

AS A MOTHER TENDERLY

**Exploring parish ministry through the metaphor and
analogy of mothering**

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As a mother tenderly: using mothering as a metaphor and analogy for parish ministry.

The thesis sets out to use maternal imagery as a way of articulating the practice of parish ministry in the Church of England. The aim is to find a language which can affirm and encourage many aspects of good practice that are in danger of being over looked because they are neither well articulated nor valued. The ministry of a parish priest is a relational activity: characterised by care. It is because the priest has a responsibility to care for those entrusted to her that she engages in priestly activity. In doing so she is sharing in the collective ministry of the church in which she has a pivotal and public role. The church is to be a community in which people grow up in Christ and come to maturity of faith.

In order to explore the relational activity of a parish priest the imagery of mothering is used. The changing place of women in society has made it more difficult to use gendered images and thus it is necessary to discuss whether mothering is an essentially female activity. After acknowledging the complexity of the gendered language and the reality that most women arrive at mothering through a specifically female bodily experience, the thesis goes on to state that the practice of mothering is not instinctual but learnt. It involves learning through a relationship with a particular child and what is learnt are human ways of being and doing which are not gender specific.

As the child is a growing developing human being the relationship and activity needs to be adaptable and contingent, requiring concrete thinking. Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* offers a philosophical understanding of mothering as a practice shaped by three demands which are all good and often conflict. Using her understanding of mothering and drawing on Hanah Arendt's categories of human activity the thesis explores the practice of mothering. The thesis then uses this understanding of mothering as a way of reflecting on the practice of parish ministry.

As a relational activity parish ministry needs to value particularity and concrete contingent responsiveness. Intersubjective relationships need to be maintained and the virtues cultivated that guard against the temptations to intrusive or domineering styles of care on the one hand or passive abnegation of responsibility on the other. Parish ministry cannot be understood in terms of tangible productivity so different ways of understanding success and evaluating priorities need to be articulated. The thesis suggests ways of thinking about and describing aspects of parish ministry that highlight the kinds of practices that enable people to flourish. The use of maternal imagery is not intended to suggest that women have a better access to these ways of being and doing, nor that congregations are like children. Mothering at its best seeks to create the relationships and spaces in which people grow up and flourish. Times of dependency are part of that but maturity and reciprocal relationships of interdependence is the goal.

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Introduction: Metaphorical language and ministerial practice

The phrase ‘as a mother tenderly’ has become familiar to many in the Church of England as a metaphor about the love of God. It appears in Eucharistic prayer G in Common Worship.¹ It alludes to Isaiah’s description of God comforting like a mother² and Jesus’ description of himself as a hen gathering her chicks.³

In this thesis I am choosing to use this metaphor not to explore the love of God but to think about the role of a parish priest. The purpose is to offer a different perspective for exploring the role of a priest, and in particular a perspective based on the centrality of relationship and care. The thesis provides an extended and intentional conversation between a way of understanding mothering and the work of a parish priest. It is not an empirical study, nor a study of how mothers function as parish priests. It does, however, draw on my own experiences of being a mother and a parish priest – experiences out of which the original thinking and exploration began.

In *Maternal Thinking*, a philosophical reflection on mothering that I will return to in Chapter Four, Sara Ruddick reflects on her own process of writing about mothering. She begins by admitting that at one level she has ‘made it up’;⁴ that is, she has not conducted an empirical study of thinking mothers. However, she is grateful to accept the observation of another scholar who defined her approach anthropologically and called Ruddick ‘a participant-observer of mothering’. She describes how she draws on both her own experiences and wider observation:

As an ‘anthropologist’ I begin by remembering as honestly and as deeply as I can my own experience as a mother and daughter and that of my closest friends. I then extend my memory as responsibly as I am able, by reading, by eavesdropping, by looking at films, and most of all by mother-watching.⁵

¹ *Common Worship*, London: Church House Publishing, 2000.

² Isaiah 66:13, RSV.

³ Matthew 23:37, RSV.

