

# The sacramental body

## Symbols of a gendered Church

*Tina Beattie*

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IS TRAPPED in an impasse between the modernizing vision of the Second Vatican Council with its historical and social emphasis, and a nostalgia for a more mystical and religious world-view associated with the pre-conciliar church. With Vatican II, the Church moved away from a maternal ecclesiology, with its imagery of the mystical body of Christ, towards an ethical ecclesiology of the pilgrim people of God, setting in motion a process which has unwittingly drained religious Catholicism of much of its spiritual dynamism.<sup>1</sup> Hence the years following the Council have seen a hardening of divisions between those who welcome the shift to greater ethical, historical and political consciousness, and those who long for a more transcendent and mystical faith played out in the rituals and rhythms of the liturgical tradition. Nowhere are these tensions more obvious than in the battles over gender and sexuality, not only in terms of sexual ethics and fertility, but on a deeper level in terms of the symbolic understanding of gendered human identity, and the impact of this upon the theology of the priesthood.

In exploring these issues, it is necessary to respect the fact that, in sacramental forms of Christianity, the Christian story is mediated through symbolism, ritual and drama with many cultic influences, and that these are the wellsprings of Catholic spirituality. They appeal to hidden levels of consciousness, evoking deep longings associated with childhood and the maternal relationship.<sup>2</sup> While this can give rise to a heightened sense of religious experience and responsiveness, it can also have an infantilizing effect if it is not tempered with a mature and reasoned ethical awareness.

However, liberalism can lead to a different form of impoverishment. Wary of devotional practices which seem tinged with superstition, dismissive of the carnivalesque dimensions of Catholic liturgical life, liberals risk denying the need for forms of spiritual and religious self-expression which are not controlled by the voice of reason and conscience. The Christian life becomes a Pelagian exercise not only in working to redeem ourselves but in working to redeem everything else

read more at [www.theway.org.uk](http://www.theway.org.uk)

as well, from the blue whale to the ozone layer, by our own frenetic activism. Just as Catholic religiosity risks an abdication of the ethical, so Catholic liberalism risks an abdication of the religious.

So how might we begin to heal the wound which currently divides the Catholic body? Is it possible to develop a sense of gendered sacramentality which encompasses the whole of life, without being trapped by anachronistic sexual stereotypes or succumbing to the rhetoric of political correctness? In order to explore these questions, I want to begin by looking briefly at the origins of Christian beliefs about gender. I shall then ask what the modern Church might learn from the past, in order to move towards a future not bound by nostalgia, but enriched and strengthened by the forgotten wisdom of her own tradition.

### *Sexual difference in the early Church*

From the beginning, the theological understanding of sexual difference has been ambiguous, an ambiguity which is reflected in the title of Kari Elisabeth Børresen's book, *Subordination and equivalence: the nature and role of woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*. Børresen defines equivalence as designating 'an identical value of the sexes without denying that they differ',<sup>3</sup> while subordination arises as a result of an androcentric doctrinal perspective in which man is regarded as the exemplary sex through the identification of *vir* (man) with *homo* (human being).<sup>4</sup> This means that there has long been a debate in Christian theology over whether the sexes are redeemed in the male body, in the male and female body, or in an androgynous body which transcends sexual difference.<sup>5</sup>

Although sexual hierarchies are common across all denominations and cultures, Catholic and Orthodox Christianity diverge in their understanding of the symbolic significance of sexual difference.<sup>6</sup> While the eastern Church accords it significance only in the order of creation, as the means by which life is perpetuated in the face of death, the western Church has since the time of Augustine (354–430 CE) accorded it eschatological significance.<sup>7</sup> This means that sexual difference belongs to the original goodness of creation, is redeemed in Christ, and will be a feature of the resurrected body. I want to look more closely at Augustine, since his ideas still implicitly inform contemporary Catholic doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

Augustine resisted the prevalent cultural and religious conviction of his time that only male bodies would be resurrected, and that women would be resurrected as men. He writes that:

a woman's sex is not a defect; it is natural. And in the resurrection it will be free of the necessity of intercourse and childbirth. However, the female organs will not subserve their former use; they will be part of a new beauty, which will not excite the lust of the beholder – there will be no lust in that life – but will arouse the praises of God for his wisdom and compassion, in that he not only created out of nothing but freed from corruption that which he had created.<sup>9</sup>

Augustine's Platonic interpretation of the two accounts of the creation of the sexes in Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:7 and 2:22 leads him to argue that God intended the existence of both sexes from the beginning, which explains the reference to the creation of male and female in God's image in the first account, but also that the woman is secondary to the man, which explains the creation of Eve from Adam in the second account. At the same time, the shared flesh of Adam and Eve signifies the closest possible union and anticipates the one-flesh union between Christ and his Church.

