What does it mean for a woman to be created in God’s image?
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Abstract

The attempt to engage with women’s participation in the *imago Dei* entails a broad range of enquiry. Underlying issues include the source of identity and the nature of embodiment, contingent on creaturely existence. In contrast with key traditional as well as recent feminist understandings which, in different ways, present a disembodied understanding of how humanity is made in God’s image, the thesis argues that the other-centered character of sexual differentiation is patterned on Trinitarian interpersonal relations. The argument runs counter to a frame of reference in which meaning is projected through sensory and imaginative facets of feminist subjectivity. Such a method is seen as vulnerable to a deconstructionist undermining of linguistics, ontology and the professed values of the feminist movement.

Based on Augustine’s understanding that the Wisdom of God has become incarnate as the historical and risen Jesus, Word-Wisdom through whom the world was made is argued to underpin the possibility of meaning while also providing a reference point for women’s identity. On the assumption that the concept of the image of God implies the possibility (albeit limited) of access to divine mystery, the *imago Dei* is understood as ‘visible symbol’ of the Godhead, in a sense distinct from spiritual access to God yet grounded in the epistemology of covenantal relationship between God and humanity and the analogical capacity of theological language. The pattern of gendered interpersonal relationships in the *imago Dei* is complex and by nature precludes anthropomorphic projection. Women do not receive identity via a masculine tertium quid as has been a common theme in traditional understanding. In addition to reflecting Wisdom, as she operates within the Godhead, women are argued to enter into the reversed relational priority of the human mother with the God-man.
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Preface

This thesis arose from questions about women and biblical perspectives. As a member of the Uniting Church, my journey began with lay preacher studies in the 1980s. At this time the Uniting Church was considering theological questions with regard to women’s role in the church and inclusive language. Although already committed by the Basis of Union to the ordination of women, an official rationale was not produced in the Uniting Church until 1990. The rationale (‘Why does the Uniting Church in Australia Ordain Women to the Ministry of the Word?’) raised further questions for me about women’s ministry in the light of the Basis of Union. Having completed a Bachelor of Divinity, I published a brief alternative rationale for women’s ordination in the Uniting Church, in *Swimming between the Flags: Reflections on the Basis of Union*, jointly edited by my husband and myself. My interest in the *imago Dei* was raised in part by being treated as ‘the mother of the congregation’ in a conservative parish because I was the minister’s wife.

‘Why does the Uniting Church in Australia Ordain Women to the Ministry of the Word?’ cites Orthodox theologian, Thomas Hopko: ‘The Orthodox generally hold that the answer to the question about the ordination of women contains the answer to all theological questions’.\(^1\) It would be an overstatement to claim that this thesis attempts to answer all theological questions. Nevertheless, the breadth of my question has become plain in the course of study. The importance of the question raised by the *imago Dei*, coupled with its breadth, underpins wide-ranging discussion with the work of key feminist writers, in particular the writings of Sallie McFague.

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I would like to acknowledge the wealth of research by other women theologians, notwithstanding my dissent from many of their conclusions. I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement, advice and prompt responses to numerous drafts from my supervisor, the Revd. Dr. Charles Sherlock, along with his persistence and patience in journeying with me from the Master of Theology to doctoral studies. My thanks are also due to the Evangelical Theological Association and the United Faculty of Theology for assisting me to begin the process of postgraduate study, to the Revd. Professor Ian Breward for advising me with regard to the Master of Theology qualifying essay and to the Revd. Dr. Andrew Murray for comments relating to philosophy. I am also grateful to my husband for his support and academic feedback.

I have made use of the New Revised Standard Version as a relatively literal translation and, on one occasion, the Complete Jewish Bible, as well as the Jerusalem Bible for the apocryphal writings. I have followed the convention of a single citation of a source where further reference to the same page of the source is made clear in my text. References to chapters in sources are cited with a lower case ‘c’ to distinguish them from references to chapters of this thesis which are cited with an upper case ‘C’.

This thesis submitted for assessment is the result of my own work, and no unacknowledged assistance has been received in its planning, drafting, execution or writing. All sources on which it is based have been acknowledged in writing, as has the supervision which I have received in the process of its preparation.