⁴ Ruddick, Sara, *Maternal Thinking*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, pp. 61–64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

She notes the different writers and friends who have shaped her thinking. In this thesis I am working in a similar way and write as a participant-observer of mothering and of ministry. Like Ruddick, alongside the many books and articles credited in the bibliography I have mined my personal experiences of being a mother and a daughter, of being a member of a congregation and a parish priest. I have also reflected on the experiences of friends who are mothers or priests or both and engaged in plenty of mother-watching and priest-watching.

This thesis is, therefore, an extended essay in which I draw out aspects of ministry that are in danger of being eclipsed by the prevailing language. It is a way of recovering and articulating the priority of relationship and care in parish ministry and locating the priest's role in the mutual relationships that should be inherent in a parish community. It is not surprising that the fears associated with decline in status and numbers leads to a desire within the Church of England to formulate programmes of growth, but there is a danger that such programmes fail to understand the nature of human growth or the reality of the local church as a community of unique people. One strength of a maternal metaphor is that it highlights the reality that parish ministry involves a *relationship* and an *activity* that are inextricably linked. Too many discussions of ministry focus either on the relationship: What does it mean to be a priest? or the activity: What are the tasks of a priest? A parish priest has accepted the responsibility of a community or communities entrusted to him or her by the bishop. Because she has this responsibility, she needs to learn what it means to both know and care for them as a priest. I suggest that looking at the way mothers engage in their responsibility to relate and care for their children can help to articulate this practice.

Inevitably, this thesis touches on issues of gender and I will return to them in a later chapter. However, one of the issues in writing is the need to use a gendered pronoun. I have adopted the convention of referring to a priest as female. This is a feminist piece of writing in the sense that it prioritises what can be learned from a way of being that has specifically female components and traditional female resonances, and in that it draws on the work of many feminist writers who critique assumptions about language, child development and the prioritising of abstract ways of reasoning over concrete practice. Yet it

is not written specifically for women. I have presumed that men and women can learn from female imagery. Therefore, when I talk about a parish priest I am assuming that the priest may be female or male. In the thesis I usually refer to a child as he, but clearly the child could be male or female.

Metaphorical language

This thesis is about how the language used shapes both the practice of ministry and the way it is valued. To speak of a priest being like a mother is to use a figure of speech. It is clearly not to say that a priest should be a mother or suggest that a priest should give birth to or feed children out of her own body. Nor, as I will explore more fully in the thesis, is it to say that women have a particular ability to be priests or that congregations need to be treated like children. It is to open up a way of looking at what mothers are like and how that might suggest ways of being priests. To explore metaphorical language further I will use the work of Sallie McFague and Janet Martin Soskice.

A metaphor is a word used in an unfamiliar context to give us a new insight; a good metaphor moves us to see our ordinary world in an extraordinary way.⁶

So writes McFague. Both writers stress that metaphor is about a use of language that enables us to make connections and think creatively about our world. They claim that metaphorical language is the basis of all language and is particularly important in religious language. McFague discusses how language works by naming things and using metaphors.

Gradually reality is outlined more precisely, richly, and complexly through such naming, and metaphor is at the heart of the process. Reality is created through this incredibly complex process of metaphorical leaps, of seeing this as that; we use what we notice about one thing to ‘name’ (describe, call up, evoke, elicit) another thing where we notice something of the same, and hence for the first time we *see* it that new way.⁷

She discusses the work of Max Black, who describes a metaphor in terms of a ‘screen’ through which the principal subject is viewed. What he calls the

⁶ McFague, Sallie, *Speaking in Parables*, London: SCM Press, 1975, p. xvi.

⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

‘associated commonplaces’ of the focal word provide this screen.⁸ Thus in my metaphor the associated commonplaces of mothering provide a way of looking at and seeing the work of a parish priest.

