

Chapter 3: A Theological Ethic of Care

INTRODUCTION

Longman's English Dictionary defines *care* as 'the process of looking after someone or something that needs attention'; as 'responsibility for'; 'paying attention that you do not damage or hurt someone or something', and 'a feeling of worry or concern or unhappiness'. In our own context, the term 'careworker' is associated with people who give practical support and care to those in different stages of HIV and AIDS (Schön *et al* 2005:100).

In this chapter I aim to establish a theology of care/caring by situating the discussion in the theological discourse of love, compassion, empathy, mercy and justice. I also seek to expose such a theology of care to some of the critical questions raised by feminist theology as it exposes the genderized nature of care and caring and how it can be oppressive to women when subsumed into a patriarchal agenda.

To this end I draw on the work of Carol Gilligan and a number of feminist theorists who have analysed an ethic of care as it applies in other fields of health and HIV and AIDS work. Many of the learnings and the critiques, I believe, can be usefully applied to women who are in ministry in the church, specifically when ministry is understood as servanthood. In identifying those aspects of caring that are theologically indefensible especially when applied to women, I contend that an ethic of care needs to be reformulated if caring is to be liberatory work for women.

3.1 CARE/CARING AS A THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT

The Christian God is understood as a caring God, and caring is an aspect of the vision we seek for our world. It is also our duty to care – we are instructed to love our neighbour (Mark 12:28ff; Matt 22:39), and show mercy and compassion. Love, mercy, and compassion are also values to be upheld and applied in making moral decisions in relation to others and the earth. As we saw in Fletcher's situation ethics, love is the primary value (chapter 2, 2.1.3.2). Compassion, love

and mercy are virtues to be cultivated and practised by the Christian. All of these aspects of care/caring are central in the moral life and consequently for those in training for ministry.

3.1.1 Caring as expression of God's love

Love is probably the most common way of understanding our experience of God expressed ultimately in the incarnation and the life, ministry and death of Jesus.

For God so loved the world that He (*sic*) gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life (John 3:13).

Kammer (1988:47) suggests that Jesus serves as the 'hermeneutical key' for helping us to understand God's loving purpose for the world and for creation. In Jesus we have the clearest sense of who God is and what God is doing; and the clearest sense of what it means to love. In his healing work, his concern for those on the margins of society, his sensitivity to the needs and situation of women and the poor, and his openness to those deemed to be sinners or outcasts, Jesus models the caring, loving compassionate God.

Kaufman (1993:137) uses the qualifier 'humanising' when trying to convey the essence of the activity of God (the mystery) in the world. Although this term may carry anthropomorphic connotations and blur the traditionally understood distinction between creator and creature too much, his intention is to convey the benevolence and compassion with which God engages in the world. Jesus embodies this creative and 'humanising' spirit and work of God in his radical example of caring and being in community with those who were marginalised in society. God's Spirit of creativity continues to be present in the world through the creative and humanising work of people who are inspired in some way by this vision.

Marie-Henry Keane (1986:21)¹ proposes the idea of the 'pathos' of God (divine empathy)² as a way of understanding God who may be seen as absent and uncaring in a suffering world. She defines divine pathos as the 'care which God bestows on the world and the interest

¹ Keane's (1986) purpose is to explore a servant model of church based on the idea of the 'pathos' of God.

² Empathy is a term used to describe the ability to step in the shoes of another and in this way to feel with their pain or dilemma, and to try and see the world through their eyes.

[God] has in it'. This divine pathos has been manifested in the creation, through the Old Testament times in the revelation of Yahweh, and the giving of the covenant and the law, and in the work of the prophets who challenged the people of Israel to live justly with one another. In the New Testament we experience God's pathos in Jesus as the 'suffering servant' manifested in his life of compassion for those who were downtrodden in society. Thus, the way people have experienced God's care and compassion influences their hopes and dreams for what they seek, for the way things should be, i.e. it is a vision of care and compassion.

3.1.2 The call to care (norms/obligations)

Our vision of God's love, care, compassion and empathy places expectations on those who have appropriated this vision in their lives. It introduces principles, norms, values and obligations which have been discussed in the previous chapter (2.1.3.2)

Love is a norm which Christians are instructed to follow: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Leviticus 19:18) and 'Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength' (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus used these two texts to sum up the Mosaic law (Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:31). In the context of Hebraic *law* 'neighbour' referred to those who were Jews, but also the servants/slaves and aliens who may enter the village or town. However, in *popular practice* it often came to be limited to members of one's own ethnic or religious group. In Luke 10:29-39, in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus reminds his listeners of the spirit of the law. By challenging what had effectively become part of an oral tradition, he extends the meaning of 'neighbour' to include one's enemies (Matthew 5:43ff): 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you ...'.³

Paul reminds us that if we do not have love, we are not living in relation to our God, to the vision of God embodied in Jesus:

And if I have prophetic knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing (1 Cor 13:2).

³ *The African Bible: Biblical Text of the New American Bible* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999).

Keane (1986:271) sees human empathy as emanating from divine empathy.

I believe that there is a close reciprocal relationship between divine pathos and human empathy and that this relationship is based on the belief that human beings are made in God's image ... so too there is a close reciprocal relationship between Christ the head and his body. Each member of Christ's body resembles Christ the head. So just as he manifested the pathos of God through being a compassionate servant of God's people, so each individual member of the body and the collective membership too, is expected to serve the world compassionately just as Christ did.

Thus the church is called to serve with compassion in the way Christ did where the qualities of the compassionate church include a deep involvement in the world and its problems, and a humble recognition that it will not have all the answers and is often *powerless* in the face of all the needs of the world (:260).

3.1.3 Ministry as caring

One could argue that the whole of ministry is about caring, and that functions of Christian leadership, e.g. proclamation, teaching, guiding, and worship are directed towards expressions of the call to love and care. However, there are also specific roles and functions that are part of the church tradition that carry responsibility for caring or pastoral care.

3.1.3.1 Pastoral care

The word pastor is related to the Greek word for 'shepherd' and carries that association. In the Hebrew Scriptures there is a reference to pastoral ministry (Jeremiah 3:15) and in the New Testament Jesus calls Peter 'to care for and feed his sheep' (John 21:16-17). In Ephesians 4:11 there is reference to local ministers who lived among the people and exercised a local ministry of support and care.

Clebsch and Jaekle (1964) describe four functions in the ministry of pastoral care: *healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling*.

Healing refers not only to curing ills, but also to helping people to a condition of wholeness. Historically, methods used for healing have included anointing, praying, the use of healers, exorcism, and in some churches, the sacramental system. Among certain African

Independent Churches elements such as ash, water, blood from a sacrificial animal and candles are used in healing both physical and spiritual diseases. *Sustaining* means supporting someone who has experienced a loss or trauma, e.g. bereavement, divorce, and irreversible injury. The aim is to help the person cope with the hurt. *Guiding* means helping people to make choices either as educative⁴ guidance which is a form of moral formation which tries to avoid moralism; or deductive guidance which aims to help people derive their own guidelines and decisions, drawing on their experiences and what is consistent with their value system. *Reconciling*, or the ministry of reconciliation, helps people to establish or renew their relationships with God and other people. Forgiveness has normally been associated with confession, the assurance of forgiveness (absolution) and reconciliation with God and the church, often through some form of symbolic self-denial showing penitence. This practice is still followed in Catholic and Anglican churches.

In addition to pastoral care, other caring terms like service and stewardship need to be examined.

3.1.3.2 Ministry as servant leadership

Finney (1989:3-4) draws attention to servant leadership by quoting this pivotal verse:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (*diakonos*), and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave (*doulos*). For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:43-45).

He warns against seeing service as total loss of self in the needs of others. His argument is that most of the references in the New Testament to the leader (minister) are as a servant of God, rather than as a servant of people. He suggests that Christ's primary task was to 'do his Father's work' and then secondarily he was a servant of the people. These two ways of understanding servant leadership have implications for women who often see their roles as service. If leadership and ministry are to be understood primarily as service *to the other*, this promotes the view that 'the other's' needs drive the agenda and these can be limitless. However,

⁴ 'Eductive' from the verb *educere* (Latin *educere* – to draw out) means to bring out what is latent or potentially there. Clebsch and Jaekle use it to describe a form of moral guidance which draws from moral principles but is not prescriptive.

if it is understood as primarily service *to God*, then the focus shifts to God's agenda which includes the wholeness and care of all, including the carer. In this case women must discern and make choices, and sometimes it may be a choice not to respond to the other's needs. Unfortunately the former meaning has been most often applied and used to legitimate a totally-other focus to the detriment of the well-being of the one serving, especially of women.

