Commentary

We are delighted that members are taking the opportunity to respond to items in previous REVIEWS. This section contains three such papers offered as responses to earlier work. Rodney Purvis takes up the Religion and the Law theme, introduced by Michael Eburn, with a paper on the tensions between secular and religious law in Family Court matters. Richard Hutch follows on from John Henningham with a critical analysis of journalists reporting of religious matters. Gary Bouma offers a sociology of knowledge piece on modern theology extending the cultural analysis of Roland Boer and the cyberspace offering of John Wren-Lewis.

Civil Relief but Mental Anguish
Family Law in Australia impacting on Religious Persuasion

Rodney N Purvis

" ... the unalterable law of God fully confirmed by Christ, a law that can never be deprived of its force by the decrees of men, the ideas of a people, or the will of any legislator: What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."
"... on the one hand there is modern legislation that permits divorce and guarantees women political rights equal to those of men. On the other hand, the force of tradition continues to make wives subordinate to their husbands ..."

Australia is a secular State. The statutory provisions as to divorce, custody and property distribution are uniform throughout the country and can apply to any resident, whether domiciled in the country or not. There is no way that a person in Australia can have questions arising consequent on a breakdown of marriage legally resolved other than by means of applying the provisions of the *Family Law Act*. As a consequence, the position of women and men as maintained by the various religious affiliations to which residents may belong is affected. This paper is directed to analysing this effect, especially upon women. How does a woman accommodate psychologically the conflict between the beliefs and tenets of her

persuasion and the actuality of the secular law?

The history of marriage and divorce in Australia provides an illustration of the State developing secular standards freed from historic and religious connections. Religious groups on the other hand view themselves as a source of authority at least equal to the State, and churches as well as states in many respects attempt to regulate the lives of their members[1].

Marriage is often comprised of a dual ceremony, a religious occasion and a procedure in accord with the civil law. Yet, on dissolution, there is compliance with the secular law but what as to the religious obligations and responsibilities assumed and rights obtained at the time of the other ceremony? This may not matter to many, but it is of significance to some. How is this concern to be met in the Australian society? How does the absence of a mechanism for dissolving a marriage created in the sight of God, in accord with the Sura of the Qur'an to affect the believer?

Does a woman see in the civil procedure a means of release from a marriage, which release is not available under the religious law, be it the Torah, Christian encyclica or the Qur'an? Does she see a means of achieving justice, equity and security for children not available to her within the context of her religious affiliation? If this be so, then what of her future in her religion? If she steps outsides the confines, the tenets, the theological doctrines and dogmas rendered applicable over generations, what then of her continuing belief, if any? Can she maintain her affiliation to a faith which she found wanting in her time of need?

Various of the world's religions regard a threat to the family, a divorce, as a fundamental challenge to the faith. This is more so when a religion has a predominantly ethnic base[2]. Threats to the family in Judaism, Islam and Hinduism are cases in point whereas Christian and Buddhist scriptures do not so often relate to this aspect. Each of the major world religions endeavour to curtail the freedom of their adherents to conduct their marital affairs and a termination of them purely in accord with the civil law.

For many Jewish women, particularly traditionalists, patriarchal patterns may still rule, this because Judaism cannot be unmindful of the past history of the Jews. Jewish divorce law, sourced in Deuteronomy 24, gives a husband the non-reciprocal right to divorce his wife, by writing her a bill of divorce, a get. The rabbis may be keenly aware of the injustice of this situation and may try to mitigate its effects on women[3]. But the rabbis act only within the framework of Deuteronomy and divorce remains open to abuse by husbands who refuse to write a get or use a wife's need for one to extract money or other concessions. The casualty of this position is the ugunah, the "chained wife", the wife essentially no longer married but unfree to remarry due either to tragic circumstance or the vindictiveness of her husband. Women are "acquired in marriage and are passive in the dissolution of it"[4].

In former times, Jewish authorities could exert political, social, economic and even physical pressure on a husband whom they considered obligated to give his wife a get, but today, such ecclesiastical pressure is unacceptable in a secular society[5]. Authorities are loathe to intervene in religious questions which are considered to be essentially private, so husbands can refuse to grant their wives Jewish divorces with impunity.

Jewish law is encumbered with the tradition that the act of divorce must be that of the husband. Judaism does not admit that the capacity to terminate a marriage lies with a court. Even if Australian law decrees a divorce under the *Family Law Act*, there will still be many who are either permanently or contingently able to enter into a fresh union only in accordance with the law associated with their religion[6]. A divorce is a licence to remarry. If remarriage is rendered impossible because of obstacles placed in its way by the religious tenets held by the parties, there may then be created a "limping marriage" with the designs of the secular authorities being thwarted by ecclesiastical laws[7].

The words contained in the encyclical letter of *Casti Connubii*, 31 December 1930, "on Christian marriage", permeate to a greater or lesser extent Christian belief. The encyclical was directed to members of the Roman Catholic faith, but the words and the practice extend to and are embraced by Anglicans and many of protestant persuasion. The encyclical recites "..... day by day, more and more vehemently, they [advocates of the neo-paganism of today] continue by legislation to attack the indissolubility of the marriage bond, proclaiming that the lawfulness of divorce must be recognised and that the antiquated laws should give place to a new and more humane legislation". The encyclical recites the arguments put forward by those propounding the "humane legislation", referring to "the good of both parties", "the guilty should be withdrawn from a union", "the good of the child", and "the common good of society". There is a recitation also of the contention "that marriage being a private contract, is like other private contracts, to be left to the consent and good pleasure of both parties and so can be dissolved for any reason whatsoever". However, the encyclical in no uncertain terms then provides that:

"Opposed to all these reckless opinions ... stands the unalterable law of God fully confirmed by Christ, a law that can never be deprived of its force by the decrees of men, the ideas of people or the will of any legislator: What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. And if any man act contrary to this law ... his action is null and void and the consequence remains ... "

The encyclical is firm in its view, upholding "the dignity and position of women in civil and domestic society", the same being restored by the good involved in the absolute indissolubility of wedlock while, by dissolution of marriage, being "shamefully lowered and the danger ... incurred of their being considered outcasts, slaves of the lusts of men"[8].

Presented with this position, women, more particularly those of a Roman Catholic persuasion, must carry with them the words of the encyclical letter in the event of their obtaining a divorce under the civil law. By doing so, they act contrary to the dictates of the ultimate source on earth of the morals of their religion. The mental anguish can be great.

Catholics are warned against espousing the relaxing of the divorce laws; greater freedom of divorce is seen as not only damaging the family structure, but also as lowering the position of women, leaving them helpless and undefended in a ruthless male world[9].