Name: _____________________ Signature: ____________ Date: __________
General Introduction

‘Are Women Human?’ is the title of an essay by English writer and theologian Dorothy L. Sayers.¹ That the question could be posed at all indicates a serious issue. The opening chapter of Genesis affirms the creation of gendered humanity in the divine image but what this means for women has received surprisingly little attention. Exploring the connection between the imago Dei and identity for women is the aim of this thesis.

Sayers writes about what she calls ‘sex-equality’, which is ‘like all questions affecting human relationships, delicate and complicated’.² To use a comparable term, this thesis enters into the question of ‘sex-identity’, equally affecting human relationships and equally, if not more, delicate and complicated. Sayers’ main point is a plea for individual ability and interest to govern eligibility for work. The focus is on the differences between women, independent of gender. ‘Sex-identity’ is on a different footing: the focus is on women as women.

The Christian tradition cannot be said to have given an unambiguous response to the question posed by Sayers. Kim Power reports that in 585 the ecclesiastical Council of Maçon voted on whether women were ‘homo’, i.e. human or not. The humanity of women was affirmed.³ Earlier Augustine of Hippo had ‘wrestled with the concept of

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³ See Kim Power, Veiled Desire: Augustine’s Writing on Women (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), p. 58. Power citing Ute Ranke-Heinemann, Eunuchs for heaven: the Catholic church and sexuality (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990), p.168, states that the issue was not whether women have souls but whether they are ‘homo’, i.e. human. Michael Nolan,
women as the *imago Dei* in a climate in which other patristic writers denied it. This kind of history lends some colour to claims that Christianity has favoured a ‘patriarchal’ way of thinking that puts women’s identity in doubt.

Sallie McFague writes of ‘patriarchalism’ as the ‘superior-subordinate paradigm’ of men over women:

Feminists who have analyzed the patriarchal model have only brought into sharp relief the pattern that, from at least the time of Augustine, has been the dominant one in Christian understanding of relations between God and humanity, as well as people with each other. In this ‘patriarchal’ climate of thinking as discerned through feminist analysis ‘women do not model God’, says McFague, while ‘men have a “role-model” in God for defining their self-identity’. The remedy for this, in feminist analysis, is for women to be said to model God. Luce Irigaray states that ‘monotheistic religions cannot claim to be ethical unless they submit themselves to a radical interrogation relative to the sexual attribution [caractère sexué] of their paradigms’. She goes on to ask, ‘are the peoples of monotheism ready to assert that their God is a woman?’

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*Opinion: The Myth of Soulless Women (First Things 72, April 1997), pp.13-14 questions the historicity of the vote: ‘The acts of the Council of Maçon contain no such discussion’.* Nevertheless, Nolan admits to an entry in *The History of the Franks* by St. Gregory of Tours about a council that may have been the Council of Maçon: ‘There came forward at this Council a certain bishop who maintained that woman could not be included under the term “man”. However, he accepted the reasoning of the other bishops and did not press his case for the holy book of the Old Testament tells us that in the beginning, when God created man, “Male and female he created them and called their name Adam,” which means earthly man; even so, he called the woman Eve, yet of both he used the word “man”’. Nolan’s claim does not affect my argument.

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4 Power, Veiled Desire, pp. 56-57.
6 McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 149-150.
Irigaray proposes a method of offering self-identity for women, based on revising the sexual attribution of the religious paradigm. If the Council of Maçon voted on the humanity or otherwise of women, this would go some way towards affirming Irigaray’s claim that the sexual character of Christianity, as a monotheistic religion, is a matter of human *attribution*. But the consensus of thought at Maçon was not so overriding as to decide against the humanity of women. Far from reflecting the dominant pattern of a ‘patriarchal’ culture, the Council is said to have been *divided* about the status of women. Something else was operating besides a pattern of ‘patriarchy’.