Foster (1978:115) stresses that service must be a voluntary choice and if it is freely chosen then the person serving cannot be demeaned or manipulated. He also draws attention to the different forms of service – from small acts of kindness to work for change against unjust structures and policies (:120-121).⁵

Finney also tries to contextualize the word *doulos*, which he suggests must be seen from the context of the early church when slavery was an acceptable aspect of society, but that it also carries the connotations of being slave to God, although he admits it implies carrying the burdens of those we serve, and from which we are liberated through the power of the cross of Christ. This is reiterated in Galatians 6 verse 2, but verse 5 is also important as it suggests that each one has responsibility to carry his/her own burden and not try and dump it on someone else.

Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfil the law of Christ.

For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he is deluding himself.

Each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason to boast with regard to himself alone, and not with regard to someone else;

For each will bear his own load. (my emphasis)

Whitehead & Whitehead (1993:103-104) acknowledge that while servant leadership represents a challenge to values of power and status, it is difficult to rescue it from its associations with servitude. Acknowledging that ministers as leaders need power, and servanthood implies powerlessness, they propose seeing servanthood in the light of 'stewardship', where a steward is understood to manage on behalf of (*oikonomos*); s/he is the one who sees to the laws (*nomos*) on behalf of the household (*oikos*). Thus it is a leadership position but exercised in the name of God for the community.

⁵ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978).

Another way of balancing the total self-giving of ministry as service is to see love as a reciprocal process. Kammer (1988:131) suggests that while the ethical norm love/serve thy neighbour is about creating right relationships with others, it is also reciprocal. In as much as we love and serve the other, so too we must also be prepared to receive the love and service of others.

The experience of faith includes our experience of needing care and of being cared for. It affirms the properness of our need for others and allows us to risk dependency on them. We still know that others will often disappoint us, harm us, desert us, but we now experience all of this as taking place in the context of a more fundamental care.

Kaufman (1993:xi) inserts care of the earth into the circle of interdependent relationships:

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.

3.1.3.3 Understanding power in ministry

Kretzschmar (2002:50) raises the issue of power in leadership and ministry in the African context, characterised by many instances of abuse and corruption. She explains these to be partly as a result of the destructive effects of colonialism and the loss of some of the African models of collaborative leadership, as well as human sinfulness and immaturity (:43-45). Her call is for the formation of 'authentic Christian leaders' who will be able to address the myriad of social problems of the continent (:40).

She proposes an investigation of the nature of power starting with the biblical use of the words power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*) where the former refers to force, strength and ability over people and things; and the latter means exercising freedom of choice, right of action and ruling with (or bearing) authority. To understand power as derivative of God is one way to prevent its abuse; the other is to see it as accountable to those who have conferred it – in the New Testament church leaders were called by their communities to lead and were accountable to them (:50); the third way is to reinterpret the word 'power'. She suggests that we understand power in two ways – as power over understood as a commodity that some people have over others, or alternatively as gifts to be shared. Power can also be seen as personal (gift) and as social (in

organisations or groups). This concept of reciprocal power sharing is consistent with a *partnership* model (Whitehead & Whitehead :209) where God is understood to be in partnership with creation and with us.⁶ Whitehead & Whitehead use the image of creation as the fruits of God's 'playfulness' in partnership with Wisdom *Sophia* (as in Proverbs 8:27, 29-30) (:208). Christian ministers within this scheme are drawn in as partners, in which we 'act not only out of duty but with pleasure'. 'If rational control is important, so is the heart's desire'. We act out this playfulness in different roles within the community. The partnership model suggests shared power, and the celebration of differences that enrich. Partnership 'depends on mutuality – where giving and receiving go both ways' (:8).

Kretzschmar (:51) suggests that Christians either abuse their power or deny its importance – both with problematic outcomes. Referring to the contribution of Whitehead and Whitehead, she argues for an understanding of the different 'faces of personal power' (:52-53).⁷

Whitehead and Whitehead (1993:116-122) describe the research of psychologist David McClelland and his four orientations in the acquisition of power to become 'strong' adults. The orientations represent a progression from being totally receptive, towards greater autonomy and achieving interdependence; the 'we' of power.⁸

What I have discussed so far is an understanding of power from the perspective of those who have access to it through their positions as leaders. But power is not only to be understood in terms of the personal – it is an aspect of systems and embedded in structures, institutions and practices which can be oppressive and exploitative. In such cases Foucault's understanding of power as discourse is helpful for avoiding the victim paradigm of the oppressed. Foucault (1982)

⁶ The word *koinonia* 'fellowship' is translated as 'partnership' in the Jerusalem Bible (Whitehead & Whitehead 1993:7).

⁷ Power as power on – needed for initiating and influencing others; power *over* – for co-ordination and leadership; power *against* – for dealing with conflict and external threats; power *for* – nurturing and supporting; power *with* – for developing others to reach maturity. In Evelyn, E Whitehead, and James, D Whitehead, *Seasons of Strength: New Visions of Adult Christian Maturing*. (New York: Doubleday, 1986) p.153.

⁸ *Receiving power* – as a child one is nurtured and affirmed, and this can be repeated in adult life through being loved by others and affirmed through certain experiences; *achieving autonomy* – a stage of acknowledging one's autonomy or own power, being independent and self sufficient; *expressing power* – turning outward and influencing the world, developing other people's power, it can be coercive; *sharing power* – interdependence, the 'we' of power, being strong together.

suggests a way of looking at power as a set of relationships or a discourse within which the protagonists occupy different subject positions in relation to one another.⁹ The exercise of power within the relationship, is defined as:

the way in which certain actions act upon another's actions where the "other" (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts ... and that faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions may open up (:220).

He analyses the features of all power relations in the following way: They all entail 'a system of differentiations' which must be maintained for a number of reasons, e.g. to maintain privilege, to accumulate profits etc. The 'differentiation' is enforced in different ways, for example by consent, coercion, by maintaining economic disparities, through systems of surveillance (monitoring), or through rules etc. These mechanisms for maintaining the 'differentiations' are institutionalized either legally, or by custom, or via defined structures, e.g. the family, educational institutions, the legal system. And then finally they are validated and rationalised (:223). According to Foucault, the exercise of power is reified and acquires its meaning through these constructions so that it is accepted as the way things are.

The exercise of power is not a naked fact, an institutional right, nor is it a structure which holds out or is smashed: it is elaborated, transformed, organized; it endows itself with processes which are more or less adjusted to the situation (:224).

Foucault suggests that people resist within power relationships where attempts are made to deny their identity and impose an identity and subject them to this. This is done by establishing 'regimes of truth' which regulate what is true and what is untrue, and trying to normalise, categorise, measure and generally regulate (in Usher 1997:77). But Foucault contends that there can be no power relationship without 'freedom' and there is always potential to resist the action of power of the other (:221).

James Scott in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) describes the way that subjugated people develop their modes of resistance in relation to the power of the

⁹ Barr refers to power as 'exercised rather than possessed in a myriad of locations, events and relations of people...lived out in uneven and fragmented ways between different categories of people and also within the experience of any one individual'. In *Liberating Knowledge: Research, feminism and adult education*. (Leicester: The National Organisation for Adult Learning, 1999) p.75.

oppressor. He suggests that both the oppressor and the oppressed operate out of transcripts – a public transcript and a hidden transcript. The public transcript is what is spoken and displayed in public; whereas the hidden transcript is the space where other texts and actions and gestures are freely expressed. It is in the space of the hidden transcript that subjugated people can express their hurts and angry feelings about their situation, to practise, as if in a dress rehearsal, their different acts of resistance that they may or may not express in the public transcript.

With reference to experiences of domination and subjection through history, Scott describes three forms of domination: material appropriation, e.g. exacting of taxes, enforced labour, extraction of grain etc; public mastery and subordination which is expressed in rituals of hierarchy, deference, speech, punishment and humiliation; and a domain of ideological justification for inequalities, e.g. the public religious and political worldview of the dominant elite (:111). He suggests that it is not enough to know what form this domination takes, but it is important to know how this domination is experienced by the subordinated, and how it affects his/her life and dignity, and in relation to his fellow-subordinates. These factors will shape the extent of the person's anger and motivation to resist (:113).