It is the current conviction of most Muslim women that there is a wealth of evidence from the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet to suggest that women were intended to be full partners in "the new society of Islam"[10]. But classical Islamic

law, with varying degrees of rigidity, provides only limited opportunities for a wife to obtain a release from an unwanted matrimonial tie. The right to obtain a divorce may vest in the husband[11]. One school may recognise the possibility of a divorce by mutual consent by the offering of compensation or a mutual release from outstanding financial commitments. Another school may permit a wife the right to apply for a judicial dissolution of the marriage[12].

A husband is, however, still favoured in the area of divorce, and although it is now possible in most Islamic countries for a wife to apply to a court to obtain a divorce, the man, according to the classical law, has an unfettered right to repudiate his wife without proffering any good reason[13]. As with Judaism, so is the Islamic law encumbered with tradition whereby the act of divorce should be that of the husband. Tensions may become high as Muslim women struggle with and attempt to reconcile the affirmation of their heritage with the challenges of a modern world[14].

Islamic women availing themselves of the provisions of the *Family Law Act* may well be confronted with the pain arising from conflict between the "divinely revealed plan for human existence" and the secular law.

Hindus in India and some other countries are governed by Hindu personal law in marriage, divorce and succession. Whilst there have been reforms, there is still discrimination against daughters in inheritance. Fathers are automatically guardians of legitimate children over the age of five. Threats to the family seen in secular law appear to many Hindus, both women as well as men, to undermine the fabric of their society[15].

The basic position in Hindu society is that "irrespective of temperament and character, nature and behaviour, the spouses belong to each other for eternity, even in future births, ... a woman [is] identified and defined as and by virtue of her role as housewife and mother, ... belonging to her husband and his family, and ... [incorporated] ... into their property owning unit for good and ill ... [this] ... the best thing for her in the long run"[16]. The wife's sacrifice "was rewarded by the merit of [her] having children ... ".

It is said[17] that one of the most heartening things about modern Buddhism is that women are stepping to the forefront at all levels of Buddhist activity. Women are breathing a fresh life into "the old religion"; they are helping it to change. What is apparent is that women do not seem "to be a force for a return to the Hindu tradition; they are bringing an intensely personal view to Buddhism"[18]. Buddhist women come from a tradition in which they not only have been strong and useful in the home and in the workforce, but also creative in literature and religion[19]. It is, however, apparent that the Buddhist woman has experienced a status consistent with the predominance of power residing in her husband, his family and her sons, if any. "The patriarchal structure of the lineage or the male family gave women no power, although it needed them for its own perpetuation"[20].

The Australian Aborigine woman had and has a role emphasised as that of nurturer of people, land and relationships[21]. Women assumed a responsibility to maintain harmoniously a complex set of relationships between the living and the land, manifesting the intertwining of health and emotional

management. They nurtured land through their health and curing rituals, they resolved conflict and restored social harmony and managed emotions. "Thus today woman's role in the domain of emotional management is, like their role in the maintenance of health and harmony, truly awesome"[22]. Women trace their rights and responsibilities for the maintenance of their religious heritage to the past in diverse ways. Any analysis of women's role and status and gender values must be seen without a framework which allows for the dynamic intertwining of the sexual politics of Aboriginal society[23].

Whilst within Aboriginal society, marriages conform more closely to the rule of polygyny with younger women going to older men as promised wives, these arrangements being within the ceremonial alliances of initiation, there are sanctions applied to cruel or irresponsible husbands[24]. There is a complex web of rights and responsibilities in which a promised marriage is enmeshed, providing protection and support for these wives. Marriage arrangements exist which cannot or should not be neglected or relegated to the domain of the secular law. Ties of affinity and descent are implicit in contracted marriages, which become an important factor in understanding the ritual maintenance of land. Marriage alliances, descent based relations to land, are all underwritten by the notion of ritual reciprocity[25].

It is argued by some[26] that "there is a significant biological difference between men and women that must be taken into account in assessing the family and men's and women's roles in it ... the female's attachment to her children is biological, whereas the man's is social ... mating and parenting are more closely linked for women than for men and the 'most important relationship in human society' is the mother/child bond ... to achieve true freedom, women today must not deny their 'need as women to love or to have children'. "

However, from a secular point of view, whilst the best interests of a child may have some relation to membership in a religious group, a group's right or a person's right by reason of a religious affiliation is not necessarily a part of the formulation. With Islamic women, it is said that it "is an instinctive part of a female's spiritual role to provide for the needs of her offspring, for the newborn's nourishment is a symbol of divine providence ..."[27].

What then as to the custody of children in the context of the *Family Law Act* where it is the best interests of the child that are to be of prime concern? After divorce of an Islamic couple, custody of the children, according to Islamic law, usually would go to the father once the children have reached the age of seven. Where a mother seeks to have the children with her, and by so doing, knowingly acts in breach of her faith, her beliefs, her conscience, the teaching of her god, what is she to do? There is presently no escape. She either complies with the dictates of her religion which might entail a handing over of the children to their father or avails herself of the procedure of the civil law.

A consequence of all that has been said is, as many interviewees have recited, that women may maintain a situation of suffering and pain because of and obliged by religious beliefs and teaching that militate against discharge from responsibilities assumed at marriage or that allow relief only in a fashion not

considered by the mother and wife appropriate to the circumstances.

It has been said by some with whom these questions have been discussed that a mechanism should be found whereby, if obligations are assumed in a religious context at the time of marriage, then they should be quit at the time of divorce, failing which a marriage not be terminated. Alternatively, that provision be made in a marriage contract approved by the church, synagogue or other relevant body and recognised by the law for dissolution of marriage, and the position that would then pertain as to remarriage and custody. The latter may not be beyond the realm of possibility in the light of inroads being made by feminism and constructionist hermeneutics. After all, the terms on which religious adherents may historically be divorced within Islam, Judaism and Christianity, it is said, bear the hallmarks of male authorship.

A situation should not be allowed to continue where at marriage, civil and religious obligations are assumed, but at divorce, only the civil responsibilities are discharged. At least a means should be provided for the soul to be placated. "I have not now done wrong in the eyes of my god". What cynicism is seen in the eyes of a beholder where at a wedding, the priest commands a congregation "what God has joined in marriage, let no man put asunder", the priest and the congregation well knowing that the civil law makes provision for putting "asunder" nearly on request. How can a woman, and it is more often the female than the male who seeks the protection and relief of the law, live with her conscience, let alone remarry, when she is clearly acting in breach of her religious dictate.

