

Chapter 2: Theological Ethics and Feminist Theology

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the contribution of feminist pedagogy to the formation of Christian women in ministry. It describes their work as an expression of care or caring, and seeks ways to support women to become critical and conscious agents of their caring. Agency, formation and caring are all aspects of a moral framework when they are associated with biblical norms and obligations to love, to be compassionate, to show mercy and to act justly. So it is appropriate to frame this discussion within the discipline of theological ethics which is reflection on the practice of Christian morality.

A central assumption of this thesis, one which I will establish in this chapter and the next, is that caring is a prerequisite and a defining feature of the Christian life and of ministry. My particular interest in this research is an analysis of the relationship of women to care and caring, the way that a patriarchal worldview has influenced how caring roles are defined and acted out within society and the church, and how women experience these roles. Thus I also locate this study within the field of feminist theology which supports a critical investigation of the dynamics of power, oppression and women within the church. This dual theoretical approach – theological ethics and feminist theology - is consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of theological ethics, which is related to other theological disciplines and also to other disciplines within the social, natural sciences, history, sociology, and psychology (Kretzschmar 1994:4-9; 2004a:35).

This chapter begins by surveying the literature pertaining to the broad field of theological ethics, and in particular to the construct of caring. It then presents an overview of the work of feminist theologians and other feminist scholars whose work can be applied to a critique of an ethic of care.

2.1 THE SCOPE OF THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

Theological ethics is a critical reflection on the practice of morality from the perspective of the Christian belief in a God who is active in creation and human history, who is made known and is present in the person of Jesus, and in an ongoing way through the work of

the Spirit. These beliefs are captured in the Christian story as told in the Scriptures and transmitted historically through church tradition and teachings. Christians proclaim these beliefs within the context of the community of the church, and are expected to give witness to them in their daily lives and interactions in society and the world.

Theological ethics reflects on the way that Christians ‘embody’ their beliefs, norms and values, including under its scrutiny convictions, attitudes, decisions, actions, habits, individual and group choices, social patterns and structures. It is concerned about choices to act, or not to act; and about questions of responsibility and accountability for these choices and actions. It further examines motives for actions, their goals and the consequences that ensue.

In this section I will examine theological ethics in relation to three dimensions: its task of critical reflection on morality and moral agency; the foundational Christian vision; and a framework which integrates moral values, norms, obligations, virtues and character.

2.1.1 Reflection on morality and moral agency

Theological ethics reflects on morality. I use the distinction that Birch & Rasmussen (1989:39) make between Christian morality as the practice of morality, i.e. ‘the standards of character and conduct of people who are living the Christian moral life’, and Christian ethics which is ‘a critical intellectual discipline in the service of the Christian moral life’. Here I follow the view of morality as a defining feature of our humanness, to ensure our survival and flourishing as human beings in society (Kammer 1988, Birch & Rasmussen 1989, Kaufman 1993).

2.1.1.1 We construct our morality

Only humans among the animals have a moral capacity. Birch and Rasmussen (1989:36) suggest that only human animals are able to ‘project a different and “better” world’ and then transform it in line with this vision. Thus the moral capacity is one which belongs only to human beings. Kaufman (1993:148) asserts that morality is not an external sphere of activity that we can choose to engage with if we wish; rather it is an aspect or extension of our human existence making us capable of being able to decide and act, even

if we are not always conscious of why we are acting the way we are. This function appears in all cultures, and moral codes and guides help to regulate and sustain the human relationships and thus the fabric of human society and existence.

Action that violates these guides introduces into the social fabric momentums moving human existence towards its own self-destruction, while right actions help to keep open the possibilities of further action, and thus have a fecundity for further action (:196).

Kammer (1988:7) agrees that the difference between ourselves and other animals is our capacity for morality and our ability to shape our world. As much as we are responsible for constructing and shaping our society, so too society shapes and moulds us. Unlike other animals that operate from instinct, humans lack many of these instincts and so instead of adapting ourselves to the environment, we have to modify both the environment and ourselves. In addition to us shaping our world, i.e. our institutions, ideologies and practices, it in turn shapes us.

This self-creation, then, is the essence of morality. We can make decisions about our own nature, what we are and what we will become. Morality is thus the embodying of particular values and options in ourselves and in our communities (:8).

Examples of this two-way or reciprocal relationship can be sought in our own context. During apartheid, as long as people (mainly whites) chose to support the *status quo* and obey the apartheid laws, so the apartheid government was given legitimacy, and this in turn perpetuated the segregated nature of our society within which we lived. Likewise, the patriarchal worldview that is prevalent as a mindset in our society is sustained by our failure to eradicate those attitudes and actions that continue to oppress, exploit and marginalise women.

2.1.1.2 Socialisation and its impact on morality

Our socialisation and our psychology, both as individuals and as groups, shape our attitudes and behaviours and moral judgment (Kammer 1988:8, Kretzschmar 1994:10).

Kammer (:18-32) describes the way society impacts on our moral 'landscape' at the level of worldview, loyalties, norms and values, and other experiential and empirical elements which shape and influence the way individuals and communities make moral decisions.

Our *worldview* provides an interpretative framework for understanding the world and our place within it. It includes general assumptions about ‘the final principles and powers that underlie the existence of both natural and human history’, and also about human nature, the nature of the world and human society (20).

Our worldview defines our *loyalties*. These refer to ‘affective influences’, i.e. our feelings towards and inclinations to associate or align ourselves with certain people and groups, and to obey certain authorities. Our society also provides us with *norms and rules* for living together and proposes what we should value, where values refer to what we care most for or what we aspire to. Our rules and norms guide us in trying to achieve these values in our lives (:16).

Society is largely responsible for determining what *information* is available to us and how we will interpret it; and our position in society will shape the *experiences* that we have. All of these are elements of our socialisation.¹ But, as Kammer (:8) says, we are not always aware of how society shapes us.

...we are unaware of most of what we value and of the consequences of our decisions for our individual and collective personhood. Society, family, friends, social organizations, schools, have all provided us with images of what we should be and how we should act. As such, the moral environment in which we operate is often as invisible as the air we breathe...The seemingly most private and personal acts are greatly influenced by social training and norms.

And so, we choose something because we think it is right, but in fact it is right because the view of the society or culture has made it so, and we have been socialised into accepting this as the norm (:40). Similarly, people have been socialised into their religions and are often uncritical of their frameworks and the inconsistencies, or the lack of congruence with its original vision or impulse:

Unfortunately, many of those do so reflexively because they have been socialised to accept such a framework. Strangely, such reflexively adopted forms of religion have little to do with the traditional insights of the religion on which they are based, but are rather blends of personal needs for comfort and legitimation. In the name of religion, popular religions often betray the best of the religious traditions themselves (:40).

¹ Kammer also suggests that one’s *mode of decision-making* may also be socially constructed, where certain societies favour particular modes of decision-making, e.g. pragmatism of the West.

However, when we talk about moral agency - the reflecting, responsible, acting agent - we allow for the possibility of reflection and critique of these processes of socialisation. Thus our socialisation can be resisted, and even changed.

2.1.1.3 Moral agency

We are not totally determined by our socialisation; our life experiences may test, develop and challenge our worldview, loyalties, norms and values, for example, the death of someone may test our belief in a loving God. Also, through reflection we may become aware of inconsistencies within the framework, or inadequacies in our worldview. We can make choices to shift in consciousness and this presupposes moral agency.

Kaufman (1993:176-193) proposes a way of understanding moral agency in an evolving way in which the reflective capacity of people takes on greater degrees of significance.² Starting at the most fundamental level, which is the level of human agency, the individual is faced with the responsibility for securing what is needed for his/her humanity. This, he says, is the first moral imperative:

...act! Take responsibility for yourself! Take possession of your humanity!
To become an agent is the primal task confronted by every person, a task presupposed by all others (:203-204).

Jonsen (1967:545-549), in tracing the etymological and historical roots of the word 'responsibility', highlights two meanings: *accountability* - being answerable for one's behaviour, and *commitment* - being trustworthy and dependable in the execution of one's decisions and actions. Responsibility as accountability is discussed by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as the agent acting voluntarily and with knowledge (3.1, 1111a21 in Jonsen:546). Thus one is only accountable if free of ignorance and free of coercion in its various forms - physical, psychological, social and economic. Accordingly, moral responsibility and human freedom are correlatives.

Aquinas reiterates the notion of the free acting agent whose actions can be judged good or bad in relation to the natural law, i.e. in keeping with one's human nature. The

² Kaufman describes five levels or 'circles' of ever-increasing depth and complexity of the interrelationship between action and reflection.

individual judges his/her action on the basis of conscience which serves as a guide to good action. Repeated good actions develop good moral habits or virtues (*habitus*) and bring the moral agent closer to God who is the perfect good and the final goal of the moral life (Bourke 1967:344-345).

Responsible persons commit themselves to an action and carry it through, accepting the consequences for its outcomes and being willing to take risks. The idea of *commitment* refers more to the character of the person rather than the choice to act in a particular way. As creatures of God's creation we are accountable to God for both knowing God's law and freely obeying it. But we are also called to respond, to commit ourselves to its ongoing work as co-creators.

Human moral life consists in the dedicated effort to discern the word of God in the situations of life and to respond to that word by faithful, loving, and hopeful action (Jonsen:548).