But Augustine also saw male and female embodiment as a metaphor for the mind. In arguing this he introduced a difficulty into Catholic theology which has yet to be overcome: he claimed that the woman by herself is incapable of imaging God, for she represents the lower part of the mind which is concerned with practical knowledge (*scientia*), while man represents the wisdom (*sapientia*) which is concerned with contemplation and prayer. Although he understood the mind to be an amalgam of both of these and therefore not subject to sexual difference, Augustine saw the sexed body as a metaphor for the psyche. This meant that a woman could only bodily image God in the presence of her husband, just as the mind can only contemplate God in its higher functions:

the woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned as a help-mate, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God; but as far as the man is concerned, he is by himself alone the image of God, just as fully and completely as when he and the woman are joined together into one.<sup>10</sup>

This has two implications. Firstly, it is a reminder that gender was understood symbolically rather than biologically in the pre-modern Church; secondly, it shows how the female body becomes socially positioned in terms of its symbolic meanings.

It also needs to be borne in mind that if gender distinctions have tended to function hierarchically in Christian discourse in such a way as to make femininity inferior to masculinity, these same distinctions have meant that men have understood their souls as masculine in relation to the rest of creation, but as feminine in relation to God. As Penelope Deutscher points out in her discussion of Augustine,

Where God is identified as 'not-man', man gives this content by being rendered the equivalent of the feminine, and the dichotomy between man and woman must be forsaken. In other words, where we are told that God is 'not-man', we are told that God is not-material, not-embodied, not-emotional, not-passionate, not-feeble. It is necessary (if paradoxical) for man to be the equivalent of the feminine in order to be masculine. It is as feminine that man negatively gives God the identity he identifies with as masculine.<sup>11</sup>

There is therefore an inherent tension in early Christian theology between the symbols of gender interpreted primarily not in terms of the sexed body but as metaphors for relationships between humanity and God, and the female flesh understood as site of disruption and temptation which must be transcended lest it unsettle the symbolic and social order. With this in mind, I turn now to consider changes in the theology of sexual difference in the modern church.

### *Sexual difference in the modern Church*

In the late twentieth century it became necessary to construct a theological defence of the exclusive masculinity of the Catholic priesthood, in the face of the challenge posed by the women's movement and women's growing access to theological education. In the past, this masculine exclusivity was based on the claim that women were inferior to men because their rational souls were housed in female bodies rather than male ones, and they were therefore incapable of symbolizing Christ as the embodiment of perfect humanity. Faced with the need to affirm the equality of women and the goodness of the body, both of which have been significant developments in twentieth-century Catholic doctrine, the Catholic Church has resorted to an ontology of sexual difference which risks excluding women from the symbols of salvation and therefore from redemption in Christ. Women are no longer denied access to the sacramental priesthood because we are inferior to men but because we are by nature incapable of representing Christ, because we are not male and the masculinity of Christ is

essential to his identification with God. Whereas once the saving significance of the incarnation lay in the fact that Christ took human flesh in its most perfect form – that of the male – today it lies in the fact that Christ was a male body which is essentially different from a female body, and this categorically excludes the possibility of female Christ-likeness.

