a systematising of theological anthropology, in their desire to avoid a simplistic, essentialist, or a historical understanding of the human person. In the light of an examination of these current approaches to the issue of theological anthropology, I now intend to examine the understanding of theological anthropology which emerges in recent papal documents and to assess in what ways it mirrors and in what ways it is at variance with that enunciated by feminist theologians and contemporary theologians such as Schillebeekcx.

The Teaching of Pope John Paul II in Relation to Women.

Since the synod of bishops on the laity in the church in 1987, in which the issue of women's role and position in the church surfaced strongly in the discussions, the Pope has been concerned with women, their role and vocation. He has tried to define and to determine what belongs to the dignity and vocation of women, and to their role in society and church - but in the process he has not referred to women.

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49 Jane Koppas, 'Beyond Mere Gender: Transforming Theological Anthropology', 224.
50 Mary Ann Hinsdale, 'Heeding the Voices', 30-31.
52 Richard Leonard, Beloved Daughters: 100 Years of Papal Teaching on Women (Melbourne: Dove, 1995) argues that the Pope considers the issue as an ecclesiological issue and that it is part of his apostolic responsibility to interpret and define what is constitutive of womanhood in the face of the contemporary movement for women's rights which threaten to deform women of their 'feminine originality...which constitutes their essential richness' 74-75. The Pope has not adverted to the fact that there are many differences among women, different levels of experience and different identities shaped by a variety of variables.
In 1988 he published an apostolic letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman, in response to the synod and as part of the Marian year. The letter is more a meditation on the dignity of women based on certain passages of Scripture. It represents his attempt to read the signs of the times and to relate this reading to the Scriptures. Its focus is on:

> Further study of the anthropological and theological bases that are needed in order to solve the problem connected with the meaning and dignity of being a woman and being a man.\(^3\)

He interweaves within the text a series of analogies, Mary and all human persons, men and women, marriage and other forms of human communion, and Christ and his Church. Mary is the paradigm for both men and women, firstly through her self-giving love and secondly, in her integration of spousal love, of virginity and of parental love. In relation to the analogy of human nature in men and women, drawing from the creation accounts in Genesis he speaks of the ‘unity of the two’, ‘called to live in a communion of love and in this way to mirror to the whole world the communion of love that is in God.’

Relying on the Thomistic distinctive view of the metaphysical character of each human person he considers that human nature is somewhat the same and somewhat different between men and women. Their sameness consists in the equality of persons, their equality in their imaging of God. Domination and desire which rupture communio are the result of original sin. Men and women lose their equality and patriarchal subjugation of women follows. Jesus reveals and promotes the dignity of women and runs counter to the culture of his time. God is not patriarchal. God’s generative power is neither masculine nor feminine. Men and women are however different; masculinity and femininity have been given distinct characteristics by God. The essence of womanhood is motherhood or potential for motherhood. In their struggle for human rights, he warns women, they must not become masculine, they must not appropriate to themselves characteristics contrary to their original femininity. The different characteristics between men and women are alluded to, but not clearly delineated; for

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him they do not constitute an inequality, nor interrupt mutuality, nor introduce hierarchical subordination.

In developing the ecclesial analogy between Christ and the church, he reiterated the inadmissibility of the ordination of women. For him there is not a univocal equality between men and women such that all roles in church and society should be equally open to both. The maleness of the priesthood is justified by an appeal to the normativeness of Jesus call to twelve men to be the apostles. Jesus freely chose to exclude women because the priest acting in persona Christi 'represents' Christ and thereby embodies masculine and not feminine characteristics. This appeal is conveyed by the use of nuptial imagery from Scripture. The church is the bride of Christ, Christ is the bridegroom, only men can represent Christ the bridegroom, therefore only men can preside at the Eucharist.

While the Pope affirms the equality of men and women, deplores all forms of abuse of women and advocates that the raising of children be the responsibility of both parents, some of his assertions have attracted strong criticism, and not only from women. In particular he is criticised for confusing egalitarian and complementary models of relationship, for confusing gender, cultural constructions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' which legitimate dominance, with real men and women, thus giving these essentialised constructs ontological status. His mariology also presents difficulties, for Mary, mother yet virgin- an impossible ideal for women, is proposed as the paradigmatic model for women. Furthermore, some would claim that in ignoring the personal reality of women and the demands of their contemporary social and ethical situation this document treats women unjustly; there is no real consideration of women's role within public life.

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55 Peter Habblethwaite argues that the mariology of Pope John Paul II is influenced by his own family experience: his mother died when he was nine after a long period of ill-health, he had no sisters- and by national Polish fervour in relation to Mary, which predispose him to idealise her. 'The mariology of the three Popes'. *The Way Supplement*, 51 (1984), 63.

56 Richard Leonard, 57.

virginity adequate and reflective of the reality of women's lives, there is no manifest understanding of the influence of patriarchy in shaping understandings of both motherhood and virginity. Ruether maintains that in relation to the issue of ordination we are again faced with a contradiction between anthropology and christology. However, because the Pope has recognised the validity of using both masculine and feminine images for God, and rejected the use of dominative power:

[H]is use of patriarchal, hierarchical symbolism to exclude women from priesthood hangs in the air, with all its traditional supports in anthropology and theology having been removed. 59

As this letter did not silence the debate in relation to women's ordination, Pope John Paul II published his apostolic letter, Ordinatio sacerdotalis, in May 1994, as a binding decision of the magisterium with regard to the admission of women to the priesthood. He reiterated that Jesus chose twelve men as apostles. The apostles chose men to succeed them, (argument from Scripture) and that it was the church's constant tradition and recent teaching (argument from tradition). Then he declared that:

the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgement is to be definitively held by all the church's faithful. 4

As this letter still did not silence debate, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in November 1994, issued a responsum to a question or dubium in which they stated that the teaching on women's ordination was part of the deposit of faith and an infallible teaching. Effectively debate on the issue has been prohibited. 60

However, part of the reason for the prior debate has been the basis of the arguments from Scripture and tradition. The Pontifical Biblical Commission which was requested

58 Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, and Anne Carr, (eds.), 'Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology'. Conclium, 206. This volume explores motherhood as a theological concept influenced by Adrienne Rich's distinction between the potential relationship of every woman to her reproductive capacity and children, and motherhood as a social, cultural and religious institution and ideology. Johanna Kohn-Roell, 'Mother- Daughter-God' explores the contradiction between the high value placed on motherliness and motherhood by church and society and the social and ecclesial position of real mothers, 64-72.


to examine the question of women’s ordination prior to the issue of Inter insigniores in 1976 had declared that there is no biblical evidence to support women’s exclusion from ordination. This decision was upheld by the American Catholic Biblical Association in 1979, and the Catholic Biblical Association of Australia in 1995. Prior to Vatican II, the only intrinsic argument against women’s ordination within the theological tradition was the faulty argument based on women’s inferior status. Arguments used in both Inter insigniores and Mulieris dignitatem to justify the maleness of the priest through the notion of ‘representation’ of Christ, using nuptial imagery, or by invoking the plea of in persona Christi, are recent, not to be found within the theological tradition before Vatican II. One male theologian comments:

The critically tenable conclusion is that unless the magisterium wishes to inculcate a form of fideism on this question, it will have to explain its position, and the mind of Christ himself, with reasons other than have appeared in the Church thus far. Any such rationale ...will have to address the central theological issue: the alleged link between the sexual difference and the nature of the priesthood, a link which comes to intelligible expression in the essential functions and operations of the priesthood, traditionally summed up as the threefold ‘office entrusted by Christ to his apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful’. However faithful to the magisterium, then, theologians may strive to be, they must, precisely as theologians continue to ask: What is it in these priestly functions that requires they be exercised by a man? What that forbids them from being exercised by a woman?61

So the public face of the church continues to be male and as yet there is no adequate theological anthropology to explain it.62 The issue of theological anthropology remains then as a critical issue for women within the church.63

This outline of the Pope’s teaching on women serves to contextualise his teaching on women within the beatification event, to demonstrate the power of textuality in the maintenance of socio-symbolic frameworks, and to elucidate the Pope’s contention that

63 In June 1996, new questions were raised at a closed meeting of the National Conference of Bishops of America, the Bishops were deeply divided. At a later meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America a ten page draft study paper was presented which examined the doctrine that women cannot be ordained against the criteria of scripture, the tradition, the contemporary sense of the faithful and justice.
"a mistaken anthropology is at the root of the failure of society to understand church teaching on women". The starting point within his theological hermeneutic is that his duty and right to teach comes from Christ, and is part of his apostolic ministry. His approach is to retell the story of the Christian Church in relation to the contemporary issues which relate to women, their vocation and role. To do this he draws on scripture and tradition, particularly as they relate to Christ and to Mary. He regards tradition as 'guardian of truth about humanity as a whole, not just the deposit of Christian doctrine'.

Towards the conclusion of Mulieris dignitatem he argues that thinking about issues for contemporary women can only be correct if we follow the truth of Christ, as developed within the scripture and tradition and mediated through the teaching office of the church. On the other hand feminist theological critique points to the distortion of the teaching of Christ within the tradition. A feminist theological hermeneutic uses the human experience of women as its starting point, and as a criterion for the validation of truth claims, with a view to promoting the human flourishing of women through their liberation from patriarchy/kyriarchy. For feminist theologians this involves practical recognition of the working of the Spirit in every human life and of women's call to equal discipleship with men.

Obviously, an impasse between these two positions is reflected in the debates about priestly ordination for women and about reproductive sexuality.

Pope John Paul II's 'Letter to Women'

To better situate the pope's address on women during the beatification it is helpful to consider A Letter to Women (29 June 1995), which was released five months after the event. It contains further reflections by John Paul II on the advancement of women

64 Richard Leonard, 78.

65 Karl Borrenson argues that despite the new holistic understanding that men and women are equally Godlike, man-centred typology remains basic in Catholic christology, ecclesiology and mariology. For her the Greek Church Father's doctrine of Christ's incarnate and resurrected humanity as exemplar of human wholeness is key for feminist theology. She argues that feminist theology needs to be inspired by an understanding of the interplay between scripture and tradition and by the Orthodox belief in the Holy Spirit acting through history. She sees that: 'when divine totality is verbalised in terms of diversified human wholeness androcentric gender models [will] lose significance in Christian doctrine and symbolism'. See 'Women's ordination: tradition and inculturation', Theology Digest 40, 1 (Spring, 1993): 15-19.

66 Cardinal Pironio, who presented it to a press conference on July 10, described it as the personal work
and the relationship between the sexes in the lead up to the World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. His intention was:

- to speak directly with every woman, to reflect with her on the problems and prospects of what it means to be a woman in our time. In particular I wish to consider the essential issue of the dignity and rights of women as seen in the light of the word of God.

The tone of the letter is sensitive, warm and compassionate. Section 2 contains his expression of gratitude to women, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, women who work, consecrated women. Section 3 in its overview of women's historical discrimination, which does not differentiate between the influence of the church and of the society at large contains the following moderated apology:

And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry. May this regret be transformed on the part of the whole Church into a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision.

For the first time there is evidence of the church’s need to be self-critical of its history in relation to women. However, the Pope does not differentiate between members of the church and members of the hierarchy and the authority structures, nor does he refer to women’s experience of discrimination in the church in the present. On the other hand, in relation to society at large, he is sensitive to the obstacles to women’s full integration into political, economic and social life, condemns sexual violence and exploitation in its various forms and positively appraises the process of women’s liberation:

the journey has been a difficult and complicated one and, at times, no; without its share of mistakes. But it has been substantially a positive one, even if it is still unfinished, due to the many obstacles which, in various parts of the world still prevent women from being acknowledged, respected, and appreciated in their own special dignity. (World Day of Peace Message, 1995)

In the ongoing work of women’s liberation it is;

the word of God [which] enables us to grasp clearly the ultimate anthropological basis of the dignity of women, making it evident as part of God’s plan for humanity.

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of the Pope. The Tablet (July 15, 1995), 911. The Letter is published in full, 917-919.
He refers to the ‘genius of women’ most truly manifest in Mary, but he does not spell out how it is to be given visible and decisive institutional expression in the church, nor does he imply the need for a change of self-understanding on the part of men.

A series of issues remain for women in the church. Roman doctrinal decisions which relate to the ordination of women, to reproductive sexuality have been taken without any reference to women. For many women, ordination for themselves or for other women would make no sense, given the way the church is currently structured. Many men as well as women consider that the requirements for establishing infallibility, for example, consultation with the bishops throughout the world, were not observed in relation to the prohibition of the ordination of women. The ban on continued debate provokes consternation for some; as does the fact that clerical celibacy and contraception also remain issues closed to discussion. A movement for renewal for the Catholic Church has been formed in which millions of Catholics in Switzerland, Austria, Germany, France, Brazil, Africa and the United States and Australia have signed referenda calling for widespread reforms, such as: respect for the equality of the faithful; lay participation in the process of electing bishops; full participation for women in all decision-making, as well as in all ministries; optional priestly celibacy; respect for primacy of conscience in all moral decision-making; affirming people rather than condemning them; welcoming those currently marginalised. 67 The women who protested during the Pope’s visit are part of a larger group worldwide protesting for change. The drift of people from the church continues to constitutes a worldwide phenomenon. 68 Szuc considers that one of the church’s greatest problems at this point in time is that while the Pope may be ‘loved and admired as a person’ he is not necessarily ‘followed or obeyed as head of his church’. Many Catholics see the need to convogue a Third Vatican Council for the reform of the church in a new millennium.