When we stop and think about what is the right thing to do, and we are prepared to take responsibility for our action, we cross the threshold as humans into morality – we are moral agents (Kaufman 1993:148). But moral agency also has to be understood in the context of community – the 'I' is constituted by the community, and is in relation to the other (1988:151).

Drawing together these aspects we can refer to moral agency as judgment about right and wrong, or good and bad; taking responsibility for choices, decisions and actions with knowledge and freedom; being committed to seeing it through and taking a risk knowing there will be unforeseen consequences; being accountable for the choices and actions and their outcomes; and all this within the context of 'the other' or the community. This is an important complex of ideas with regard to women in training for ministry in the church. It raises questions about the ways in which the church and theological institutions create the necessary enabling environment for the development of women as knowing and free moral agents; and it challenges women to become responsible moral agents who are both accountable and committed to their choices, decisions and actions. This discussion will be developed in chapters 4-6.

This discussion leads me into looking more specifically at the way beliefs, faith and commitment to the Christian vision impact on morality and agency.

2.1.2 Christian reflection on morality

In the previous section I introduced ideas of worldviews, values, responsibility, norms and agency as aspects of morality. How are these to be understood in the light of the Christian vision and perspective?

Kretzschmar (1994:16-21) defines the task of Christian theological ethics as three-fold: reflection, declaration and action. *Reflection* encompasses personal and social analysis of our worldviews, institutions, loyalties, actions and attitudes in their local, societal, global, and ecclesiastical dimensions; and the use of theoretical tools from other theological fields or the social sciences to assist. *Declaration* or proclamation refers to commitment, belief in, and public witness to the gospel. *Action* is aimed at transformation of the person – as individual and as community. Within these processes a degree of change or ‘conversion’ (*metanoia*) is expected to take place, both within the individual and the group. There are a number of other approaches to the task of theological ethics many of which incorporate the elements of observation, reflection on faith, Scripture and core values, and transformative action. They are all praxis-oriented approaches in that they presume change in reflection (or theory), as well as changes in practice.³

2.1.2.1 The Christian vision

The tasks of theological ethics rest on an underpinning Christian vision which motivates, inspires and provides a measure for evaluating the moral person and their life.

‘Where there is no vision the people perish’ (Proverbs 29:18).

As the writer of Proverbs suggests, a vision is essential to life, to being human. A vision describes the kind of future we want to strive for and create for our children and our grandchildren. It is the stuff of the future and of dreams and hopes. A moral vision is defined in relation to present reality and our experience of its inadequacy or disappointing features in the light of the Christian vision of the *basileia* (Kingdom/rule of

³ See the following: (1) The *See-Judge-Act Method* which was developed by a Belgian worker priest, Joseph Cardijn, in the early 20th century and is still used today in the movements for the Young Christian Workers and the Young Christian Students, as well as having been adopted by many other church groups. (2) Philip Wogaman’s Method of Moral Judgment in Philip J A Wogaman, *Christian Method of Moral Judgement* (SCM Press: London, 1976). (3) David Cook’s method from his book, *The Moral Maze* (SPCK: London, 1983), pp. 86-131.

God). The achievement of this vision is dependent on people adopting values and norms consistent with it.

‘I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10b). As this text from the gospel of John suggests, the Christian vision is aimed at ‘human flourishing in which all human needs are met’ (Parsons 2002b:212). Kammer (1988:96-101) differentiates between two aspects of human need – those that have to do with our fundamental human nature, and those that are aspects of our potential humanity. Within the Judeo-Christian biblical framework, the person is understood to have fundamental needs for food and physical needs, psychologico-emotional and rational needs, and these should be met. Many stories in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament speak about providing food for the hungry, e.g. the feeding of people of Israel in the desert (Exodus 16: 9-36), Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes (Matt 15:32-38) etc. But our biblical tradition extends our humanity beyond simply satisfying basic human needs. There is an aspect of what we can become – our human potential as individuals and communities seeking integration and wholeness.

Mary Grey (1989:4) discusses redemption as being both the struggle for liberation from those structures that oppress and exploit, but also about the ‘universal human hungering for healing, wholeness, integrity and transformation’. This is ultimately a spiritual quest for relationship with God.

Our Christian vision incorporates the individual and the group / community; and it is an inclusive vision. God envisages us as community - the Hebrew Scriptures address us as ‘individual in community’, and Jesus often referred to the person in the context of their relationships in the community. And our vision is not only for humankind, or ourselves but also for all of creation.

2.1.2.2 Participation in the vision

The Biblical Hebrew uses verb forms rather than noun forms to speak of creation, suggesting the belief in the unfinished and dynamic nature of God’s creation. As humans we are co-participants with God in ‘a grand, ongoing venture’ (Birch & Rasmussen (1989:52). The vision has implications of engagement for those who share in it. Grey (1989:5) proposes that in holding the processes of creation and redemption together we

allow ourselves to be drawn into the creative task of transforming the world as co-workers with God.

Because our moral vision contains both the integration of self and the reconciliation of community, it implies structural change and transformation – the call to love is also the call to justice. The prophet Micah (6:8) reminds us:

God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God?

When we respond to the needs of others at the level of providing for their basic needs, or working at structural change to ensure their equitable provision, or healing and supporting others' spiritual growth to fullness, then we are participating in the vision through *caring for* others. Our action for love and justice also includes care of the earth as a moral imperative. Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983, 1992) and Sally McFague (1987, 1993) both discuss the relationship of human beings to the whole of creation as part of a *common creation story*.⁴

Like Kammer (1988) and Kaufman (1993) noted previously, Ruether (1983:85-92) questions the understanding of humans as morally superior to nonhuman forms of life and consequently invested with the right to exploit and control nature. She discounts a dichotomy between nature and human history and stresses instead the continuity between human consciousness and the energy of matter throughout the universe, as well as the interdependence between humans and the ecology.

McFague (1993:110) explores the metaphor of the world as the body of God and the implications for an ecological theology. Based on an understanding of the creation of the whole universe in which all of life is connected, she outlines the implications of such a cosmology, including the decentering of human beings whose appearance on the continuum of existence is relatively recent, and the interconnectedness of all life forms.

Kaufman (1993:xi) warns that it is not only human communities that are being destroyed or oppressed – our whole earth and its future are under threat:

It is becoming increasingly evident, for example, that for the sake of what we have regarded as our human well-being we have been exploiting – and even

⁴ See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SPCK, 1983) pp.256-258; also *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992) pp.32-58; Sallie Mc Fague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) p.110.

destroying! – the capacities of planet Earth to sustain life, including human life. If we wish to be fully responsible men and women, thus, we must pay much more attention to what is happening to the web of life as a whole when we take up our concerns about justice, humaneness, and our overall well-being.

2.1.2.3 The vision is ever-expanding

Birch and Rasmussen (1989:59-62) suggest that our moral vision is subject to change – either through some significant event or experience in our lives that shifts the picture we have of our world, and with these shifts our perceptions of the moral life can change. And so our values and obligations, and the way we envisage the ‘good person’ and ‘a good life’ will need to realign themselves. Any change in a moral vision involves ‘a broadening of areas of responsibility’, and ‘an expanding sense of humanity’ (:59). They describe a number of examples: one with regard to the institution of slavery which, for many centuries was an acceptable part of the moral landscape, and yet today is considered abhorrent and morally indefensible; a second example is the changing perception of women and their incorporation into a vision of equality of the sexes; and a third example is a moral vision that includes all of life, not only human life and with it ethical choices and practices that suggest care for creation (:61).

Needless to say these shifts are paradigmatic and take place both at the level of individual consciousness and the broader structures of knowledge and power. This thesis will argue that such a shift is being sought in order for women to become fully and equally part of the Christian church, and subjects of their religious knowledge and the processes of codifying and transmitting it. Such a shift will require both that the church aligns its theology and its practice with a moral vision that affirms the worth and equal contribution of women, and that women claim their responsibility as conscious moral subjects of their church and theology rather than as ‘objects and victims’ (Teresia Hinga in Kretzschmar 2004b:91).

2.1.3 Fitting the pieces together in a moral framework

Christian ethics includes reflection on our beliefs about right and wrong (and good and bad), on how we live out our obligations, and live up to our values and ideals. It extends to moral decision-making and action within the complex realities of our lives, and the

formation of the person's character; and the '*willingness and ability to exhibit good conduct* in all dimensions of our lives' (Kretzschmar 2004b:86)

Birch and Rasmussen (1989:39-40) propose a useful way of connecting these 'elements of the moral life' into a framework. In their model they situate moral vision and moral agency at either end of the continuum, encompassing the two poles of the moral life - an 'ethics of being' and 'an ethics of doing'. An 'ethics of being', otherwise known as 'virtue ethics', focuses on the development of the moral character and the moral virtues and habits that are consistent with the Christian vision. An 'ethics of doing', or responsibility ethics, focuses on moral decision making and the application of values, principles and obligations in shaping choices and actions. In many ways the distinction is more a question of emphasis rather than separate moral entities because in the moral life it is not possible to separate the acting person from the actions they perform. Moral formation is seen as shaping both 'being' and 'doing' and includes discussion of the community and the way it presents and models the Christian narrative to those who are being formed.

In this section I will trace some of the literature on these different elements in the framework in an attempt to demonstrate the critical and constructive task of theological ethics, as well as to locate the contribution of this work more precisely.