This shift from a non-essentialist to an essentialist understanding of the nature of sexual difference has been justified through an appeal to scientific theories which have ostensibly confirmed that sexual difference operates at the microcosmic level of the human organism. Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated that such ideas can be traced back to the late eighteenth century, when the quest for scientific evidence was driven by cultural changes in the understanding of the relationship between the sexes. At least until the seventeenth century, Laqueur argues that sex 'was still a sociological and not an ontological category'.<sup>12</sup> The Catholic Church is not noted for its eagerness to embrace new scientific theories which overturn centuries of its own tradition. However, in this instance it has suited church conservatives very well to fly in the face of tradition and endorse the findings of science. So, for instance, Hans Urs von Balthasar insists that, 'The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists, and the female body is utterly female; and this is also true of their whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness.'<sup>13</sup>

In adopting these quasi-scientific arguments, modern theologians have surrendered the traditional Catholic understanding of sexuality as having its significance primarily in metaphorical and performative relationships, to a biological model which Laqueur demonstrates can be linked to sweeping changes in the social organization of sexual relationships. This has introduced a new literalism to Catholic theology which threatens to undermine the whole symbolic function of theological language. I want to consider the implications of this from the perspective of the theology of the priesthood.

### ***Biological essentialism and the masculinity of the priesthood***

The 1976 Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, *Inter insigniores*, argues that:

The whole sacramental economy is in fact based upon natural signs, on symbols imprinted upon the human psychology. 'Sacramental signs', says Saint Thomas, 'represent what they signify by natural resemblance'. The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for

things: when Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this 'natural resemblance' which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.<sup>14</sup>

This argument implies that it is not the human image of Christ but the male image of Christ that is 'imprinted upon the human psychology', so that we relate to Christ's masculinity before we relate to his humanity. But if our sexuality takes precedence over our humanity, then where does a woman look for symbols which affirm the uniqueness of the female body in the story of salvation?

*Inter insigniores* defends its emphasis on the masculinity of the sacramental priesthood by appealing to the nuptial symbolization of the relationship between Christ and the Church, which requires that a man represents Christ as 'the author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom and Head of the Church'.<sup>15</sup> The document acknowledges that the priest also represents the Church, and in this sense the priestly role could be performed by a woman. However, it refutes this argument by insisting that if the priest represents the Church which is the Body of Christ, 'it is precisely because he first represents Christ himself, who is the Head and Shepherd of the Church'.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the male body can represent the female body because it has priority, but the female body cannot represent the male because she derives her identity and her significance from him.

So far, however, it could be argued that none of this is new. The female flesh has always symbolized carnal weakness and non-godliness for both sexes, and for both sexes the attainment of holiness has been sought through the subjugation of the flesh with its womanly associations. But there is no longer any way in which a woman can transcend her own flesh even through the acquisition of manliness, because while the symbolism of womanliness remains inclusive, the symbolism of manliness has been rendered exclusive. So while it is still the case that masculinity symbolizes God and femininity symbolizes the creature, women are now inescapably confined to the realm of the creaturely and denied any possible access to the image of God, even through the mimesis of manliness.

*Inter insigniores* ends by saying that 'the Church desires that Christian women should become fully aware of the greatness of their mission'.<sup>17</sup> This begs the question: what role is available to women in

such a way as to reflect 'the greatness of their mission' and offer reciprocity with the masculinity of the priesthood?

*Symbolic femininity and the female body*

John Paul II has developed a rich theology of the body in *Original unity of man and woman*, in which he refers to masculinity and femininity as being based on 'two different "incarnations", that is, on two ways of "being a body" of the same human being, created "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27)'.<sup>18</sup> This suggests a theology which recognizes both the revelatory potential of the human body as male and female, and the need for an understanding of the ways in which man and woman together and individually bear the image of God in their sexed bodies. My question is to what extent this insight is actually developed in the pope's theology, so that women have access to a symbolic narrative within which to explore what it means to be a female incarnation of the image of God.

In *Mulieris dignitatem*, John Paul II describes the relationship between the sexes:

The fact that man 'created as man and woman' is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a 'unity of the two' in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life.<sup>19</sup>

If one considers carefully what is implied in this, it is as a 'rational and free being' and in communion with man that woman images God. However, rationality and freedom are not, in traditional Catholic thought, sexually determined characteristics – they indicate the dimension of human existence which is theoretically *not* marked by sexual difference. So John Paul II perpetuates Augustine's belief that woman images God alone insofar as she is rational (and therefore not woman), but as woman only in relation to man.