Thus, the answer in part to the question raised early in this paper: it is necessary and desirable for there to be a rethinking of the obligations assumed at marriage, where the same are taken in a religious environment, having in mind that the marriage may be dissolved civilly without the parties being deprived of and released from their religious rights and responsibilities.

"Because religion regularly functions as a sanction for the social relations in a given culture, religion has on its hands the stains of many women's blood and tears"[28]

Notes

1. Weisprod C, Family Church and State: an Essay on Constitutionalism and Religious Authority, *Journal of Family Law*, 745
2. Sharma, Arvind, *Today's Women in World Religions*, State University of New York Press, 1994: 35
3. Plaskow J, *Standing Again at Sinai*, Harper and Row, San Francisco: 62
4. Plaskow, op. cit.: 63
5. *The Jewish Law Annual No. 4*, E J Brill Leiden, 1981: 189
6. ibid.: 245
7. ibid.: 280
8. Clark E. and Another, *Women and Religion*, Harper & Row, 1977: 237-238
9. ibid.: 227
10. Talhami G, *The Human Rights of Women in Islam*: 6
11. *The Jewish Law Annual*, op. cit.: 226
12. ibid.: 226
13. ibid.: 231
14. Sharma, op. cit.: 308
15. ibid.: 125
16. *The Jewish Law Annual*, op. cit.: 246
17. Sharma, op. cit.: 159
18. Cabezon J I. *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, SUNY Press: 102

19. ibid.
20. ibid.: 170
21. Crotty R.B., *The Charles Strong Lectures, 1972-1984*, E J Brill, Leiden, 1987: 39
22. ibid.
23. ibid.: 49
24. Bell D., *Daughters of the Dreaming*, Allen & Unwin, 1988: 80
25. ibid.: 269
26. Heckman S.J., *Women's Nature, Gender and Knowledge*, Boston, North Eastern University Press, 1990: 138
27. Carmody D.L., *Women and World Religions*, Prentice Hall: 195
28. ibid.: 226

Teaching Journalists to Report Religion

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Perhaps it is common knowledge that journalists are of mixed minds about reporting on religion in society. On the one hand, it is easy to **sensationalise** religion, and to allude to its possible anti-social, even sinister dimensions. Headlines like "Cult Menace," "Seige at Waco" and "Are Priests Child Molesters?" gain the instant attention of the public. On the other hand, there is a tendency for journalists to **ignore** religion, or just not give it as much attention as it may merit, given the public's persistent interest in the topic. At its worst, religion all too often appears to be hoisted on the petard of oppressive moralism, for which the Reverend Fred Nile commenting on Sydney's Gay Mardi Gras is a caricature. At its best, journalists enjoin religion as a personal avenue of self exploration and growth, one that contributes to sanguine "New Age" outlooks suitable for cappuccino bar conversations. Sensationalising and ignoring are ready, automatic responses to religion in society. They hardly result from reflection about religion, or from learning what those who study religion in society have to say about it. As such, both approaches are of limited scope. They should be exchanged for more sophisticated lines of investigation and interrogation of the phenomenon of religion as a force in people's lives.

Religion Inside and Out

And it is the scope of religion in society that is at issue, and the need for journalists and others to broaden what they understand religion to be. Thus, one could well ask, is religion only a bizarre social aberration that is doomed to extinction, often by its own hand? Is it only a source of reassurance for the foundering egos of the effete and faint-hearted? A recent discussion in the sociology of religion points in a direction in which an answer to such questions would have to be cast in the negative. Sociologists of religion offer journalists and others the "next step" on the road to a more sophisticated approach to reporting religion. What is at stake in this recent discussion amongst sociologists of religion?

The particular discussion offered has to do with a distinction between what is called "implicit religion" and "explicit religion." Implicit religion is the core or set of personal beliefs and value orientations that sustain an individual and provide guidance, a sense of direction and/or a sense of belonging in contemporary postmodern times, which is difficult indeed. In popular jargon, implicit religion is often referred to as "spirituality," as in "she is a very 'spiritual' person." Explicit religion is the corroboration of implicit religion by means of interpersonal interaction and collective life. Simply put, and again in popular phrasing, this is a "community of faith" in action together, giving (usually) institutionalised vent to their shared implicit religion. A people's longing for the sacred, or implicit religion, remains constant, whilst its institutionalised forms, or explicit religion, come and go with time and place. The point to be made is that once the distinction between explicit and implicit religion is recognised, journalists and others may begin to broaden their understanding of the nature and dynamics of religion in society.

Why is expressing implicit religion difficult, or why do implicit and explicit religion appear to have come unstuck? Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992: 5) offers a compelling analysis:

In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical inter-play of the local and global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options.

If this is the way society is, then the "self" becomes the locus of implicit religion, or a "sacred centre," in which one's identity, says Giddens (1992: 54; his emphasis), "is not to be found in behaviour, nor, - important though this is - the reactions of others, but in the capacity **to keep a particular narrative going**. The individual's biography, . . . cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self." Sociologists of religion have noticed an eclipse of the so-called "grand narratives" of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on. Grand narratives are frameworks of self-understanding involving mythic rationales for how the world came into being ("creation myths"), descriptions of human nature as sacred, and possible scenarios for how the world will come to an end, if ever it should. Unlike people living in centuries past, contemporary individuals face too much ideological competition to be satisfied for long adopting one such grand narrative, along with its institutional outcroppings, over another. In other words, whilst implicit religion is alive and well, explicit religion, or the playing out of grand narratives as forms of social life, is found wanting time and again. This is what most journalists miss, especially those who, perhaps without thinking too much about it, readily identify religion only with religious institutions like churches.

Social Reactions to Religious Uncertainty

However, sociologists have described three social reactions to the eclipse of the grand narratives of explicit religion (Cavalcanti and Chalfant, 1994: 444). Journalists who step beyond either sensationalising religion or ignoring it have tended to report on religion according to one or more of these three social reactions. This is all well and good, and to do so increases the sophistication with which religion in society is reported, but there is more to it as we shall soon see. However, let us first ask what those three social reactions to the attenuation of institutionalised religion are. **First**, sociologists of religion have been intrigued by a resurgent, aggressive fundamentalism that fears changing times and clings onto older stories about the creation of the world and the nature and destiny of human life, simply assuming there is no problem of belief in the postmodern world. Shi'ite Islam is a case in point. **Second**, also noted has been the emergence of new religions like Scientology, the Unification Church, Hare Krishna, Neo-Pagan groups and The Family. These represent explorations of explicit religious forms as new expressions of implicit religion, and are often perceived to be exotic, even culturally alien. **Third**, also evident has been "supermarket" religion, where it is up to the lone individual, acting in virtual isolation from others, to pick and to chose diverse elements out of which to weave together a meaningful outlook or personal faith of some sort. There is, however, an omission, another social reaction to the eclipse of the grand narrative that most journalists and sociologists themselves have missed.