2.1.3.1 An ethic of being

An 'ethic of being' refers to the kind of persons that moral agents are – their moral virtue and the formation of their character. An ethic of character, or virtue ethics, refers to a very long Greek classical and Christian tradition, which tried to define the 'good person' and the 'good society' and how to achieve this goal, which I will briefly summarise.⁵

Plato (428-354 BCE) discussed the four cardinal virtues viz. wisdom, justice, courage and temperance in his work, *The Republic*. He saw them as key to the moral life and ensured order in the Greek *polis* (city state). Aristotle (384-322 BCE) developed virtue ethics substantially in his work *The Nichomachean Ethics*. He distinguished between

⁵ I wish to acknowledge Professor Ernst Conradie of the University of the Western Cape for his overview of developments in virtue ethics in the Course notes for Ethics 121: *Introduction to Ethical Theory*, pp. 43-47; also for his way of presenting ethical theory in relation to three quests: the quest for a moral vision, for moral virtue and moral values.

those virtues that can be developed through knowledge and training – the cognitive virtues like judgment and wisdom, and the moral virtues (aspects of character) that cannot be taught but are acquired through ‘habitual exercise’ (MacIntyre 1981:144). So we can become just or courageous by performing just or courageous acts, but we become theoretically or practically wise as a result of systematic instruction (:145). Both are forms of moral education. According to Aristotle, one cannot separate excellence of character and intelligence (:145).

Moral virtues are like personal characteristics that some people exemplify and they are expressed in certain habits. Aristotle discussed courage, temperance, generosity, integrity, a magnanimous spirit, tenderness, justice and friendship as important virtues. He spoke of the virtues as ‘precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement towards that *telos*’ where *eudaimonia* is defined as prosperity, blessedness and happiness (MacIntyre:139).

In Christian theology virtue is a significant feature of morality. Saint Paul spoke about faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13). Other virtues referred to in the New Testament include peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, patience, kindness, faithfulness and purity etc. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) discusses the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity of which charity is the most important: ‘Charity is the mother and the root of all the virtues, inasmuch as it is the form of them all (in Brown 1996:12). Following Aristotle, Aquinas taught that repeated good actions develop good moral habits (*habitus*). Habits are dispositions that do not necessarily come naturally but may be exercised through particular practices. In contrast to Aristotle’s *telos* (goal) of *eudaimonia*, for Aquinas the goal of the moral life is unity with God who is the perfect good.

After the Enlightenment of the 18th century, discussions of character and virtue became less topical in moral philosophy, as the role of human critical reason took precedence in moral discussion. This foregrounded debates about duty and obligation (deontological theories) and about consequences of actions (teleological theories) (Richardson 1994:91).

Since the 1980s there has been a recovery of the importance of a virtue ethics through the work of the moral philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre, particularly his book, *After virtue*

(1981, 1984), where he argues that modern people have lost a systematic moral framework. He argues for the return to virtue ethics to stem the moral chaos of our era. MacIntyre (1981:178) defines virtues as the ‘moral goods that are internal to the person’ including one’s motives, intentions, attitudes, and perceptions.

Theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas (1981:55) suggests that character is more than possessing certain qualities or traits, but is ‘a more inclusive and unitary concept’ which suggests moral strength and consistency. It ‘also denotes a more basic moral determination of the self’, and the freedom of the moral agent to choose to be a certain kind of person.

Connors & McCormick (1998:10) define character as ‘that specific and very particular configuration of good and bad habits, affections, attitudes and beliefs that make up a person. It is who we really are in our hearts.’ Mokgethi Motlhabi (2001:96) relates character to the African understanding of *Botho/Ubuntu* – our humanness which is shaped in relation to the other – ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’.

Birch and Rasmussen (1989) suggest that in addition to virtues, which are normatively defined by the particular moral community to which one belongs, character is also structured by social and psychological factors like one’s perceptions and intentions. *Intention* is the aspect of character that indicates the moral agent choosing to act with a particular purpose and direction; it suggests free choice and accountability (:80). *Perception* is the process of selecting and interpreting experiences on the basis of one’s fundamental symbols (:77). Brown (1996:8) develops this idea to suggest that as one alters one’s perception of God and the world, so too one’s values, perspectives and principles, i.e. one’s character is reshaped. I will argue in chapter 5 that as changes occur in women’s theological symbols about God, and in the way they perceive themselves in relation to God as being loved and having equal worth, so too are changes effected in their perspectives about their experiences, and their values and principles are redefined and sharpened and evidenced in actions. However, these changes will often be in conflict with normative understandings of the ‘good woman’ as being subservient and passive and may well create tensions for women in the church.

Questions about the role of the community in shaping character are addressed by Hauerwas (1981:83-86) who draws attention to the importance of the church in the formation of the moral person. The ethical person in community and the centrality of community is redolent of Aristotle's view of the person in the *polis* – the city-state. For Hauerwas there can be no Christian ethics without community – the person is person in community (in Richardson 1994:92). The community's role is to educate and support the agent through functions of worship, proclamation and reaching out, and training for discipleship and in communal virtues of courage, patience, hope, charity, non-violence, and hospitality to the stranger (:96).

Hauerwas sees community as church which is constituted by 'a particular narrative rooted in the Christian story and the events in the life of Jesus (1981:44-49). Although he recognises the problems associated with the text, he sees the fundamental authority of the text, and the community which lives in faithfulness to the story as more important in the formation of character than a set of rules.⁶ Thus, belonging to this Christian church community sets one apart from other communities – there is a distinctiveness (Richardson :94), but the church's task is to 'read the signs of the times and to recognise God at work in the world' (:95). Because the church is fallible it is important to include reasoning, 'communal self-examination and listening to the voices both of outsiders and dissidents within' (:95).

Brown (1996:18-19) proposes that narrative is only one of the different genres of the Christian tradition that are important in shaping character and moral conduct. He draws attention to moral principles, liturgical traditions, sermons, and legal codes as other examples. In his discussion of the role of wisdom literature in the Hebrew Scriptures and ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, he shows how they provide 'profiles of characters' and role models of people who live virtuous lives which also help to 'shape the contours of virtuous character' (:19).

Richardson (1994) analyses Hauerwas' focus on the church as the community of moral formation in relation to the South African context. He raises questions about the concept 'church' particularly during apartheid where it could not be seen as an

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas *The Self as Story* cited in *Character in Crisis*, William Brown (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p.17.

unproblematic entity. He refers to the way the *Kairos document* categorized churches as either those of the oppressor or those of the oppressed.⁷ Suggesting that there should be a closer engagement between church and society than Hauerwas seems to allow, he discusses the role of the church in the social issues of the context which require engagement with others, outside of church, in the common work for justice (:97).

In the context of this discussion of virtue ethics and community two questions emerge in relation to this study: *Firstly*, what are the nature of the virtues that women must acquire that do not reinforce their submissiveness within a patriarchal church; and *secondly*, what is the nature of the community where the churches that women attend reinforce patriarchal attitudes and practices? Do we need the ‘small interim communities’ that Alisdair MacIntyre proposes along the lines of Fiorenza’s *ekklesia* of women⁸ and Ruether’s *feminist base communities*?⁹ This discussion will be developed later in this thesis in chapter 6.

Kammer (1988:128-129) criticizes the tendency in the Christian tradition to personalise virtues, to see them as private piety and righteousness at the expense of our neighbour’s needs. He offers three reasons why this is not consistent with the vision of self-in community. *Firstly*, it is not consistent with a God who seeks relationship with the world; furthermore Jesus’ life was not committed to personal virtue but sought out those who were considered unvirtuous.

⁷ *The Kairos document* differentiated between those churches that adopted church theology characterised by a lack of social analysis, an inadequate understanding of politics and political strategy, and unworldly, private and individualistic type of faith and spirituality (p.16); and churches of the oppressed communities characterized by prophetic theology that is responsive to the struggle of oppressed people in this country and contains a biblical, spiritual and pastoral and prophetic response (pp.17-27). In *The Kairos document: challenge to the church* revised 2nd edition (Braamfontein: Skotaville 1986).

⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza describes the ‘theoretical and practical space’ which women claim as church. It exists where women gather and articulate a different vision of church, theology and religion from a feminist perspective. This happens, not on the margins of the patriarchal church, but in the centre of it. In *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) pp.328-331.

⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether speaks about feminist base communities which are ‘autonomous, self-gathered’ communities that take responsibility for reflecting on, celebrating, and acting on the understanding of redemption as liberation from patriarchy. In her view they do not necessitate a rejection of the institutional church but they would impact on the church as a ‘field of mission’. In this way she suggests that ‘the relationship between the two ‘becomes a creative dialectic rather than a schismatic impasse’ In *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983) pp.205-206.

Secondly, the personal search for virtue often creates hierarchies and destroys the possibility of relationship and reconciliation. Matthew Fox (1979:36-67) compares two trends in spirituality both present in our Christian spiritual history. The one is a more individualistic quest for perfection; while the other is a quest for compassion and inclusion.¹⁰

These two quests are suggestive of the distinction between morality and moralism. Peter van Breenan draws attention to the difference between morality as an authentic faith response that emanates from a relationship with a loving God and which motivates moral actions. This is opposed to *moralism* where the person feels burdened by the responsibility of having to prove that she is worthy by scrupulously doing right actions.¹¹

Thirdly, by only focusing on personal integration one can become self-preoccupied, but, as Kammer suggests, we become integrated through others and our relationship with God. Kammer draws attention to the paradox of the New Testament ‘the one who finds his life will lose it and the one who loses his life for my sake will find it’ (Matt 10:39).