*Mulieris dignitatem* repeats the argument of *Inter insigniores*, that in choosing only men as apostles, Christ intended the Eucharist 'to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is "feminine" and what is "masculine"'.<sup>20</sup> It identifies motherhood and virginity as the 'two dimensions of the female vocation',<sup>21</sup> symbolized by Mary in whom motherhood and virginity co-exist in such a way that

‘they do not mutually exclude each other or place limits on each other’.<sup>22</sup> Both of these dimensions allow the woman to discover her own particular vocation to be a gift of self to the other through the vocation of marriage and motherhood, which also describes the spousal relationship between the virgin and Christ expressed in the spiritual motherhood of the religious life.

Referring to the analogy between Christ as bridegroom and the church as bride in Ephesians 5:21–33, John Paul II suggests that it reveals the meaning of the woman’s creation in Genesis 2:18, namely, that ‘*the dignity of women is measured by the order of love*, which is essentially the order of justice and charity’.<sup>23</sup> The fact that love is the special vocation of women is confirmed because ‘the human being is entrusted by God to women in a particular way’,<sup>24</sup> so that from the beginning to the end of history, from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation, the woman is situated in the forefront of the struggle with evil.

All this appears to be a positive statement of women’s centrality to the story of salvation. However, the idea of ‘woman’ in *Mulieris dignitatem* bears no necessary relationship to the female body. It is a metaphor for humanity’s relationship to God, insofar as everything that is said to apply to the special dignity and vocation of women includes men, with the exception of biological motherhood. Even the celibate priesthood is analogous to the spousal love of the virgin woman for Christ.<sup>25</sup> John Paul II repeatedly recognizes that what he attributes in a special way to women is true for all:

All human beings – both women and men – are called through the Church, to be the ‘Bride’ of Christ, the Redeemer of the world. In this way ‘being the bride’, and thus the ‘feminine’ element, becomes a symbol of all that is ‘human’, according to the words of Paul: ‘There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ (Gal 3:28)<sup>26</sup>

This means that the woman described by John Paul II is the universal human being understood as feminine in relation to God, in a symbolics which renders the male body essential and the female body inessential in the symbols of salvation. Any body can stand in the place of woman but the converse is not true. The bride incorporates both men and women because she is human, but the bridegroom is essentially male because he symbolizes God: ‘The Bridegroom – the Son consubstantial with the Father as God – became the son of Mary; he became the “son



of man”, true man, a male. *The symbol of the Bridegroom is masculine.*<sup>27</sup>

So only one sex – the male – is necessary for the performance of the story of Christ with all its masculine and feminine personae. This is achieved through an asymmetrical essentialism which on the one hand detaches femininity and motherhood from any necessary relationship to the female body, while at the same time insisting that the female body precludes women from performing any role associated with the essential masculinity of Christ. So maternal femininity now refers to the natural, unmediated functions of the female body when it relates to women, and to the mediated, symbolic functions of the female body when it relates to men. This reduces the woman as female body to her biological function of reproduction which she shares with every other female creature, and that which makes the human animal not like all other creatures – namely, godlikeness – is denied her. If this represents ‘two ways of “being a body”’, then the contrast between the sexes lies in the fact that man is the human body made in the image of God, and woman is the human body in its natural state of animality. Is it possible to go beyond this impasse – which is close to being an idolatry of the masculine in the modern Church – to a more holistic understanding of sexual difference?

### *The Marian priesthood*

Mary Daly argues that the Catholic hierarchy has created a ‘sacred House of Mirrors’<sup>28</sup> with a sacramental system which spiritualizes motherhood so that its functions can now only be performed by ‘anointed Male Mothers, who naturally are called Fathers’.<sup>29</sup> While I agree with Daly in practice, in theory it is important to have a collective symbol of motherhood. The problem with the Church’s maternal identity is not the symbolization of motherhood, but the exclusion of women from the enactment of this cultural symbolism. Yet if the Church only had the courage to acknowledge the wisdom and foresight of her own tradition, she already has a developed doctrine of a maternal Marian priesthood which could be seen as the fulfilment and consummation of her sacramental life.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1950s, René Laurentin undertook a two-volume study of the historical and dogmatic significance of the Marian priesthood. He demonstrates in meticulous detail that the question of the Marian priesthood – is Mary a priest and what form does her priesthood take? – has been increasingly widespread and troubling in the Church’s tradition. The problem as Laurentin sees it lies in the persistence with

which this idea suggests itself to theologians and mystics alike, allied to a profound reluctance to probe its theological implications. This means that potentially fruitful enquiries tend to collapse into incoherence and irresolution.