To posit a connection between women’s identity and the *imago Dei* raises the prior question about the nature of the *imago Dei*. Irigaray asks whether the peoples of monotheism are ready to *assert* that their God is a woman. She writes of the ‘upheaval in the symbolic order’ that such an (ethically necessary) ‘substitution’ would occasion. Grace M. Jantzen goes so far as to canvas the notion of ‘a deliberate replacement of the traditional masculinist projection of God with a feminist pantheist projection’. But a ‘symbolic order’ in which the notion of God relies on assertion or projection is a different conception to that in which humanity is said to be made in God’s image. C. S. Lewis writes that in ‘the Church … we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities

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8 Luce Irigaray, ‘Questions to Emmanuel Levinas’, p. 185. Cf. Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming divine: Towards a feminist philosophy of religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 9-10: ‘To begin to understand Irigaray’s answer [to Freud and Lacan] … and to see what religion has to do with it, it helps to see that according to Freudian theory modified by Lacan, the achievement of subjectivity … takes place according to what Lacan, in deliberate echo of Catholic liturgy, calls the Law or Name of the Father. This thinly disguised religious formula indicates the authoritative nature of social demand, its patriarchal character, and also its religious structure. Indeed the obverse of the boy’s repression of his desire for his mother is his entry into the language and civilization and social world of the fathers, which after Lacan can be referred to as “the symbolic”. The “symbolic” in French thought … includes all of language … and … can be used to designate the broad conceptual patterns of civilization’.

utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge’.10 The notion that we are at liberty to assert that God is a woman (or a man) is foreign to C. S. Lewis’s way of thinking. It is the other way round. God determines what humanity is like, not vice versa. Lewis states: ‘We have no authority to take the living and seminal figures which God has painted on the canvas of our nature and shift them about as if they were mere geometrical figures’.11 Gender is understood to be a ‘mystical’ reflection of transcendent realities, something to be received, not asserted.

As depicted by Lewis, the modus operandi of the imago Dei is not intended to arise from masculine projection. Key feminist writers have unmasked it as such, not without reason but perhaps with less than justice. This thesis takes issue both with a ‘symbolic order’ that is no more than a ‘patriarchal’ construct and also with the recommended feminist cure. If a method of human projection was employed by ‘patriarchy’ at its worst, it would be ironic for feminists to copy it. Rather than perpetuating a method of projection on feminist terms, this thesis recommends a correction of an aberration in thinking about the imago Dei.

Projection as a method in religious thinking is not without difficulty. Jantzen notes that Freudian and Marxist theory considered religion an illusion on this very account: ‘atheism has, indeed, regularly been seen as the logical conclusion of projection theories of religion.’12 Such a history, however, does not deter Jantzen from using projection as a method. She goes on to say:

I suggest, however, that projection can be understood in a much more interesting and positive way. Though it is not my main concern… [i]t would be entirely possible that there actually was a divine being with just those

11 Lewis, ‘Priestesses in the Church’, p. 92.
12 Jantzen, Becoming divine, pp. 88-89.
attributes which (some) humans projected from their own traits: indeed it might be argued that the Christian teaching that human beings are made in the divine image would have exactly that consequence.\textsuperscript{13}

Jantzen does not acknowledge that a ‘positive’ method of projection might result in illusion. It is not, she says, her main concern to consider whether a projection of human traits actually does reflect a divine being. Actuality is, however, a matter of concern in traditional understanding of the \textit{imago Dei}.

This thesis agrees with many feminist writers in taking the concept of the \textit{imago Dei} as a premise. But what is meant by the \textit{imago Dei}? The thesis supports resistance to a method of projecting male attributes to portray a notion of God, on the ground that such a \textit{method} is in conflict with what it means to be made in God’s image. The kind of thinking that would posit ‘projection’ as a legitimate means in religious discussion alters the meaning of ‘metaphorical’ language, ‘symbolic’ reference and ‘sacramental’ identity as will be seen. The tenor of such thinking is argued to weaken the premise, as in the case of Jantzen, for whom the divine image is not the main concern.\textsuperscript{14}

In order to explore what it means for a woman to be created in God’s image, it is necessary to first ask whether gendered humanity is thought to be made in the divine likeness. Secondly, it is necessary to be clear that the claim to be made in the image of God means to be made like God as a copy is to an original. Thirdly, one must ask: what is the basis of the claim to divine likeness? It then becomes possible to ask what

\textsuperscript{13} Jantzen, \textit{Becoming divine}, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf., however, Janice Rees, ‘Sarah Coakley: Systematic Theology and the Future of Feminism’ in (ed.) Brendan Byrne, \textit{Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies}, vol 24, n. 3 (Melbourne: The Pacifica Theological Studies Association, October 2011), p. 307. Rees contrasts Coakley’s ‘doctrine of creaturehood’ with ‘autonomous models typical of feminism’. Rees states that Coakley ‘points to the \textit{imagio dei} as the fundamental point of enquiry regarding both gender and difference’ (p. 303).
this means, for women in particular. Such questions engage with what is meant by a ‘symbolic order’ in terms of gendered identity as well as epistemology: how do we know that we know.