Little study has been done on the pilgrimage of those who have been implicitly religious but felt a need for collective involvement **apart from** the social reactions that are represented by fundamentalist faiths, new religious movements, or totally privatised amalgams of explicit religion. The stories individuals tell - their biographical narratives -help us to understand their spiritual quests and the meanings of their collective life. Few reports of those whose implicit search found its end in new, nonfundamentalist forms of explicit religion, rooted in ancient, continuing traditions of faith have been investigated. This is especially the case with Christianity. The recent visit to Sydney, Australia (19-20 January, 1995, the two days following the devastating earthquake in Kobe, Japan) by Pope John Paul for the purpose of declaring Mother Mary MacKillop "blessed," itself a step in the process of beatifying her as an Australian saint of the Catholic Church, offers a glimpse into the matter. Reports of this event, even a noticeable lack of reporting, demonstrate, perhaps, how journalists in particular have for the most part fallen short in reporting on the explicit religion - collective involvement in a community of faith - of Catholic Christians in such a way as to increase the perception by the public that this is, indeed, a justifiable expression of implicit faith. The importance of the collective life of the Australian Catholic community as the ground of their implicit religion has been largely missed by the journalistic establishment. This statement can be generalised and said about most other collective lives of major religious traditions, for example, Islam and

Buddhism, in Australia. Some major journalistic reporting on the Pope's visit may serve to exemplify the pattern.

Reports of the Pope's Visit to Sydney

The question before us is, have journalists reported on how Catholics themselves have been responsive to the way of life available to them within the Catholic Church as a community of faith, insofar as this has been accentuated by the Pope's visit to Australia and Mother Mary MacKillop's beatification? Have reports caught the sense of how Catholics bounce their individual, implicit feelings off the traditions of Catholicism in this event? Three print media have been perused for clues. Two of them are national publications, namely, *The Bulletin* and *The Australian*, and the third is the well regarded local Sydney newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald.*

For starters, Edmund Campion's (1995) cover story for *The Bulletin* on January 17 demonstrates only a preponderance of implicit religion, itself somehow aiming to boil down Mother Mary MacKillop's "spirituality" for mass consumption. This is fine as far as it goes. However, Campion's emphasis may falter insofar as it links implicit religion not with the explicit religion of the Catholic Church, but instead with the collective life of all Australian people past and present, Catholic or not, who are specifically engaged in feminist issues associated with patriarchal institutional life in society. According to Campion (1995: 23), Mary MacKillop is a "role model" who is "important for psychic health" and, like other role models, she shows us how to overcome "the battering life gives to people like us." Thus, Campion clearly ignores the explicit religion of Catholicism, and fails to link it with the genuine implicit religion of MacKillop and other Catholics.

In the following distinction, Campion (1995: 23) engages instead in perhaps inaccurate speculation about how MacKillop's spirituality could best be understood as only an idiom of Australian cultural identity:

> *Mary Mackillop? She may seem an unlikely role model or hero for everyday Australians: a rural school teacher who started a religious body to teach the children of the poor, who lived her adult life in convents, wearing a religious uniform and spending many hours in prayer. These may be the ho-hum elements which the Vatican will choose to highlight about her. But closer to home, specialists are asking about the parts of her life which resonate with wider Australian experience.*

Would that Campion had told us something about those "ho-hum elements," as they themselves specifically represent the collective life of the explicit side of the Catholic faith! All we get is an impression that makes Mother Mary into a genteel, "tea and scones" nun placed by unidentified specialists at contemporary barricades that would appear to be built out of rhetoric about social and political relations between the sexes. (Would a similar story be told if the Pope came to beatify a man?) Concludes Campion (1995: 25), "So, it is not likely that the pope will say the final word on why Mary MacKillop might become an Australian role model." Whilst this may be true, readers are left wanting some pointed, clear word about the explicit religious nature of Mother Mary's steadfast and creative spirituality, or implicit faith.

The following week's edition of *The Bulletin*, January 24/31, 1995, bears the banner on the cover, "Bumper Issue," and features "Australia 2000" throughout. Included is "The way we will be at the turn of the century: our food, cars, computers, fashion, arts and housing . . . Plus lots of fun and games, short stories, travel, beaut yarns and all our usual fare." Nothing whatsoever about the Pope's visit is reported, not even a short follow-on story from Edmund Campion's piece about Mother Mary MacKillop as an Australian "role-model." It is as if the event never happened in Sydney in 1995, and this non-event status (religion ignored) makes for a major journalistic omission.

Articles in *The Australian* edge into descriptions of Mother Mary's implicit religion, including the faith of her followers in the Josephite order of nuns. However, the articles fall short of telling a complete story about how the explicit religion of practicing Catholics is coupled to their spirituality. Very little is said about saints in the church, and about the rites of beatification and canonisation by which saints are declared, and for this reason readers are left with only half of the story of the Pope's visit. In "MacKillop Ideals 'Key to National Harmony'" on January 19, D.D. McNicoll opts to quote extensively the Pope's own words. The Pontiff's words point to the implicit religion of Catholicism and the Josephite Order. McNicoll (1995a: 5) reports that the Pope said,

We are reminded of all that the arts, sciences, government and religion have contributed to the creative and vigorous society which has developed in your land. To the believer, these works of human hands bring to mind a deeper, more mysterious reality . . . Mary MacKillop consecrated her whole being to God and by fulfilling the demands of her religious vocation she sought every day to fulfil the first of all Commandments: 'You shall love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' . . . Because the love of God inflamed her heart, she tenaciously defended the weak, the poor, the suffering and all those on the margins of society.

The Pope's words point toward the inner life of implicit religion. They eschew talk about Mary MacKillop as a social "role model" who might be good for the "psychic health" of Australians. Any use made of Mary MacKillop to guide living plays itself out in implicit religion that would seek explicit, collective expression. Writes McNicoll (1995a: 5), "The Pope called on all Australians to look to the example of Mother Mary and let her spirit stir in each one the desire to do God's handiwork." The Pope cued McNicoll (1995a: 5) by saying that his "ardent prayer" was that the church in Australia "will inspire, encourage and guide the building of a nation whose history will be deeply marked by love of God and neighbour."