Laurentin identifies 'two antinomical tendencies' between which none of the authors he has studied seems able to decide clearly: 'the propensity to affirm the Marian priesthood is a *logical* process. The censure is an *intuitive* process. A thousand reasons lead towards affirming the priesthood of Mary; a sort of diktat which does not give its reasons blocks the affirmation.'<sup>31</sup> This diktat, suggests Laurentin, is because Mary is a woman, a point on which he says there is a mysterious silence, beyond the acknowledgement by some writers that being female precludes her from the priesthood.

Having identified the fact that the reluctance to attribute ordination to Mary is due to an unexamined instinct against women priests running through almost the entire theological tradition, Laurentin sets out to explain why this instinct is theologically sound. He writes,

In Christian doctrine, the symbol of man and woman expresses the rapport between God and the redeemed creature. The man represents God: initiative, authority, stability, creative power. The woman represents humanity: power of welcome and receptivity where the all-powerful initiative of God ripens and bears fruit.<sup>32</sup>

Once again, there is a symbolic system operating on the basis of an identification of the female body with the creature and the male body with God, and this is the only reason Laurentin can find to justify the exclusion of Mary from the priesthood.

Laurentin identifies one feature that is common to all the authors he has studied, and that is that all the priestly functions attributed to Mary are construed in maternal terms. Mary is, he argues, essentially mother, and 'that which is priestly in her is an aspect of her maternity'.<sup>33</sup> He therefore rejects the traditional term 'virgin priest' in favour of a more nuanced understanding of Mary's maternal role, arguing that the conflation of maternity with priesthood obscures the balance between the unique calling of men to the sacramental priesthood, and the unique calling of women to motherhood.

But I have already suggested how problematic it is to define sexual difference along the lines of a symbolic function on the one hand, and a biological function on the other. So what happens if, instead of understanding motherhood in a literal, biological sense,

we interpret it in a liturgical and sacramental sense? If one removes the irrational diktat which Laurentin identifies, then his own historical research constitutes the makings of a developed theology of a Marian sacramental priesthood, richly informed by maternal imagery and symbolism. Might this allow for the recognition of the ordination of women as an organic part of the church's developing vision of faith, and how would this affect Catholic liturgical and ethical life?

***Maternal ethics and the sacramental priesthood***

Catholics entered Vatican II as the dependent children of Holy Mother Church, and emerged as adult citizens of the modern world. The problem is, as any psychoanalyst would tell us, the abandoned and alienated child plays truant in the gaps and slips of our adult language. For the sake of psychological and spiritual health, there is a need to grow towards a more integrated and holistic understanding of faith. This means reconciling the symbolic and the ethical, by attending both to the ever-present voice of childhood imagination which finds expression in our longing for God and in our spiritual heritage, and to the ever-present ethical demands of adulthood in a suffering and struggling world.

Feminist thinkers are creating a growing body of literature which proposes a new ethical vision based on maternal values and responsibilities. Some of these, such as Grace Jantzen, Sara Ruddick and Jean Bethke Elshtain, refer to Hannah Arendt's idea of natality as the possible basis for a maternal ethics.<sup>34</sup> Arendt uses the term 'natality' to refer to the unconditional claim which the newborn, the natal, has upon us, and also to its significance as a constant re-opening of the world of human affairs to future possibilities. Arendt writes,

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men (*sic*) and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence . . . It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their 'glad tidings': 'A child has been born unto us.'