While we can but speculate as to the effect of John Paul II’s idealistic and theoretical definitions of women’s place and role on women’s and men’s understanding of

Christian womanhood, in this context I intend to examine the influences which women in this survey see as having been formative for them as Catholic women.

Women's Perception of their Real Role Models
Who has been influential for the women in this study? Given their religious socialisation, what has been the impact of feminine models within the tradition? Do they emphasise past figures, dead figures, people they would not have personally known? Or have the influential forces for them been living persons, persons they have personally known? Are these influences to which they refer exclusively feminine? Are they renowned figures, or ostensibly ordinary persons? Are there discernible differences in the way religious women and lay women speak of what has been significant for them? What else can we interpret about their constructs of Christian womanhood?

What is at first notable among the women in this survey is the little reference to Mary of Nazareth as a formative influence in shaping their experience. Only four women make specific reference to her, and one of those only indirectly. They convey both their ambivalence towards her and their sense of her continuing importance. For example:

I realise that the Mary figure, Our Lady, the Virgin Mary figure, I've actually been quite hostile to for so many years and because of this lack of resolve I've never prayed to Mary, never. I've always prayed to God the Father, or Christ... I feel there is a whole area there I just don't know [referring to her religious education]. A lot of those women, she being the classic example, I didn't identify with. I identified much more with Mary Magdalen [as she speaks she starts to reflect]. All this is very interesting to me now that its dawned on me and I realise how extraordinarily neglected its been. I'm starting to wonder and I wondered still more when I was asked... to preside over a woman's mission...the number of women there who basically said 'well Mary was just a route to Jesus Christ and there was no sovereignty in Mary'. It was quite insidious that we hadn't been presented except on a one to one basis with any female authority. Mary is presented by the men as a female authority, but I don't know a woman who thinks Mary is an authority figure. What is going on? The men sentimentalise her and the women don't like her. The more you think about it the richer it becomes in trying to flesh it out. (Caroline)

Another woman who does identify with her has begun her own process of
demythologising, trying to situate Mary within her own genealogy and to reconstruct her agency:

I identify with Mary the Mother of Jesus, but not the airy fairy woman...the feeble woman, this little virgin village type...I identify with a robust woman who went about her business and raised this child the best way she could, I guess she had a family life, but she was there when she watched this child of hers doing strange things she couldn’t understand.... The other woman I like is Anne, the grandmother of Jesus because she must have seen and done things that encouraged her daughter and encouraged her grandson. (Stephanie)

She emerges for still another woman, as does Mary MacKillop, as an image of a woman ‘who goes through darkness or struggle ...not knowing what the outcome is, but daring to go into the darkness’. (Rosemary)

Reference to the saints of the tradition, apart from Mary of Nazareth, is quite limited.
For one woman the only saint who made an impact on her at school was St Dorothy whose name she chose for Confirmation:

I read about St Dorothy, this incredibly brave martyr who had defied the Emperor and said that she was never going to give up her Christian faith and so he had her beheaded...she didn’t give way under all the torture ...and I remember being incredibly struck by her strength, her incredible strength and stubbornness and commitment and I thought, wow! Yes even if it is the most revolting name I ever heard I am going to take that for my confirmation. (Donelle)

Another cites Catherine of Siena who remonstrated with popes. She believes that many women’s lives need to be retrieved and objects to the omission of the names of women in the Easter liturgy, particularly of those women who were spiritual partners to men saints, such as Claire and Scholastica. (Stephanie) For Kate, who has divorced and remarried, Mary MacKillop is ‘the one I’ve chosen, or she’s chosen me. She is the one who means something to me and the only one that has had an impact’.

Overwhelmingly, these women refer rather to women who have been part of their lived experience. Some emphasise that they have been influenced by a variety of women and sometimes find it hard to designate particular women. Several women mention their mothers and the qualities they mirrored for them:

My mother is a very significant figure for me...there’s something in her
and in my sister ... who are just ordinary people who have a quality of humanness and goodness and of commitment to people and commitment to the gospel, as they understand it, which is enormously moving to me and more significant to me than a lot of hallowed saints, but that's because I experience it and I need to experience it. (Christiane)

I've always admired the pioneer women of the outback... like my own mother who immigrated here to Australia, married an Englishman...had a large family... My mother's only one of many mothers. I grew up in the country and could see these valiant women... who held the values of the gospel and lived by them. (Geneva)

Spiritually, within the time of my mother I would say it was my mother spiritually. I would admire my mother before any other person... my mother was my spiritual guidance. She was everything that I would have wanted to be as a woman and I don’t think I could compare or compete with my mother in a spiritual sense. (Grace)

I would have great admiration for my own mother, my grandmother, both well informed, well read women, committed Catholic women, in no simplistic way whatsoever. Aware of... demands of faith and very much part of the societies where they were. They were women of great strength and great goodness... basically I think we admire and in some way seek to identify with an integrity, a compassion, a willingness to participate, to pull your weight in whatever the human venture is and somehow to look to the horizon, there is a world beyond this one. (Marian)

Almost all of these women were educated in convent schools by sisters. Given that many women who have been influential in politics, in the public service and in professional life, similarly educated, attest to the importance of the influence of the religious women who taught them, do these women speak of their teachers? Some do and make specific reference to the influence of a particular sister:

My first teacher was ..., a remarkable Christian woman, a woman of great faith, vision, insight, and enthusiasm for the kingdom and I've never seen her lose it. (Geneva)

The nuns were the people I identified with and they had a profound effect on me. They were alive in front of me, they interacted with me, there was an extremely good, gutsy nun. These women were a vital version of Christianity and I found that immensely practical. (Caroline)

Another woman contrasts her earlier unfavourable experience of sisters with her present
experience of some of the Sisters of St Joseph she has come to know as result of their initiatives in regard to the beatification;

I have found in those women, the women with whom I have become friendly such strength and goodness and it really has filled up an incredible amount of gaps in my life. It has been an absolutely wonderful experience for me .... I had a lot to do with...... in the twelve months leading up to the beatification and through the experience of those women and the other sisters I became friendly with I feel I've made my way back into the Catholic Church. (Angela)

She is not the only woman to refer to adult relationships of friendship between sisters and other women. One of the Aboriginal women contrasts her childhood experience with her present experience of sisters working in the Aboriginal ministry:

Today the ones I move around with.... for me its really wonderful, we're women, for God's sake we are just women. If I want them to be a nun then I say: 'can I talk to you as a sister? I want to run something through you and its very private and I want your support in a very Christian way'. But otherwise we are just women. We go to conferences together, we camp together. And I never forget the first time we went to ... and sister was in the room. I thought O my God! we are running round here starkers, we must get our nighties on, and I looked around and sister is doing the same thing next to me and it hit home, well for God's sake we are all just women. (Joan)

Religious women speak of the significance for them of contemporary women. For example:

contemporary women.........for me .... enormously significant. These are women who are really coming to terms with what it is to be a Christian today, what it is to be a woman and a Christian, and what it is to be in a relationship. It's the quality of having to deal with human relationships in a very intimate way that lends them a certain reality I often find absent in religious women. (Christiane)

For one of the younger women there are many different sources of influence which are helping her to understand who she is, and what is worthwhile for her in the present and the future:

When I went to the Catholic Ordination of Women's Conference, I was just struck by all these fantastic amazing women who were so powerful and so strong and knew in themselves who they were. I was far the youngest there and felt that they were passing on their wisdom to me and I felt so close to them and felt that was the way I wanted to be, so powerful and strong and so rooted in my beginnings, as wise as they were. Since then so many women that I have come across have felt like
models for me. The women at the refuge, the tribal women who come down from up north, the older ones, who are just so connected to their past and to their earth, and so innocent and open, and trusting and full of fun. They seem like an incredible model of a spiritual woman. And the Monday night group, a feminist theology discussion group...a mixture of religious and lay women ranging from their twenties to their sixties, all of them seeking a spiritual path and trying to liberate themselves from patriarchal oppression. I feel they have incredible wisdom to pass on to me about how to live life in ways that are freer. (Danelle)

The emphasis on ordinariness is there in the women's anecdotes about women who have been sources of inspiration for them. The relationship of friendship and mutuality which exists between the women who speak and the women to whom they refer is evocative of inner personal experience for both of them. One woman speaks of the women in the ethnic community she ministers to:

the humanness of these people and their ability to say: 'yes, that's the reality'. They have pulled themselves up from what they have done and that inspires me. There is a lady who is from Hong Kong who says to me: 'every night when I go to sleep...I pray and I say to God: 'these are things I wasn't so good at doing for you today, but I'll try better next day'. In the morning I wake up and say to God: 'What have you in store for me today?' [She comments] That kind of real faith. (Rosslyn)

Such friendships can transcend race and class, as is instanced by one of the Aboriginal women who spoke earlier of her relationships with white sisters.

It is very hard for me a black woman to notice when people are genuine...There is only one old lady and she was my best mate...She died about a year ago. She was then in her nineties. We were actually best friends. She was one of the women I admired most. She was a white lady; she did a lot of social justice work for Aborigines. The most humble person I ever met in my life. I think she would be my closest friend, the closest to my heart. I felt so much for this little woman who was only five feet. She wrote these little books, only for her family use and they are quite a well off white family. And I've got one in there where she wrote about me, so humble, but so nice. She would come up, go to Redfern and go to lunch, working behind the scenes until she dropped, trying to get the people to help themselves and she was there all the time for people not in a patronising way. (Joan)

Another woman speaks of her encounters over time:

There are the people, the parents I've met as I've journeyed through the various places of work, education and pastoral work and just to see how they live out their Christian values...the people I have walked with have
been a wonderful inspiration of Christian living and the men too. I could, as we all can, tell the stories of these heroic people and their lives that aren’t published. (Geneva)

The influence need not be specifically Christian, nor exclusively feminine.

Christian women around the place, I haven’t had much to do with them in my life. A lot of people I have admired on the strength of the quality of their conviction and their belief and their behaviour. (Angela)

Some refer to the influence of men on the shaping of who they are, and of their representations of reality. For instance:

I’ve certainly been affected by being socialised as a girl and as a woman, but I grew up in a house where my father wouldn’t believe in any of that. I’ve always thought persons are more important than gender... even though I’m often more comfortable with women, there are not many men I’m comfortable with... Growing up it was more men, my father was a strong influence, [a priest] was a strong influence, the person I was engaged to when I was young was a strong influence. I did know some strong women but they weren’t probably as influential... When I look back I was I suppose limited by being a woman. I tended to get married and do things like that. I didn’t set out to have significant individual impact on the world. It sounds crazy but I really am interested in truth and I am moved by things that I think are true... the certainty that you can ever find it has evaporated for me... but some things seem to me to be more authentic than others. (Sue)

The search for meaning has led some of these women to value texts from which they can take what is meaningful for them. It is what people have written, women, but not always and not necessarily so:

I’ve been vitally influenced by Jean Vanier... it’s not a feminine experience, but it’s something of this notion of God as lover God, as mother... he’s the one who has made that very valid and real for me. But it’s his associate Claire de Mirabel who seems to me to be able to articulate an understanding of what it is to be a Christian today. She’s been very significant to me in her writings.... I find myself coming back to poets, but not necessarily women poets, who are somehow reflecting on the human condition. (Christiane)

Another woman describes herself as willing to learn from wherever she can. Strongly
influenced by poetry, she reads Seamus Heaney, Denise Levertov, William Blake, Amy Wilting, Noel Rowe. She has been open to influence from a whole range of men and women across different disciplines:

I mean I’m conscious that it’s important to read women’s work, so I would be careful not to read only men’s work, but I’m not going to be critical of somebody’s work because it happens to be written by a man... in my choice of texts I’ll make sure I read both men and women. There is some relationship I know between the physical body that writes the work and the work that’s written, but there’s also a break between them and I’ll exploit the break because I’m really making it my own, so I may learn more from a man than a woman. But I’m not really learning from the man I’m learning from the text... I do value literary works very highly. (Lucienne)

Later she illustrates the distinction she makes between the writer, about whose life she can be quite indifferent and the text and how she draws from texts, by referring to a text of Janet Erskine Stewart:

All your raw material for sanctity is in the now just as it is... never want it to be other than it is by a hair’s breath. Now often that will come to me if I’m in a traffic jam, champing at the bit, this phrase will come to me, ‘never want the now to be otherwise by a hair’s breath’ and that really calms me down, it has an amazing effect on me. And she says ‘if it did not have the two elements, the one which you would not choose and the one that you did not understand then the present moment would not be what it is to you’.