Scott describes the crucial role of the social circle of the hidden transcript. He stresses that there has to be a social form behind any act of resistance, describing 'the individual resisting subject as an abstract fiction' (:118), i.e. that behind every act of resistance is a group of fellow subordinates who are complicit; that there is 'an offstage subculture in which the negation can be formed and articulated' (:118).

Within this restricted social circle the subordinate is afforded a partial refuge from the humiliations of domination, and it is from this circle that the audience (one might say "the public") for the hidden transcript is drawn. Suffering from the same humiliations or, worse, subject to the same terms of subordination, they have a shared interest in jointly creating a discourse of dignity, of negation, and of justice. They have, in addition, a shared interest in concealing a social site apart from domination where such a hidden transcript can be elaborated in comparative safety (:114).

In the safety of the hidden transcript, the subordinate group may publicly perform acts of negation of the dominant culture through alternative rituals and practices and outright challenges to what is spoken and believed in the dominant culture. Scott (:19) refers to the 'infrapolitics' of subordinate groups which are small and 'low-profile' forms of resistance that dare not speak in

their own name'. Acts of resistance can include revolt or other subversive actions, e.g. gossip, rumours, stories, linguistic tricks, disguises, metaphors, euphemisms, ritual gestures, anonymity (:137), and spirit possession (:141); also the creation of autonomous social space for the assertion of dignity, and the development of a dissident subculture (:198). This is an 'unobtrusive realm of political struggle' (:183), often communicating one thing to those in the hidden transcript, and something else to those outsiders and authorities (:184):

Infrapolitics, then, is essentially the strategic form that the resistance of subjects must assume under conditions of great peril.

Infrapolitics happens in a relatively anonymous way, in small groups, without evidence like documents, identifiable leaders or public activities and so may escape notice (:200). The moment when the hidden transcript is made public is the moment of 'breaking the silence' (:206) and Scott comments on the degree of freedom that is experienced when this moment occurs:

The sense of personal release, satisfaction, pride and elation – despite the actual risks often run – is an unmistakable part of how this first open declaration is experienced...it is all too apparent that the open declaration of the hidden transcript in the teeth of power is typically experienced, both by speaker and by those who share his or her condition, as a moment in which truth is finally spoken in the places of equivocation and lies (:208).

Scott's discussion of the infrapolitics of the hidden transcript is helpful for understanding the way women mount resistance to their experiences of patriarchy in the church and will be discussed in chapter 5. 'Breaking the silence' is a key metaphor for describing the public articulation of women's private suffering of abuse and violation. Women claiming their voice is also a significant milestone in women's claiming moral agency, a theme that will be developed in chapter 4.

One may question why Jesus chose to speak of leadership – his own and his disciples' – in terms of *doulos* and *diakonos*? If we try and understand this in the context of power relations of dominant and oppressed groups, and of resistance, then, in choosing to be a servant leader, Jesus was making clear his option to side with those who were oppressed, as opposed to those in power in Jewish and Roman society. In so doing he entered the discourse of power on the side of, and at the service of those who were on the margins. Whilst he did not take the military option, nor play an overtly political role, his leadership and vision supported their struggle for

more human lives, expressed through their hidden transcripts. Jesus' challenge to his disciples to be 'servant leaders' was a challenge to take this option. Understanding servant leadership in the light of its role on behalf of the oppressed makes it subversive and ultimately powerful. It also prevents it from being appropriated into the discourse of those in power, where it is juxtaposed against overt power and domination and is ultimately disempowered.

In this section I have indicated that caring is intrinsic to our notion of God and to the Christian's response to the other. Caring is also a defining feature of ministry. I have also drawn attention to the biblical understanding of compassion in which mercy and caring cannot be separated from justice. The imperative to love is a call to put right relationships and structures that are uncaring of others.

But behind the ethical ideal of caring is the potential for its distortion and the oppression of those who care. Words like 'partnership', 'reciprocity', 'mutuality', and 'interdependence', when incorporated into notions of caring, can help to balance the total self-giving of the one who cares by situating caring in the context of mutual relationships. Also, the idea of choice raised by Foster is central to countering imposed servitude. Witness Jesus' injunction to 'go the second mile' (Matthew 5:41): the first mile is imposed, but the Christian goes the second mile voluntarily which opens spaces for extending care, love and mercy to the 'other' and 'the enemy'.

What happens when caring/love is disassociated from justice and from choice, and when caring and service become genderised within a patriarchal framework? In the next section I discuss Carol Gilligan's research into an ethic of care as well as the ensuing debates, in order to derive some learnings which have relevance for women in ministry.

3.2 CAROL GILLIGAN AND AN ETHIC OF CARE

In this section I aim to introduce the term 'an ethic of care', a term which has emerged in ethics particularly with reference to women in the caring, healing, social work and teaching professions as a result of the work of Carol Gilligan and others since the 1980s. There is a plethora of books

and articles dedicated to an ethic of care and its critique, as well as its developments into new fields especially that of HIV and AIDS work.¹⁰

My interest in this exploration is to highlight some of the critical questions raised in these discussions which I believe can be generalised to women in other caring roles, and in particular to women in ministry in the church. In this section I propose to outline briefly the work of Gilligan and her foundational claims to an ethical approach based on relationality, and to summarise some of the contributions of other scholars to this debate.

3.2.1 Gilligan's contribution to an ethic of care

In her ground breaking research published in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), Gilligan presents a view of morality that contrasts with views of philosophers like Immanuel Kant, John Rawls,¹¹ and Lawrence Kohlberg whose ethical paradigms reflected a concern for rights and justice. Gilligan makes the claim that the ethic of care based on relationality is equal but different from an ethic of rights.

It is interesting but probably not surprising that such an ethic is to be found primarily within the helping professions – teaching, nursing, HIV and AIDS work – areas of work involving caring and which are largely women's domains.¹² However, as I will argue in chapter 7, such an ethic needs to be mainstreamed within the 'malestream' so that the training of men should also incorporate exposure to such an ethical perspective.

¹⁰ It should be noted that since Gilligan a number of feminist ethicists have developed the themes of a relational ethics and caring. Among them are Sara Ruddick, Sarah Hoagland, Marilyn Friedman, Joan Tronto, to name a few. They will be further referenced in this text.

¹¹ John Rawls in his book *A Theory of Justice* (1971) argues for an understanding of social justice of institutions as primary. Justice as an individual virtue is derived from justice as a social virtue.

¹² In a paper entitled 'The Ethic of Care versus the Ethic of Justice: An Economic Analysis', Robert Taylor sets out the first economic analysis of the merits of these two types of ethics which gives perhaps one pragmatic reason for why an ethic of care is not mainstreamed. He suggests that the ethic of care is more time-intensive than the ethic of justice and therefore is more costly, and as a result can only realistically be applied within small groups, such as the family. It is less appropriate in large institutions like governments and the marketplace. It is usually applied by those groups 'with relatively low wages ...due to their low opportunity cost of time.' It points to women and minorities as being the groups most obviously able to practise this ethic 'due to market discrimination and other factors' www.rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/taylor17/Synopsis.html (15/08/04).

Gilligan's work in cognitive and moral development as first documented in *In a Different Voice* presented a challenge to Kohlberg's (1981, 1984) model of moral development as a universal description. Kohlberg's research was based on Piaget's theory of cognitive stages (1965) and involved presenting people of different ages with moral dilemmas and interpreting their responses to these dilemmas, the outcome of which were a number of levels and stages.¹³

Gilligan's concern was that, according to Kohlberg's model, women seemed to score quite low on the development scale – only achieving the 3rd level (conventional) where the motivation for acting in a moral way is to seek approval. This was in comparison with the men in his study, who more frequently achieved the internalised, principled moral perspective of the higher 6th level. After conducting her own research among women students at college, and also on women who were confronting a decision over an abortion, she concluded that women's moral development follows a different path to men and thus Kohlberg's development model could not be generalised.