Although articles in *The Australian* tipped the balance mainly in the direction of describing the Pope's visit as an occasion for reviving the implicit religion of the Catholic Church and, to a lesser degree, the Australian nation, some effort appeared in the paper on the following day to draw attention to explicit religion, or the collective life of the Catholic community and the meaning of saint-making within it. Errol Simper and D.D. McNicoll (1995: 1) described views of Sydney's Cardinal Clancy on the meaning of saints in the church, and the importance of saints (and martyrs) to

Australian Catholics in particular, in their article, "A Nation Consecrated":

Cardinal Clancy said that the Australian church had lacked 'the acknowledged saints and martyrs such are the strength and the crown' of older churches. It was therefore 'impossible to exaggerate the importance' to Australia of the MacKillop beatification.

This is indeed commendable, as is the effort made by these two journalists to give space to the Pope's view of women in the church in a way that is quite different from the construal of, say, Edmund Campion in *The Bulletin* three days earlier. The Pope, write Simper and McNicoll (1995: 1),

. . . said there was a 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 . . . An authentic theology of women based upon an anthropology revealed in the mystery of creation and redemption, brings to light women's feminine originality and particular genius.

Here more implicit religion is articulated, but this time it raises high the Pope as an icon, a part of an explicit tradition of religion in which saying such things is meaningful and taken as truthful by the collected faithful. The iconic stature of the Pope as the centrepiece of the explicit religion of Catholicism is described by James Murray (1995a: 5) in his article, "A Pastor Reaches Out to His Flock," in *The Australian* on January 20:

It has been the experience of a great many who have seen this Pope that he radiates a sense of God. And that when he speaks of 'mystery', it is spoken with a sense of interior wonder.

However, Murray's effort to articulate explicit religion on page 5 collapses in the light of his Campion-like piece on page 1, "Battling Nun Practises What She Preached" (Murray, 1995b), which is simplistic bush theological caricature that has little to do with either explicit or implicit religion.

Unlike both *The Bulletin* and *The Australian*, the local broadsheet, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, came closest to the mark of integrating implicit and explicit religion. Of these three publications, it was the only one to go beyond Mother Mary's or the Pope's "spirituality," and to explain in depth the explicit religion that was the *raison d'être* of the Pope's visit to Sydney. The Pope's purpose was clearly "institutional," namely, to beatify Mother Mary MacKillop and, thus, to initiate the process of her canonisation as a saint of the Catholic Church. Two days before the Pope's arrival, Richard Leonard (1995a) wrote, "Signs of a Saint is that Vital Second Miracle" on January 17. Leonard, a Jesuit priest, explains the criteria for sainthood in Catholicism, chief of which is that evidence must be given of a would-be saint having performed not just one but two "miracles." No mention of this important and essential point was made in relevant articles in either *The Bulletin* or *The Australian*, which could be cause for serious concern amongst knowledgeable, reflective readers.

Furthermore, on January 19 a piece appeared by Paul McGeough (1995) on page 1, "A Silent Witness to Mary's Miracle," and it let readers in on Mother Mary's first of two required miracles. The article was about a woman of 57 years who dramatically recovered from leukemia in 1961 after a "formal novena of prayers" was directed to Mother Mary

MacKillop by several Josephite nuns, one of whom was an aunt of the afflicted woman, asking for healing (McGeough, 1995: 1). Evidently this woman was in the small gathering of the faithful, who had assembled near the Pope as he prayed next to Mary MacKillop's grave. Thus, we learn from *The Sydney Morning Herald* that authenticated miracles are essential for sainthood, a critical point which *The Bulletin* and *The Australian* never make clear. This point is a bare fact of the explicit religion of Catholicism, or the institutional infrastructure, that carries the moral and spiritual force of the implicit religion of the faithful.

There finally appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on January 19 another article by Richard Leonard (1995b) that capped-off the commendable explanation of the explicit religion of the entire event of the Pope's visit, "Simple Ceremony Will Transform MacKillop." Once a second miracle is documented (as undoubtedly it will be?), then Mother Mary MacKillop will be able to be canonised, or made a saint universal. For now, however, she is only beatified, this state having been enacted by the Pope in the simple rite Leonard (1995b: 8) describes, in which the Pope said, "and hereafter [she] shall be venerated as blessed" by Australian Catholics. Thus, it would appear that the local Sydney newspaper, not the national publications, invited readers to an informative and sophisticated consideration of the meaning of the Pope's visit to Sydney.

We can only hope, perhaps urge, that journalists and others who report on religion in society work diligently to avoid sensationalising and/or ignoring religion. Once over those stumbling blocks, we can urge that the subject of religion in society be viewed not only through the lens of well studied social reactions to postmodernism (loss of "grand narratives"). But also (and moreover) that it be viewed with an integrated and balanced regard for implicit ("spiritual") religion and explicit ("institutional") religion together. Three cheers to those writers, perhaps like Richard Leonard, Paul McGeough and others like them, who continue to make the effort!

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God, Spock and the New Physics: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Changes in Christian Theology[1]

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Exodus 20: 1-4 'Then God spake all these words. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; you shall have no other gods before me. Your shall not make for yourself any image, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.'

Introduction

How do we conceive of God? What are sources of our images of God? How are we to speak of God? What shapes the way we speak of God? I do not raise these questions primarily as an epistemological concern of, 'How are we to know God?' Rather, let us assume that we, or if not we, at least some people, experience God, the beyond, that which is more than, that which environs, that which qualifies. At the very minimum, let us admit that some people have these experiences which they wish to describe as experiences of the ultimate reality of the universe. Moreover, there are groups of people who share about such experiences in ways which promote at least an intersubjective understanding of these experiences if not a trans-subjective one. For example, there is a considerable consistency in the reports of mystical experiences even among people who are not in communication with each other. They are usually affirming, sustaining, feeling of mercy, uplifting, holding, the sense of a presence.

Given this, the issue becomes, How are believers to describe, discuss and articulate these experiences, these relationships? Beyond the problem of describing mystical experiences, or relating to others our experiences of the transcendent, believers who choose to communicate about their belief must find some language with which to communicate. How are believers to talk of God? I do raise the issue of imaging God as a foundational theological question. If theology is faith seeking understanding, it presupposes a relationship between believer and believed, between us and God. How are believers to describe their relationship with God?

If we accept an experience of God as given, the issue becomes one of expressing, communicating, imaging, conceptualising that experience. In doing this believers in a Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition have long been enjoined not to make images of the beyond (2nd Commandment), but this has not stopped most theologians from chiselling out mental images of the divine. Moreover, a doctrine of revelation that claims that God self-discloses to humans does not

help in this problem. Such a disclosure must still be imaged, conceptualised and expressed in order to be communicated. The problem remains, 'How do we eff the ineffable?'