Arendt, a Jewish writer, thus links her idea of natality with the joy that surrounds the birth of Jesus. Jantzen writes that 'Instead of . . . *contemptus mundi*, the contempt for the world which mediaevals expressed in renunciation and moderns express in ever-increasing efforts towards mastery, Arendt placed *amor mundi*, love of the world, as the foundation for ethical and political action.'<sup>35</sup> In Jantzen's philosophical vision, an awareness of our own mortality and vulnerability inherent in the concept of natality, might shift the theological gaze away from its 'necrophilic' obsession with death and the after-life, and focus it in a more concrete and ethically responsible way on this world and this life. Thus the maternal role, with its responsibility to and care for natals, becomes the paradigm for a transformed ethics, what Julia Kristeva refers to as a 'herethics'.<sup>36</sup>

Space precludes a detailed expansion of these ideas, but they resonate with the Catholic social ethos which has emerged under Pope John Paul II. Indeed, the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, with its emphasis on a culture of life and its identification of a wide range of social injustices with a culture of death, goes some way towards being a manifesto for a maternal ethics. The Christian Aid slogan, 'We Believe in Life Before Death', expresses what Linda Woodhead refers to as the 'turn to life' in modern Christianity. She cites a number of Christian thinkers, including John Paul II, in whom this turn is manifest:

For John Paul II it is *this* life which is centre-stage rather than the next, and humanity about which he speaks as much as God. Punishment, hell, damnation, demonology have almost dropped out of the picture, as has a strong stress on asceticism and self-mortification. And death has become the enemy.<sup>37</sup>

John Paul II has repeatedly called upon women to participate in public life in order to build a 'civilization of love'.<sup>38</sup> But as long as these visionary pronouncements and exhortations are allied to an unyielding determination to exclude women from any position of sacramental or symbolic significance in the Church, they are bound to generate more scepticism than enthusiasm among the women they are addressed to.

A sacramental maternal priesthood, inspired by the motherhood of Mary and incorporating the female body as a sign of promise and redemption into the liturgical life of the Church, would be a potent and inspiring symbol of the Catholic Church's maternal love for the world. This is not to advocate yet another form of biological essentialism, but

rather to appeal for a return to a more fluid and poetic use of the language of gender. Male and female together symbolize the incarnation – the divinization of the human flesh in Christ and its sanctification at every stage of existence from conception and birth through suffering and death to resurrection. If the male priest tilts the imagination more towards Christ and his sacrifice on the cross, the female priest tilts its back towards Christ and his birth from Mary. These are inclusive, not exclusive symbols, inviting us into a world of inexhaustible possibilities and promises played out in the drama of the Mass and fulfilled in an ethic of love. In worship, we are children at play, nurtured by the maternal body of Christ in the Church which keeps alive our mystical longing for God. But when we step out from the Church we ourselves become mothers, called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, care for the sick.

I have tried to demonstrate in this article that, far from being a transgression or a violation of tradition, the Marian priesthood is a coherent and logical development of doctrine. Both sacramentally and ethically, it might be the reconciling move which will take us beyond the painful and intractable quarrels of the present, into a new world of God's healing love incarnate among us as natals made in the image of the natal God.

**Tina Beattie** is a freelance Catholic theologian and writer, and a tutor counsellor with the Open University. She did a doctorate on the theology and symbolism of Eve and the Virgin Mary, and her latest book is *The Last Supper According to Martha and Mary* (London: Continuum/Burns & Oates; New York: Crossroads, 2001).

#### NOTES

1 I explore this in more detail in 'Mary, Eve and the Church', Candlemas lecture for the Centre for Marian Studies, 2000, published in the journal *Maria*, February 2000.

2 The object relations theorist, D. W. Winnicott, argues that religion and art find expression in that aspect of the psyche which represents the transition from the early infant's sense of union with the mother, to the experience of separation and individuation. It is in the unresolved and dynamic space between the two that we find ourselves free to play, to worship and to create, beyond the restraints of the social order. See D. W. Winnicott, *Human nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1988), p 107.

3 Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and equivalence: the nature and role of woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995 [1968]), p xvi.

4 *Ibid.*

5 For further discussion of this, see Kari Elisabeth Børresen, 'God's image, man's image? Patristic interpretations of Gen 1:27 and 1 Cor 11:7' in Kari Elisabeth Børresen (ed), *The image of God: gender models in Judaeo-Christian tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995 [1991]).

6 I do not discuss Protestantism in this essay, because the symbolic significance of sexual difference is closely associated with sacramentality. In churches which are mainly non-sacramental in their theology and worship, gender is less fundamental.

7 See Andrew Louth, 'The body in western Catholic Christianity' in Sarah Coakley (ed), *Religion and the body* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp 111–130.