She interpreted her own research findings as follows: *Firstly*, that studies done with women produce a different description of their psychological development.¹⁴ *Secondly* and as a result, women are motivated differently when they are confronted with moral problems and

¹³ Kohlberg's stages of moral development are described in his book *Essays on Moral Development, Vol.1* (1981). I am grateful to Howard Summers for this summary of the 6 stages in moral development. In *Christian Religion Education* book 2 chapter 6, (Johannesburg: TEEC, 2001). They are: Stage 1: pre-conventional level (fear of punishment); Stage 2: the instrumental-relativist orientation (motivated by self-interest); Stage 3: conventional level (seeking approval); Stage 4: the law and order orientation (obedience creates good order); Stage 5: post conventional level (legal processes are necessary); Stage 6: the universal-ethical-principle orientation (internalised principles of love and justice). In response to Gilligan's criticisms, Kohlberg makes two proposals: *one* is to postulate a 'soft stage 7' which places justice in the context of a broader and deeper worldview of the good life and incorporates care. He argued that care both incorporates and transcends justice. He sees care and love as an 'act of grace' which cannot be demanded or required, whereas justice is about rights and duties and can be claimed. The *second* is to incorporate love and care into the 6th stage with justice and then to suggest that these are two aspects of the more abstract concept 'respect for the human person', which becomes the highest universal principle from which they both stem. In Van der Ven *Formation of the moral self*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) pp.214-215.

¹⁴ Chodorow (1978) attempted to explain certain general differences characterizing men and women as a result of nurturing patterns in very young children and the role of the caregiver. She suggests that gender identity is pretty well established by the time a child is 3-years old. As most young children are mainly brought up by women – for girl children this means their identity is shaped in an ongoing relationship with a female – so there is continuity and greater attachment to the external-object world than with boys. Whereas boys, in defining themselves as masculine, see themselves as separate from their mothers/caregiver and there is a clearer ego boundary and greater degree of differentiation from their external world. 'Girls emerge from this period with a basis for "empathy" built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not.' And 'girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another's feelings or feelings as one's own'. In Geirsson & Holmgren (eds). *Ethical Theory: A Concise Anthology*.

instead of grappling with competing rights, principles or rules, theirs is much more the dilemma arising from conflicting responsibilities. Thus the standard or scale that Kohlberg applies which suggests women's moral immaturity is, in fact, problematic.

Essentially, Gilligan is proposing that there is another way of coming to moral decisions which is largely the domain of women; there is *a different voice*.¹⁵

As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women, but the difficulty of hearing what they say when they speak. Yet in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethics of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection (1982:173).

She (1982:19) suggests that this conception of morality is concerned with maintaining relationships, and is contextual and narrative, rather than abstract and procedural. Gilligan does not suggest that there is an essential difference between men and women but she does support the view that experiences of socialisation by same-gender care givers is at the basis of women's greater attachment.¹⁶

The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the "real and recognizable trouble" of this world. For men the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfillment.

(Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000) p.275. Thus Chodorow concludes that relationships and issues of dependency are experienced differently by men and women: for men identity means separation and individuation and fear of intimacy; for women: feminine identity is defined through attachment and fear of separation.

¹⁵ In her later publications, and in response to challenges on this essentialist position, Gilligan suggests that it is not only women who 'speak' with this other moral voice; there are men as well. But because of their socialization women occupy this space more evidently. In 'Reply by Gilligan', *Signs* 11:2 (Winter 1986:327).

¹⁶ In later work Gilligan and her colleague, Nona Lyons (1983), extended their study of gender-related differences in moral perspectives to include the work done by Chodorow and others on identity development. They showed how the responsibility orientation is more central to those whose conceptions of self are rooted in a sense of connection and relatedness to others, whereas the rights orientation is more common to those who define themselves in terms of separation and autonomy. Although these differences in self-definition do not necessarily divide along gender lines, it is clear that many more women than men define themselves in terms of relationships and connections to others, a point which was made previously by Jean Baker Miller (1976) and Nancy Chodorow (1978). In Belinkey *et al*, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. (New York: Basic Books, 1986) p.8.

This focus on individual rights and liberties is consistent with post Enlightenment and modernist thinking that has dominated Western thought since the 18th century. Gilligan's conclusion was that another ethical logic is at work organized around ideas of responsibility and care, which is different from the morality of rights as described by Piaget and Kohlberg. The former responds to the different needs that present themselves within a situation and interrogates the particular details of the context before reaching a decision; and the latter relies on abstract laws and universal principles on which to base moral choices.

Gilligan (1982:76-78) identified three levels of an ethic of care or responsibility, which she suggested represent a progression in the woman's (person's) moral development:

Level 1 - care is self-concerned and self-protective out of a sense of vulnerability;

Level 2 - caring is altruistic and extends ever outwards to others;

Level 3 - the person recognizes the need to care both for herself and for others and so takes responsibility for herself; in Gilligan's words "taking control of one's life" and "taking responsibility for one-self"

Van der Ven (1998:213) summarises the differences between an ethic of justice and an ethic of care which can be tabulated in the following way: (*see my table overpage*)

Table 2: Comparison between an ethic of justice and an ethic of care

Ethic of justice	Ethic of care
Moral conflicts emerge from competing rights	Moral conflicts emerge from competing responsibilities
Justice is related to developing autonomy	Care is related to developing connection
Justice has to do with interest, contracts and power	Care is concerned with not hurting other people, helping, supporting and loving them
Justice is based on rules	Care is based on relationships
The self and the other are independent and opposite	The self and the other are interdependent
Justice asserts	Care serves
Justice is about separation, individuation and achievement	Care is to do with attachment and intimacy
The morality of rights is predicated on equality and on fairness	An ethic of responsibility relies on the concept of equity and recognizing different needs
The ethic of rights is about establishing and maintaining mutual respect	The ethic of responsibility rests on understanding that gives rise to compassion and care

3.2.2 Contribution of the debate on an ethic of care

The debates¹⁷ and applications¹⁸ of Gilligan’s work, which have ensued over the last twenty years, attest to the seriousness with which feminist ethicists have taken her contribution, and the

¹⁷ The following editions provide a range of views on the various issues raised by both Gilligan and Noddings - Cole, Eve Browning and Coultrap-McQuin, Susan (ed). 1992. *Explorations in Feminist Ethics: Theory and Practice*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Card, Claudia (ed.), 1991, *Feminist Ethics*, Kansas: University Press of Kansas; Geirsson, Heimir & Holmgren, Margaret, R (eds), 2000. *Ethical Theory: A Concise Anthology*, Ontario: Broadview Press; Larrabee, Mary Jeanne (ed.), 1993. *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, New York & London: Routledge.

¹⁸ One significant application has been the work of philosopher of education Nel Noddings in her book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984). She supports Gilligan’s view that there is an alternative moral voice that many women adopt which is based on what Noddings calls ‘their capacity to care’ (1984:40). Noddings derives her ethic of care from the human experience of being cared for as a baby – what she terms *natural caring*. She suggests that from that unreflected experience we learn that caring is good and something that should be continued, and thus we are motivated by this experience to choose to care, what Noddings terms *ethical caring*. She describes the circles of caring in women’s lives beginning with close family, then one’s associates – work and other, then those brought into the circle through the previous 2 connections, and finally the stranger. In Geirsson & Holmgren (eds). *Ethical Theory: A Concise Anthology*. (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000) p.290.

For Noddings, the ‘proximate stranger’ is the one who presents himself/herself for care, rather than the extensive needs of the world. The caring relationship is critical within her ethic and so she justifies the exclusion of those beyond the circle because it is not possible to meet all needs in a caring relationship; attempting to do so, simply makes our caring abstract (1984:18). Thus she differentiates between caring about – which is a commitment to the possibility of caring; and caring for – the actuality of caring and entering into a caring relationship. She suggests that the carer is obliged to care even when the situation becomes life threatening; this is the ethical ideal.

degree of resonance there is with the themes of women and caring. There is both affirmation and critique of an ethic of care and, from the currents in the literature, an indication of the desire for ongoing dialogue among contemporary theorists to keep the debate alive.

On the one hand, there is a sense of deep appreciation for the seeming boldness with which issues of relationships in the private domain – that of the personal, the family and the home – have been placed on the agenda of the public domain of ethical debate; as well as the contribution and value of such an ethic within a world which clearly has not been healed or cared for enough.

3.2.2.1 The private becomes public

What is invaluable about an ethic of care is that it places the domain of family and friendships firmly on the ethical agenda, something that has seldom been done, and further that it makes as central to the purpose of morality, the establishment of a world in which we can be in relation to one another, recognising that relatedness is an aspect of our human existence and where caring is a commitment to an attitude and a way of being towards others (Houston 1989:86-87). It allows for formal ethical discussion around the primary relationships of caring – mother-child and family – opening up the possibility for issues of domestic violence and abuse, so often considered a private affair and something that happens behind closed doors, to be brought into the open and within the scrutiny of the public domain. *It suggests that both love and justice are important for public and private life.*

3.2.2.2 Women's work is valorised

An ethic of care acknowledges forms of work where enormous amounts of time, energy and commitment are expended, but which hitherto have gone unnoticed and unvalorised. Here I refer to the so-called hidden work, mainly of women, but also of those on the underside – those who heal, who clean, who repair, who support and who assist. In this thesis I want to affirm this work as work that needs to be done, but without its proscription by gender, race and class.