Probably about a quarter of the women in this survey spoke of never having given much thought to influential role models, of never having reflected on their own construction of womanhood. One echoing the significance of a changing cosmology says:

I haven’t any role models. I might be looking for some. I feel that the woman of today, whether she be Christian or whatever...she’s lost, ...she’s focussing on the male, but we’ve really lost our power and I don’t think its related just to ourselves, its related to the land...we live in an artificial world like suburbia. It’s all interrelated with the whole of nature and the whole universe, because that is very much part of the feminine and because we are divorced from that we are kind of lost as well. (Fiona)

Several women made reference to the ways in which woman can succumb to what they perceive to be destructive influences stemming from a need for masculine approval. Such reference is reminiscent of Carol Gilligan’s thesis that women, from their
adolescence on can deny their own voices and their own truth in order to maintain relationship.

We can get caught in what is not our best side...we can be seductive, I don't mean seductive in the worst sense, but we can modify the truth to such an extent that it is no longer the grain of truth...because we need to be held in very good stead, and the more urbane the male is the more likely we are to get caught in it....I think that one of our primary strengths is that whole ability to be inclusive...that's where I see our core in us, but once we get hooked into that other side, somehow truth gets drained away, because we water it down to maintain this other kind of relationship, that puts us down a bit, that touches into our needs or the needs that have been educated into us. (Caitlin)

I'm talking about women. They become power hungry; they become full of themselves; they just want to make things happen...so they look good to the authorities they are working for...It all has to look so glamorous. Every minute has to be accounted for... And sometimes I wonder: 'do you get caught up in your own glory? ...I do have a little sadness at times for any woman who gets into these positions with the bishops. I have even been with such women travelling with the bishops. (Joan)

In summary, what picture emerges of these women? of the qualities they value? Certainly while they are idealistically oriented they are grounded, earthed, concerned with naming reality, accepting what is real, unmasking falsity. They value people in the ordinary, people who are ordinary; they do not privilege heroic achievement, nor material success. They do value relationality, mutuality and inclusiveness, which are both key gospel as well as feminist values. They illustrate the possibility of transcending the barriers erected by gender, race, class and religious status, of the healing of alienation and disaffection through inclusion and acceptance. They value compassion and the search for authenticity. Probably they are much more influenced by their socialisation than they acknowledge; many evince a good deal of self knowledge, others are fairly uncritical.

Yet as these women speak, what they have to say is at odds with the refined language, the literal interpretation of biblical imagery, the intellectualised and spiritualised depiction of women, and the iconic representation of Mary of Nazareth in the Pope's writings and addresses. He keeps trying on the one hand to resolve the issues which
relate to women in the church and on the other, to legislate for the maintenance of women's secondary status within the church. His stance vis-à-vis women in the church on the one hand and women in society on the other, remains somewhat schizophrenic.

In this Chapter, I have endeavoured to represent something of the diversity and the commonality of the ecclesial experience of women in this study. Then I have examined the teaching of Pope John Paul II on women and reflected in his discourse on women during the beatification ceremonies, in the light of feminist approaches to the theology of the human person. Finally, I have considered what women in the study would identify as significant influences in their own social and theological constructions of Christian womanhood and their relationship to the Pope's discourse on women.
Chapter Six

Women and Spirituality in an Australian Context

Living is dailiness, a simple bread
that's worth the eating. But I have known a wine,
a drunkenness that can't be spoken or sung
without betraying it. For past Yours or Mine,
even past Ours, it has nothing at all to say;
it slants a sudden laser through common day.

It seems to have nothing to do with things at all,
requires another element or dimension.
Not contemplation brings it; it merely happens,
past expectation and intention;
takes over the depth of flesh, the inward eye,
is there, then vanishes. Does not live or die,
because it occurs beyond the here and now,
positives and negatives, what we hope and are.
Not even being in love, or making love,
brings it. It plunges a sword from a dark star.

Maybe there was once a word for it. Call it grace.
I have seen it, once or twice, through a human face.

(Judith Wright \(^1\))

In this thesis so far I have considered the Sisters of St Joseph's endeavour to retrieve,
actualise and celebrate the life, spirit and contribution of Mary MacKillop to Australia, for
the Australian people. Their concern to evoke and reinforce what they perceived to be the
depth of goodness within the Australian people irrespective of religious affiliation has
emerged with great clarity. So too, has their practical intent to recognise the spirituality of
the Aboriginal people, and the place and contribution of Aboriginal Catholics within the
contemporary Australian Catholic Church. In considering the experience of women from
different social locations within the contemporary church, we have glimpsed something of
what they value, what they choose, and how they struggle within the Church. Many of

them clearly differentiate between religion and spirituality. In this chapter therefore, I intend to explore in greater depth the issue of women and spirituality in an Australian context, an issue which has already either explicitly or implicitly emerged in the preceding chapters.

The connotations of the word spirituality have altered over time. It first emerged as a result of the emphasis on the spiritual, the effects in the human person of the action of the Holy Spirit, in the Pauline Epistles. In the twelfth century the spiritual came in philosophical discourse to denote that which was neither temporal nor material. In the seventeenth century the emphasis changed again. Spirituality then designated the interior life of faithful Christians. During the eighteenth and nineteenth and well into the twentieth century it implied a life of striving for Christian perfection. Now it has entered ordinary parlance and means for most people concern with the deeper issues of what it means to be human.

Christian feminist theologians emphasise its implications of total engagement in life, by women and men intent on assuming their own embodied personhood as disciples of Jesus Christ. Thus Mary Jo Weaver speaks of 'faith made explicit in life'; Joan Chittister of 'life here and how we relate to it, rather than life and how we guarantee it for ourselves'; Sandra Schneiders of 'the experience of striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self absorption, but of self-transcendence towards the ultimate one perceives'. All of them would see that a specifically feminist spirituality involves critique of patriarchy, commitment to an alternative feminist view of reality and to structural change to effect it. Elizabeth Johnson and Sandra Schneiders are also aware of the particular challenges of postmodern culture. For the former, in addition to an inclusive feminism: community,

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1. There have been many expressions of Christian spirituality throughout the history of Christianity. What is common to them is a belief in Jesus Christ as the disclosure of God's self, continued in the Christian community (the ecclesia) through the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Christian spirituality including its feminist expressions is in essence, trinitarian, christocentric and ecclesial.


3. See Weaver, New Catholic Women, 180; Joan Chittister, Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men (Grand Rapids: W. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 1; Schneiders, Beyond Patheging, 73.
tradition, solidarity and a sense of kinship with the cosmos are central in a global world driven by the forces of economic exploitation, militarism and tribal nationalism. Sandra Schneiders emphasises the importance of adhering to the riches of the Christian tradition as part of a search for deeper interiority while being open to the purification of the distortions and biases within the tradition which contemporary culture can provide. Spirituality as they conceive it is thus a dynamic force, impelling conversion of mind and heart, not 'a panacea for human pain', nor 'a substitute for critical conscience'.

The Australian Context
Within contemporary Australia there are specific spiritual challenges for Christian women associated with the issue of Aboriginal reconciliation, endemic violence as part of belonging to a globalised society, and a renewed focus on spirituality within the society including the specific relationship between spirituality and Australian culture. The issue of Aboriginal reconciliation shatters the silence and denial which has hitherto shrouded the effects of European colonialism and white racism on the Aboriginal people. It illuminates the multiplicative effects of systemic injustice, even as it heightens awareness of the living sense of the sacred which permeates traditional Aboriginal culture. For white women, the testimony of Aboriginal women, their endurance and compassion, provide a rich spiritual resource.

Violence, particularly against women and children is endemic in Australia as it is in societies the world over. It is documented daily in the media, has been the subject of much feminist activism, and as a result, of government enquiry, legislation and social welfare

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7 Chittister, Heart of Flesh, 1.
provision in this country. The multifarious forms of violence women suffer worldwide because they are women are listed by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza:

[Child pornography, sexual harassment in schools and jobs, sex tourism in Asia, Latin America and Africa, trafficking in women, sexual and domestic bondage, gender-specific violation of human rights, lesbian bashing, right wing neo-Nazi terror against women, mutilation and stoning of women on grounds of infidelity, restriction of movement and exclusion from the public sphere. Purdah in its various forms, sati in India, sexual assault in the workplace, rape in war and peacetime, women refugees and displaced persons, maids and migrant workers, illiteracy, poverty, forced prostitution, child prostitution, wife bartering, female circumcision, eating disorders, psychiatric hospitalisation, battered women and children, incest and sexual abuse, homelessness, silencing of women, negation of women's rights, HIV infection through husbands, dowry death, isolation of widows and older women, abuse of the mentally ill, emotional violence, cosmetic surgery, cultural marginality, torture, strip search and imprisonment, female infanticide, witch burning, footbinding, rape in marriage, date rape, food deprivation, serial murder, sadomasochism, genital mutilation.]

The majority of these forms of violence are pertinent in an Australian context. The effects are enormous. Women strive to hold on to, and to reclaim their human dignity, grieve their brokenness, heal their woundedness, claim their agency and resist through protest and advocacy. This involves many of them in a conscious exploration of the spiritual dimensions of their human feminine existence.

Undeniably, these last years of the twentieth century have seen a renewed interest in spirituality in all its diversity, including that of Eastern religions, spirituality designated New Age, and religiously disconnected forms of feminist spirituality. This interest is reflected in current rhetoric, in the abundance and diversity of spiritual literature in book stores, in the flourishing of spirituality groups and retreat centres, in the offering of courses and programmes, in the explorations of the relationship between spirituality and art,

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9 See Reports from the National Committee on Violence Against Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Judy Palt and Kate Higgins, Violence Against Women in Australia: Key Research and Data Issues. Griffith : Australian Institute of Criminology, 1997.

spirituality and science, and spirituality and ecology. There is as well, new awareness of the distinctiveness of Aboriginal spirituality and of the articulations of an Australian spirituality by Australian theologians and writers attentive to the natural creation, to the land and to the cultural plurality of the settled areas.

In this chapter, because the central focus of the project is on the experience of women within the contemporary Catholic Church, I intend to return briefly to the spiritual experience of Mary MacKillop, to see how she related to and imaged God, and how this shaped her own identity. Then, I will indicate the ways in which contemporary Sisters of St. Joseph are endeavouring to reinterpret the founding charism as part of their post conciliar process of spiritual renewal and adaptation to the society. I will also examine the ways in which they sought to perpetuate the influence of Mary MacKillop through the Mary MacKillop Art Award and through Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney by linking spirituality with art. Then, I will consider the insights of other women subjects of this study and show the ways in which they reflect, or run counter to, the emerging insights of Christian feminist theologians working in the area of spirituality and the insights of women writing on spirituality in an Australian context. I will also show how they differ from those of men writing on spirituality in an Australian context.

The Spiritual Experience of Mary MacKillop

Max Harris saw Mary MacKillop as exemplifying the spiritual values enshrined in the Australian way to life: ‘Mary MacKillop gives us the chance to contemplate a wholly Australian mystery; to revivify a dormant depth in our culture’. While Mary Cresp considers that:

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11 Feminist theologians such as Mary Daly and Elisabeth Johnson argue that the symbol of God functions; that it shapes the identity of individuals, of communities, of whole societies.

12 Max Harris, an agnostic, was one of the first people in the wider Australian society to focus on the ‘inner and innate’ goodness of Mary MacKillop in a series of articles published in the Weekend Australian in February and April, 1985. He saw her as an icon for Australia.
The ability to find God in the ordinary events of daily life became for Mary MacKillop and her sisters the foundational element of their spirituality.  

Within her letters it is possible to catch glimpses of her certitude of God’s presence and love arising from her personal experience. ‘From early childhood, as far back as I can remember, He gave me such a sense of his watchful presence’.  

As she grew up she had the sense of being called by God ‘to serve Him in a special manner’. A dominant image of God as friend appears in her accounts of her experience in prayer as a young woman, in her letter to Monsignor Kirby in Rome: ‘all I did then was to place all in the hands of God. I, as it were spoke to Him my only Friend—who knew all things’. ‘His presence is before me almost in everything, and I love to come to him in prayer as to my dearest and only friend’. 

Palpable awareness of the presence of God marks the moment of her excommunication by Bishop Sheil:

I do not know how to describe the feeling but that I was intensely happy, and I felt nearer to God than I had ever felt before. I can only dimly remember the things that were said to me, but the sensation of the calm, beautiful presence of God I shall never forget... I loved the Bishop and the priests, the Church and my good God more than ever. I did not feel alone, but I cannot describe the calm beautiful something that was near.  

Voyaging alone overseas, absent from her community for almost two years, she writes to the sisters: ‘Yes, indeed I pass through strange changes and I daily experience the sweets of God’s particular care, and the comfort of having Him in many trying scenes as my best of friends and only support’. The metaphor of God as friend is suggestive of mutuality, of loving and being loved, of accepting and being accepted, of knowing and being known.  