Soskice explores the idea of a frame in distinguishing between a model and a metaphor. To speak about the fatherhood of God is, she says, to use fatherhood as a model for God. Once language begins to attribute to God fatherly ways of being towards his children, the language becomes metaphorically based on the frame of the model father. Thus, she claims, the ‘talk based on models will be metaphorical’. She also distinguishes metaphor from analogy, which she defines thus:

language that has been stretched to fit new applications, yet fits the new situation without generating for the native speaker any imaginative strain.⁹

In her understanding analogy is not model related or figurative.¹⁰ In this thesis I would suggest that I am using maternal imagery both metaphorically and analogously. It is a metaphor in the sense that it offers mother as a model to reflect on ministry in new ways, and part of its imaginative stretch arises out of a deliberate use of a word associated with women. The rich commonplace associations around mothering can invite imaginative and creative ways of re-imagining the language of ministry. Yet there is also a sense that, as I explore the metaphor, in many areas the analogous relation between mothering and ministry does not involve an imaginative strain. Both mothering and ministry are relationships of care and thus I am able to use the presumptive reasoning of an analogy to assume that obvious similarities require similar ways of thinking and acting.

The ability to think and speak metaphorically is, both Soskice and McFague suggest, fundamental to the ways human beings explore ideas. It is not simply a poetic linguistic device, but a central component of human language. McFague argues that ‘metaphorical thinking’ is the way human beings ‘move in all areas of discovery’.

⁸ McFague, Sallie, *Metaphorical Theology*, London, SCM Press, 1982, p. 23.

⁹ Soskice, Janet Martin, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 64.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Human beings are organisms, not machines, and like other organisms they ‘grope’, but in a special way, a conscious way, which means that their special ‘thing’ is their ability to make novel connections and associations within their familiar environment, dislocating it sufficiently so that the old, the stale, the ordinary, ‘what is’, is seen in a new light as what might be.¹¹

So speaking metaphorically is how we can shed new light on practices, consciously searching for new insights. For McFague and Soskice it is particularly important to understand this in the language we use about God and they go on to explore the models and metaphors used in such language, including a maternal model.

In discussing language and the metaphorical basis of all language it is important to note the existence of dead metaphors. Our language is full of such phrases where the figurative connection has already been lost. Soskice writes;

Finally, the most important means by which one distinguishes dead from living metaphor, and both from non-metaphorical speech, concerns the relationship of metaphor to model. An originally vital metaphor calls to mind, directly or indirectly, a model or models so that when one says ‘the wind howled about the eaves’ there is a suggestion that the wind, like a dog or a madman, howls. As the metaphor becomes commonplace, its initial web of implications becomes, if not entirely lost, then difficult to recall.¹²

So a dead metaphor is one where the model is no longer obvious or has lost the common resonances that would enable it to illuminate the primary subject.

Models and metaphors for the ordained

The first chapter of the thesis will explore how ordained ministry is understood within the Church of England and the different theologies that underpin the kinds of language used about ministry. To speak metaphorically about the role of the priest is not new; there are plenty of traditional models. In fact, the ordinal of the Church of England uses many different images to describe the work of a priest. They are to be servants, shepherds, messengers, watchmen and

¹¹ McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, p. 48.

¹² Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 73.

stewards.¹³ Clearly these are offered as models that can be explored metaphorically. Clergy are not to actually look after sheep or to stand as look-outs on the ramparts but to draw metaphorically on the commonplace associations of shepherds and watchmen to illuminate their practice of ministry. The chosen images connect to Biblical imagery and in some cases have become so much a part of the inherited Christian language that the metaphorical connections have lost their vibrancy. They are, in a sense, dead metaphors. This is partly because the images that were ordinary and contemporary in Biblical times are no longer a part of everyday life in Britain so have lost their commonplace associations. So when we image clergy as shepherds we first have to think hard about shepherds, using imagery that is mediated through art, literature, story and religious ideas about shepherds and priests. We cannot simply draw on our own everyday experience.

The terms shepherd and servant, and in some traditions ‘father’, have become so widely used in connection with ministry that in context they have become dead metaphors. To speak of a bishop and his flock is for most people a straight-forward description of the relationship and does not instantly make them think that they are sheep. To refer to a priest as father is rarely to call to mind paternal characteristics but to offer an appropriately priestly title. It is, of course still possible and fruitful to meditate on the origins of such metaphorical language and to reflect on the life and work of shepherds, watchmen and stewards in the Old and New Testaments and through such reflections find new insights for ministry.¹⁴ It is important to reflect on why such images have remained so powerfully part of the tradition. However, these metaphors relate to models and, as Soskice points out, reflecting on these can be both fruitful and disturbing.