3.2.2.3 Focus on relationality and community

Gilligan's focus on an ethic of care and relationality has produced a number of works in feminist psychology which place relationship as a key category for women's experience (O' Graff 1995:82) and which converge with the work of feminist theology. As seen in chapter 2 (2.2.2.1), relationality and mutuality have been used as key metaphors in the work of feminist theologians and ethicists. I will pursue this theme of relationality and community as vital in relation to both a framework for theological education (chapter 5), and also in sustaining the insights and practices of a transformative ethic once women are in the field of practice (chapter 6).

Ongoing research by Gilligan and others, among young and adolescent girls from both culturally homogenous and culturally heterogeneous backgrounds in the United States show some useful observations about experiences of relationality among young women and teenage girls.

Firstly, that the development of the self of women (and men) happens in relationship - the term 'self-in-relation' is used - and autonomy, independence and other qualities of the self develop within this relational context.¹⁹

By relationship I mean an experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity: the ongoing, intrinsic inner awareness and responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard (Jordan *et al* in O'Hara Graff 1995:123).

Secondly, that in the process of girls' development, self-silencing and disconnection occurs, as young women begin to accommodate themselves to patriarchal expectations. Girls give up a clear relationship with themselves and others, in favour of relationships maintained by 'being nice' and silencing what they know and feel. There is a steady loss of authentic voice in order to accommodate oneself to the needs and feelings of others, especially men (:125). Healing requires the establishment of authentic connection with self and with others, 'especially for girls coming into adolescence' (:126). In chapter 5, I examine the different 'voices' that women use and what pedagogical processes are needed to support women to heal or recover their voice. But

¹⁹ This theory of 'self-in-relation' is the work of Jean Baker Miller and her colleagues at the Stone Centre for Development Services and Studies at Wellesley College. See O'Hara Graff, 'Strategies for Life. In *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, (New York: Maryknoll, 1995) pp.122-125.

these insights also have implications for work with young women at an earlier stage – in schools, youth groups, and women’s organisations in the church.

Acculturation to patriarchy presses upon girls the loss of authentic relation and the nurturing of “nice” relationships (:126).

Thirdly, whilst these findings seem to be indicative of a pattern among white young women and Latinas, the research suggests that it is less true for black American women. Black women, who have mostly had to live on the margins, and have experienced difficulties with regard to their race and class within institutional systems, have been able ‘to maintain an acute ear for false relationships and resist staunchly’ (:125). While these findings have not been corroborated in the South African context, they do suggest that in addition to gender, positionalities of race and class are also factors that affect the way women experience and practise their caring. As the discussion on the feminist classroom in chapter 5 will suggest, these differences will impact on different needs and agendas in the classroom which the facilitator/teacher must take into account.

Fourthly, the research draws attention to the family as the primary site of patriarchal patterns of hierarchy and oppression, and yet also as the primary site for the formation of the self-in-relation. Thus it is in the families where imbalances in the power relations between men and women prevail that women learn to accommodate themselves (:128). The family ‘practises the norms and sanctions of the wider culture’ (:129). Of course there are also families which encourage critique of the *status quo*, and where the subversive voice is encouraged.

When family relationships are abusive, the power of the adult over the child is further extended. The crisis for the child is ‘how to stay connected to the self and others when disconnecting is forced or necessitated as a strategy for survival’? A number of psychological strategies occur including ‘splitting, dissociation, numbness, amnesia’ or other adaptive behaviours, so that the girl-child can maintain the relationships which she needs for survival and connection with the caregivers, who are at the same time doing her grave harm (:130).

3.2.2.4 Women need to heal

An ethic of care also points to the important healing work that many women have to do for themselves to shed some of the negative effects of patriarchy. Healing for the adult survivor of abuse requires processes of remembering and mourning in order to develop a reconnection with self and others (Jordan *et al* in O'Hara Graff 1995:130). As will be illustrated in chapter 4, many women in ministry have been exposed to abuse and violence in their childhood and in their marriage relationships.

Scilla Elworthy (1996:58) describes the condition of depression that many women suffer from. She describes how women absorb the negative labeling ('stupid', 'weak', 'incompetent' etc) as well as the praise which is related to the superficial or what she looks like ('sexy', 'a chick', 'sweet') they have heard since childhood and this accumulates in a woman's psyche. If a woman asserts herself, then the label changes ('a fishwife', 'hysterical', 'a nag', 'difficult', 'aggressive'). These labels accumulate and erode a woman's confidence. Women often respond out of this low self-esteem by constantly apologising or taking the blame for something that is not their fault, being unsure or just feeling guilty. She says of this:

It is like a dense greyness that women carry around with them - unless they have been exceptionally lucky and been brought up by very affirmative parents, especially fathers - who taught them their self-worth (:59).

Many women live in a state of depression because of these feelings of low esteem. This depression involves self-blame, self-hatred and powerlessness and seeing themselves as victims. Elworthy suggests that the only way to overcome this is to get in touch with the deep-seated feelings and working with them (:60).

In chapter 5, I discuss the importance of the healing classroom for women who have experienced such abuse or violence and not had the opportunity for healing. In chapter 2, I referred to Mary Grey's (1989) reference to creation and redemption as key theological constructs that provide a channel for the development of women as active moral agents. In light of this she (1989:134) suggests that healing work and the recovery of wholeness, should also be seen as redemptive work:

Therapeutic practices of healing in relationship can change and transform because they can help a person find safety, integrate terrible memories, bear grief

and rage. These practices can support a person into a new life and a changed relational world. These are concrete acts of redemption, and their result is the liberation, indeed the transformation, of a person towards a more vital and authentic relational wholeness and growth.

3.2.2.5 Caring relationships beyond the home

The ethic of care and the ongoing debate surrounding it has helped to foreground other caring relationships, as they exist in the many different forms and modes: in one-on-one / group / community / national / transnational locations; in relationships between friends; in educative relationships in schools and other learning environments; within the church; in the healing profession; and in the counselling, advocacy, representational, educative, legal, and political work of NGOs and government departments.

Within the framework of the church there are many different caring groups - prayer, bible study and *Manyano* groups²⁰ – that provide moral, spiritual and emotional support and concrete help to people in different crises. And Christians are involved in caring activities in the community, for example in charity organisations, community rape crisis and trauma centres, and projects aimed at caring for animals and the environment. On a national scale, people of faith are involved in the work of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in campaigning for adequate and available medication for HIV infected people; in government departments (notwithstanding the frequent criticisms about corruption, adequacy or pace), and involved in the delivery of health and social services. All of these are spaces where an ethic of care is evidenced and caring relationships do exist. But we do need to problematise these relationships, as not all work done in the name of caring, does care for the other. Here some of the debates around Gilligan's ethic of care are helpful.

3.2.3 Critique of an ethic of care

The critique of Gilligan's ethic of care has centred on a number of themes. *Firstly*, more recent psychological studies on women's emotional and cognitive development and the role of socialisation do not reveal as marked a gendered response within moral decision-making and

²⁰ *Manyano* groups refer to women's groups which meet for prayer and sharing about their lives and faith.

caring responses as Gilligan has intimated. Ehinger (1993:407) suggests that these studies show greater degrees of difference *within* the sexes than between them. Although there is evidence that women have the capacity for intimate interpersonal relationship, and that they do occupy the primary caregiver and nurturing role in most cultures, there is no supporting evidence that girls are more empathic than boys. She also refers to studies among non-western people which do not support ideas of essential difference between men and women. She further avers that many Freudian theorists describe separation and attachment anxieties as part of development of both sexes.

Catherine Greeno and Eleanor Maccoby (1993:202) question the gender stereotyping of women as more caring than men, saying that subsequent research findings, where variables of class and education were controlled, male and female scores on moral reasoning and decision-making are more equitable.

Secondly, there are methodological inadequacies particularly with regard to Gilligan's research processes and interpretations of the data. Ehinger (1993:396) refers to the lack of empirical precision in the research, claiming that it was not tested according to accredited research methodologies in the social sciences. Also, that Gilligan's claims are made too loosely and that she did not draw accurately from Kohlberg's findings, i.e. that there were no trends within Kohlberg's research that suggested that men scored at higher levels than women.