Given the biblical source for knowledge of the *imago Dei*, this thesis argues for the reliability of the biblical writings, anchored in a concept of covenant and communication between God and humanity. While the information that gendered humanity is made in God’s image comes from Genesis 1:26-27, details relevant to women about the nature of the gendered *imago Dei* can be found, it is argued, in Genesis 2-3. Such details are assumed and developed in the New Testament, in particular, it will be maintained, by the apostle Paul.

The idea of something being in the image of something else implies a correspondence or likeness. If women are said to be in the image of God, the inference is that women are, in some respect, like God. Correspondence can be discerned, it is argued, in biblical typology expressed in gendered terms. Such typology is based on the concept that the biblical writings, diverse as they are and presenting as they do a developing divine revelation through human agency nevertheless have an overarching coherence.\(^\text{15}\) But this assumption is currently under dispute, not least in consequence of questions about women’s leadership in the church and the possibility of using feminine language for God. It is argued here that recent

\(^\text{15}\) The 2004 Seattle Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* paragraph 7, note 1 states: ‘By typology we mean a reading which accepts that certain things in Scripture (persons, places, and events) foreshadow or illuminate other things, or reflect patterns of faith in imaginative ways (e.g. Adam is a type of Christ: Romans 5:14; Isaiah 7:14 points towards the virgin birth of Jesus: Matthew 1:23). This typological sense was considered to be a meaning that goes beyond the literal sense. This approach assumes the unity and consistency of the divine revelation’.
doubts raised about the coherence of biblical writings are themselves open to question.

Willard M. Swartley traces questions about coherence in some detail, in the context of questions about women. He begins by contrasting biblical interpretation that functions like a mirror with that which functions like a window: ‘some method must be used which gives the text distance from the interpreter’s ideology, a method that allows the text to speak its piece, to function as a window. Otherwise’, says Swartley, ‘the text becomes a mirror reflecting back what we want it to say’. The assumption of unity and consistency in the biblical writings, in which scripture interprets scripture leads too easily in Swartley’s view to what he calls ‘the mirror game’. He goes on to claim: ‘liberationist writers (at least some of them) concede that not all of the texts say the same thing. This vulnerability becomes a strength because it shows that the projection of the interpreters’ ideology onto the text has been broken’.

Liberationist writers, according to Swartley, are less likely than traditionalists to use biblical texts to mirror their own ideology: ‘They [i.e. liberationist writers] see something that doesn’t say exactly what they would like the text to say.’ What he does not acknowledge is that, for liberationists, unpalatable texts are not necessarily required to be authoritative. Liberationists must find an extra-biblical perspective by which to judge the relative authority of the textual ‘windows’, once again raising the

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17 Swartley, p. 186. He remarks with regard to the liberationist position: ‘the very coherency difficulty of the position testifies to a breakthrough in overcoming the tyranny of the mirror game played by the interpreter’s ideology. The interpretation represents a wounded, but not despairing, position in coherency’.
18 Swartley, pp. 185 – 186. Swartley’s italics.
19 Swartley, pp. 185 – 186.
question of the interpreter’s ideology. Put in terms of Swartley’s analogy, even if texts do function as windows, as far as authority goes the blinds can be drawn on some of them.

This thesis attempts, in Swartley’s phrase, to look through biblical texts as windows providing access, however limited, to the truth. Broadly speaking the thesis divides into two parts, Chapters 1-4 concerned with the symbolic reference of religious language, Chapters 5 - 8 with the source and nature of identity for women. For biblical texts to be taken seriously as windows giving access to higher realities, the assumption of biblical coherence would appear essential. But, given this assumption, ideological bias remains a danger, as Swartley points out. It is suggested here that the vista from the windows as regards the imago Dei, is more pleasant than sometimes surmised and is, in fact, well worth looking at, in particular without some traditional perspectives that appear to have impeded such viewing.