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14 Letter to Monsignor Kirby, 22 May 1873.
15 Letter to her mother, 27 November 1866.
16 Letter to Monsignor Kirby, 22 May 1873.
17 Letter to Tenison Woods, 15 November 1871.
18 Letter to the Sisters of St Joseph, 1 September 1873.
19 It is a metaphor which re-emerges in feminist reflection on God. See for example Sally McFague, Models
Europe besides the assistance she received from priests, particularly Jesuit fathers, she experienced kindness and encouragement from many communities of religious women, with whom she stayed, and whose schools she visited. She writes to her sisters that many refer to her as ‘a child of special Providence’; and that:

What they long to and dare not do here, they see attempted elsewhere and they say the time is coming when a similar thing must be done in many places, whilst in the meantime at the antipodes God is aiding us to show how this may be done. 21

She claimed the ability to identify with the needs and to share the poverty of people, particularly children, scattered over the vast area of Australia. She and Tenison Woods claimed for their Australian institute an egalitarian spirit and an absence of cloister, so that the sisters might be free to live in twos and threes in isolated areas for lengthy periods without benefit of clergy. Her letters are replete with references to poverty. It was an essential element in the original rule. Although Rome changed the restriction on the institute’s ability to own property, the importance she attached to both the spirit and nineteenth century understandings of the practice of poverty is reflected in her discourse. In Rome under the influence of the Jesuits she came to deeper understanding of the virtue of obedience, and of the need for discernment as integral to its practice. For her St Joseph, ‘our glorious Father and Patron’ exemplified these virtues of poverty and obedience, as well as the virtues of humility and confidence in God. Mary Cresp considers that she chose Joseph as the patron because she could identify with his approach to life: practical in his role as foster father to Jesus; constant even in the face of doubt; flexible so that what was needed to be done was done; attentive to the signs of the time and ready to adjust to the call of the moment. 22

She could have been embittered by her trials with bishops and clergy, with difficulties from among the sisters, with the burden of constant care for the day to administration of the

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20 of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age; Marie Tulip also emphasises the mutuality and connectedness which typifies women’s new naming of God in Knowing Otherwise, 18.
21 Letter to the Sisters, 9 July 1874.
22 Letter to the Sisters, 16 February 1874.
22 Cited in Doyle, El· Hage and Wolah, The Story of Mary MacKillop, 8.
emerging institute for so long a period, with being irregularly relieved of her office. However, her consistent attitude to suffering reflects her desire for God, her experience of God’s graciousness and her openness to being personally transformed. The following citations from her letters attest to this: ‘with the eyes of our soul fixed upon God -with Him ever before us as the only object of our desires let us humbly thank Him alike for the blessings, for the bitter as well as the sweet’; ‘take crosses and trials as a proof of God’s love’; ‘God has protected his work and brought good out of all our crosses’.

Her God is the God of Jesus revealed in and through Jesus’ life, suffering and death. From the beginning of her religious life she symbolised her devotion to the passion of Jesus Christ by adopting the name of Mary of the Cross. Her devotion to the humanity of Christ was further symbolised by the designation of the institute as the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. While in Europe she had gone on pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial, in France, where Jesus appeared to Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-90) whose revelations were the genesis of this particular devotional practice. She writes of her experience at this time, and alludes to a dialogue she had with Christ symbolised by the Sacred Heart, in a circular letter to the sisters in 1907. She includes the following detail:

With this burning appeal came such a rushing of longing desire on my part to be Its lover and Its own true child, that in a glance, the falseness of the world appeared to me; the beauty, the pity, and the generosity of the Sacred Heart in this loving appeal could not be resisted. And in Its cause since it has deigned to raise me to It, I have never known aught but true peace and contentment of heart. Its love makes suffering sweet, Its love makes the world a desert. When storms rage, when persecutions or dangers threaten, I creep quietly into its deep abyss; and securely sheltered there, my soul is in

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21. It also reflects her own socialisation as has been previously explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
22. Letter to the Sisters, 1 January 1875.
23. Letter to the Sisters, 2 May 1877.
peace, though my body is tossed upon the stormy waves of a cold and selfish world.\textsuperscript{28}

Her devotion to the Holy Spirit is most in evidence in her invoking the wisdom and guidance of the Spirit in preparing for the chapters of the institute. The permeation of her spirituality by a living sense of the church has been well illustrated. It is manifest in her lively sense of mission, in her immense kindness, generosity, attentiveness to and forgiveness of other people; in the warmth of her affection. Her remarkable capacity for friendship transcended the divides of social class and religion.\textsuperscript{29} Her relations with the sisters are typified in the following request: 'I...ask you to forgive me and to pray for me, and always to remember that I love you dearly and have your interests at heart.'\textsuperscript{30} Thus it is possible to discern to some degree at least, how her idea of God functions within her life and the life of the original community she founded.

The Spirituality of Contemporary Sisters of St Joseph

While one would assume a continuity of spirit between the foundress and contemporary sisters, the historical and social changes in the years since her death in 1909 have necessitated a reinterpretation of her spirituality expressed in the discourse of nineteenth century pietism. Rosa McGinley in her historical study of institutes of religious women in Australia analyses the changes which have occurred within them as a result of official Church directives. She maintains that:

> Canonical legislation of the first three decades of the twentieth century came to cement something of an ideology rather than a genuine freeing of the theology of religious life. Like the implementation of most ideologies, enthusiastic subscribers as well as formal implementers came to impose

\textsuperscript{28} Letter to the Sisters, 21 May 1907.

\textsuperscript{29} Friendship is a theme which has been addressed by feminist theologians. See for example, Janice Raymond, \textit{A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection} (Boston: Beacon Press, London: The Women's Press, 1986) and Mary Hunt, \textit{Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship} (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

\textsuperscript{30} Letter to the Sisters, 17 December 1883.
rigid categories, restrictive of legitimate freedoms and increasingly the cause of personal casualties.31

Monastic influences, cloister, separation from lay people, restrictions on contact with family and relations, emphasis on the habit, on a style of life, on a spirituality still reflecting the austere practices of the French school, meant that religious women became more and more distanced from the lives and concerns of contemporary women. This cultural dissonance was marked from the inter war period on, despite appeals and directives from Rome to update, particularly during the pontificate of Pius XII. 32 This resistance to change was finally countered by the directives contained in the Document on the Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965, from the Second Vatican Council. Religious orders were directed to renew religious life by returning to the gospel and to the inspiration of their founding charism, and to adapt their structures and life styles 'to the changed conditions of our time'.33 The mechanism for enforcing change was the prescription that all constitutions had to be revised and rewritten by special general chapters of the members themselves, after which they were to be submitted to Rome for approval.34

Anne Henderson's book, *Mary MacKillop's Sisters: A Life Unveiled*, contains biographical data on Sisters of St Joseph based on interviews she conducted with many sisters after the beatification of their foundress. It enables the reader to glimpse something of these women's experiences before and after the changes enacted in response to the Council. Emphasis on teaching in primary schools, hard work, large classes, constant changes of location and struggle with limited means characterised the lives of the sisters well into the

1960s when their numbers peaked.\(^{35}\) Pressures in the 1950s and 1960s augmented as Catholic schools could no longer meet the demand for Catholic schooling, as a result of the post war influx of immigrants. Sr Judith Geddes who joined the Sisters of St Joseph in 1957 in reflecting on her early experience considers:

Somewhere between Mary MacKillop's time and when I entered, the spirit of the order got bogged down. You know, she went off to Rome, she didn't wear any habit. And then she came back. And you read her writing and she'd say, 'I want to go up to Gawler, to see how the sisters are getting on'. She went and visited all her places. But when I was a postulant the school sports, say, were on. And we couldn't go. We couldn't go anywhere for ourselves. Somehow we picked up practices that were never part of the original set up.\(^{36}\)

However, she concedes that although 'Josephite life may have been oppressive in some ways it always fostered women in active roles.\(^{37}\)

Following the call to renewal and adaptation issued by the Vatican Council the Sisters of St Joseph had to rewrite their constitutions and rethink their way of life. This involved a reinterpretation of the style of religious living. Change was painful for many, as Sr Elizabeth Ward recalls:

At the beginning, when the changes started coming, we were encouraged to talk things out. But it was terribly difficult at first, because we had never talked about anything personal for years. All of a sudden you had to share your faith, your ideas, your visions with people you had lived near for years but whom you had never really talked to. Nobody was particularly keen to tell you how they really thought or felt about anything.\(^{38}\)

\(^{35}\) Anne Henderson, indicates that there were around two thousand sisters in the 1960s; that 'by 1966 the order was training 110 novices in two year levels at Baulkham Hills. There was a training school for teachers at North Sydney and 317 convents, 356 schools, nineteen motor missions, five juniorates, ten hospitals, six homes for children, two hostels, four missions catering for Aboriginal and Maori groups and one 'preventorium'... across Australia, New Zealand and Ireland.' By 1996 there were 1246 sisters; the average age was sixty five, Mary MacKillop's Sisters: A Life Unveiled, 15. Rosa McGinley indicates that between 1966 and 1995 the numbers of women religious in Australia decreased from 14,622 to 8,069. A Dynamic Of Hope, 332.

\(^{36}\) Cited in Henderson, Mary MacKillop's Sisters 43.

\(^{37}\) Henderson, Mary MacKillop's Sisters 43.

\(^{38}\) Henderson, Mary MacKillop's Sisters, 221.
Opportunities for religious and professional renewal, for travel for study overseas gave new freedoms and led to changes in the style of community life reflected in this comment by Sr Kathleen Clifford:

Community Life has changed. We have community meetings, community reviews of the quality of our lives. We make communal decisions. There are community leaders rather than convent superiors. And the function of a community leader is to facilitate the running of the house, to draw on people's gifts and see that they can be used. And hospitality is a big thing, and compassion especially for the frail and the aged.39

Other sisters reflect on the experience of obedience in the past, which contrasts with the present, with its emphasis on listening to the voice of God in the interior of one's heart and then discerning with the appropriate authority:

There was no room for protest. The voice of the superior represented the voice of God. That was real obedience then. I had four superiors in four years at one stage, the Joys was a pretty appropriate name for us. We were always on the move, moving from one place to another. Now I would see this as not being to our personal advantage. There were never any roots put down. It was always 'here for a short time, then move on'. There was no putting down roots or settling into any place.40

And when I entered, we went to very difficult places and we got through the difficulties because of obedience. We were told it was God's will. Now I look back and I wonder whose will it was. We are more enlightened now. Today I find it very hard to define obedience. Who are we obedient to?41

The emergence of a predominantly lay staffed system of Catholic schooling throughout the country, in addition to other changes, has led to a diversification of ministry for the sisters, and to a style of life more reflective of the middle class. Sr Josephine Mitchell reflects:

When I grew up we were the battlers, We've all gone on to middle class positions now. You can lose touch with that sense of Catholicism for the needy. But I believe you can bring that back. And our sisters have always worked with the people. When I was on the north coast in the mid 1950s we didn't have any money; we didn't have any money to get us back to

39 Henderson, Mary McKillop's Sisters, 218.
40 Henderson, Mary McKillop's Sisters, 216.
41 Henderson, Mary McKillop's Sisters, 218.
Sydney... So we shared our lives: ate the same food, breathed the same air and talked the same things. I don’t see it lost. I’d hate to see it lost.42

She refers to her own sense of vocation:

I think its something you realise in yourself. It’s a call. That God is somewhere beyond that ordinary part of living. I’ve always searched beyond and I’m still doing it actually. There’s something “inner” like there is for artists and poets or scientists. If you’ve got it, that’s what you’re true to. Without it you’re not right somehow. 43

Now working with refugees, she has been active in establishing the Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies to assist East Timorese people to preserve their own Tetun language. In late 1995 the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph offered East Timorese refugees sanctuary in instances when they faced pressure to return to East Timor.

Focus on the socially marginalised and on the need to resist social injustice exemplifies both the reinterpretation of the founding charism and the renewed ecclesial understanding that action on behalf of justice is intrinsic to genuine Christian spirituality. Among the Sisters of St Joseph I interviewed were two sisters, themselves of Asian ethnicity, working with Asian migrant and refugee communities. One of them comments:

I believe if she [Mary MacKillop] were here today she would be doing what I am doing and encouraging it, trying to liaise between the unchurched and the churched and the church as church. She would have seen the needs of the people, like the Port Hedland Detention Centre and other various detention centres, where they don’t understand the culture....

I’m a migrant myself. When you first come, especially, when you do not know the language, do not have the support system you have in your own country - to see the reaching out hand of the church...This year I have the opportunity of a community with a multicultural thrust that says to the people, ‘you are welcome; whatever race, creed, religion whatever, it doesn’t matter, whatever you have done there is a place for you’...The ministry I am doing, nobody else has done it before in the way I am doing it. With the church community it’s vital to be able to say these are the needs of the people, what are we doing about it? ... I have just been to Port Hedland and I wrote a report which I sent to the Centre managers, and as a result

42 Henderson, Mary MacKillop’s Sisters, 95-96.
43 Henderson, Mary MacKillop’s Sisters, 141.
some things have changed. I believe it is good to speak out against injustices, but it is the way we do it ... they can't deny it has been said in a way that does not antagonise people. Then I received a letter from the Immigration Department thanking me for the report saying that these are the things they and I have to check up on. (Natalie)

Thus their work involves advocacy with the government as well as the church. They are aware of the changing face of the church as it becomes more multi-cultural in its composition. The other sister working with the Chinese community in Sydney comments:

After the Pope came it helped them to understand that we are one church no matter what race you are or where you come from. She's our saint .. after the beatification we had a Chinese Mass in the Mary MacKillop Chapel and we had close to two hundred [people]. (Rosslyn)

Sisters have been living and working with and learning from Aboriginal communities in the Kimberleys and other parts of Australia. Sr Emily comments:

In Maisie Cavanagh, my Aboriginal friend, I found tremendous inspiration. She gave us a lecture on the black/white partnership and later I asked her to become my retreat director: we had a two week retreat shortly after I heard her in Sydney. I slept in a convent next to her home and spent the days with Maisie. We did whatever Maisie wanted, talked, went into the bush, wrote things, listened to her stories. We are only beginning to find the sacred things here. With Maisie I found another part of myself. The church is only starting really in this country.44

Then as well, there are sisters working with refugees in South East Asia and with poor communities in Peru, which opens up perspectives for them on life for women and children in the so-called Third World.