The phenomenon of dead metaphors ‘coming to life’ and surprising us by their implications corroborates our claim that metaphor and model

¹³ ‘The Ordination of Priests also called Presbyters’ *Common worship*, www.churchofengland.org (20th February 2012).

¹⁴ A good example of exploring a traditional metaphor is found in Moody, Christopher, *Eccentric Ministry*, London: DL&T, 1992. He reflects on the idea of the shepherd in Palestine as a way of thinking about current patterns of pastoral care.

are closely linked. It is the hidden or unacknowledged models they suggest which sometimes disturb us over dead metaphor.¹⁵

Thus when female priests find themselves in churches where priests have always been called ‘father’ it can no longer be seen simply as a priestly title; the metaphor ‘comes to life’, raising issues about gender and ideas about authority. And to realise that a shepherd – however caring – is looking after a different species raises issues about clericalism and how the laity are valued, a subject that will be explored further in chapter one.

A question of language

It is not simply the inclusion of women in the priestly ministry of the Church of England that has raised questions about the language used to talk about ordained ministry. Historical changes in the status both of Church and clergy has affected the way clergy see themselves. Anthony Russell’s book *The Clerical Profession* clearly charts the changes in clerical status and self-understanding from the late eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth.¹⁶ Martyn Percy in *Clergy: The Origin of Species* comments on the professionalisation that Russell charts and the ambiguity of the clerical profession:

This rapid development of professionalisation would normally be something that is welcomed in the vocational or occupational spheres of work. But in ministry, its status as a ‘profession’ has never been something that could easily be agreed upon.¹⁷

Both Russell and Percy join the many writers who note that the current context in which clergy work, the changes in the way they and the Church are viewed by society, and the pressures of dwindling numbers all lead to an uncertainty over how to describe the role of a parish priest. There is, at some level, a crisis of self-expression.

Alongside these historical changes in the role of the parish priest as a profession there have been theological debates about ordination prompted by ecumenical discussions. Questions about recognising ministry in other

¹⁵ Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 74.

¹⁶ Russell, Anthony, *The Clerical Profession*, London: SPCK, 1980.

¹⁷ Percy, Martyn, *Clergy: The Origin of Species*, London: Continuum, 2006, p. 72.

denominations pose questions about the significance of ordination itself. These issues have also been raised by the increase in authorised lay ministries and non-traditional patterns of ordained ministry. Thus the majority of books written about the clergy in the Church of England today acknowledge these uncertainties about how ordained ministry is understood and many contend that there is an urgent need to challenge and change traditional assumptions about the role. Within these debates, I would suggest, there is little consensus about the language and imagery to be used about the parish priest. Although traditional titles and metaphors are still favoured by some, there is an increasing use of 'leadership' to talk about the role of those in ministry.

The word leader is now being used not only as a substitute for the Anglican titles *priest* or *presbyter* but also in preference to the much more common expressions of *minister* (meaning servant) or *pastor*.¹⁸

writes Steven Croft in his book on ministry. He clearly does not feel that 'leader' is an appropriate title, and advocates a return to the Biblical terms *diakonia*, *presbyter* and *episcopo* but, I suggest, these do not offer a model that has a metaphorical resonance. Again, they require their own imaginative interpretation before they can be used to inform the practice.

The popular language of leadership for ministry borrows models from secular organisations that stress anything from hierarchical ideas of a vision-setter to more collaborative or even 'servant' styles of leadership. This generalised terminology fails to offer a workable model for metaphorical thinking. It needs the underpinning of a well-developed ecclesiology to describe what or who is being led and where. Even a cursory look at the wealth of material on leadership in the sociological and business worlds shows how quickly discussions of leadership need to be qualified by definitions of style, context and aims.