In looking through a window, the point of view is of key importance. Chapter 1 of this thesis addresses the linguistic possibility of looking through textual ‘windows’. Chapter 2 considers the direction and nature of view: the presuppositions behind the Thomist doctrine of analogy alongside proposals for the gendered imago Dei. Chapter 3 attempts to look through textual windows for clues relevant to women as the imago Dei, on the assumption that views from different texts give access to a coherent, if moving, panorama. Chapter 4 deals with problems in interpreting such views, engaging with biblical models of what it means to be human, and how

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Swartley, pp. 189 – 191. He refers to ‘Nestorian hermeneutics’ in which readings deemed to have human authority only would be non-normative, and attempts to overcome the ‘Nestorian’ factor by using ‘faithfulness to the gospel’ as the perspective to measure and accommodate diversity. He does not comment on the role of ideology in assessing what ‘faithfulness to the gospel’ entails.
representative feminist theologians have approached them. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the meanings or lack of meanings offered by various epistemological viewpoints with their effects on identity for women. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on perceptions of gendered identity in Christian churches.

While these chapters centre on theology, consideration of the symbolic nature of the *imago Dei*, and language about it, has to some extent brought the thesis into the current domain of philosophical discussion of language. Discussion from the twentieth century, however, appears to largely omit a late nineteenth century ‘deconstructionist’ development as it relates to symbol: here Romantic symbolism becomes intra-textuality and yearning for the infinite becomes a search for an ‘other’ via the sub-rational self. The challenge to extra-linguistic reference is accompanied by a denial of the theistic validation of language, as is remembered in the ‘deconstructionist’ image of the rubbed-out coin. The twentieth century discussion has looked elsewhere for validation, to the verification principle of the logical positivists, for example. The thesis attempts to restore symbolic reference to the *imago Dei* (and to language about it) and makes a suggestion about the validation of such language. The former is relevant to the divine likeness of gendered humanity, the latter to identity, for women in particular.

A key focus of the thesis has to do with the reference of words. This focus governs not only content but also method. Dan Stiver’s survey of the current discussion of

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23 See, however, Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, pp. 321-324 on Wolfhart Pannenberg’s *theological* approach to epistemology and opposition to anti-transcendent positivism as a foundation of knowledge at a metacritical level.
language contrasts an approach that ‘stresses the endless play of textuality’ with movements ‘that have looked to hermeneutics, metaphor and narrative … but only in an indirect and mediated way – a type of via analogia if you will’. This thesis is an attempt to follow the via analogia in terms of exploring the imago Dei. Such a method is distinct not only from the kind of linguistic approach that detaches language from reference to the outside world in an endless play of textuality but also from a positivist stress on verifiable cognitive language. One of the exponents of the validity of metaphor and narrative is Paul Ricoeur. Anthony Thiselton notes that ‘Ricoeur rejects … the positivistic view … that metaphor constitutes a generally misleading abuse of language, which encourages illusion.’

A further distinction needs to be made here. A positivist view tends to regard ‘metaphor’ as a projected picture stemming from the literal idea behind it. As noted above, Freudian and Marxist theory rejected religion as a projected illusion. This does not, however, deter Grace Jantzen from proposing a ‘positive’ feminist pantheist projection. A feminist approach to ‘metaphor’ based on a theory of projection is distinct from the way of the via analogia in which metaphorical language is assumed to refer to what it purports to signify. This thesis follows the via analogia in assuming the referential capacity of the imago Dei.