Many contemporary Sisters of St Joseph see themselves as assuming a more active role in a directly spiritual ministry. Some sisters are now directly involved full time in spiritual ministry in retreat houses or houses of spirituality, for example at Baulkham Hills in Sydney, Mt Mee, with its forty acres of tropical rain forest in Brisbane, Aldgate in Adelaide, and in Townsville. However, while there is evidence of a renewed interest in

44 Henderson, Mary MacKillop's Sisters, 227
creation spirituality and the environment, there is no specific reference to issues of spirituality for women, nor to Christian feminism in Anne Henderson's documentary material. In the interview transcripts for this project there is explicit reference to women and spirituality to which I made reference in Chapter 3 of this thesis. However, it would seem that most sisters in religious institutes are like many other women in that they eschew explicit reference to feminism while espousing many feminist perspectives and values. This may also be related to the age and weariness of many after a lifetime of service, and because to do so would entail a painful journey into the sources and nature of their own secondary position within the church and an awareness of the structural contradictions which characterise their institutional existence.

However, among the Sisters of St Joseph there was a strong sense of agency in relation to spiritual possibilities inherent in the beatification of Mary MacKillop for Australians as a whole:

Within this event there's something of spirituality coming out of this land. Now it's the evolving spirituality which we're being invited to articulate, and if, and when we do, and I hope we aren't too long doing it, I think it could give direction to other people. I don't think people are so much about commitment to an institutional church in this day and age, but they are certainly on about a religious experience, going off in all sorts of off-shoots at the moment. That's fine, until we can get together and open up the treasures and enable people to see that lots of things they are doing are goodly, Godly things. (Geneva)

They perceived the need to continue the influence of Mary MacKillop beyond the beatification. One sister comments:

The beatification raises the whole notion of the spiritual ...of the essence of life and of the goodness of the person, and what can happen, that she was like one of us. We each do have goodness within us, it's what we choose to do with it. To me the great concern is ...that we can't stay on that crest, we have to do something to bring that into the consciousness, the sub-consciousness of our people. What's it say about us, the kind of really

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45 Elaine Lindsey argues that movements for change in relation to women's role within the Church in Australia from the late 1960s into the 1990s have been primarily led by lay women. See *Rewriting God*, Ch 2.
unravelled part of that message, part of who that woman is, and that continued challenge. (Eleanor)

This agency seems not to be diminished by questions which are sometimes raised in relation to the institute’s future. The most recently professed sister comments, ‘We often joke about it. None of us talks seriously about it, but we wonder at times whether there will still be any novices in twenty years time’. Feminist theologian Sandra Schneiders considers that religious life today is ‘at the bifurcation point between death and transformation, between entropy and self renewal’. In her analysis of the paradigm changes for religious communities she utilises models and metaphors drawn from the new science. She argues that only a firmly established identity will enable religious institutes to be responsive and resilient, as well as dialogical and autonomous in the face of change. In asserting that there is an experience of disjunction between spirituality as lived faith experience and religion as articulated tradition she maintains that institutional renewal can only occur through the critical appropriation of Christian identity in dialogue with post modern culture. In an earlier text she argues that in the American context it is sisters’ wrestling with the questions posed by contemporary feminism which has familiarised them most with the challenges of post modernism. The beatification certainly challenged the Sisters of St Joseph to a re-appropriation of their Christian identity; it also revealed elements of postmodern spirituality.

Concern that the influence of the Mary MacKillop on the spiritual life of the nation be continued beyond the beatification is reflected in the following initiatives to link spirituality, art and nationality.

46 Henderson, Mary MacKillop’s Sisters, 147.
47 Henderson, Mary MacKillop’s Sisters, 18
48 Henderson, Mary MacKillop’s Sisters, 20-25.
Spirituality, Art and Nationality

The Mary Mackillop Art Award

The Mary Mackillop Art Award was a three year project which culminated in the initial viewing of the exhibition by Pope John Paul II at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney on January 19, prior to the beatification Mass. The forty eight art works selected for what was to be a travelling exhibition from almost two hundred entries\(^5\) are reproduced in the catalogue, *Mary Mackillop: A Tribute*.\(^5\) In the introductory section of this book, Sister Mary Cresp considers that: ‘[t]he images of Mary MacKillop illustrated in this book have recorded for history Australia’s growing awareness that spirituality is a vital, often hidden element in the forming of our national culture’.\(^5\) Sisters, Clare Koch and Margaret McKenna, who had conceived the idea of the art exhibition and resolutely countered opposition to it, contend that:

"Art is a universal language that has been used over the centuries to celebrate and record significant events. The Beatification of Mary MacKillop is an historic landmark for Australians and challenges us to recognise what goodness and vision coupled with courage can achieve. We believe that these aspects of Mary's life, and the spiritual motivation that nourished her, deserve particular attention. To communicate this we chose art, because it passes beyond the superficial and the traditional, and ventures into the dangerous territory of the prophetic. In a country that aims to be multicultural the universality of art has an added dimension.\(^5\)"

In Sydney the exhibition was viewed by almost two thousand people; other people viewed it in Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide. While we can only speculate about how it engaged their own spiritual consciousness, we can sense something of the spiritual hermeneutic of

\(^{5}\) Entries for the exhibition were chosen by a panel consisting of the Director of the Powerhouse Museum, Terence Measham, Anmita Keating, Rosemary Crumlin, Colin Lacolley and the Director of the National Art Gallery, Betty Churcher. The exhibition was on view at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney from 19 March - 26 March, 1995; at the Art Gallery of South Australia from 6 April- 15 May, 1995 and at Parliament House in Canberra from 3 June-26 June 1995.


\(^{52}\) Wilson, *Mary MacKillop*, 12.

these late twentieth century artists presented with the unusual challenge to depict something of the significance of Mary MacKillop, 'the Australian People's Saint'.

To contemplate the paintings in *Mary MacKillop A Tribute*, is to be struck by both the commonality and the diversity of the representations. Issues of commonality relate to the interpretation of Mary MacKillop as a strong woman, a woman conveying spiritual strength, integrity and tenacity of purpose; the many representations of her with children; the predominance of earth colours, browns, reds, golds, evocative of the Australian landscape, and of the colours of blue and white associated with the sacred; the representations of her writing; the use of words; the effort to represent both the intersection of the temporal and the eternal. The diversity is immediately apparent in the diversity of styles, abstract expressionism, traditional Aboriginal, portraits, iconography, photographs, mixed media, and representational works. The artists consist of almost equal proportions of men and women; notable in itself given that according to Julie Ewington, women artists have been more the exception than the norm in Australian painting. The men include many well known artists, there are also young artists represented. Aboriginal artists, Asian Australians and European Australians are indicative of the multicultural and multireligious nature of the entrants in the Award. Muslim, Albert Hadid, representative of the UCOM, sponsor of the publication writes:

Mary MacKillop fought poverty and ignorance. She devoted her life to educating and caring for the poor and needy and in particular, the children, regardless of religion or race. This is the spirit in which Australia has taken into its national family, the most diverse community on earth and the same spirit that has made us an example for all nations. Australia is richer for this. As Mary had many friends of different backgrounds and religions, so we Australians possess that same tolerance and love for our fellow human beings.

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Although events since 1995 have demonstrated the fractured nature of tolerance within Australian society, nevertheless, the challenge to appreciate difference and diversity as enrichment, which this society provides, remains real. I intend to illustrate something of the diversity in thematic approaches in the Art Award by referring to specific paintings.

Aboriginal artist, Hector Chundaloo, uses dreamtime symbols and natural ochre colours, to represent Mary as Manampurra, dreamtime person, spiritual leader. This symbol occupies the centre of the painting. It is surrounded on either side by the bush tucker minyjiwarra (bush plum tree), to symbolise Mary MacKillop's following of God’s ways and her spiritual nurturance of the Australian people. The effect is conducive to contemplation.

Queenie McKenzie, also uses natural ochre paint on linen, and Aboriginal symbols in her painting entitled The spirit of Mary MacKillop. She draws a parallel between the growth of schooling in the Wamum Aboriginal Community and the spread of Josephite education. Symbolic figures depict mothers and children, some located under a tree, others doing bushcraft - some children within the pre-school, others within the primary school, which is adjacent to the sisters' house. This painting conveys the sense of community as both a lively material as well as spiritual reality. Tjungkiya Wukup (Linda Syddick) Napaltjarris 'A Nest of Crosses, Gladly Borne, on the other hand is a Western Desert dot painting which uses vibrant colours of white, gold, orange, brown and blue. It incorporates religious symbols, including a circle of crosses.

Bao Hua Li's portrait of Mary MacKillop, both the background and the figure of which are painted in light hues of grey and brown to convey 'a sacred and transcendental feeling', also communicates a sense of profound spiritual presence conducive to contemplation. However, here Mary MacKillop in her body shape, face and hands has taken on an Asian appearance. Bruce Goold's Mary MacKillop, a linoprint on linen, presents an iconic portrait of Mary MacKillop. The bottom third of his representation consists of a colourful arrangement of Australian wildflowers, 'symbols of spirituality'. Mary is surrounded by a garland of wattle flowers; a magpie and a kookaburra act as sentinels above her. Luke Robert's imaginative mythological version of Mary has her seated astride a horse, flying
through a gold streaked sky, four little joeys clasped with her right hand, two sitting upright on her left. Between her strong, blue eyed face, with its humorous expression, and the horse’s head are the white stars of the Southern Cross. She is about to receive a halo from an Aboriginal angelic figure, daubed with white Aboriginal markings. The bottom third of the picture depicts a bush school in a fenced paddock and the white, handwritten words ‘My childhood version of Mother MacKillop galloping past the Alpha Convent bringing more joeys to central western Queensland’.

In Jiawei Shen’s award winning, realistic representation: *Mary MacKillop of Australia*, a blue eyed, brown habited Mary is seated in the interior of a red coach of Cobb and Co, in the 1880’s, holding a green glad child upon her lap. The coach dominates the painting; beneath it is corrugated road, through and beyond it, a cluster of trees. The canvas is crowded by people; half representations of men, women and children, of an Aborigine clutching boomerangs, of a child’s and a woman’s hands along the railing, on top of the coach. Within the coach are two mothers and their children and an elderly man and woman. In the bottom right of the picture, standing on the ground in front of the coach, is an elderly Aboriginal man and a white child in a white smocked dress. The painting conveys the serenity of Mary MacKillop, her solidarity with Australian people in all their diversity, the itinerancy which typified her life in her desire to be of service to others, and the lives of many nineteenth century Australians.56

Several women avoid naturalistic representation in their paintings and depict the handwriting of Mary MacKillop. Leonie Nielson’s *Palimpsest* consists of two squares; the first with a wide square border of crossed writing and an empty white square in the centre; the second mirrors the first, but here the centre consists of crossed writing and the border is blank. For her such writing is associated with mysticism and with Freud’s Mystic Writing pad which conveys the sense of ‘unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces’. Crossed writing constitutes one of the triptych photographs in Anne Graham’s A

56 Jiawei Shen studied at the General Institute of Fine Arts in Beijing before emigrating to Australia in 1989.
Subtle Cross in which she is intent on symbolising Mary MacKillop's intellectual and spiritual ministry. In Margaret Fredrickson's *Blessed Mary* a collage of objects, pictures, photos, a stamp, a crucifix, a bank note, eggshells, pages of a letter, in hues of whites and browns are used to depict Mary's life at the time of her visit to Rome in 1871. The entire collage is covered by gold leaf imitation of the handwriting of Mary MacKillop. The actual words are taken from prayers of Mary MacKillop. It is a powerful representation of Mary MacKillop's spirituality, of her being attuned to God through the ordinary events of her life.