This discussion of moral formation raises a number of questions about the relationship between those being formed and their teachers or formators, as well as the content and processes of formation. For example, who defines women’s character and the virtues she needs to acquire? Who sets the programme of formation for shaping the habits that contribute to the development of women as conscious and critical moral agents?

¹⁰ Fox uses an interesting symbol of ‘climbing Jacob’s ladder’ to describe the search for perfection based on Genesis 28:10-19 where Jacob goes off to sleep one night, and in a dream he sees a ladder pointing up to heaven and God, and angels climbing up and down the ladder. In the dream God promises Jacob that he will have the land on which he is lying and many descendants who will follow him. Fox suggests that Christianity has taken over this symbol of the ladder as a way of describing the spiritual journey. It is a journey upwards to God, and away from the world, and neighbour. Only a few people can climb this ladder, and it also presupposes a hierarchy, thus it is competitive, and creates pressure. It is an austere journey, in search of the right way and of orthodoxy. The ladder also presumes a distance between God and human beings.

In contrast, Fox suggests a different symbol which he calls ‘Dancing Sarah’s circle’ which illustrates the journey in search of compassion based on Sarah’s discovery of her pregnancy in spite of her barren old age (Genesis 18:11-15 and 21:1-8). The symbol of Sarah’s circle is one of laughter and joy. Dancing is a shared activity and there is always space for one more, it is inclusive of all. God is not separated from the dancers, but fully present weaving in and out of the dance. Sarah’s circle is concerned less with the rules than with the life of people, and particularly those who suffer. Jesus’ life seeks to manifest his growing self-knowledge and relationship with God, alongside his sense of mission and relationships with his disciples. Likewise, in the lives of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena, two key women in the history of the church, these two dimensions are integrated, i.e. the journey to self and God, and to others and the world.

¹¹ Peter G van Breenan *Certain as the dawn*. Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1980) pp.150-152.

These issues will be discussed in chapter 4 where I present some of the difficulties of women's qualities and virtues that have been defined within a patriarchal discourse, and in chapter 5 where I look at the ethical implications of the teacher-learner relationship.

2.1.3.2 An ethic of doing – norms, values, obligations and moral decision-making

Earlier I discussed the role of responsibility – as accountability and commitment in the moral life. An ethic of responsibility draws the Christian into active engagement with the world and into taking responsibility for its transformation. Such an ethic challenges views that focus on 'private religious experience' or 'closed communities of "the saved"', or of the church as a place of withdrawal from the social and political realities of our lives (Jonsen 1967:548). A responsibility ethic or an 'ethic of doing' involves judgments and choices about what is morally the right or best thing to 'do'. Here the language shifts to action and doing and concerns about values and obligations.

Values in ethics '*refer to moral goods to be realized in society*' (Birch & Rasmussen 1989:50). They serve as measures to judge the actions and structures of society, as well as standards for a future society we strive for. Some things can be virtues as well as values, e.g. justice or honesty. Birch and Rasmussen suggest that value ethics is goal oriented – towards a *telos* and thus it pays attention to consequences of actions and how they help to realize the moral vision – teleological ethical theories are part of this tradition. A teleological ethic examines the consequences of decisions and actions and judges their effects as 'good' or 'bad'. 'The defining mark of a teleological theory is that it claims that the *only* ground of obligation is the good produced or the bad prevented' (Wellman 1988:36). In addition, the goal or intended aim or purpose comes under scrutiny (:192) as well as the reasons (or rationalizations) and both the 'stated' and the 'real' motivations (Kretzschmar 1994:9-12).

But an ethic of doing also incorporates norms and values, and obligations evoked by the questions: 'What is the right thing to do?', 'What is my duty?', or 'What ought I to do?' These are important for regulating our lives in community and ensure that basic responsibilities pertaining to relationships are met (Birch & Rasmussen 1989:53-54). These obligations and duties are often stated in the form of principles, laws, rules or codes. For example, the Golden Rule 'So always treat others as you would like them to

treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets' (Matt 7:12). Immanuel Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative says: 'So act in every case as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, as an end, and never a means only' (:55). The Ten Commandments are another example. Ethical theories based on obligation and duty, also known as deontological theories, denote a view of morality which stresses the rightness of a particular act in accordance with norms and principles, and the obligations which flow from this. It is 'concerned with the normative and overriding force of morality and seeks to secure this by connecting morality to rationality' (Shutte in Villa-Vicencio 1994:25). For the Christian, the mores or norms derive from the Bible and the teachings of the Church.

Villa-Vicencio (1994), in his assessment of an ethic of responsibility which is useful for us in our South African context, refers to the ethical thinking of Joseph Fletcher, Paul Lehmann, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. All four theologians recognized the place of norms and principles in ethical decision-making, but see them weighed up and applied with varying degrees of flexibility in the context of particular situations.

Fletcher, whose ethic is popularized in his book *Situation Ethics*, recognizes one absolute: 'the act of self-giving love for the benefit of one's neighbour'. What defines the loving response can only be determined within the context of the problem or dilemma (in Villa-Vicencio 1994:76). Whilst norm and principles are acknowledged they are not absolute and help to illuminate rather than prescribe, and they can be violated if the situation requires it.

Although Lehmann¹² would agree that each situation has its own dynamic which will require a specific response, he proposes that the New Testament ethical rules are normative for the Christian, i.e. it cannot be ignored or violated. As he suggests, they must become part of the interior life and identity of the Christian.

There is a sense in which he regards them as part of the spirituality that nurtures those renewed by Jesus Christ and that inspires Christian community, within which Christians find their personal identity (in Villa-Vicencio 1994:77).

¹² Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

Lehmann rejects any legalism by insisting that at all times the Christian has the duty to decide what it is that God requires in each new situation. This places a responsibility on the Christian community for the moral formation of its members.

...the moral insight of the agent, to the extent that he or she affirms the Christian faith, is to be shaped and honed within the tradition and mores of the Christian community (:78).

For Barth the absolute is the person's obedience to 'God's command' as contained in the scriptures, for example in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (in Villa-Vicencio 1994:79). But he allows for the application of reason to discern what God's Word requires in each situation, and this discernment happens in the community of faith (:80). Barth's idea of *Grenzfall* (extreme or exceptional case) refers to what appears to be God's command to do something contrary to what is accepted as the norm or the right way – 'an apparent contradiction between what God has commanded in the past (in the biblical record) and what God is now commanding' (:80).

In the case of Bonhoeffer, Villa-Vicencio draws attention to his notion of 'responsible freedom' which emerged out of his struggle to find an ethical response to being a Christian in the context of Nazi Germany. In associating himself with an attempted assassination on Hitler he 'understood responsible action as demanding ethical behaviour that violated the ideal ethical norms of society' (:85).¹³

For Bonhoeffer the responsible person is one who shares in the transforming work of Christ in the world, without seeking to protest his or her innocence. In acting responsibly, a person is required to assess the situation in the most careful and precise way possible, and to act according to what would best further the purposes of Christ in the world (:85).

But for Bonhoeffer, this responsibility also carries with it guilt – in taking on the decision to act in violation of Christian ethical norms – makes one guilty of transgression and in need of God's mercy which, as Villa-Vicencio suggests, 'militates against triumphalism, and calls for careful (and fearful) decision-making' (:86).

Villa-Vicencio warns against an ethic of responsibility being used as an excuse to do what one likes and should take into account 'human rationalizations and the

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* translated by NH Smith and edited by E Bethge (London: Collins, 1964).

inclination to self-justification' (:86), i.e. it needs to be taken responsibly, and requires the willingness to risk oneself for others. Karl-Wilhelm Merks (1994) includes the notion of conscience in his ethic of responsibility which would still be guided by norms, but where the individual was required to exercise the freedom given by God, and to make decisions based far more on conscience, on respect for human beings and faith in God, rather than on individual or group interest.¹⁴

As in the case of virtue ethics, here also we need to problematise Lehmann's and Barth's notion of 'the community' and ask ourselves whether it is always trustworthy for women? As I aim to establish in chapter 4, Christian communities, in this case churches and theological institutions, are tainted by what Radford Ruether describes as the sin of sexism¹⁵ and are not themselves free from corruption and distortions of the Christian truth. *Secondly*, for Christian women who already carry a load of guilt, Barth's guilt feels like an additional burden, especially when it accompanies a decision to challenge or act against norms or obligations which are themselves in need of revisioning. If, as Motlhabi suggests (section 2.1.3.3), conscience is the internalised voice of the community directing one's actions before, during and after, then how can we 'reform' the conscience of women so that the patriarchal voice is dulled and the liberating spirit of the gospel may be heard more clearly?

2.1.3.3 Moral formation

Moral formation is about socialising members into the norms and practices of a moral community. Birch and Rasmussen (1989:45) describe it as shaping the individual's moral identity so that it is in line with the 'faith identity of the community'. Motlhabi (2001:91) agrees with this socialising function:

¹⁴ In André Van Niekerk, Challenges for Moral Systems in *Questions about Life and Morality: Christian Ethics in South Africa Today* edited by L. Kretzschmar and L. Hulley (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998) p.266.