While it offers a positive proposal for the way in which women participate in the *imago Dei*, much of the thesis might be described as a conversation with various feminist writers in terms of analysis of their methods and conclusions. Sallie McFague’s method is of principal relevance here. Although she writes in a broader context, her concerns include feminist issues and her method is influential for other feminist writers.\(^\text{26}\) I argue that Jantzen’s proposal for a feminist projection is not without echo in McFague’s presentation of ‘metaphor’ since McFague shares the feminist concern to break the hegemony of the metaphor ‘God as father’.\(^\text{27}\) Her explication of ‘metaphor’ is outlined in the chapter on ‘Metaphor, symbol and analogy’ in Dan Stiver’s overview of the current philosophical discussion of language.\(^\text{28}\) Reference to her work, however, does not appear in Anthony Thiselton’s more lengthy survey although, with regard to a method of ‘*de*patriarchalizing’, Thiselton notes ‘the obvious parallels with Bultmann’s proposal for *demythologizing* and Latin American or neo-Marxist proposals about *de-ideologizing* the biblical texts’.\(^\text{29}\)

Some further remarks may help to explain terms as they are used in this thesis. As noted above, the understanding behind the *imago Dei* is that gendered humanity is a copy or *model* of God. McFague uses the term ‘model’ in a different sense. Her


\(^{27}\) See McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, p. 29.

\(^{28}\) Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language*, chapter 6. Stiver notes a disparity of definition of terms: ‘It is arguable that metaphor, analogy, and symbol can be seen as very similar, and it is arguable that they are very different’ (p. 127). In *Metaphorical Theology*, 198 n. 16, McFague draws attention to David Tracy *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, (New York: Crossroad; London: SCM Press, 1981), stating that ‘his view of the analogical imagination is in many ways identical with my understanding of the metaphorical sensibility’.

\(^{29}\) Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 452.
theory of biblical interpretation goes beyond judging the relative authority of textual windows. She denies that the purpose of biblical texts is to function like a window; rather, their purpose is to function like a model:

On my view, what we have in Paul’s letters and in the Gospel of John are two highly imaginative (and very different) attempts to express the salvific love of God in metaphors and concepts appropriate to their time … The question we must ask is, … What should we be doing for our time that would be comparable to what Paul and John did for theirs? Does Christian theology involve, either through translation or through interpretation, using the metaphors and concepts of Scripture (and the tradition), or does it involve taking scriptural texts as a model of how to do it, that is, of how to do it in the language of one’s own time? I believe the second option is the necessary and appropriate one.  

McFague goes on to state that this suggestion is radical in the sense that it is a self-conscious recommendation. For examples of ‘relatively unselfconscious radical theological recontextualizing’, adds McFague, ‘we need only think of Augustine’s Neoplatonism or Thomas’s Aristotelianism, both of which are considered nonetheless to be in continuity with the very different theologies of Paul and John’. In fact, feminist theory has critiqued Augustine’s Neoplatonism and Thomas’s Aristotelianism for lack of sympathy with feminist goals. But McFague’s interpretative stance relativizes the basis on which such a critique could operate. If

32 See Jantzen, Becoming divine, chapter 2, ‘Who becomes divine? The gendered subject of the philosophy of religion’. Cf. Elizabeth A. Johnson, SHE WHO IS: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse (New York, NY: Crossroad), 2007 pp. 24 - 25: ‘One of the most influential androcentric syntheses in the Catholic tradition is that of Aquinas which may serve as an illustration of how such a pattern of thinking works … From woman’s natural inferiority Aquinas reasonably deduces a host of consequences, such as … women may not be ordained priests since priesthood signifies the eminence of Christ and women do not signify what pertains to eminence; women should not preach since this is an exercise of wisdom and authority of which they are not capable’. Johnson cites Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson, ‘The Man Who Should Have Known Better’ in Women and Religion: A Feminist Source-book of Christian Thought (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977) 78-101: ‘Some commentators have observed that there are elements in Aquinas’s theology that could have led him to a more positive evaluation of women’s nature … his belief that in one sense women were indeed created in the image of God’. The word ‘indeed’ emphasizes the actuality of the human likeness to God that might have corrected human-based error about the nature and role of women. This kind of critique works, it can be noted, within the frame of reference for the imago Dei that Aquinas would have accepted.
biblical texts offer no more than a model of how to produce ‘recontextualized metaphors’ and concepts *de novo*, the foundational nature of the *imago Dei* is removed. What then becomes of the *imago Dei* as a premise?