Suellen Symons demonstrates the power of the photograph in *Mary MacKillop: Divine I*, which consists of two adjacent photographs. The first is of a young girl in a brown dress with white collar and white lower sleeves, with her hands joined and her face lifted upwards, revealing the whites of fine eyes in a serene and innocent looking face. She is standing against a mantelpiece in a domestic setting. This photo conveys something of the young Mary's attraction by the divine. The second photograph depicts Mary holding a small white clad child on the back of a large white horse. The gaze of both Mary and the child are riveted on what is presumably, the mother and sister of the little girl. The mother is pating the horse while the little girl is holding a large white arum lily. The gaze of the figures in both photographs is averted from the viewer; in the first photo this suggests Mary's relationship with God; in the second the relationship between the figures on the horse and the figures on the ground suggests their mutual concern. It was the artist's intention 'to show something of her spirit, determination and love of children as well as her independence, compassion and courage'. These paintings help to raise questions for the viewer about human life, the nature of holiness, the spiritual journey in an Australian context.
Mary MacKillop Place North Sydney

Mary MacKillop Place advertised as, 'more than a museum, its a miraculous journey', 'in most unusual, amazing museum about Australia's first saint', was opened to coincide with the beatification. Housed in the former novitiate buildings at the Convent of the Sisters of St Joseph in North Sydney it combines audio-visual and kinaesthetic representations. The project involved the leadership of the Sisters of St Joseph, Elizabeth Fowler, senior curator, designer Peter England, and Tony Sattler of Wintergreen, a television production company. Beth Gilligan’s critique of the museum, entitled ‘Thoroughly postmodern Mary’, indicates the dominant role of Tony Sattler. She considers he approached the production of the museum as a piece of theatre, with emphasis on scripting the conflict and tension, highlighting the humour and creating the set and atmosphere to make it work. Historians could be troubled by the lack of historical accuracy, feminists by the sensationalism and masculinist bias. It is an example of intertextuality, of the constitution of a new text by the interplay of texts taken from different locations.

The entrance to the museum is marked by a large polished section of a River Redgum from Pennina, felled in 1935 after a growth of 275 years. The rings of the tree section are used to designate major events in the life of Mary MacKillop and corresponding events in world history. All named historical figures are men. All the key signposts are somehow associated with violence. The masculinist bias is also in evidence in the vestibule devoted to depicting saints, and to answering questions associated with definition, origins, fact, fantasy or fiction, relics and haloes, and saints today. The ceiling is covered with computer graphics of the Old Masters' depictions of saints; the walls with the illuminated video.

57 There is as well the Mary MacKillop Pilgrimage Centre in Melbourne and the possibility of guided pilgrimages to the significant sites in the life of Mary MacKillop in Victoria and South Australia.

58 Gilligan, Beth. 'Thoroughly postmodern Mary', 40-41.

59 Jacqueline Lunn cites Tony Sattler as saying: 'This is showbusiness- we have to keep the audience entertained'; 'a museum dedicated to a dead nun is a pretty dry prospect'; 'She was a remarkable woman but there are no hot rollers, nothing, so we had to tell her story in a catching way'. 'Selling of a Saint with Showbusiness'. Daily Telegraph Mirror, January 16, 1995, 38.
screen faces of Saints Joseph, Joan of Arc, Elizabeth Seton, Maximilian Kolbe, and Francis of Assisi. Of the thirty-two saints named only nine are women.

From the vestibule of the saints the visitor proceeds to the vestibule of the Dreamtime. Here the curved ceiling depicts the Dreamtime legends of the primal creation of the universe - the legends of Wanapi the Rainbow Serpent and the Creation of Life; the Creation of the People and the Southern Cross, Urrunna the Hunter and the Seven Sisters in colourful patterns. Painted by Sakshi Anmatyerrre it is described as the largest Aboriginal painting in the country. On a wide video screen Aboriginal television and film personality, Ernie Dingo appears around a campfire, and to the background noises of the bush at night, proclaims 'Mary MacKillop was a fair dinkum Aussie and now she is a fair dinkum saint'. In this way the spiritual giftedness of Mary MacKillop is associated with the sacred and timeless traditions of the Aboriginal people. Mary MacKillop's associations with the Aboriginal people were indirect, through the involvement of her brother and contemporary Sisters of St Joseph. It could be argued that this is in some ways an appropriation of Aboriginal culture.

From the Dreamtime room the visitor passes by exhibits designed to convey something of the early influences on Mary's life, her family, her life with the Camerons, the influence of Tenison Woods, the first sisters. Among the collection of artefacts there is a photocopy of the original rule of the Sisters of St Joseph. There is a recreation of the original schoolroom at Penola which attempts to evoke the atmosphere of an outback school. A film screened on a wall within this room depicts a talking Sr Monica. In many ways this is one of the worst theatrical features of this museum. The Sisters of St Joseph had tried to educate the media to avoid trivialising and sentimentalising Hollywood and television stereotyping of sisters, so I was surprised to find this parody of the early sister. Beyond this room, an attempt is made by wall inscriptions to educate the visitor to the meaning of excommunication. However, the Accusation room with the talking video faces of Woods,

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60 The Aboriginality of the artist has since been challenged.
Bishops Sheil, Quinn and Reynolds, commemorating both her excommunication in 1871 and her dismissal from Adelaide in 1883, while dramatic, is also too much in the nature of a caricature. The journey continues past depictions of the spread of the institute to Alma cottage where Mary had lived and died. There is a recreation of her deathbed scene in one room and in the next, the Miracle room, the opportunity to learn about the miracle of the woman cured of leukemia through the intercession of Mary MacKillop.

From this room one enters the Chapel and is confronted by the material reality of the tomb of Mary MacKillop. The tomb differs from the rest of the museum, for it constitutes a sacred place within a place of worship. It is a focal point within the Chapel for people who come as individuals or as groups to pray. It is symbolic of the intersection of time and of eternity; and is inscribed with the words of Mary MacKillop, 'remember we are but travellers here'. Here it was that the Pope came to pray on the morning of January 19. Many people, including some of the women I interviewed, attest to their being powerfully and unexpectedly moved kneeling beside this tomb within this silent space. The heart of this museum is the Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel where Mass is celebrated daily, and where special Masses are celebrated on the eighth day of every month in honour of Mary MacKillop. From the Chapel, the visitor returns to the entrance building with its photographic display of a 'Day in the life of a Sister of St Joseph', coffee shop, souvenir stand and book stall. There are sisters, as well as a team of volunteers, available to offer hospitality to the people who come.

Despite all its limitations the museum is keeping the story alive. Since the beatification it has attracted thousands of visitors. It is a place where student groups from schools come, where ethnic groups meet regularly for prayer and for Eucharist. Many people come as individuals, the curious, people with an historical interest, needy people, people with trauma in their lives...people with psychiatric illness, people who have come out of gaol. They all seem to be profoundly moved when they've finished going through all areas of the museum culminating in the tomb of Mary MacKillop...it's not just an information place it's a ministry...it's very much an open place for people to be healed. (Kate)
One sister comments:

There’s goodness in every single one of us ... and we just sometimes have to be helped to discover that, and that’s been my post beatification experience of the many, many people whom I’ve been privileged to meet who have come along here. (Geneva)

Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph are a significant expression of women’s spirituality within Australia. The women I interviewed present an opportunity to consider different perspectives on women’s experience of the spiritual within this country.

The Spiritual Experience of Women within this Study

Firstly, I will focus on the differentiation these Catholic women make between spirituality and religion; then I will examine their reflections on the spiritual search within contemporary society, and consider the importance they attach to prayer and transformation as part of a spiritual life.

For many women though spirituality is still mediated for them through the Catholic Church, and their idea of God is trinitarian, they have come to an awareness of wider dimensions of spirituality, and a new appreciation of themselves as is evident in these extracts from women’s interview transcripts. They reflect the tensions which come from valuing the tradition while grappling with new insights which challenge the tradition.61

I remember reading one of those pamphlets... about the importance of forgiving oneself and that Christ didn’t just exhort us to forgive each other but to forgive oneself, and this at a time when I had basically left my husband. It meant an enormous amount to me to find a way of living within the church. And I realised the truth and also that it opened one up to the notion that faith was not faith of rules and constraints, this was not the way to virtue, but it was to have a faith of possibility, to listen to whatever course you were being guided along. (Caroline)

61 Sandra Schneiders argues that ‘the deeply interior life of the serious postmodern Christian requires the shaping influence of the tradition worked out over centuries by saints and scholars, mystics and martyrs, even as the tradition itself requires the critical challenge of its postmodern adherents whose new insights into reality must redefine the tradition of its historical bias’. In ‘Congregational Leadership and Spirituality in the Postmodern Era’, 25.
The search of a second woman was also precipitated by a need to rethink her relationship with the church as a result of her divorce:

The sort of feeling I've not followed the rules...but I'm looking beyond that at the spiritual side. When I felt like turning away from Catholicism I did explore other religions, other ways of living spiritually, including Buddhism...looked into chanting and meditation and that was very renewing for me. It was something I needed in a down part of my life and I found that exploring my inner self was important for my ego and my confidence. Then I came to realise through reading...how much the same it all is, the spiritual life, Catholic faith, other Christian religions, Asian, Eastern religions. I just started feeling the sameness about them...what in my Catholic teachings was called something else I now recognise as the same thing as someone was calling differently, like the Holy Spirit dwelling within. So I started to see spirituality rather than religious sects and divisions and branches and I think that was a great maturing for me in my spiritual life. (Kate)

Another woman reflects on the influences which have shaped her faith in God and of her need to transcend boundaries in her continued spiritual search for God

My main job is to be in myself and being in myself aspects of the Church are within me, so the Church is within me in some ways...the Church is very significant within me really, I mean I manifest it in some ways. I'm not sure I'm in it at all. I don't have much to do with it these days.... It has so strongly formed me and my way of thinking and insights that I would never disown it...but I would never limit my search to what is considered to be Catholic or Christian...I could never consider God to be limited by Christianity, let alone Catholicism...God, for me, would have to be manifested by everything that came before Christianity and everything that came after Christianity. (Lucienne)

There is among several women the realisation of the limitedness of their understanding of the nature of a providential God, of the power of the Spirit of God and of their own need for openness and receptivity:

There's no doubt there's a deep spiritual search, that there are realities beyond what we can see. There's the massive problem of evil for which we've no real explanation except that we are caught up in it and it is acting all around us. Somehow we are on a path, we certainly can't see around the next bend in the road, but again I suppose we can only call on a sense of
integrity, a sense of listening, a sense of sensitivity, to be open to hear what people are saying without manipulation, without defences, without privileges to defend. (Marian)

I believe that God does. Whatever God is (laughs) goodness will happen. Whatever the Holy Spirit represents - is that the strength of that goodness really in people's hearts - I think things happen but not in the way you or I might want it to happen... The other thing is this business about chaos theory. If I do my little bit, who knows what the effect of that is going to be. If you do your little bit. We don't know. It could take a million years or it could be two minutes. Maybe change will happen in some little way. (Stephanie)

I gave up praying for particular things to happen years ago...but I do think its possible to be open to the Spirit, so that as in the birds of the air you know that whatever does happen in a sense doesn't sort of matter. I don't know whether I have really tested that...the biggest test would be if something happened to the kids...Having the scale with which you make sense of everything. If you are a bird and you die or haven't a nest, well that's pretty catastrophic isn't it? but if that statement of Christ is true, he's really saying this is the natural rhythm of life. You know that's not what it's really about, it's about something bigger than that of which you're only a part.... Christ who came to articulate his own experience, I feel in awe of that. I'm not at all cynical about that, but I might be cynical about dogma. (Sue)

We are about to enter into new possibilities that come with change and all those things untried...one has to believe that the Spirit and God is behind everything. So it's not about rejecting what to me is essential truth but a way of discerning and reading the signs and I suppose I'm reading the signs. I recognise there are many good things that come with having a religion, especially as I look at how my children are being shaped...and I'm really glad that I've had some roots on which to base how I've lived my life so that I can model for them how they might choose to live their life as they go into their adulthood...I believe there is a huge amount of goodness and wisdom - all those things that come through the church. (Andrea)

Several women speak of their experience of God in prayer, of their experience of their need to pray:

I always had something in me that was always searching for something. I remember at nine, it could have been earlier, I don't know why I did it, but we had this shed and a trunk and I went up to that trunk and looked in and I
found a little Mass book. It was one of the devotional ones. It was my mother's when she went to school. That became my bible, and from it I gained a spirit of prayer from reading it continually. I saw even at that age that God was really alive. I could feel his spirit, his warmth, he was someone who really is, and it's not just what I did, like go to church, it was something I gained for life. That to me was important and the rest wasn't important...it was something inner I gained because I climbed up and found that book, and whoever's words were there they taught me to pray and to ask for significant things that were important to help my spirit to grow. (Fiona)

My personal spirituality is becoming more important to me, and, but for the Eucharist a lot of that could happen outside the church. It may be the call to a deeper prayer life. Irene McCormack says prayer is very 'dangerous' because perhaps it leads to where we don't want to go. (Andrea)

My only regret is that I don't do a lot of faith development. I want to go away on a prayer day. I've been trying for eighteen months to get a prayer day. I feel very much the need to pray. ...I don't want to pray for hours a day, but I do feel my devotion is very poor. (Caroline)

And not only do women speak of their own concern about praying, they refer to their dialogue with other people about it. One of the Aboriginal women involved in the ministry to Aborigines within the church refers to her dialogue about prayer with a novice from one of the institutes of women religious working with her, in the context of her reflections on religious life:

And I'm finding the ones in New South Wales who are on the ground are very humble sisters, they work very hard and they don't get paid and I think about them when they go back to their rooms. And I said to one of my friends, the novice yesterday: 'How do you survive? You are a woman and you are a nun. I can go home...I can do what I want to do, I can meet my need to make myself happy'. We both leave here a bit miserable and down and depressed. She said to me 'well...I have my prayers, my prayers and my faith get me through every day'. I started questioning her. 'Well, how do your prayers get you through?' Because sometimes I pray and sometimes I feel like a hypocrite and sometimes I'm angry with God. He doesn't listen to me. 'Why are you making all these things happen to me? I'm a pretty good person, but evidently when I pray you are not listening to me,' I've got to learn to pray, but this is the strength of the nuns that makes them Mary MacKillop's. (Joan)
Another woman refers to her dialogue with a gay man in a pub at Paddington prior to the beatification:

I remember saying to this man who claims he is not at all religious - I don't know whether he is or not - a lot of characteristics I see in him his creativity, his artistry, his love for his fellow AIDS sufferers and his devotion to his aged Dad...are all there because it's part of the goodness of God. They are in him as participation in the life of God, and whether he attributes them to that source or not, they are. And a lot of people have a lot of holiness in them that they never put that name on...But for some people its nurtured because they are much more conscious of it and it is nurtured probably by a direct response to God in prayer. While some other people have the goodness but they don't pray and it is unconnected to God - in a way it's like a gift with the wrapping still on it.(Rachel)

Towards Spiritual Maturity

These women reflect the understanding that spiritual maturity involves inner personal change, relationships of mutuality, and a sense of solidarity with others in their suffering.