¹⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SPCK, 1983). This view is supported by Kammer who describes sexism as a social sin where women are discriminated against because of their gender and which 'like racism is the attempt to draw artificial limits on community; to exclude from God's community for arbitrary reasons a whole class of persons. ...it denies our common humanity and God's intention that we affirm and live out the affirmation of that common humanity'. See Charles L Kammer III, *The Kingdom Revisited* (Washington: University Press of America, 1981) p.145.

In short, moral formation involves learning a good way of life, being transformed by this way of life, participating in it, and manifesting it in one's own conduct.

It is a process that takes place over time and one in which the community plays a significant role (:90). It is both about nurturing the character of the person, as well as about the development of conscience in order to 'provide internal motivation for our moral practice' (:89). By moral conscience he means internalised norms that guide us, warn us, and if we do not listen to, leave us with feelings of guilt.

Connors and McCormick (1998:117) suggest that conscience be understood in three ways - as a capacity that alerts us prior to an action (antecedent conscience), during an action (conscience as process), and as judgment afterwards (command conscience). It is also our capacity to seek for the good and to encounter God (:128). Kretzschmar (2004a:117) emphasises the importance of conscience which acts as 'an overriding moral claim' but she warns that because it is influenced by social custom and beliefs, i.e. our socialisation, as well as our tendencies to rationalisations and self-deception, on its own it is not 'an absolutely reliable test of morality'.

Johannes Van der Ven (1998:36ff) defines 'the community' and its processes of formation of character. He speaks about informal, non-intentional transmission of moral values and habits which happens in the home and local communities. Formal transmission, on the other hand, takes place through schools and educational institutions and the church. Informal education includes discipline which is the formation of habits, self mastery and self regulation; and socialisation is the process of passing on the community's values and principles to the next generation. Formal transmission aims at moral development, clarification of moral norms and values, and the growth of trust and confidence and emotional maturity.

Kretzschmar (2004b:90) discusses the moral formation required of African Christians so that we can more effectively participate in the moral regeneration process on our continent in the context of war, corruption, social and community degradation, poverty and economic greed and corruption. She defines moral formation as:

the development of righteous character through the exercise of virtues such as integrity, goodness, fairness and caring. This leads to the formation of the bedrock of moral identity which can issue in moral conduct such as just and compassionate action (:87-88).

She argues for an integration of moral and spiritual formation, where ‘spirituality provides Christians with the moral motivation and empowerment necessary for character formation and social renewal to become actual realities’ (:95). As Kretzschmar sees it, the danger of separating spiritual formation from moral formation is to ignore the person’s relationship with God, and what this requires in terms of repentance, conversion and interiority.

Authentic Christian spirituality, thus, issues in moral change and caring conduct. True worship is inseparable from personal moral character and love for neighbour (Matt 7:20; Jn 4:19-21) (:97).

In Kretzschmar’s view formation must pay attention to spiritually nurturing the person ‘being formed in the likeness of Christ’ (:88) and focus on the acquisition of spiritual disciplines, as well as the moral aspects that will shape an ethic of being and of doing. She cites Foster (1978) who describes the spiritual disciplines in terms of those that are *inward* (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), those that are *outward* (simplicity, solitude, submission, service); and those that are *corporate* (confession, worship, guidance, celebration);¹⁶ and Willard (1998) who defines the disciplines as ‘disciplines of abstinence’ and ‘disciplines of engagement’.¹⁷

Whilst I would agree with Kretzschmar’s view that Christian formation should include both spiritual and moral dimensions, my concern is that any programme of formation must also be contextualised and genderised, particularly with regard to the formation of women. The discipline of fasting and abstinence is a more appropriate element in the context of affluence than it is for many African women on a continent where millions are starving, and where it is often women who give up their food share for the men, the children, the sick and the elderly. Similarly, spiritual goals of interiority need to be qualified with reference to women’s spirituality which has largely been shaped by male spiritual directors (leaders and teachers), and with reference to a male experience.

¹⁶ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978).

¹⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding how God changes lives*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998).

As Sandra Schneiders (1989:38) argues, religious instructors are predominantly male and the stress in moral formation is often on what Schneiders terms ‘male vices’ of pride, aggression, disobedience to lawful hierarchical authority, etc. In contrast women are rarely alerted to the behaviours typically or often associated with women, e.g. submissiveness, fear, self-hatred, jealousy, timidity, self-absorption, submersion of personal identity and manipulation.

If anything, women’s spirituality has been too interior, too solitary and submissive and, as I discuss in chapters 3 and 4, its focus on service within the patriarchal environment of home and church has been destructive to women. Consequently, the cultivation of the *opposite* qualities or disciplines are necessary so that women’s spirituality can become more externalized and public and their spiritual insights become formative within Christian spirituality for all. This study is concerned about the theological / Christian formation of women and seeks ways for this formation to be liberating of women as Christian disciples and as active agents in the transformation of the world. But this task requires that we scrutinize our texts and the theological tools of our tradition with a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’.

Processes in moral formation need to combine both an ethic of doing justice in the world, and doing justice to oneself as women – and that is about integrating our moral work and our spiritual work. As Mary Grey (1989:6) suggests:

The very act of recovering a sense of being created in the image of God, is, for women, a redemptive act, in reclaiming the lost wholeness, and sense of self-worth.

In the light of this overview of the field of theological ethics, I propose to situate my work as an aspect of moral formation. It addresses the question of how prepared *women* are to make judgments and choices, to take responsibility for their decisions and be accountable to themselves and to others, and to commit to decisions and actions as freely acting moral agents. Women who are in training for ministry are engaged in personal and theological development in preparation for their work in the church. This work also asks of the *communities of formation* – the church and theological institution – to consider whether the theology they teach and their educative processes ensure the full moral development of women.

An integrated model of moral and spiritual formation (Kretzschmar 2004b) provides an holistic way of defining what needs to happen in those processes – of shaping consciousness, commitment and responsiveness to need. It draws together analysis and prayer, personal growth and structural change. The task that I have set myself here is to situate women as the subjects of this formation and to examine the processes that are necessary for ensuring that women become critical, conscious and caring moral agents in their work of ministry.

2.2 THE FIELD OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

As this thesis seeks to survey the ethical category of care/caring and women as its agents through the lens of feminist theology, it is necessary to provide an analytical framework as background to such a discussion. The task of feminist theology can be considered to be both deconstructive and reconstructive, and so I present a critique of patriarchy and how it has impacted on the Christian moral vision and the consequent stunting of many women as critical and conscious moral agents. I also explore the way that a number of feminist/womanist theologians speak about a liberatory vision and view of human relationships that can be transformative for all, and especially for women.

2.2.1 Commonalities and differences

Feminist theology is a heterogeneous term; it points to a range of different positions and methodologies known under different labels including ‘womanist’ of African American women, *Mujerista* of Hispanic women, *Minjung*, Indian and Asian forms, feminist theology (European and North American white women), post colonial, African women’s theologies, *Bosadi* of (Northern Sotho) South African women,¹⁸ to name a few.

Delores Williams (1993:179) suggests that the understanding of the scope and definition of the term ‘feminist theology’ varies according to the class and cultural locations of women. She points out a number of differences between womanist theologians and other feminist theologians including: what it means to be female;

¹⁸ A proponent of this view is Madipoane Masenya who attempts to locate her work on woman’s liberation biblical hermeneutics in the context of African-South African women. She uses the Sotho word *bosadi* (womanhood) to describe her approach. Reading the Bible the Bosadi (womanhood) way. In *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* vol 4, no. 2, 1997, pp.15-16.

different and even opposing hermeneutical positions; and different ways of understanding God's relationship to the oppressed in history. Despite differences in cultural contexts, social locations and experiences, feminist/womanist theologians hold in common women's experience as a central interpretive category for doing theology, and a rejection of sexism as it permeates Christian symbols, doctrines and practices. It also defines itself as a liberation theology where its starting point is those who are oppressed or marginalised and its commitment is to *praxis* or liberating action.

In analysing the range of feminist theological positions in Europe and North America, Meyer-Wilmes (1995:67) proposes that instead of seeing these variations as problematic, they be considered 'not as irreconcilable worldviews but rather as paths along which we can find a new consensus in an ever more evident truth'.¹⁹

Mary Ann Hinsdale (1995:22-24) suggests a three-way classification which can be detected in the feminist theological scholarship – *critique* of patriarchal theology and its sexist bias, *recovery* of the 'lost voices' of women in the Christian tradition as well as the marginalisation of their experiences and reflections, and *reconstruction* of theology from the starting point of woman as *imago Dei*. These strands have been influential in feminist biblical hermeneutics²⁰ and studies in feminist theological anthropology.

I situate myself as a white, Christian, middle class, feminist theologian in South Africa, deeply appreciative of the wealth of critical scholarship that I have been privileged to receive from those in the north and the west and from other cultural contexts, and of the analytical tools and critical resources that have helped me to scrutinise received reality and the institutions of power that oppress women. At the same time I draw from the experience, reflection and compassion of African women theologians (white and black) whose work is rooted in the context of our people's lives

¹⁹ Meyer-Wilmes (1995:67-68) classifies feminist theologies in Europe and North America in relation to their stance towards *feminism* (gynocentric, humanist, and socialist); their *epistemological point of reference* (liberation theology, ontology, structuralism/semiotics, and archetypal teaching); and their *method as point of reference* (historical-critical, socio-historio, literary critical, and linguistic critical).