Gilligan (1986:327) subsequently corrected the gender orientation of her findings, suggesting that she was postulating two different ethical orientations – one of justice and the other of care, and that they were not necessarily tied to gender.

Some theorists have criticised the research because it excluded 'other women' and was focused on white, middle class and privileged and academic women.²¹

Thirdly, and this is the focus I am most interested in for the purposes of this work, is whether such an ethic can be claimed by feminists to be liberating for women or whether it serves to reinforce women's traditional roles and contributions and maintain the *status quo*. Can we claim such an ethic for women who are in ministry in the church, and if we can, what do we

²¹ See for example Vanessa M Bing and Pamela Trotman Reid, Unknown Women and Unknowing Research: Consequences of Color and Class in Feminist Psychology. In Goldberger, Nancy *et al* (eds). *Knowledge, Difference and Power: essays inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing*, (New York, Basic Books, 1996) pp.175-202.

need to learn from the following discussion on the weaknesses of such an ethic that can be useful when we consider the caring work that women perform in the church?

3.2.3.1 Ascribing goodness and maternity to all women is problematic

One of the criticisms leveled at the exponents of an ethic of care is to suggest that women's moral decision-making based on relationality and connectiveness is derived from their innate maternal goodness. This, suggests Ehinger (1993:401), 'cannot be sustained by an uncritical notion of women's goodness or a sentimental ideal of relationship that ignores its darker side.' Not all women are mothers and not all mothers are good. As Kate Millet has said, 'It is one of conservatism's favourite myths that every woman is a mother' (in Ehinger :408).

Baier (1991:234) describes destructive relationships that often occur between mothers and their children. Mothers with their daughters frequently reinforce patriarchal patterns and are complicit with them:

Women, precisely because they have so often themselves been victims, should not be trusted too readily by other women or by men. The fact that they have been the victims of lies, exploitation, betrayal, cannot be expected to make them less ready themselves to lie, cheat and betray.

Ivone Gebara (2002:96ff) speaks about 'women weaving the cloth of evil' where women themselves perpetuate patriarchy by abusing their power and roles as mothers, mothers-in-law and grandmothers in families. For example, they may perpetuate traditions that are harmful to their daughters; or in the workplace they may fail to support other women, or play "games" of competitiveness or revenge which set people up against one another. In some cases women in authority in the religious or other contexts may abuse their power and position (:102). Women are sometimes also responsible for violence towards their children – often as a result of their own unhappiness and lack of resolution, even presenting themselves as victims of their own children – blaming their children for their oppressive situation (:99). In our own context it is often the women, 'the custodians of cultural practices' who are responsible for assisting at cultural practices that can be harmful for women (Kanyoro 2001:159-160); and the practice of virginity testing may be a case in point (Bruce 2003, Phiri 2004).

3.2.3.2 Caring can be unliberating for women

A further critique challenges whether caring is in fact a liberating response for women, or whether it is simply a sign of women's exploitation in society (Puka 1989; Ehinger 1993; Hoagland 1993; Benhabib 1995). Ehinger (1993:401) suggests that while it is important to celebrate women's compassion, in doing so we should be careful not to reinforce the exploitative tendency in society. She says:

Public discussion of social policy concerning the welfare of children, the sick, and the elderly too willingly assume that women will provide the care that society as a whole has failed to provide for its citizens.

This caution can be endorsed when we acknowledge the extent of reproductive (nurturing and caring) work that women perform within our own society - caring for the sick, children and HIV and AIDS patients. Women are also expected to do the cleaning and caring work in the church.

Puka (1989:19) takes a similar view when he suggests that Gilligan's caring responses, rather than reflecting the development towards a more mature ethical position as she claims, provide instead 'a set of coping strategies for dealing with sexist oppression' (19). Referring to her three levels of caring (see section 4.1), Puka shows how at each level, women use particular ways of dealing with oppressive behaviour:

- *level 1* is primarily a coping strategy for facing hurtful rejection and domination and so the person/woman withdraws into herself in order to protect herself;
- *level 2* the woman cares in a slavish way in order to gain approval and recognition. However, when confronted with further domination and rejection by men, Puka suggests that the level 2 women will either revert to level 1 behaviour (withdrawal), or some form of self-protective behaviour, or even a refusal to care anymore.
- *level 3* shows a more reflective ability but there are also dangers. Here a woman learns where she can exercise her strengths, interests, and commitments within the male power structure and chooses those situations where she would do better to comply with that structure rather than resist (1989:23).

Puka suggests some of the limitations of this level 3 response: (1) it personalises this orientation as a desirable form of 'taking control of one's life' and 'taking responsibility for

one-self’;²² (2) it does not accurately identify the causes of its ‘sense of service’ in the sexist nature of social institutions and sexual politics primarily; and (3) it does not lead to a sense of solidarity with other women out of which cooperative social action might derive’ (24).

What Puka points out is that the motives for women’s caring actions are an important consideration in determining whether women are complying with patriarchy’s agenda or whether they are making a free choice to care. In addition his challenge to individualistic and uncritical responses is important and one that I will return to in chapter 6 where I will argue that both analysis and solidarity are key components of a critical ethic of care for women in ministry.

Further, he refers to the danger of the Christian message of ‘love as service’ as a way of reinforcing the ‘slave morality’ phenomenon among many Christian women (:26). When we consider the women in the church and the range of ‘service roles’ they perform,²³ it is important as discussed earlier (3.1.3.2), to examine the theological rationalisations that accompany this caring, in the theology of service that Christians and particularly women are socialised.

3.2.3.3 Separating care from justice creates a false dichotomy

Many feminist ethicists suggest that there is a false separation between care and justice. Nunner-Winkler (1984) claims that there is a greater complementarity between care and justice than either Gilligan (or Noddings) allow and that they are not really different ethical positions but refer instead to two types of moral duties.

Whereas the ethic of justice specifies ‘negative duties’ – obedience to prescriptions that disallow certain behaviour, is absolute and binding at all times and places; in contrast, an ethic of care and responsibility constitutes ‘imperfect duties’ – duties of commission which do not prescribe specific, binding acts with set limits, but simply provide a guide to action, e.g. practice

²² Puka is quoting Gilligan’s words (in Gilligan, 1982:76-78).

²³ For a fuller development of this theme within the South African church context, see the following research: Venables, Heather Elaine. 1998. *Women and Empowerment: Strategies to achieve the liberation of women from oppression*. Unpublished MTh. thesis. Pretoria: UNISA. Ralphs, Mary Bernadette, 1999. *The ethical consequences of women’s exclusion from the ordained ministry in the Johannesburg diocese of the Catholic Church*, Unpublished MTh. thesis. Pretoria: UNISA.

charity which the moral agent applies after taking into account the concrete conditions (:349).²⁴ Ehinger (1993:40) contends that Gilligan's ethic of care artificially separates justice and care and that in fact there is a deeper relationship that binds them, which can be liberating for women.

Van der Ven (1998:209-223) shows that from the Christian narrative such a unity between love and justice exists. This is explored in section 3.3 of this chapter. But he also draws attention to different understandings of justice that are operative in this debate. Whereas Kohlberg' and Rawls' ethic of justice is based on liberal, individualistic view of the rights of individuals to freedom and quality, there is another view which can be traced to Aristotle and Aquinas. Here justice is directed to the other, the *polis* (for Aristotle) or *bonum commune* – the common good (for Aquinas). Justice understood here is never about the individual but about the other. Aquinas speaks about commutative justice – the relation between the parts and the whole (or the individual's just response to the community), and distributive justice - the relation of the whole to the parts (the just response of the society towards the individual).

The *bonum commune* also suggests that all should have a share in the common good. So food, shelter and the resources of the earth belong in common. Citing 12th century theologian Abelard, Van der Ven says that helping the poor is not a work of mercy but of justice, because food is owed to the poor. (:221). The common destiny of goods is an economic value that respects the right of people to private property, but acknowledges that this property is given as a gift and is to be used for the common good. This gift is infringed when a few people take more and more of the earth's resources for themselves at the expense of the poor (Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1999:12-16).

3.2.3.4 Caring can be harmful for women

Many feminist ethicists conclude that an ethic of care can actually be harmful to women. Houston (1989:88) points out the dangers it holds for women within patriarchal contexts, especially where abuse and violence are prevalent.