Whatever, believers have been effing the ineffable for thousands of years and libraries are full of volumes of theology. Moreover, if the shelves of space given to the topic in book stores and the emergence of stores devoted to purveying crystals, new age remedies and other such wonders are any evidence, spirituality is one of the strongest interests of Western mortals.

This article reframes the question and asks, 'What are the sources of our images of God?' The question is asked as a question within the sociology of knowledge and then asks what are the socio-cultural factors reshaping the way believers in western societies image God. In doing this, several overlapping trends between theology, sociology and theoretical physics will be noted. As with any question emerging from our lives, this one is susceptible to analysis from multiple perspectives. It should be noted that this article does not proceed from a 'history of ideas' perspective but from a sociology of knowledge perspective.

A Sociology of Knowledge Approach

The question, 'How do we conceive of God?', when raised as a question within the sociology of religion, in particular in the sociology of knowledge aspect of this discipline, becomes, 'What are the social sources of the ways in which God is conceived?'.

The sociology of knowledge studies socio-cultural influences on the development, distribution and impact of various ideas. It also examines the ways in which certain ideas serve the interests of various groups in a society. Sociologists observing the process of knowledge formation in various groups and places note similarities among seemingly disparate groups or enterprises.

One of these key understandings is that all knowledge, all imaging, all expression is perspectival. Knowledge reflects the socio-cultural milieu within which it was formed. To understand another's knowledge requires to some extent taking the position of the other. For example, each of the sciences says: 'Look at the world this way and see what we see' and Scientism says, 'This way is the only way to look at the world and this is all there is to see'. Similarly, each religion says: 'Look at the universe this way and see what we see' and fundamentalism within each religion says, 'this way is the only way to look at the universe and this is all there is to see'. Each perspective, each culture, each science, each religion involves a committed observational stance, or a commitment to a particular methodology, or the adoption of a particular frame of observation. These commitments are made prior to seeing, prior to observing, prior to 'knowing'. They are meta-theoretical, meta-theological, meta-scientific.

In this sense, belief precedes seeing, hearing and knowing. This is true of each culture, religion, philosophy and science. A decision must be made to adopt the perspective, or one must be raised within it. This decision is an act of orienting will which cannot be legitimated from within the perspective nor can it be justified by its products, for each of these approaches are attempts at self-justification. Thus, a

decision to reject an experience of God as impossible is as much a prior metaphysical judgement as the decision to be open to the possibility of such an experience. Either decision is made prior to rational reflection and is therefore meta-rational.

Not only is all knowledge perspectival, each culture, each perspective, each science and each religion presents canons of judgement, rules for knowing and deciding when something is known. This is as true of mystics as it is of physicists. The failure of one group to understand or appreciate the other is no excuse for dismissing their knowledge as irrelevant or unworthy of consideration.

A Swansonian view of the social origins of change in theology

One of the clearest applications of a sociology of knowledge approach to the development of and changes in theology is found in the work of Guy Swanson, who developed further the seminal ideas of Durkheim regarding the societal base of religious imagery (Durkheim 1915:462ff). For Durkheim, Swanson, and for the Social Anthropology tradition upon which they depended, one essential point of the sociology of knowledge regarding the emergence of and change in patterns of thinking is that our experience is the source of our concepts and shapes our patterns of thought.

The early social anthropologists focussed on the Human experience of power in nature as a source of imagery for the actions of God or the spirits. For example the use of the Hebrew word *ruach* or the Greek *pneuma* for spirit of God, human spirit, but also breath (life force) arising from human experience with wind which is an invisible but powerful force.

Durkheim and Swanson move beyond our experiences with nature and turn our attention to experiences of the social as sources of images of God. That experiences with human society are also a source of images for expressing the nature of God and of God's relationship with humans is evident in terms referring to God as the Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Prince of Princes. Anyone familiar with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures will be aware of the development in imagery related to God in the Hebrew Scriptures. From a tribal God associated with one family, JHWH becomes a universal deity interested in social justice and the conduct of nations. Hebrew high monotheism emerged during the exile. This theological development occurred when the prophets had to answer the question of whether the God of Israel had any bearing on Babylon. In exile the Israelites had the experience of a king who was king of kings, whose rule determined the fate of several nations-extending to the then known or relevant world. This experience of a new social structure gave rise to a universal monotheistic conception of God (JHWH).

That this process continues today was made obvious to me when participating in a conference on 'Man and Science' in the early 1970s attended by leading physicists, biologists, psychologists I observed the emergence of a new 'image'. With great excitement one participant declared, 'I've got it! We can revolutionise theology by referring to God as the System of systems!' The suggestion was greeted with some enthusiasm but then dropped when someone pointed out that it was only a

contemporary image corresponding to King of kings, but grounded in the then very popular systems theory.

Guy Swanson (1960) went beyond the mere identification of the origin of specific theological concepts in experiences with nature and the social, to an attempt to identify the social origins of structures of theologies. Swanson argued that our experiences of social structure, structure our theological thinking.

In his research he found that monotheism, or a high god, is found only in societies which have a social structure in which at minimum one group can be seen to be coordinating the activities of at least two other groups. The degree of activity of this high god in the affairs of life depended on the degree to which the coordinating group actively coordinated the affairs of other groups. He went on (1967) to predict successfully which countries would and which would not adopt protestant theologies in the 17th century given differences in their social structures in the 15th-16th centuries.

The point of all this is that our experiences with the social can be seen to have provided a source of imagery with which believers have tried to communicate with each other and with non-believers about their experiences of the transcendent. So if we accept that our experiences of the social shape the images we use to express our experiences of God and that we are likely to use imagery which is at hand to form our concepts of God what experiences of the social are at work shaping the theological imagery of Australians today?

For example, we could ask, 'What kind of image of God would you expect Australians to hold given 150 years of being lightly controlled from afar by head offices in London?' Australia has been a colonial culture, despised by colonial overlords, upon whom Australia has relied for protection, and who ultimately let Australia down. Is this ambivalence not found in our theology both as published and as found in the living theology of Australians.

The focus of the rest of this article is to examine potential social sources for changes in the imagery used in contemporary theology to describe God's relationship with us.

The effect of Spock on God

This century has witnessed some profound changes in Western Christian theology, changes in the way a relationship with God is imaged. These include the softening of the patriarchal God image, the shift from the evangelical protestant (Calvinist) image of God as the uncaring law giver, and an abandonment of the distant architect God of the 18th century deists/ transcendentalists. In the place of these images have come images of God as the intrusive busy body seeking personal and social improvement among humans through discipline and God the unconditional lover of all humanity (creation), God as friend and companion on the way. An examination of these changes in theology over this century leads to the question, What are the social forces, or sets of experiences which would account for these changes?