²⁰ A similar classification of biblical hermeneutics has been used by Schüssler Fiorenza as the hermeneutics of suspicion, proclamation and retrieval (remembrance and historical reconstruction) and creative actualization. Fiorenza has done pioneering work on reconstructing the New Testament texts in relation to women in their historical, social and cultural locations. In *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Seabury Press, 1997) p.75.

and suffering, and who bring a focus on healing and transformation that makes so much sense to me in my own life and in my work among women.

2.2.1.1 Women's experience

Women's knowledge/experience is one of the central interpretive categories in feminist theory and thus also in feminist theology. What is meant by 'experience' is not just an individualistic, subjective feeling-response by an individual woman to a particular situation, although one does not discount the affective or the personal in the totality of any experience. Neither is experience simply raw data; there is always interpretation. But when this interpretation or filtering takes place in the validating community of other women, i.e. it is not just one woman's experience, then it can be claimed to be a criterion of truth. It refers to sources of truth and knowledge that are mediated by/through women about different aspects of life in their 'subjective concreteness' and their 'social entanglements' (Mies 1991).

Dickey Young (1990:53-56) describes five ways of referring to women's experience:

1. bodily experience - all women menstruate or have done in the past, most have some measure of sexual experience, most experience pregnancy and childbirth, many experience menopause;
2. women's socialised experience – all women have appropriated, to some degree, what culture teaches them about how they are to be as women, in many cases to accept male dominance, to remain in the sphere of the home and family, to adhere to virtues of meekness, submissiveness, self-denial, nurturance, support of others;
3. women's feminist experience – for those who have been exposed, this is a critical response to women's socialisation, and acknowledgement of how women suffer in different contexts, viz. poverty, racial and class oppression which leads to a redefinition of what it means to be a woman;
4. women's historical experience – recovering the lost history and what we can learn from women who have gone before us; this knowledge has often been excluded;
5. women's individual experience – all the personal experiences that make each woman's story unique.

Radford Ruether (1983:12) emphasizes that the claim to experience is nothing new in theology and that all theology, scripture and tradition are made up of collective human experience which has been codified, and therefore it is subjective and not absolutely normative:

Human experience is the starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle. Codified tradition both reaches back to roots in experience and is constantly renewed or discarded through the test of experience. "Experience" includes experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic.

The difference for feminist theology is that women claim the subjectivity, value and legitimacy of their own experience. There are two ways that women's experience can be used: *Firstly*, we can claim and celebrate women's identities; reclaiming experiences and reflections on these experiences that have been ignored by patriarchy. Here feminist theological research includes an exploration of women in the biblical tradition and the early church, the early church mothers, the writings of women mystics, the work of religious sisters, social reformers and missionaries (Hinsdale 1995:31-34). It has also included a recovery of the body (Susan Bordo 1989) and the use of terms like 'desire' and 'erotic' to describe key aspects of women's experience (Audrey Lorde 1984, Luce Irigaray, Carter Heyward 1989 and Rita Nakashima Brock 1989).²¹

O'Hara Graff (1995:80) describes the central place of emotions in knowing:

The presence of affect in a person's response to an issue simply cannot be dismissed as a temporary lapse from reason, as we have been taught to treat such occurrences. The emotional tenor of a response signifies meanings, values, connections for that person; it is informative, not an opacity in the lens of a glass that must remain unsullied.

Thus emotions like anger, grief, joy, love are important dimensions of theology and particularly in relation to concepts like sin, sexuality, grace and healing (:81) which will be addressed in chapter 5 when I examine feminist pedagogy in relation to theological education.

²¹ Audre Lorde describes the erotic as 'the assertion of the life force of women' – that creative energy which comes from deep within our being and which we have been taught to fear but which fuels joy, relationships and mutuality. In *The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God in Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984) pp.53-59.

Luce Irigaray uses the word *jouissance* to describe the quality of women's sexuality (meaning enjoyment and delight) in Susan, A Ross, *Extravagant Affections* (New York: Maryknoll, 1995) p.111.

Rita Nakashima Brock speaks about grace as the 'erotic power' that is present and available within and between humans. In *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

Secondly, women's experiences of oppression under patriarchy are placed in the foreground. Here Thistlethwaite (1989) and others stress the importance of social location in shaping the way we understand human experience.²² She warns against the dangers of ignoring the category of difference, commenting that:

white feminists have made a mistake parallel to that committed by white men - the assumption of common experience and hence the false universalization of what is in fact only the experience of a particular group (:12).

Instead we need to approach a discussion about women's experience with 'a hermeneutic of suspicion of racial privilege and a hermeneutic of the truth of white women's sufferings as tools' (:141). Thus she acknowledges that white women bring their own experience of oppression with them and that feminist interpretation should not negate it, but it has to be held in tension with the 'otherness' of black women's experience. So, whilst women's experience is a central resource, because it is so fragmented within our society, it has to be interpreted and critiqued through the lens of race and class before it can be usefully employed (Hogan 1995:17).

Govinden (1991:287) draws attention to the racial and class differences through which South African women's experiences are mediated.²³

Amid the commonality there is also much diversity of women's experience in Southern Africa. The condition of being female may be a defining characteristic of any woman's grouping, cutting across differences of class and race. Yet the painful separation created by apartheid is soon experienced. We begin to realize that we are sisters of two worlds, even in the same church. The differences between white and black women are indeed entrenched by the divisive system of apartheid in its many manifestations.

The relationship between women in South Africa is particularly complex where white women, in the past, occupied the dual positions of being both the oppressor, and the oppressed, and where black women by and large experienced the triple oppression of race, class and gender (Bazilli 1991). Despite the new democratic order, these racial and

²² O'Hara Graff suggests that social location includes sex, race, class, ethnic group, sexual orientation, culture and subculture, in its historical moment. In *The Struggle to Name Women's Experience* (New York: Maryknoll, 1995) p.75.

²³ Jakobsen echoes this caution and warns against drawing generalizations for all women based on one group of women's experience. 'Ethics in Feminist Theology' In *Doing Ethics in Context: South African Perspectives*, Charles Villa-Vicencio & John de Gruchy (eds). (Cape Town: David Philip, 1994) p. 150.

class stratifications still play themselves out in addition to gender discrimination, and are experienced by women in the church. African and South African women doing theology refer to these 'multiple oppressions' that African women experience in culture, the church, the family and home, in the health and education systems, and in the workplace.²⁴ At the same time many of these theologians desire to affirm the values of African culture, of *ubuntu*, and of women's role in bringing healing in their respective situations.²⁵

At the same time, Russell *et al* (1988:28) stress that we must find ways of coming together because 'the best tactic of the preservers of the *status quo* is to make sure that they convince different groups of women that they have nothing in common'. This will prevent women from working together in order to eliminate racism, sexism and classism and building a more human society.

Implicit in the understanding of the term 'women's experience' is the element of *praxis*. This refers to 'liberating activity, which in turn changes consciousness and transforms understanding' (Hogan 1995:142). Charles Davis speaks about the dialectical relationship between theory and praxis in the following way:

Theory is the consciousness of *praxis*; *praxis* is action infused with and made conscious by theory. ...Critical theory is the conscious component of revolutionary *praxis*; a theoretical consciousness is inseparable from the concrete, historical effort to overcome the contradictions in existing society (in Hogan 1995:83).

Feminist theology is committed both to the analysis of women's experiences of oppression and to seeking liberating alternatives where the action emerges from those who are 'affected', using Mies' categorization where 'affectedness' refers to the 'victim and the object status of being oppressed'.

Affectedness only becomes a concept which transcends victim status when those affected do not remain at the level of simply coming to consciousness ... the dialectical movement in one affected must press toward

²⁴ See for example: Nyambura J Njoroge & Musa W Dube (eds). *Talitha cum: Theologies of African Women* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001); Isabel Apawo Phiri, Devakarsham Betty Govinden, & Sarojini Nadar (eds). *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002); Isabel Apawo Phiri, Beverley Haddad, Madipoane Masenya (eds). *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003); Ackermann, Denise. *Tamar's Cry: Re-Reading an Ancient Text in the Midst of an HIV/AIDS Pandemic*. (Stellenbosch: EFSA, 2001).

²⁵ See Beverley Haddad (ed). *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 1997:4-5.

action. It cannot remain at the level of emotional outrage, of coming to consciousness, of criticism and analysis. If it does, it will inevitably end in resignation and regression (1991:81).

Ackermann (1994:202) speaks about women doing theology always being ‘on the ground’ with women struggling against discrimination, violence and oppression. Liberating praxis begins with our own lives and extends to others across differences.

It is a collaborative effort which requires a shared commitment; it needs creative strategies and is action-oriented; and it has justice, healing and wholeness as its goal, as compelling material to the South African context.

This thesis addresses women’s experiences in two ways: *Firstly*, the broad experiences of oppression of women living in our South African context, and in particular with regard to poverty, violence and HIV and AIDS (this will be addressed in chapter 4). *Secondly*, the thesis explores the experiences of women who are in ministry. It examines their experiences as women; how they experience themselves as women in the church; and their understanding of their work of caring in ministry (themes which will permeate chapters 4-6). These various experiences will be interpreted through the theoretical frames of theological ethics, feminist theology and feminist pedagogy.