²⁴ Nunner-Winkler draws on this distinction between perfect and imperfect duties made by Kant in his *Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797/1977). In *Two Moralities? A Critical Discussion of an Ethic of Care and Responsibility versus an Ethic of Rights and Justice*, in *Morality, Moral Behavior, and Moral Development*, William M Kurtines & Jacob Gewirtz (eds). (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993) p.144.

They (Gilligan and Noddings) assume that the needs of others make claims upon our care which can only be ignored if we have justification. It is less obvious that unconditional value is assumed for the one-caring. As long as this ambiguity remains, we cannot be assured that the ethics of care will assist women in avoiding self-sacrifice. Nor can we be sure that the ethics of care will avoid the subordination of the interests of women, as a group, to the interests of other groups, for example, men and children (:88).

Tronto (1993:250) raises the potential for conservatism and insularity in an ethic of care, as the caring relationships might become embedded in caring only for those within our immediate family, our friends, and those of our own kind, and promote a level of closeness and even prejudice against those outside this circle or boundary and thus 'become a justification for any set of conventional relationships'.

Houston (1989:89) calls for dialogue between caring relations and the social context which she believes is missing from the ethic of care as it is formulated. Ehinger (1993:401) insists on balancing the elements of both care and connectiveness with social critique:

Hence, I will insist that a justice ethic must be a critical component of any feminist ethic: that (*one*) Gilligan's investigation of the psychological dynamics of moral decision-making must include a concomitant analysis of the historical, social and political roots of oppression; and that (*two*) women's connectiveness demands a generous concept of justice to challenge the external structures and causes of social injustices for all women as well as to mediate the internal injustices often inherent in women's relationships with self and others.

Tronto (1993b:157) discusses the politics of care. Her central thesis is that only if we understand care as a political idea will we be able to change its status and the status of those who do caring work in our culture. She analyses the different levels of care and the value placed on them within American society. In a culture based on values of success, competition and material achievement, care and caregivers are devalued. She differentiates between those who are the carers and those who make the policy decisions about caring (:111). Carers are usually black, lower class women, whereas the policy makers are mainly men but also professional women, middle class, and predominantly white. She says:

Our understanding of care is fragmented in several significant ways. In the first place, the work of care is fragmented, caring processes are incompletely integrated, and differing kinds of care assigned different weight in society. In the second place, care is described

and discussed as if it were only about trivial concerns. Care conjures an association with the private, the emotional, and the needy; thus a concern about care is a sign of weakness. Both the devaluation of care as work, and the location of care within trivial, private and emotional states, make understanding the broader social, moral and political ramifications of care difficult (:112).

Delores Williams (1993: 60-83) describes the service roles which she calls the 'co-erced surrogacy', of black women during slavery. The black slave woman occupied three roles: as Mammy where she substituted for white women in parenting and caring for children, and in some cases taking complete charge of household affairs; as plantation workers and farmhands where they substituted for male labour, often being treated with greater brutality; and as sexual partners for white masters. All these roles were coercive and black women were not able to make choices. With the abolition of slavery black women were theoretically able to refuse, but, as Williams points out, economic necessity often kept them in these master-servant relationships (:61), although she records a number of stories of how women resisted imposed sexual relationships (72). The impact of these enforced caring roles has been negative for many African-American women and been used by both the ruling class as well as some black men to 'keep women in the service of other people's needs and goals' (:81).

In our South African situation the role of black women as domestic workers and farmworkers took on similar dimensions. Even with the advent of democracy in 1994 and the introduction of labour legislation like the Basic Conditions of Employment Act which regulates the relationship between employer and employees with regard to working conditions, i.e. remuneration, working hours, and leave, the policing of these laws in private homes still leaves the door open for large scale abuse of women.

For educated black women under apartheid, there were few opportunities other than nursing, teaching or social work – all of them service roles. It is also significant in the context of the church, it is women who do the cleaning, cooking and serving and much of the caring of the sick and needy. Also interesting is the inferior place that caring courses/modules occupy within theological training programmes.²⁵

²⁵ In the Joint board curriculum (which is due to close down in December 2005) students were only required to complete one year of Healing and Counselling, whereas they had to complete two and even three years of Scripture and Systematic Theology.

Tronto (1993b:114) qualifies the view that caring and carers are devalued in society, noting that the reality is more complex when one differentiates between caring about (the association of giving to charity by those who are more privileged); taking care of (within the family, the parent-child relationships or in more public roles - the pastor, the doctor) where there is an unequal relationship of power; whereas actual care-giving work is left to those who are less-powerful. However, she warns about being too cynical about those who go into the caring professions and not to dismiss their motivation only as 'false consciousness'. For there are those who understand exactly what they do, and their choice reflects the value they place on human life (:117). In these cases carers choose to care over and above other values of self-interest and success. In order for the choice to be both a wise and a morally good choice, it is critical that the carer is informed and able to evaluate the situation before making her decision.

What is clear from this evaluation of an ethic of care based on relationality proposed by Gilligan is that a focus on caring has helped to make public some of the hidden transcript (3.2.3.3) of women's lives and pain, particularly the abuse and violence that takes place in the private space of the family. Secondly, it has paid attention to all the hidden work of women, but also to that of people of colour, and of the working class. It has brought these roles and contributions into the public domain and valued them. But it has also pointed to the role of choice and having the freedom to make a choice, of making informed decisions, and the important place of analysis in ensuring that caring work is liberating for the carer and the one who is cared for. An undifferentiated approach to caring which sees all caring as 'good' or 'morally right', and which does not examine the positive and creative possibilities, as well as the potential for harm, is morally indefensible and potentially destructive for women. As we have seen, care without the complementary values of justice and reciprocity, and without critical consciousness and the skills of social analysis, leaves such an ethic wide open to its being co-opted into a patriarchal agenda for the ongoing oppression of women.

And yet we cannot ignore the fact that our world cries out for care. Caring work is necessary and a responsiveness to a world in need of care is central to the Christian commitment.

In the last section of this chapter I take into account the contributions and the cautions that have been raised here, as well as retrieving the biblical understanding of compassion understood as love and justice, in order to reframe a critical ethic of care that can be transformative for women.

3.3 A REVISED THEOLOGICAL ETHIC OF CARE

The previous section drew attention to a number of difficulties with an ethic of care in relation to women. It has helped to eliminate those aspects of an ethic of care that are oppressive and have been incorporated into patriarchal power relations, and cannot be claimed by women as liberating. In summary these are:

- Care is not only to be operative in the private domain of family and close interpersonal relationships but must be mainstreamed in society.
- Care is not just a value and virtue for women, but intended for all people to practise.
- The different aspects of caring work (from policy making to implementation) should not follow the contours of hierarchies and discriminatory practices that operate in society and which are based on race, class and culture).
- Caring is not about self-interest or self-aggrandisement but neither does it negate the self.
- Care is not aimed at entrenching patterns of domination and submission in systems – family, community or church.
- Care is not abusive, violent or harmful to the other.
- Care is not about uncritically preserving and transmitting family, group and cultural traditions and practices.
- Care is not an individualistic or personal response in the face of structures of uncaring, but it confronts structural injustices in solidarity with others, and for the good of all.

Where women in the church are embedded in relationships that exhibit these features, then they are *not being cared for*. If they are aware and choose to remain in these relationships, then it may well be that they are colluding with patriarchy's agenda for them, and *they are not caring*. I will argue that care, which is rooted in an integration of love (care) and justice, and based on the biblical understanding of compassion, can provide the resources for a *critical ethic of care* that is liberatory for women in ministry.

3.3.1 Compassion – care and justice integrated

Matthew Fox (1979:14) traces one of the reasons for a separation of love and justice and the ‘domestication of compassion’ to the Industrial Revolution when morality became a concern about private issues and sexual misconduct, and not a concern for justice in the workplace. As a result, the stress in capitalist thinking lay on self interest and profit resulting in the subjugation of the values of compassion and economic justice to aggressive competition. He suggests that this separation is not biblical and can be reintegrated through an understanding of compassion. He (:10-13) stresses that compassion and justice are aspects of one another in the Scriptures. The Hebrew word for compassion *hesed* implies doing something and is frequently associated with the word *mispal* ‘right’ – thus ‘doing right’.