Two women in their forties refer to the changes in their spiritual journey associated with changes in their life cycle; both of them refer to Mary MacKillop:

I guess spirituality in the latter half of my life is more to do with identifying ego from true self and with the implications which I probably haven't confronted or faced up to yet,...And there's nothing in Mary MacKillop to say how she deepened her spirituality, or if there was I missed it. She was very practical and that was one of her gifts.... I don't think I have the same degree of put-up-witness she had.(Andrea)

The one thing I don't know is how her relationship with God changed because as I get older I feel that I am actually more active and less confident in the vividness of God. I am told this is a very familiar pattern in the approach to a more mature faith. This seems a contradiction to me. I've become very interested in that quality of more active, less vivid and I don't feel that I know that about Mary yet... yet everything tells me that must have happened.(Caroline)

As we have already noted the issue of right relationality has emerged many times in this thesis. It is integral to an understanding of Mary MacKillop and was of paramount concern in the reflections of the Sisters of St Joseph in their preparation for her beatification. In considering theological anthropology we identified mutuality as a more adequate model of
relationship between men and women than either equality or complementarity. In the spiritual journey women identify the importance of community, of relationships of mutuality:

I have this sense that some degree of openness to vulnerability, to sharing my vulnerability with other people is what community is about and that I need to be aware of my own intolerances and lack of openness... When we live in groups we want the group at least to move in the direction of mutuality and to realise that mutuality and individuation is really what a community is about and if its not well its a hoax and a sham however well intentioned people are. (Christiane)

The issue of mutuality in relation is quite central to the theology of many feminist liberation theologians. One of the earliest was Carter Heyward. ⁶² Drawing on the thought of Jewish existentialist philosopher, Martin Buber, she identified mutuality as referring to the power of connectedness at work in the universe. Mutually connected, 'our power in relation' is God. God, the dynamic power of relation at work among us, is experienced in mutuality, in which each person cares and is cared for and in which power is shared so that each person is enabled to emerge with integrity. Power is thus conceived as a creative liberating energy, the root of love and justice-making in history. Used creatively it is 'power-with'; used destructively it becomes 'power-over'; as empowerment it leads to relational transformation. Jesus emerges as the model of right relationship. His Christic liberating power becomes incarnate in our relationships with one another.⁶³ Other feminist theologians who emphasise the concept of mutuality in relation are Mary Grey, who proposes a metaphysic of connection, Joann Wolski Conn who argues for differentiation for

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⁶³ Heyward, Carter.
the sake of deeper relationship, Dorothee Solle and Rita Nakashima Brock. Sally McFague and Rosemary Ruether emphasise a renewed relationship with the earth in an ecological age.

One of the Aboriginal women I interviewed refers to her mission experience and to her desire to transcend it. Educated in a white mission school where white missionaries ‘completely screwed me up in terms of religion’ she explains how she conceives her spirituality as an Aboriginal woman:

> Spirituality means for me the inner strength of being...the relationship between the great Spirits and the heart. The heart allows the mind to live in peace and harmony with humans. That’s what we are on about at the moment, feeling comfortable with the Bible. It’s O.K. if we read the Bible. I feel for many years spirituality of Aboriginals has not been understood by whites, and not really understood by whites in authority in the Catholic system, and therefore it has not been recognised as being of the essence of life and living for our people. The struggle has created for Catholic Aboriginals [a need] to concentrate on how non-Aboriginal people perceive our spirituality through the eyes and ears of the church. (Joan)

‘Deep colonising’ however, has deeply affected the psyches of white Australian women. The Aboriginal women I interviewed would have appreciated more conversation with white Australians before the beatification. The issue of mutuality is very pertinent in the relationships between Aboriginal and white women. Aboriginal, Anne Pattle Grey, contends that: ‘Aboriginal women of Australia welcome women who are willing to listen, and to learn to open their hearts.’ Yet in referring to Australian Church feminism, she

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argues that it is blinded by its own racism and classism so that the assumptions it makes of commonality between Aboriginal and white women in relation to such issues as social origins, epistemology and experience, are badly flawed. The different experiences of white women and Aboriginal women are not truly identified, nor is the dominant role white women have played in the oppression of Aboriginal women. Neither is there acknowledgement of the marginalisation Aboriginal women have suffered within the Christian Churches.

While white Australian women have to undertake a long journey, among the women I interviewed there is evidence that for many spirituality is deeply related to concern for social justice and to solidarity with other people, including those who suffer in the Asian Pacific region. For example one young women reflects on her experience in the Philippines:

I saw another part of the Church, the Third World Church and the Church of liberation theology. I went to Mass up there about a million times because they have Masses all over the place. The first one I went to was on a picket line-striking workers had been there for six months- and they had a Mass to celebrate the visitors from Australia, to celebrate our arrival, and we stayed with them for a couple of days and slept on the picket line. It was quite an amazing scene, it was just incredible - it was unmistakably a picket line and in the middle of it there was this bishop in all his finery, and it was so strange. I thought ... I'm going to Mass because I want to be in solidarity with the people and to be sensitive to where they are. But I didn't think it would be a good experience. But that Mass was quite amazing. I felt incredibly connected to everyone there, it was quite a mystical kind of experience. (Donelle)

African American feminist liberation theologian Shawn Copeland delineates the concrete spiritual practice entailed in solidarity which also seems applicable in an Australian context, where the issue of cultural diversity is so real. For her, solidarity does not consist in eliminating or dissolving difference, nor in absolutising the categories of difference,
thereby denying their complexity. Nor is it manifest in a naive 'politically correct' clichéd rhetoric of solidarity. She argues:

Not difference, but indifference, ignorance, egoism and selfishness are the obstacles to solidarity. We must push through our own personal indifference, ignorance, egoism and selfishness, we must push through the indifference, ignorance, egoism and selfishness of our society. These obstacles to solidarity can be understood comprehensively as failures in authentic religious, intellectual, and moral living, they can be expressed compactly as bias. 63

She maintains that only if people work to bring about institutional change and engage in systemic conscientisation will they be able to practice the life of the Spirit who heals, nurtures and empowers. The first step is to engage in active and attentive listening. The second, to engage in social analysis of human situations, by examining the historical and structural dimensions which underpin them, in the light of the gospel. For her:

Solidarity is a wrenching task: to stand up for justice in the midst of injustice and domination; to take up simplicity in the midst of affluence and comfort; to embrace integrity in the midst of collusion and cooptation; to contest the gravitational pull of domination. We need grace for solidarity and community. We are in need of the grace of interruption: to change our course, to accept fully the challenge of transformation in the concrete. We are in need of the grace of liberation to free us from the gravity that impedes the human spirit and anaesthetises our deepest desires for more fruitful, more creative living and loving. We are in need of the grace of risk. 69

Mary MacKillop exemplifies the transformative power of the Spirit gracing her for solidarity and community in her own time. Many of the women I interviewed give evidence of trying to embrace integrity and to open themselves to liberation. The model of Christian maturity and wholeness which emerges from the data is one that emphasises radical dependence on God, creativity, mutuality and fidelity in human relationships, continual transcendence of personal limited horizons through collaborative discernment, and commitment to concrete social action. Mary MacKillop exemplifies this model well. In relation to herself she declared: 'I do want with all my heart to be what God wishes me

69 ibid, 30.
to be\textsuperscript{76}. She demonstrated remarkable relational capacity as well as relational competence\textsuperscript{77} and she was very focussed in identifying a major cause of human suffering in her society, and tirelessly in her efforts to alter it. That she does not emerge as a significant role model for many of the women I interviewed is somewhat related to her removal in time and to the circumscription of her institutional location within the church.\textsuperscript{72}

**Spirituality within an Australian context**

Many of the male theologians who write on spirituality within an Australian context emphasise the secularism of Australian society.\textsuperscript{73} They write of the harshness and brutality of the beginnings, the antipodean isolation of exiled Europeans, the oppression of the Aborigines and the derogation of their spiritual heritage, the sectarian bitterness, the daunting nature of the environment, the masculinity of the emergent society and its myth of mateship. Tony Kelly, for example, considers the ‘religious dimension’ as ‘a precious secret rather than as the open confession of more explicitly religious cultures’\textsuperscript{77} and that:

> When the Australian culture has so resolutely opted for the ordinary, it seems that the ‘extraordinary’, the ‘mystery and the poetry’ require vigorous and discerning effort if they are to be expressed and experienced.\textsuperscript{75}

Kinnane argues that Irish Catholicism in Australia, deprived of its cosmic base in Celtic culture, reflected the narrow intellectualised faith of European seminaries, infiltrated by Jansenism and reacting to the Enlightenment. As such ‘it had little to say to a struggling...’

\textsuperscript{72} Cited in Lesley O’Brien, *Called to Love*, 182.


\textsuperscript{77} Elaine Lindsay considers that many women are suspicious of religious women as role models in the Australian context because of sisters’ attitudes and behaviours which work in reinforce stereotypical categorisation of women. The Sisters of St Joseph seem to have been mindful of this in their preparation for the beatification.


\textsuperscript{77} Tony Kelly, *New Imaginings*, 120-121.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 122.
struggling people of peasant lineage trying to root themselves in a strange alien land.\textsuperscript{76} Alienated from the land, from the physical, unable to appreciate the spiritual reality of the original inhabitants, Catholicism 'substituted the cultic and a narrow sexual morality for an integrated holistic life of cosmic reality'. However, he argues the most insidious form of dualism is the subject/object one, of which masculine/feminine dualism is a variation; 'lack of fear of intimacy seems to haunt us'.\textsuperscript{77}

However, as Elaine Lindsay so rightly recognises most recent studies in Australian spirituality are masculine:

founded on scriptural interpretations by male exegetes and the reflections of male theologians...and/or Australian male historians, cultural commentators, writers and artists. Put most crudely, the meaning of all our meanings is located somewhere near Uluru and the quintessential Australian spiritual journey is figured as a pilgrimage to the centre....The imagery most often employed is that of the desert, the 'answer' is other than where we are, the way to truth is generally the Way of Purgation, tragic male figures are our spiritual heroes and Christ models. Father God is the focus of power and the feminine, when it is made present, is linked to the land which is to be subdued, or to Mother Mary the unobtrusive homemaker in the household of faith.\textsuperscript{78}

She draws attention to women's absence from discussions of Australian spirituality. In her study of the writings of three women writers of fiction, Thea Astley, Elizabeth Jolley and Barbara Hannahan, she delineates a spirituality which is quite distinct from desert spirituality. She considers that in this spirituality God emerges as a God of love, who is always present, 'in one's own heart, in nature, in one's creativity, or in other people', accessible at any time and in any place. This spirituality involves acceptance rather than negation of the self. Neither nature, nor death are seen as overwhelming threats. Salvation

\textsuperscript{76} Danny Kinnane, 'The Oz Church on the Edge'. In Compass. 28 (Autumn, 1994), 40.

\textsuperscript{77} ibid, 41

\textsuperscript{78} Elaine Lindsay, 'A Mystic in her Garden: Spirituality and the Fiction of Barbara Hannahan' in Moray Joy, and Penelope Magee, (eds.), Claiming Our Rites: Studies in Religion by Australian Women Scholars, 20.
is seen as communal not individual. While God is found through joy, creativity and loving kindness. 79

In exploring the fiction of Barbara Hanrahan, which has escaped the attention of religious commentators on Australian spirituality, she refers to Hanrahan's mystical consciousness, revealed in awareness of the presence of God within her, with whom she can be united through creativity, and within the smallest and most insignificant of things. Her heroic figures are people living ordinary lives in the suburbs, who manifest honesty and courage in their responsiveness to the possibilities of their daily lives. Lindsay sees Barbara Hanrahan's writing as part of 'the theology of the settled areas which has grown out of the first hand experiences of women'. 80 Veronica Brady similarly considers:

for so many women writers, it is the kitchens, the gardens, people without jobs or with boring jobs even more perhaps than the world of the successful and the affluent, which constitute the sphere of revelation. This revelation, however, usually comes unexpectedly, as a grace rather than merit. It contradicts religion as a machine to be manipulated by the virtuous and powerful. But it is the grace for which we hope and live. 81

There is a correspondence between the spirituality of Mary MacKillop, with its emphasis on the ordinary, the simple, the hidden, the preciousness of each person, the graciousness of God, and these concerns of contemporary Australian women writers. The views of these women writers also seem to be consonant with many of the views of the women I interviewed, who are located within the Church.