All feminist/womanist theologies share a critique of patriarchy as it manifests itself in particular historical and cultural contexts. But, whilst this fundamental opposition to patriarchy is shared, responses take a variety of forms particular to these locations which I will now examine.

2.2.1.2 Critique of patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to the social system that promotes hierarchies and awards economic, political and social power to one group over others. Classical patriarchy refers to the domination of the male over the female, children, servants and slaves (Ackermann 1991:95), but we understand patriarchy in contemporary times to describe all forms of chauvinism, cultural and class domination and even 'humanocentrism making humans the norm and crown of creation' (Ruether 1983:20).²⁶

²⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has introduced the term ‘kyriarchal’ to illustrate some of the dimensions of Western patriarchy – ruling power, elites, propertied, educated, freeborn male. In Elisabeth Schüssler

Feminist theorist, Demaris Wehr (1987:16ff) describes the negative way that patriarchy is expressed in relation to women in three ways - as androcentricism, as exclusion or as forceful subjection. *Androcentricism* is a male-centred world-view which values the male as the norm and devalues and excludes female perceptions, critique and contributions. A woman is named or defined in relationship to a male, be it a father, a husband, or children. It is:

the habit of thinking about the world, ourselves, and all that is in the world from the male perspective... Androcentricism drowns or silences women's voices and perceptions by the continual downpouring of male perceptions into the world (:16).

When Wehr refers to *exclusion* she means that women are restricted, usually to the domestic realm, and not allowed entry to the world of politics or the economy, and if they do enter, they are excluded from leadership positions or policy-making decisions. It is also reflected in the way women have been treated as minors, without legal status. Women are also forcibly *subjected* either by sex or violence, or economically oppressed and exploited.

Kretzschmar (1995b:147-161) discusses the way externalised patriarchal oppression as it is imposed by the structures, worldviews, norms and expectations of society become internalised by women themselves. Freire (1970, 1993:29) describes the way that those who are oppressed internalise the image of the oppressor, adopt his [*sic*] guidelines and are fearful of freedom. In order to become free, the oppressed needs to 'eject' that which has been internalised and 'replace it with autonomy and responsibility'. This is important in my discussion of women's formation which has as its goal the development of women as free and responsible moral agents. It implies that part of the process of becoming free is deconstructive, and requires the shedding of aspects of patriarchy that have become embedded in women in the church. I refer to this as 'healing work' in chapter 6.

O'Murchu (1997:15,131) describes manifestations of patriarchy in hierarchies of control in which the male, the rich, the powerful, the white, the west, the human, the employer assumes dominance and control over 'the other'; attaching gendered attributes

Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland (eds). *Violence Against Women* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994) pp.xxi-xxii, n.1.

to men and women that have the effect of fixing, limiting, proscribing and prescribing. The concomitant effects of patriarchy on women include marginalisation, silencing, enforced submission and the potential for abuse and violence, and the internalisation of this oppression by women, issues all of which have been adequately theorised by others.²⁷

Kammer (1988:105-6) describes a further dimension of patriarchy in the west in what he calls 'a peculiar bifurcation of our humanity' that sets up oppositions between reason as the controlling principle associated with adult, white males, and the emotions and the body as subordinate and associated with women, persons of colour, and children. The west has assumed that white males are to govern all other persons in the same way that rationality is to control the body and the emotions. Women are to be subservient and live out their lives as emotional beings, who nurture and care for the young and offer a haven, a home, for their husbands. The effects on women and men have been destructive and he proposes that these dualisms are foreign to the Judeo-Christian tradition which has an integrated understanding of the human person and the person in community.

Biblical tradition knows nothing of disembodied souls, or the dominance of human reason in creating integrated persons. When immortality is discussed, it is always done in the context of bodily resurrection, for it is presumed that we cannot be persons, cannot be human, without our bodies and all they contribute to our humanness (:106).

Women in the church experience the various manifestations of patriarchy outlined above when they are excluded from office or the creative use of their gifts of leadership as a result of their gender. Patriarchy expresses itself in the sexist language in the church liturgy and official pronouncements, as well as at the symbolic level of naming God and naming oneself in relation to God. It is codified in uncritical and androcentric interpretations of the Scripture and church teachings, and conveyed in racial and cultural practices, attitudes, gestures, jokes and asides that denigrate or undermine women. Women in the church experience the oppression of patriarchy when their bodies are

²⁷ Rakoczy (2004) raises the issue of women's own internalizations of oppressive structures and beliefs and how women may only become mature moral agents if they deal with their own sense of unworthiness; Groves (1997) stresses the dangers of only externalizing the struggle and the need for women to work on themselves. Ralphs (1999) describes the effects of patriarchy on women's self-perception in the Catholic church.

violated or abused, when they are exploited in any way; when they are paid less for the work they do, and when they are expected to take on the service and nurturing roles just because they are women. These are issues that will be developed in relation to the women in my research in chapter 4.

2.2.2 The reconstructive task

A significant part of the task of feminist theology is to analyse and reconstruct some of the key doctrines in Christian theology that can be liberating for women (Hinsdale 1995:35), for example, what it means to be human, how to understand creation, sin and grace, forgiveness and redemption, the notion of embodiment, sexuality and desire. Against the backdrop of women's experiences of oppression under patriarchy, a number of feminist theologians have proposed some key metaphors and religious symbols which help to destabilise the power relations on which the patriarchal worldview is based. They provide a way of describing God's relationship to the world and flowing from this people's relationship to one another and to the earth.

2.2.2.1 Key metaphors

Letty Russell uses the term 'household of freedom' to imply the concrete relationships between people but also a critique of where freedom is not honoured (1987:26). Haney speaks about 'friendship', which balances the power relations between people:

To make friendship central is both to transform the power relations that most often hold between individuals, groups, and people and the earth, and to be a participant in that transformation. Friendship is a relation of mutuality, respect, fidelity, confidence, and affection. It is impossible in, and therefore a rejection of, most competitive patterns of relating. To begin to make friendship a reality is to begin acting as a friend. That is, to demonstrate in one's speech and behaviour that one is not superior or inferior and that one will no longer countenance being related to in those ways (1994:6).

Other theologians (Margaret Farley 1975, Mary Grey 1989, Beverley Wildung Harrison 1994) describe relationships of 'mutuality' that allow women to transcend traditional self-sacrificial relationships:

For Farley, mutuality implies that all parties in a loving relationship display both active and receptive qualities. For women, receptivity is the stumbling block in

Christian love, because receptivity has been distorted into demeaning passivity, submissiveness and self-surrender. Theologians have mistakenly asserted that God is totally active; the Christian, totally passive. They have assumed that the Christian is completely active on behalf of the neighbor; the neighbor, completely receptive. Such models for behavior leave no room for mutuality. Farley insists that both parties in a love relationship are active. The one who appears to be receptive is at the same time active. The one who appears to be receptive is at the same time active (in Andolsen 1994:154).

While it is not true to say that all theologians build on these rigid and dualistic notions of passive and active love described above, Farley is correct to point to currents in theological thinking and preaching that convey distorted understandings of love and self sacrifice. The revisioning of these is part of the reconstructive task of feminist theology.

2.2.2.2 Revisioning love and self-sacrifice

The origins of the theological understanding of *agape* love as self-sacrifice are to be found in the work of Anders Nygren (1932) where *agape* is seen as the norm for Christian ethics, and *eros* as natural self love and therefore morally negative.²⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr (1932) followed this view, condemning self-love and emphasizing sacrifice, with Jesus as the epitome of this kind of sacrificial love. For Niebuhr there is a dialectical relationship between love and justice. The ethic of Jesus shows the pure form of God's love which cannot be realized in this present human existence by men [*sic*] who are egoistic and selfish. Therefore, he understands love as an 'impossible possibility' which may be achieved to some degree in the family, but not in the public sphere; here justice must operate at the institutional level (1935:19). Instead of trying to apply the law of love to political and economic reality, he suggests the principle of justice as an 'approximation of love'.

Yet the law of love is involved in all approximations of justice, not only as the source of the norms of justice, but as an ultimate perspective by which their limitations are discovered (:85).²⁹

²⁸ A Nygren *Agape and Eros*: Part I, 1932; Part II 1938.

²⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribners, 1932) and *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935). Cited in Yun Jung Moon, *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)* Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology.

Wildung Harrison (in Andolsen, 1994:154) differentiates between the self-love that is self-absorbed, egocentric or narcissistic, and that of a healthy and integrated person who is self-accepting and self-caring. She critiques the view which seems to suggest a split between the public and the private world – love being the norm in the family but justice in the public sphere. She asserts that Jesus did not desire death on the Cross as a manifestation of total self-surrender, but his death was the inevitable outcome of his decisions, and his commitment to mutual love. Thus, she says:

It is not suffering itself which Christians should seek. Rather we should emulate Jesus' absolute dedication to love which highlights human dignity (155).³⁰

Gebara (2002:113), writing from the Latin American context, discusses the symbol of the cross as a burden that women carry and must submit to. She proposes looking at salvation not as submission to an imposed dominating power but through working for justice and 'promoting relationships of justice, respect and tenderness among human beings'.