The prophet Micah (6:8) says: ‘What does Yahweh ask of you except to do *hesed* (compassion) and love *mispal* (justice).’ Other prophets repeatedly call the Jews back to justice, for example, Amos 5:24 says: ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.’ And Hosea (6:6) says: ‘What I want is compassion, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not holocausts’.²⁶

Compassion in the Latin ‘*cum patior*’ means to suffer with, to undergo with, to share solidarity with. It is feelings of togetherness which incorporate both celebration and sorrow. Fox (:7-8) discusses biblical compassion and its connections to works of mercy and justice. In Isaiah 58:6-8 we are reminded of the ‘corporal’ works of mercy: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless poor, and breaking unjust fetters. Other works of mercy that are mentioned include giving drinks to the thirsty (Genesis 24:18), visiting the sick (2 Kings 8:29), and burying the dead (1 Sam 31:11ff). Then there are ‘spiritual’ works of mercy – to instruct the ignorant (2 Chronicles 17:7), counsel the doubtful (Isaiah 37:6, 10), admonish sinners (1 Sam 15:16ff), bear wrongs with patience (2 Sam 16:5-14), to forgive offences willingly (Genesis 45:1-5), comfort the afflicted and those who mourn (Jer 45:1ff), and pray for the living and the dead (Gen 18:22-23). These 14 works of mercy bear out the point that compassion leads to action, to works.

²⁶ Source: *The African Bible* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999). *The New English Bible* uses the word ‘sacrifice’.

In the New Testament Jesus continues the idea that compassion involves action on behalf of the other, in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:35), the parables of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-8) and the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), and explicitly in the Beatitudes (Matthew 25:34-46). Compassion urged him to heal the blind (Matt 20:34), cleanse the leper (Mark 1:41), teach the ignorant (Mark 6:34), raise the dead (Luke 7:13), and feed the hungry (Matt 15:32, Mark 8:2).

Van der Ven (1998:218) also returns us to an examination of the dialectical relationship between justice and love in the Christian religion. The *basileia* is the reign of God's justice where 'justice is first and foremost a characteristic of God, not of men and women'. God's justice functions as the ideal form of justice that transcends human justice or liberal understandings of rights. The difference is illustrated in the parables of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt 20:13-16) and the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). No one is left out of God's justice.

One might say that this divine justice differs from human justice in that it is informed by unconditional love: it is not conditioned by individual, group, or national characteristics or by any special moral, religious, or ecclesial achievement... This justice does not primarily look at what people deserve, owe or claim, but at the deficits and shortages they suffer. It looks not only at the needs people have, but also and especially at the needs they are (:219).²⁷

Love must extend to the other: the poor, the suffering, the alien, the hostile (the enemy) and the dead (:221). Justice is a gift from God and which people pass on to others. It is not something that is due, although claiming one's own rights is a part of justice if it is done from a 'deep insight into the gift of this justice by God' (:219). Love is the most fundamental virtue as it is the very essence of God: God is love and love is God (:220).

There is no justice without love and no love without justice. Justice is love-informed justice; as love is justice-informed love. Moral development must be built on the dialectical relation between justice and love (:223).

²⁷ Ven der Ven's reference to 'the needs they are' as opposed to the needs people have suggests that our very being cries out for spiritual fulfillment, for God. This extends beyond our basic needs for food, shelter etc. It is what Kammer (1988:96-101) refers to as 'our potential humanity' - what we can become. (See chapter 2, 2.1.2.)

3.3.2 Care is voluntary and requires commitment

Carers are primarily in service to God; doing God's work is service. This may lead to a decision not to care in a way that is prescribed by another's agenda. The carer as a moral agent responds freely and is accountable within this relationship. Caring is a voluntary response willed by the carer in response to the other. Thus the carer must resist coercion or manipulation and examine her own motives for deciding to care. This requires thought and analysis about the causes of uncaring and the most appropriate way to respond. It requires commitment to pursuing the decision to care. It can include a decision to be self-caring, as well. And, as Fox (1979:7-8) has pointed out, it is about both celebration and sorrow.

3.3.3 Caring is about establishing right relations

Caring is about establishing relationships based on love and justice with the *self*, with *others* and with *God*. Thus self-care and growth and care for the carer are important aspects of care. So too is the development of one's spirituality and relationship with God. Both these aspects of caring help to balance the tendency of the carer to be totally outward-giving. The focus on the other and God also prevent the person being totally introspective and insular. Both these aspects are part of our Christian heritage. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5) balance the relationship and care of God (commandments 1-4) and the care of others (commandments 5-10).

In the context of global and national inequities, restoring right relations is linked to social justice and a preferential option for the poor. This is a call to participate in work for justice with those who live in poverty and are on the margins of society (Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference 1999:12-16).

3.3.4 Care presupposes a number of values and virtues

Nolan (1982:63-72) draws attention to four values that are consistent with an ethic based on love and justice. *Sharing* is about love, compassion and justice lived out in the area of money and possessions (:65); *honouring human dignity* means that all people are treated with the respect worthy of them as bearers of the image of God (:66); *human solidarity* takes care beyond the

interests of the private or needs of our own group, and embraces all people; and *service* exposes and rejects abuses of power and makes possible the service of others (:72).²⁸

In addition to virtues traditionally ascribed to women of caring, nurturing, and sensitivity, women who are carers also need to develop attributes of character or virtue to counter the traditional views of ‘the submissive serving woman’ of patriarchy. These include self-esteem and self-confidence, humility understood as honesty and self critique, righteous anger, leadership and decisiveness, wisdom both as knowledge and insight, the ability to discern and the courage to act. These will be discussed in chapter 7 when I explore aspects of a new curriculum for women in training for ministry.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that caring, understood as love, empathy, compassion and justice are key ethical constructs. They permeate the Christian vision and our understanding of God, how God relates to us and to the whole of creation, and how we are called to respond to God, our neighbour and ourselves. In addition, the Christian commitment to caring work is essential in a world where human suffering is manifest in so many forms, and on such a large scale. Caring is also central to an understanding of Christian ministry and its associations with servanthood. But, as I illustrated in my discussion on Gilligan’s research and subsequent debates, caring needs to be problematised and subjected to scrutiny before it can be adopted as a rule of life, especially for women. In my effort to develop a more nuanced understanding of caring, I have examined it both in the light of a feminist perspective, as well as from biblical perspectives on love and justice.

From a feminist perspective, the debate on caring is important for a number of reasons: it has helped to make public some of the hidden aspects of women’s lives - their pain, particularly the abuse and violence that take place in the private space of the family; as well as highlighting the hidden work that women do, especially poor women. However, the debate also exposed some

²⁸ In Louise Kretzschmar, *The Resurgence of Christian Ethics and Spirituality*. In *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* edited by McGlory Speckman and Larry Kaufmann (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001) p. 297; and also *Study Guide CGM 304-V*, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2005) pp.44-45.

of the harmful aspects of an uncritical ethic of care. For example, where it reinforces women's subservience and passivity even in potentially violent situations; feeds gendered stereotypes of women's innate caring and nurturing natures; and masks the sometimes harmful and uncaring roles that some women play, particularly in relation to other women and to children. Thus, an undifferentiated approach to caring, which sees all women's caring as 'good' or 'morally right', and does not examine the critical and creative possibilities, as well as the potential for harm, is morally indefensible and not a liberating ethic for women in ministry.

The biblical perspective developed in this chapter (3.3.1), which drew on the work of Fox (1979) and Van der Ven (1998), illustrated how a recovery of the biblical understanding of 'compassion' *hesed* integrates care and justice. Understood in this way, care is concerned with establishing right relationships – with oneself, with others and with God. Its focus of concern extends beyond the private space and includes economic and social relations based on equality and justice for the poor and marginalised. Care presupposes values and virtues of sharing, respect for the dignity of others, solidarity, and service (Nolan (1982), but also those of self-esteem and confidence, honesty and self-critique, righteous anger, leadership, wisdom and courage.

Care is voluntary and requires commitment, and always includes the possibility of a decision *not* to care. Thus it points to the importance of choice, and the freedom to make an informed decision, and the important place of analysis in ensuring that caring work is liberating for the carer and the one who is cared for.

For women in the church, an ethic of care without the complementary values of justice and reciprocity, and without critical consciousness and the skills of social analysis, leaves such an ethic wide open to its being co-opted into practices associated with their subordination. As was pointed out in the chapter (3.1.3.2 and 3.1.3.3), servant leadership and power have to be analysed in relation to their embeddedness in the systems and institutions that oppress others, and reconfigured in ways that can be liberating, in our case, for women in ministry. The implications of this revisioning, and for the theological education of women will be explored in chapters 5 and 6.