Given a variety of usage, the term ‘model’ is used in several senses in this thesis. In a quotation at the beginning of this introduction McFague refers to ‘the patriarchal model’. In the ‘patriarchal model’, claims McFague, women do not model God.\(^{33}\) This is to use the term ‘model’ in two different senses. According to McFague, in this particular ‘model’ (i.e. construct or way of thinking) women do not ‘model’ (i.e. are not said to be like) God. The assumption, attributed to the so-called patriarchal model, is that to ‘model’ God has the meaning of (masculine) anthropomorphic projection. As will be seen in Chapter 5, science uses the term ‘model’ to mean a construct that is rigorously tested against external reality. The ‘Medieval Model’ is also referred to in Chapter 5: the meaning here is an overarching philosophical system which was believed to reflect external reality. In Chapter 4, McFague’s human models for God are contrasted with God’s models for humanity.

While McFague’s models would seem to constitute a one-sided projection from the standpoint of human subjectivity, God’s models for humanity are realized through interaction with humanity. The *imago Dei* could be defined as a divine social construct but it is not one-sided or static. *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (ARCIC) paragraph 8 states: ‘The Old Testament bears witness to God’s creation of men and women in the divine image, and God’s loving call to covenant relationship with himself’. There is a connection between being created in the divine image and

\(^{33}\) McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 149-150.
covenant relationship with God. In one sense the imago Dei is independent of the human response (or lack of it) to the call to covenant relationship with God and in another sense, as will be seen, dependent on, and symbolic of, that covenant relationship.

McFague bases what she calls a ‘model’ on an extension of what she calls a ‘metaphor’ 34 Chapter 1 explores what she means by this. Etymologically, the term ‘metaphor’ has the sense of transference or ‘carrying with’. In common usage, a metaphor provides access to a new transferred sense of meaning. This does not mean that every aspect associated with the literal meaning is carried into the transferred sense of meaning. 35 This thesis follows I. A. Richards in using the term ‘vehicle’ for the literal meaning and ‘tenor’ for the transferred meaning. 36

C. S. Lewis 37 attempts to capture the nature of the tenor (i.e. transferred meaning) relative to the vehicle (i.e. literal meaning) in poetic descriptions of women in terms of flowers:

34 See McFague, Models of God, p. 34.
35 In this regard McFague cites Max Black’s usage of the terms ‘grid’, ‘screen’ or ‘filter’ as a way of describing the operation of metaphor, in which ‘a less familiar subject [is organized] by means of seeing it in terms of a more familiar one’. But, for McFague, the screening process also has the negative function of excluding ‘other ways of thinking and talking’. As such, she claims that metaphors (or models) ‘can easily become literalized, that is identified as the one and only way of understanding a subject’. See Metaphorical Theology, pp. 23-24; cf. chapters 3 and 13 in Max Black, Models and Metaphors (Ithaca, NYL: Cornell University Pres, 1962).
36 See M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 37. Abrams alludes to I. A. Richards, Philosophy of Rhetoric, 1936, chapters 5 and 6. Cf. also McFague, Metaphorical Theology, p. 37. McFague states that Richard’s definition of ‘metaphor’ is a good beginning: ‘In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is the result of their interaction’. She claims to base her ‘metaphorical theology’ on ‘an amalgam’ of various theories about metaphor, including those of I. A. Richards, Max Black and Paul Ricoeur. Further consideration of whether McFague’s usage of ‘metaphor’ is commensurate with the usage of these theorists appears in my article ‘Metaphor or Better-for?: an appraisal of Sallie McFague’s “metaphorical theology”’, forthcoming.
37 For Lewis’s contribution to the current discussion of metaphor, see his essay, “Bluspels and Flalansferes” in Max Black (ed.), The Importance of Language (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962) 36-50. See also p. vii: [The article was] ‘reprinted by permission of the
Burns tells us that a woman is like a red, red rose and Wordsworth that another woman is like a violet by a mossy stone half hidden from the eye. Now of course the one woman resembles a rose, and the other a half-hidden violet, not in size, weight, shape, colour, anatomy or intelligence, but by arousing emotions in some way analogous to those which flowers would arouse. But then we know quite well what sort of women (and how different from each other) they must have been to do so. The two statements … are even, in their own proper way, verifiable or falsifiable: having seen the two women we might say ‘I see what he meant in comparing her to a rose’ and ‘I see what he meant in comparing her to a violet’ or might decide that the comparisons were bad.38

There is an elusive likeness between the women and the respective flowers. One would need to see the women to judge whether the comparisons were apt or not. On the other hand, if one lived in a country in which roses (or violets) did not grow the descriptions would not perhaps mean very much. And if one lived in such a country, one might assume that the comparison had something to do with the size, weight, shape, colour, anatomy or intelligence of the women. But one would be wrong.