Williams (2002:201), writing from a womanist perspective, describes Jesus' mission as one of 'righting relations'. To be a Christian means to be 'tangibly related to the survival/quality of life struggle of suffering black people – the homeless, the people with AIDS, people living in dire poverty, the poverty-stricken single parent trying to raise children. Christological issues are not about Jesus' humanity or divinity but about his being involved in black women's daily affairs and supporting them (:203).

Mary Grey (1989:1) proposes an alternative to the patriarchal language of domination and submission in the language of creation and redemption. She suggests that women need to reclaim the symbols of 'creation' and 'liberation' where creation means women as God's good creation (:5), and liberation is understood as personal wholeness and integration as well as structural transformation (:2). Women need to be redeemed from what she describes as:

passive acquiescence in (her) inferior status, an acceptance of the "female lot", with its cheapening of (her) own sexuality, and of complicity in acting out the subservient roles into which women are often trapped (:15).

³⁰ A view expressed by liberation theologians Gustavo Gutierrez and John Sobrino. Gutierrez says, 'Jesus' death is the consequence of his struggle for justice, his proclamation of the kingdom, and his identification with the poor'. (London: SCM Press, 1983) p.15.

Daly (1994:124) proposes a revisioning of the three theological virtues in a way that acknowledges women's subject position and the task of overcoming structures of domination:

Faith can come to be understood in a non-authoritarian and universalist sense. Hope, rather than being restricted to expectation of rewards for conformity, can come to be experienced and understood as creative, political, and revolutionary. Love will mean uniting to overcome oppression. It will be understood that the most loving thing one can do for the oppressor is to fight the oppressive situation that destroys both the oppressor and the oppressed.

2.2.2.3 Symbols for God

Different feminist/womanist theologians have suggested ways of naming God that defocus the parent-child relationship and challenge the patriarchal white male symbol. Sallie McFague (1987:98,106) proposes a number of symbols, viz. God as mother, that we came from the womb of God, as God's beloved creation; God as lover (:125); as friend (1982:180). Ivone Gebara (1989:44) speaks about the 'God of compassion and mercy'; Kwok Pui-lan (1986:92) of God 'who suffers and weeps with us'. Grace Jantzen (1999:254) uses the phrase 'a horizon of beauty'. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001:40) describes the Yoruba designation for God as 'source of *alafia* (shalom), of grace, hospitality and compassion.'³¹

2.2.3 Revisioning the theological project

What is the task of women as moral agents (defined in 2.1.1.3) when the symbolic frame of a patriarchal God is no longer adequate, our internalised negative perceptions about ourselves as women need to change, and where our awareness of our self-destructive and submissive attitudes and behaviour begins to surface? What does it mean to take moral responsibility and be moral agents in this new situation where, as Adrienne Rich says: 'the maps they gave us were out of date'?'³²

³¹ I am grateful to Susan Rakoczy for her section on different names for God. In *In Her Name* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004) pp.76-94.

³² From 'Dream of a Common Language' by Adrienne Rich. In L. Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) p.162.

Kretzschmar (1995b:147-161) proposes a number of aspects to countering patriarchy which entail strategies both at the level of structures, but also at the level of consciousness. In discussing patriarchal culture as it has permeated society and church, she (1995a:90-104) stresses that women need to be helped to analyse their situation with due sensitivity as to where they are on a continuum of consciousness.³³

In addition, women need to learn skills and abilities that result in self-confidence, self-knowledge and self assertion; they need to be empowered through education aimed not merely at the transmission of knowledge but at the development of self-confidence, discernment and direction; and further that men also need to be liberated from the attitudes and structures that bind them – their selfishness and fear need to be exposed.

But attention has also to be given to theological issues, to our symbolic world and the language we use to speak about God and ourselves, viz. how we understand as women in creation and redemption, using inclusive language for speaking about God, and new ways of thinking about what it means to be a woman.

This calls into question traditional views on sin and grace and how women have internalised these teachings. In her essay ‘The Human Situation: A Feminine View’ written more than 40 years ago, Valerie Saiving (1960) reflects on the inadequacy of theology of the middle of the 20th century with reference to women’s experience. She draws attention to then current views on sin and asserts that these views refer to men and their experiences and cannot be applied to women whose socialisation mainly into maternal roles have been very different. Whereas the corrective for men’s sin of pride is self-sacrifice and love of others, the corrective for women is to claim her human dignity, and her creative potential as a person of value.³⁴

Women’s sin, according to Saiving, is expressed in the following behaviour – ‘triviality, distractability and diffuseness; lack of an organising centre or focus;

³³ She suggests 4 paradigms with regard to women’s consciousness in relation to their experience of culture: 1. those who are completely unaware – either because they are too comfortable, or because they are struggling for survival; 2. those who have been successfully socialised into patriarchy; 3. those who have an emerging consciousness; and 4. those who are active in its challenge, are organised, in networks, and organising others.

³⁴ In the work of Reinhold Niebuhr sin is depicted as firstly pride expressed as domination, intellectual arrogance, and pride as ‘virtue’ where the individual sets himself up as morally right and makes judgments over others.

dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality; gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason – in short, underdevelopment and negation of the self' (in Christ and Plaskow 1979:37).

In relation to situations of violence against women and children, Mary Potter Engel (in O'Hara Graff 1995:163-165) describes a revisioning of the concept of sin in relation to four typical and destructive responses from women who have been abused: not allowing oneself to be angry in the face of abuse – rather than seeing anger as a valid response; defining one's behaviour as disobedient – instead of naming the sin as the perpetrator's betrayal of trust; denouncing one's behaviour as pride in the face of the reality - where so many women feel worthless and when abused, hate themselves and their bodies; and of being dependent on men. Here the task is to see the two faces of anger: one, as a destructive, abusive and usually counter productive form of behaviour; the other, in its constructive role of drawing attention to injustice and expressing revulsion at the negative effects of another's behaviour on self and others. This is the righteous anger of the prophets and Jesus towards those who treat others unjustly (for example, Amos 4:1-12; John 2:13-16).

Oduyoye (1995:195) describes the way African women are socialised into passivity, service and self-sacrifice:

We African women have been brought up, and folktalk has been part of our education, to be devoted daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, to always love others more than self. It seems to me that in this process we have also learned to vote against the self, always preferring others and loving them more than we love ourselves, doing for them what we decline to do for ourselves because we consider ourselves unworthy of such attention.

Thus when we are dealing with women's recovery, we have to rethink some of the traditional categories like anger, pride, humility and service in order that we do not perpetuate harmful patterns of behaviour in the name of good, Christian living.

This overview of feminist theology, in its various manifestations, serves as a backdrop against which women's role in ministry and the kind of formation they require to become conscious and critical carers will be evaluated. These themes will be more thoroughly

explored in chapter 4-6. My intention will be to present a critique of the way that patriarchy manifests in women's lives, specifically in the church and how women in ministry actually experience this. But in drawing from some of the learnings of the Women's Studies course, I will explore concrete ways that the formation of women can be revised so that it opens up new, creative and healing opportunities for women in the church.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I *firstly* presented the work of a number of ethical theorists who integrate the Christian vision of a benevolent God whose ongoing work of creating and recreating calls us as agents into this project of shaping a more caring and 'humanizing' world (Kammer 1998, Birch & Rasmussen 1989, Kaufman 1993). As Birch and Rasmussen have suggested, the relationship between these dimensions of vision and agency rest on an 'ethic of being' and 'an ethic of doing' – who we are as people and communities in this divine project, and how we make decisions, choices and act upon them. To prepare us for this task as moral agents is the task of the community and its responsibility for moral formation.

But, as I have argued, if we view these ethical categories through the lens of gender, then many of their traditional formulations need to be analysed. For example, notions of virtue, character and habits, have been applied in the Christian community to reinforce genderised patterns of behaviour and usually at the expense of women. And so the 'good woman' is the one who is compliant, submissive, in service to others, neglectful of her own needs.

If one of the primary tasks of theological ethics is to inculcate a sense of moral responsibility and agency, then some of the obstacles to women's reaching this stage of development need to be removed, viz. a view that women's opinions, concerns, experiences and contributions are always to be subordinated to male authority and control.

Kretzschmar (2004b) has argued for holistic formation and the integration of spiritual and moral formation and for its insertion into the theological curricula of institutions. In doing this she helps to bridge the gap between what one believes and

professes about God, and the kind of person you are and how you act in the church and the world. The implications of this integration for a curriculum that is liberating for women and which deconstructs the patriarchal views of character, virtue and spiritual disciplines within a community of practice will be explored in chapters 4 and 5.

Secondly, the chapter presented a feminist theological framework from which to view subsequent discussions on women as carers in the church. I analysed some of the manifestations of patriarchy experienced as androcentricism, exclusion and sexism, (Wehr 1987) that churchwomen experience, for example in the sexist language and treatment of women, their exclusion from certain roles, the application of a discriminatory theology that legitimates the subordination of women, and the abusive or violent treatment that women sometimes experience in the church.

In presenting an outline of the reconstructive task of feminist theology, I pointed out that foundational symbols of God and God's ways of relating to humankind, of concepts of sin and grace, creation and redemption need to be revisioned if they are to serve as theological symbols that are liberating for women. This process of revisioning theology and women's formation will be discussed further in chapters 5 and 6.

I concluded that the formation of women as moral agents has to take into account the undermining forces of patriarchy in the church and seek new ways of affirming the Christian story for women.