In the search for an explanation one of the areas to which our attention is turned by the sociology of knowledge approach is changes in patterns of child raising. One of the consistent findings in the social psychology of religion is a link between child raising experiences and images of God (Lambert, Triandis and

Wolf 1959; Vergote et al 1969, Vercruysse and deNeuter 1981; Vergote and Tamayo 1981; Hertel and Donahue 1995). In this context, Freud (1960 and 1964) argues that what is worshipped as god, is the projected image of the father. Freud went on to argue that there was no God, that all there is, is projection. One of the reasons I do not accept this view is because it confuses the image with that which is imaged. However, I do understand the extreme power of images in the relationship one has with whatever reality lies beyond the image. By the way, this is as true in theology as it is in Physics. Imagery shapes, controls and informs what is seen, heard and felt in the relationship with that which is imaged. No wonder one of the first commandments is against making images. Yet the making of images is the only way we have of thinking and communicating.

Given the findings of social psychology and the insight of Freud that image was at least as important as 'reality' in determining our relationship with what is imaged, if we are interested in seeking the social origins of the images used in late Twentieth Century theology I would suggest that we blame Dr (Benjamin) Spock[2] for a part of it. That is, we should examine the theological implications of the shift that has occurred in child-rearing practices in the twentieth century (for studies of these changes see Ehrenreich and English 1979, Reiger 1985:153-175 and Gilding 1991)[3].

The images of God presented by most mainline churches today bear a greater resemblance to Spock's depiction of the effective parent than to the punitive, fire breathing tyrant God of those raised a few generations back. Spock, Bowlby and their popularisers emphasised the importance of unconditional acceptance and love in parenting. Secondly, control of the child was rational and involved the giving and withholding of affection (not love) as opposed to angry physical punishment. The effect of several generations of Spockian child-raising techniques has lead to a set of foundational social experiences which predispose people in Western societies to be more ready to accept images of God as friend, love, unconditional acceptance rather than judge, punitive overlord. Changes in this direction in the images of God held by Australians were revealed in the National Social Science Survey of 1990 (Bouma and Mason 1995:44).

Given the findings of Lambert, Traindis and Wolf (1959), I would predict that those who are attracted to a negative and harsh punitive God were raised by parents who used harsh (by contemporary standards) child raising techniques. It is interesting to note that those groups which market a harsh image of God the Judge also advocate punitive child rearing practices (Elison and Sherkat 1993a,b; Nelson and Kroliczak 1984; Nunn 1964).

The maternalisation of early life

A second major change in child-rearing practices which may well be shaping our theology has been **the maternalisation of child care** (Ehrenreich and English 1979, Reiger 1985:153-175 and Gilding 1991). With the increased differentiation of home and work, with extension of the time spent in schooling, and the feminisation of teaching, in this century child care has become increasingly something done by mothers and women to children. Fathers and other males have been increasingly

absent from the life of the child. Note the case of Woody Allen who was denied custody of his children, not because he had slept with his partner's daughter, but because he could not name any of his children's friends, or their teachers, nor had he taken them to the physician. In short, he had not done any parenting to this point in their lives; so what would lead one to think he would begin now.

Given this early and profoundly shaping experience of the structures of power in society it is not surprising that the masculine God of power is seen as distant and unrelated to the ongoings of life and that the current search is for the warmth and closeness children enjoyed with their mothers cocooned in a suburban house. The dominant parenting images for the Baby boomers and the next generation are mothers and networks of women, resulting in a feminisation of the images of deity.

Thus, one of the experiences of the social which may be shaping the imagery used to depict God is child-rearing. As patterns in child-rearing have changed so too have the images of God popularly held. The theological implications of creche raising have yet to be seen, nor have the theological implications of the rise of one child families, blended families or very late born children been felt. For example, do late born children image God as older than children born when their parents are yet young?

Cultural Sources of Changes in Theology, in Images of God

Throughout its history, Christian faith has found images for its theology, both its undeveloped living theology and the formal systematic theologies of the Doctors of the Church, in the patterns and images current in their cultures or the cultures of their overlords. Examples include: St Paul using Greek thought, St Thomas using Aristotelian philosophy, and Calvin taking cues from the emerging field of jurisprudence. That both theology and science drew on the larger culture for their imagery is clear in the way Seventeenth Century theology saw God as the law-giver, laws which science discovered, laws which even God could not break. The science emerging at this time also sought to write down the laws of the universe. As the natural world became more predictable the image of law was used to inform the goal of science. An echo of this is found in Paul Davies' (1992) attempts to find the mind of God in the findings of the new Physics.

Our current cultural heritage

At this point several orientations seem to dominate our thinking whether it is about physics, sociology or God. First, Enlightenment Cartesian philosophy leads to seeing the world in dualistic thinking: truth vs falsity, subject vs object, faith vs reason, male vs female, matter vs energy, right vs wrong, us vs them. The result of this is to see divisions, gulfs, barriers, dichotomous differences and to be blinded to diversity, multidimensionality and interrelationship. Secondly, scholastic Latin thought has led to a focus on essences, on being. Hence the divisions we see are often hierarchies of being, of essential value. Thirdly, Materialism focuses attention on essences, on things, on entities. While Marxist Materialism also discusses relationships of power but limits the view to the material.

These three cultural orientations have lead to theologies, to images of God's relationship with humans which start with separation, brokenness, to theologies of essence rather than of relationships, to a focus on the material (eg equating the word of God with scripture, to a demand that the 'real presence' be material, to the empirical verification of miracles.

Against all this current physics tells us: 1) That essences do not exist empirically. Physical reality is insubstantial at its core; 2) That Cartesian dualisms are misleading: for example matter vs energy makes less sense each day. Subject vs object distinctions are shown to mean less and less as the foundations of objectivity are eroded. Forms of subjectivity are preconditional to any viewpoint; 3) that relationship is more foundational than independent being; and 4) that the relationship between observer and observed is relativity, a relativity involving interdependence and inter-relationship, and two way causation[4]. Some events simply do not occur unless or until they are observed. Current physics is leading us to rethink the way we image knowledge and to focus on relationship as foundational, not essences, not entities. This has profound implications for the way in which we think of God.

Western theology (as opposed to Eastern Orthodox theology) has said that entities are foundationally real and more narrowly that physical entities are real and that, given this, the way to reality is through the physical senses. This view gave rise to science and to the denigration of all knowledges not grounded in material aspects of reality. In doing so, it gave rise to scientism. However, and least expectedly, now science has deconstructed itself at this very fundamental orienting stance of arguing that the material, the entity or the atom is ultimately real. The new physics has radically undermined any notion of the substantiality of matter and reduced such substance as there might be to relationship. Not only is 'matter' not ultimate, substance is not prior to relationship either in cosmology or in cosmogony. The implications of the lack of the priority or primacy of substance is appearing in theology now nearly 100 years after the introduction of the theory of relativity.