8 In the following discussion of Augustine, I am indebted to Børresen, *Subordination and equivalence*, pp 15–91. See also Kim Power, *Veiled desire: Augustine's writing on women* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995); Elizabeth Clark (ed), *St Augustine on marriage and sexuality* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996). The ideas to which I refer are scattered widely throughout Augustine's work, but are mainly to be found in Augustine, *The Trinity*; Stephen McKenna (trans), *The fathers of the Church, a new translation [NFC]*, vol 60 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963); Sister Mary Inez Bogan (trans), *The retractions, NFC*, Vol 60 (1968); Roland J. Teske (trans), *On Genesis: two books on Genesis. Against the manichees and on the literal interpretation of Genesis: an unfinished book, NFC*, Vol 84 (1991); 'On the good of marriage' in *Seventeen short treatises of S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo* (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: F. and J. Rivington, 1847), pp 274–307; Henry Bettenson (trans), *Concerning the city of God against the pagans* (London: Penguin Books, 1972 [1467]).

9 Augustine, *The city of God*, Book 22, ch 17, p 1057.

10 Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book 12, ch 7, n 10.

11 Penelope Deutscher, *Yielding gender: feminism, deconstruction and the history of philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p 158.

12 Thomas Laqueur, *Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge MA and London UK: Harvard University Press, 1992), p 8.

13 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: theological dramatic theory*, Volume 2: *The dramatis personae: man in God*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco, 1990 [1976]), p 365. For other examples of such quasi-scientific theological arguments, see John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1987), n 18, p 68; Monica Migliorini Miller, *Sexuality and authority in the Catholic Church* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1995), pp 171–182. See also Gerard Loughlin's critique of von Balthasar's 'body theology' in Loughlin, 'Erotics: God's sex' in J. Milbank, C. Pickstock and K. Ward, *Radical orthodoxy: a new theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp 143–162.

14 *Inter insigniores: declaration on the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood*, 15 October, 1976, in Austin Flannery (ed), *Vatican Council II*, Volume 2: *More postconciliar documents* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982), pp 331–345, p 339.

15 *Ibid.*, p 340.

16 *Ibid.*, p 341.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

18 John Paul II, *Original unity of man and woman – catechesis on the book of Genesis* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1981), p 62.

19 *Mulieris dignitatem*, n 7, pp 22–23.

20 *Ibid.*, n 26, p 98.

21 *Ibid.*, n 17, p 64.

22 *Ibid.*, n 17, p 65.

23 *Ibid.*, n 29, p 107.

24 *Ibid.*, n 30, p 112.

25 See *ibid.*, n 20, p 78.

26 *Ibid.*, n 25, p 94.

27 *Ibid.*, n 25, p 95.

28 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: towards a philosophy of women's liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1986 [1973]), p 195.

29 *Ibid.*, p 196.

30 In the following I am drawing on Tina Beattie, 'Mary, the virgin priest?' in *The Month*, December 1996, pp 485–93. See the website, <http://www.womenpriests.org>, for this and other material relating to the Marian priesthood.

31 René Laurentin, *Marie, l'église et le sacerdoce*, vol 1: *Maria, ecclesia, sacerdotium: essai sur le développement d'une idée religieuse* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1952), p 630.

32 *Ibid.*, p 644.

33 Laurentin, *Marie, l'église et le sacerdoce*, vol 2: *Étude théologique* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1953), p 200.

34 See Hannah Arendt, *The human condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'The power and powerlessness of women' in Gisela Bock and Susan James (eds), *Beyond equality and difference: citizenship, feminist politics and female subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp 110–2; Grace Jantzen, *Becoming divine: towards a feminist philosophy of religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal thinking: towards a politics of peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989; London: The Women's Press, 1990).

35 Jantzen, *Becoming divine*, p 152.

36 Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat mater' in *Tales of love*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp 234–263, p 263.

37 Linda Woodhead, 'The turn to life in contemporary religion and spirituality' in Ursula King (ed), *Spirituality and society in the new millennium* (Sussex Academic Press, forthcoming).

38 John Paul II, 'A letter to women' in *The Tablet*, 15 July 1995, pp 917–919, p 918.