Lewis considers that the ‘language in which we express our religious beliefs and other religious experiences, is not a special language, but something that ranges between the Ordinary [i.e. everyday language] and the Poetical’.39 There is a poetical element in the concept of the imago Dei, I would add, in the assertion of likeness between humanity and God. The likeness is symbolic. There is something elusive about it. It is not predictable. In this sense anthropomorphic projection is in the same case as trying to predict the rose-like quality of a woman without knowing anything about roses. Size, weight, shape, colour, anatomy or intelligence of humanity might

39 C. S. Lewis, ‘The Language of Religion’, pp. 171-172. Lewis makes a distinction between religious language that borders on the poetical and more abstract theological language, which, he says is often necessary but ‘is not the language religion naturally speaks’.
be projected but the result would be an illusion. By contrast, to continue the analogy, the *imago Dei* in its symbolic aspect would claim to know something of the divine ‘rose’ likeness even without direct access to it. The *imago Dei* lays claim to glimpses of, and messages from, a far country.

The term ‘symbolic’ accords with the notion that humanity as male and female provides a glimpse of the Godhead. The term ‘sacramental’ accords with the notion that humanity as male and female in some sense offers an embodied representation of the Trinitarian God. Broadly speaking, the term ‘symbolic’ is concerned with linguistic and visible reference, as of a copy to an original. The term ‘sacramental’ is concerned with the reception of meaning and identity. Both aspects are relevant to what it means for a woman to be made in God’s image.

As noted above, Lewis writes that in ‘the Church … we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge’. Lewis, ‘Priestesses in the Church’, pp. 93-94. Male and female are ‘live and awful shadows’ here in the sense that gendered humanity is symbolic of the Godhead. But Lewis, who is writing about the priesthood, limits his conclusions to what this means for male identity and does not consider the relevance of Trinitarian diversity to male and female at the human level.

This thesis asks what our status as the image of the Triune God means for women’s identity in particular. Male and female in bodily form and social interaction are seen to have something to convey about divine reality, albeit not in a way that can be
simply projected. The thesis explores the way in which women, in their physical sex, reflect, and sacramentally embody, divine reality, on their own and in relationship with men. This status is expressed in marriage, church leadership and in a shared (but not necessarily literal) involvement in motherhood, with particular reference to the motherhood of Christ.

The thesis is a theological appraisal of the way in which gendered humanity as unity in diversity is in the likeness of Trinitarian unity in diversity. The frame of reference runs counter to a claim that ‘projection’, based on ideology, is a legitimate means of religious thinking. Much current feminist writing raises questions about the meaning of human existence and language, in particular the possibility of human language having transcendent reference. At the same time such writing emphasizes the importance of identity and embodiment for women, whether or not ‘projection’ is an effective means to the realization of these ends. Given these considerations, the thesis engages with aspects of linguistic, epistemological and historical enquiry as well as current thinking in the social sciences, in particular as it affects the identity of women in the Christian churches.

The broad-ranging nature of the enquiry leads to a method of argument that, to some extent, proceeds in overlapping circles rather than in a linear fashion. The aims of the thesis can be listed as follows:

- To orient the *imago Dei* towards God rather than in the direction of ontological non-reference;
• To restore the exegetical assumption of the carrying power of metaphor and symbol where relevant to the *imago Dei*, and to distinguish such usage from allegorical projection;

• To explore the nature of gendered humanity as *imago Dei* in the literary context of the wider biblical story;

• To propose that 1 Corinthians 1:1-11 offers a textual frame for a key Pauline focus on gendered humanity in the image of the Trinitarian Godhead;

• To posit the performative function of the Word or Wisdom of God in validating identity (for women in particular);

• To contrast the character of demythologized myth with that of a legend about St. Francis and St. Clare;

• To establish a sacramental basis for ‘inclusive language’ and identity for women.