In this chapter I have been intent on revealing something of the spiritual search which characterises contemporary Australian society and of the contribution the beatification of Mary MacKillop constitutes to the ongoing conversation on spirituality in an Australian

79 Lindsay, Elaine, ‘Rewriting God’, Ch. 2.
80 Elaine Lindsay, ‘A Mystic in her Garden’, 30.
81 Veronica Brady, ‘Every Christian in her own place: Women's writing and theological understanding’ in Freedom & Entrapment, 74.
context. What emerges from these texts is the immense openness of these women to the
divine in and through the myriad experiences of their own lives. They respond in the here
and now within Australian multicultural reality to a God who attracts them through love.

I am struck by the sheer goodness of these women. Self-respect has led many of them to
question patriarchal power, patriarchal definitions and expectations of who they should be
and what they should do. Mindfulness of their own dignity has led some of them to leave
marriages, religious communities, parishes and jobs in the search of more authentic forms
of human relationship. For them right relationship is based on self-knowledge and self-
acceptance, on awareness of personal giftedness, strength, endurance, as well as personal
failure, limitation, bias, vulnerability; above all, on awareness of grace at work in their
lives. This grace comes so often within the mutuality of relationship, within the mutuality
of openness to, delight in, and forgiveness of the 'other'. A deep sense of compassion and a
desire for justice borne of their own struggles commits them to social concern and social
responsibility. Because they are aware of the interstructuring of injustice through
patriarchal sexism, through racism and economic exploitation, spirituality does not
function for them as a sedative, as a reinforcement for private religiosity.

For most, if not all of them, their relationship with the Catholic Church, as was evident in
the previous chapter, is one of frustration and alienation. They are aware through their own
experience and study of what is not life giving for them in the interpretations of Scripture
and tradition, in the symbols, rituals and structures. Yet the Christian faith in its Catholic
expression continues to give meaning and direction to their lives; for them the reality is
more than its visible manifestations. It entails a conspiracy of hearts and minds with people
the world over, and through time. Among them as well, there is awareness of, and
openness to learn from the great spiritual wisdom of other religious traditions, including the
spiritual tradition of Australian Aborigines.
Conclusion

The story of the life, achievement and legacy of Mary MacKillop, largely unknown by the Australian people a year before her beatification on January 1995, was retrieved primarily through the agency of the Sisters of St Joseph. This story taken up by the media and blazoned across the nation resulted in the name of Mary MacKillop becoming a household word by the time of her beatification. For women within the Australian Church the beatification presented contradictory messages both symbolically and semiotically. On the one hand there was the retrieval of the life of an Australian woman committed to the inbreaking of the liberating power of the gospel within Australian society, despite the obstacles which confronted her within the institutional church. On the other hand, in the lead up to the beatification and in the actual celebration it was evident that structurally and systemically the church still privileges male clerical power. For women to affirm their own agency in the present as women open to and empowered by the Spirit, entails resistance to processes and practices which emphasise submission, effacement, silence and passive obedience.

The beatification of Mary MacKillop, on January 19, 1995, was inextricably linked with the visit to Australia of Pope John Paul II, one of the most significant international leaders in this last decade of the twentieth century. Named by Time Magazine as Man of the Year in 1994, in recognition of his vision, purposefulness and moral stature, he is nevertheless an authoritarian figure committed to a monarchical view of the papacy. Far removed from the empirical reality of women's everyday lives, he has struggled throughout his leadership to 'be open and to respond to the voices coming from women' throughout the world. His consistent reiteration of papal teaching on the limits to women's ability to control their own fertility and his definitive stand against the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood cast him in the eyes of many women, and in the eyes of the public at large, as a maintainer of male privilege and male clerical power. At the same time many people would acknowledge his attractive personal and spiritual qualities.
The liturgy during the beatification was a powerful conveyor of conflicting messages. The Sisters of St Joseph had struggled so that the beatification Mass might be a simple, inclusive ceremony which mirrored the racial, ethnic, and social diversity of the Australian Church and people. They tried to minimise the dominance of male ministers by pushing the existing liturgical norms as far as they were able. As a result, women were included as readers, altar servers; the national and provincial leaders of the Sisters of St Joseph headed the procession of bishops and sat on the podium; Sr Mary Cresp was the reader of the brief biography of Mary MacKillop during the ceremony; she and Sr Mary O'Dea extended the sign of peace to the Pope. Nevertheless, dominant images of the ceremony are the long procession of mitred bishops ascending the altar stairs and the presiding Pope attended by male clerics. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church, members of which in an earlier period had excommunicated, abused and calumniated Mary MacKillop, now vindicated her heroic goodness. But there was no explicit mention of her sufferings at the hands of officials of the church. Neither was there any apology for them. The leaders of the sisters gave the sign of peace to the Pope as a sign of reconciliation, in continuity with their foundress's spirit of forgiveness. Yet increasingly in contemporary Western societies, including Australian society, the practice of justice entails the naming of abuse, recognition of its systemic effects in acknowledging the wrongs people have suffered, and concerted action by the relevant authority to eliminate such abuses of power in the future. While explicit mention was made of the evils of racism in the prayers of the liturgy, there was no reference to the structural and personal sin of patriarchal sexism, nor to the systemic violence suffered by Mary MacKillop and by countless women and children.

While the Sisters of St Joseph did not see themselves as owning Mary MacKillop, her beatification did entail recognition of their institute, its historical contribution to Australian society and its continuing mission to those most in need. For them the beatification was an outcome of, as well as a further impetus to a return to the spirit of the foundress. At the end of the twentieth century they too share the diminution of membership, the mixed motivation and goal diffusion which accompanies the institutionalisation of religious charisms, and periods of profound cultural transition.
However, that there are Sisters of St Joseph who are Asian immigrants, as well as other Sisters of St Joseph working with communities of Asian Australians within Australia, and with refugees in South East Asia reflects a capacity to adapt to an Australia more attuned to Asia and the Pacific region. Their involvement too, with Aboriginal communities has strengthened their identification with the Aboriginal people. The beatification Mass reflected their multicultural consciousness and awareness of the enriching possibilities of difference.

Sisters of Joseph whom I interviewed were conscious of representing women in preparing for the beatification. The actual experience of their involvement has led to greater consciousness raising in relation to the difficulties and the challenges for women in the church. They were seeking to embrace a participatory, collaborative, inclusive model of decision-making, but during the preparatory phase of the beatification they encountered opposition from men operating from a clerical patriarchal hierarchical model of decision-making. The sisters of the secretariat in reflecting on their experience ask whether the institute's desire to be conciliatory towards the hierarchy may reflect something of a shadow side of the institute. Committed to service within the institutional church which continues to marginalise women, they as all institutes of religious women, can only use their institutional power to effect change in relationship to patriarchal sexism within the church with great circumspection, otherwise they risk being subject to its disciplinary power. This is a real dilemma for religious women because it raises questions about the future of feminine religious life.

The women I interviewed who do not belong to religious communities have greater freedom in relation to the institutional church. While most of them desire to be connected to Jesus Christ in and through the Catholic Church conceived as the community of the People of God, their experience of struggle, of disconnection from themselves and others has led to a certain fluidity in relation to their membership. Some speak of themselves as having separated from the church for a time, and then, as part of their ongoing search for meaning and belonging, as having returned to it. Others, while still considering themselves Catholic, cease to attend church, or to belong to a parish, no longer willing to tolerate hierarchical dominance and the lack of scope
for dialogue and participation. They pursue their spiritual search elsewhere and see themselves as only partially identified with the church. Some have meaningful relationships with religious women. The mutuality of such relationships between women suggest that the divide between lay and religious women is in process of being breached.

Theologically speaking, all women in the church are lay women, united in a common baptism, all called to holiness of life. The canonical division of women into religious women and lay women, prior to the Second Vatican Council, was symbolised by habit and cloister, and a theology of separation from the world for sisters, with an emphasis on the role of Christian motherhood for lay women. This division is based on 'sexual stratification and patriarchal anthropology'. The Pope’s homily on women during the beatification took place within the closed gathering of Sisters of St Joseph, their associates and friends. In it he referred to societal difficulties with the church’s teaching on women as being rooted in a ‘mistaken anthropology’.

The church’s traditional theology conceived of human nature in terms of a male/female, and a corresponding spirit/body dualism. The Pope continues to talk in terms of an anthropology which emphasises two natures, now acknowledged as equal, but different and complementary. In his homily to the Sisters of St Joseph and their colleagues, he spoke of women’s feminine ‘originality’ and particular ‘genius’ exemplified by Mary of Nazareth. Critique of such an anthropology points to its rootedness in the myth of female power, and to its giving ontological status to gender stereotypes. However, within the human sciences, including feminist anthropology, the debate in relation to the extent to which sex differences are innate or largely culturally learned is still in process. Feminist theologians committed to a contextualised theology are hesitant to talk in terms of universals; they are sensitive to differences, and to the difference variables other than gender effect in human experience. For the majority of women in this study, Mary of Nazareth was not a role model, neither were the saints. The women whom they perceived as having been influential for them were women whom they had

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1 Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 1993, 97
personally encountered and with whom they were, or had been, in relationship. The issue of relationship, of relational autonomy, and of human persons as persons in process, are further elements considered in an emerging feminist theological anthropology. They are central in feminist discussions of spirituality.

The issue of spirituality in an Australian context is a central concern for the Sisters of St Joseph. They desired to enter into dialogue with the spirituality, the goodness, already operative within the Australian people, in all their diversity, through the beatification of their foundress. Mary MacKillop exemplifies what it means to search for God in and through the ordinary events of life. As Christian she related to God as Father, Son and Spirit, was motivated by the human life of Jesus and the power of His love, symbolised by the Cross and the Sacred Heart, and saw herself as part of the Christian community, as daughter of the church. She loved people without distinction; though in seeking to right the wrongs of poverty and isolation in Australia her emphasis was on those most in need. Simplicity, and integrity in resisting cooption, are part of her witness. Through the Mary MacKillop Art Award and Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney - museum, place of pilgrimage and of prayer - the Sisters of St Joseph have sought to extend her influence.

Certainly it would be hard to argue that the beatification of Mary MacKillop was without spiritual impact for many people within Australia. Most particularly, the smoking ceremony conducted by Aboriginal elders at Randwick was a powerful reminder of the cosmic dimensions of liturgy, and of the spiritual insights Aboriginal people have to offer all Australians. The inclusion of women as participants in the events of the altar mirrored what is central to Christian feminist spirituality, the reclaiming by women of their imaging of God in and through their embodied being. In this reclaiming there is also a call to become less indifferent to forms of global systemic violence, multiple in their impact, which distort the image of God in people. The beatification of Mary MacKillop illustrates that the church, as it seeks to proclaim the justice of God in the wider world, stands in need of the liberating grace of justice in its internal relationships and structures. The voices of Christian feminist theologians, in
articulating distortions of the gospel message, may rightly be considered a grace for the church in our times.

This study opens up possible avenues for future research on women within the church by women themselves. At a later date the Sisters of St Joseph will be able to evaluate the impact of the beatification on their own evolution as an institute of religious women within Australian society. Women have in the past been faithful in their response to God in and through the church, but in the present because of women's systemic marginalisation, the institutional Church risks losing the adherence of many women, particularly young women. The issue of role models for women would lend itself to small scale detailed studies: for instance in relation to the role models proposed and the actual role models of adolescent Catholic girls in a variety of settings. Many contemporary feminists educated in Catholic schools speak of the powerful influence of sisters who ran their own institutions at a time when women rarely ran any institution. Now this has largely disappeared. Research on women in leadership roles within existing Catholic educational, health and welfare institutions could therefore be a valuable subject for research, given that many roles formerly held by women have now been assumed by men. Research on the exchange of experiences between white women and Aboriginal women, between white women and women differently coloured who see themselves as Catholic/Christian may also assist the process of reconciliation within the church and within the society.
Appendix I

Index of Interviewees: Subjects of The Study

The names of the subjects of this study have been changed in order to preserve anonymity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Place of Interview</th>
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<td>1 Christiane</td>
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<td>2 Marian</td>
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<td>23 Andrea</td>
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<td>24 Rachel</td>
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</table>
Appendix II

Research Questions

1. What did the beatification of Mary MacKillop say to your experience?

2. In what ways do you think this event may have been significant for the country as a whole?

3. Are there some ways in which you can identify with Mary MacKillop?

4. Are there women whom you find more attractive than Mary MacKillop as a model of what it is to be a Christian woman?

5. What is it like for you as a woman in the contemporary Australian Catholic Church?

6. If people were to be critical of the beatification what do you think some of their criticisms might be?

7. Was there any thing about the event which irritated or upset you?
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