Reconceiving the universe as sets of relationships which give rise to entities requires a new language of description. One which does not come easily to western patriarchal materialist culture, but one which is well developed in mysticism, religion and feminism. Such a language should be well developed in sociology, and in the social sciences. The priority of society to self, to culture and to all human production has been a keystone of much of social science for the bulk of this century. However, recently this mode of thinking has been hampered by: a) the suspicion that the subject matter of sociology was not real, that is, involved no material entities; b) the reduction of the social to the personal, the personal being at least associated with a visible material entity - the body. It is time for sociology to reassert its core understanding and perspective.

In a way similar to the impact of the new Physics, the insights of post-modern thinking and the process of globalisation point out:

1) the interrelationship of each to all;
2) the inadequacy of narrow discipline bound intellectual activities;
3) the relativity of perspective;
4) the complexity of our diversity; and

5) that the plurality of overlapping viewpoints is normal and that absolute consistency is hardly ever found and may be undesirable. So too the fact of living in a plural and multicultural society turns our attention to the fact of difference in relationship as foundational in our daily lives; not essences in separation.

Thus developments in Physics, in the Social Sciences and contemporary life experience in multicultural Australia lead to the conclusion that the fundamental fact of the universe is relationship not separation, diversity in relationship, not essences in isolation.

The Feminist Reconstruction of Theology

Within this context Feminist theology has emerged. I am not arguing that the new physics has given rise to feminist theology, but that there is an inescapable parallel between these two modes of thought and imaging. If I were to argue anything it is that the changes in patterns of experiencing the social have contributed to the imagery used in both physics and theology. I would certainly argue that the language and insights of sociology have been essential to the rise of feminist theology.

Feminist Theology focuses on relationships and not essences. In doing so it questions our oppositional, hierarchical, divided, power driven, masculist models of the world and of God's relationship with the world. Secondly Feminist theology, especially that of Catherine Mowry LaCugna (1991) and Elizabeth Johnson (1992), presents alternate images, images of diversities in relationship vs essences in separation, or essences in hierarchy. Feminist Theology argues that relationship is more foundational than essence, relatedness more than separation. The most recent development in the emergence of feminist theology is a radical reconceptualisation of God or at least of the program of theology. In particular the recent reworking of the doctrine of the Trinity by Catherine Mowry LaCugna and Elizabeth Johnson. Here a theology is doing some of the work that social scientists need to do, re-imaging that which is being studied as foundationally relational.

LaCugna presents an image of the Trinity as an open relationship into which humans are invited; a God seeking actively for our inclusion, a God who is relationship, who yearns for the completed relationship of oneness with us and with all creation. This image is a far cry from another image which presents God as being so consumed with anger at humanity that he (deliberately male) has to take this wrath out on someone, as it turns out his own child, to get the score even. This substitutionary atonement theory is referred to in some circles as 'child abuse' theology, for good reason. Instead LaCugna and Johnson describe a god who yearns for relationship with creation in a kind of yearning reminiscent of the yearning of contemporary parents for a relationship with and for wholeness of understanding of their somewhat distant teenager. This image of the role of the parent is quite novel, not detectable prior to the late Nineteenth Century and only popularised in the Twentieth then retrofitted to Adam and Eve. In this re-imaging of God's relationship with us LaCugna and Johnson can be seen to be focussing on the relational, using images resonant with child-rearing practices current in their childhood and building on

images which would be expected from a woman's perspective. In all of this, the essential change is from a focus on God as an entity to a focus on the nature of relationships with and within God. The imagery used to depict God shifts from entity to relationship.

The images presented in feminist theology, the images of diversities in relationship also mirror the fundamental change in post-modern society from uniformity to diversity in relationship, from a single dominant world-view (meta-narrative) to a plural society in which diversity is held in relationship, relationships which at least ideally argue for the recognition of the dignity of each diversity, the value of each diversity and that the whole is better if the diversities are maintained not overcome.

It is worth noting that there are some important implications of this starting point of feminist theology. If the fundamental nature of God is relationship, a relationship of equals and not being; if we start with that as the core concept of the Trinity, male headship theology becomes heresy and in the theology of the church hierarchy becomes tolerable only as an organisational necessity but not a divinely grounded principle of ecclesiastical organisation.

This shift in theology, while completely interesting in itself, takes on additional interest when held in relationship with the developments in the 'new physics' where focus is increasingly on relationships not entities. Thus new developments in both physics and theology along with the insights of sociology involve a shift in the fundamental images used to represent the realities under study. The shift is from substantialist to relational images, from oppositional dichotomies to more complex pluralities, from hierarchies to networks. One possible experiential basis for this change imagery, or at least for the degree of acceptability accorded the new images may be found in the patterns of child raising and in the experiences of plural societies which characterise the second half of the 20th century.

In this social context it is not surprising that there is a similarity in the images that are now emerging in a variety of intellectual contexts. From sociology comes a focus on relationship, structure, creativity, relativity - the importance of perspective, multiplicity of views, multicultural perspectives; from physics comes a new fluidity, loss of a focus on essences, a focus on relationship, relativity, and now from theology (liberation and feminist) comes fluidity, responsibility, agency, relationship - not hierarchy.

Notes

1. For those who are interested there exists a contemporary philosophical epistemology which develops as reasonable the proposition that mystics experience the beyond (Alston 1991). Alston's philosophy of perception argues that there is no reason not to take at face value the things that mystics and other believers say. That is, they perceive, in the sense of being made aware of the presence, the relationship with an other, an other which is not present to the physical senses (that is, the senses of entities) in the same way as, say, a house might be present, but having the same impact on awareness as physical perception. That is, the perception is immediate, not a result of thinking about, or fantasising or dreaming, but something which 'makes itself known'.

2. I was informed at one of the seminars to which versions of this paper were presented that Dr Benjamin Spock was none other than

Dr Margaret Mead's Paediatrician and learned from her about the child-raising patterns of other societies. He acknowledges her influence in the development of his child-raising ideas.

3. For those who were hoping for some Vulcan theology in this article I can only point out that the Star Trek Dr Spock behaves toward the rest of the crew very much as the father figure advocated by Dr Benjamin Spock.

4. There are various sources of these general statements. The ones I have found most helpful are the writings of Paul Davies, in particular, *The Mind of God* (1992), and Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*(1988).

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