In order to understand what it means to be a leader we need to understand the nature of authority and the purpose of the organisation being led. For clergy these are areas that are ambiguous and contested. Simply to talk about ministry and to use its Greek roots of *diakonia* or service only provides a

¹⁸ Croft, Steven, *Ministry in Three Dimensions*, London: DLT, 1999; 2nd edition 2008, p. 26.

limited metaphorical framework. To be a servant is one of the traditional images offered to clergy but, again, it is too ill-defined. What kind of a servant? Are we God's servants or the bishop's or the congregation's? The image suffers from our lack of understanding of the kinds of roles servants had in the past and, therefore, the associations are often simply about a lowly status or the need to do the bidding of others.¹⁹

It follows that many of the current discussions about the role of clergy fail to grasp the importance of good metaphors. Even where some of the writing offers stimulating and challenging theological reflections on what we mean by ordination, the lack of a model for ministry that resonates with ordinary and contemporary lived experience can make it hard for connections to be made between theology and praxis. A case in point is the work of Robin Greenwood in *Transforming Priesthood* who, while arguing lucidly for a collaborative understanding of parish ministry, offers the model of presiding and president for the parish priest.²⁰ The commonplace associations with these terms are either rooted in a particular aspect of liturgical practice, presiding at the Eucharist, or with senior governmental or societal office within a hierarchical framework. Wesley Carr's helpful book *The Priestlike Task* has some important insights into parish ministry, but his choice of the model 'consultant' envisions a level of detachment and seniority.²¹ John Pritchard's recent book *The Life and Work of a Priest* gives a multiplicity of images to envision the multi-tasking work of parish ministry but fails to offer a model for integrating them.²² Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown in *Being a Priest Today* draw on a rich seam of traditional imagery for a priest, particularly from Gregory the Great.²³ These multiple images can provide fertile resources for reflecting on ministry, but they do not necessarily offer a way of integrating the many aspects of parish life or clearly highlight the relational aspect of the priest and people. All the above books understand at

¹⁹ For a concise discussion of some of the issues around the term *diakonia*/servant see *For such a time as this: A report to the General Synod of the Church of England of a working party of the House of Bishops*, London: Church House Publishing, 2001, pp. 31–35.

²⁰ Greenwood, Robin, *Transforming Priesthood*, London: SPCK, 1994, p. 145.

²¹ Carr, Wesley, *The Priestlike Task*, London: SPCK, 1985.

²² Pritchard, John, *The Life and Work of a Priest*, London: SPCK, 2007.

²³ Cocksworth, Christopher & Brown, Rosalind, *Being a Priest Today*, Norwich: Canterbury, 2002.

some level that being a priest is about both who one is *and* what one does. Yet, as we will explore in the next chapter, both questions of being and doing in terms of priesthood involve theological questions about ontology and functionality that don't seem to be adequately addressed in these accounts.

Outlining the thesis

It is my purpose in this thesis to offer a model of parish ministry that can be explored metaphorically to articulate and highlight many different aspects of the role. The model is one that has many commonplace resonances and is part of the everyday experience of human life. Although only some people are mothers, we have all had mothers and are constantly able to see diverse expressions of the practice. This of course can, for some, be problematic because negative emotions about mothering can distort the metaphor. Yet there is a commonplace understanding that equates mothering with ideas of love, nurture and care. Above all, we understand that it is both a relationship and an activity. Mothers are mothers by dint of their relationship to specific children and mothering is grounded in particularity; I am Ben and Joe's mother. My mothering relationship is then lived out in what I do as a mother for and with them. I am *actively* involved in mothering them, though not all the time. And in this loving, nurturing and caring I collaborate with other people who are not their mother but who share in different ways in the practice of mothering them. Plenty of these tasks can be shared and undertaken by a number of different people, but the children also require the knowledge that my relatedness is trustworthy, that I am there for them and I will ensure that the necessary care will be provided.

The thesis is an extended reflection on the metaphor and posits an analogous relationship between the contingent nature of the practice of mothering on the one hand, and ministry on the other. This contingency arises out of the reality that the work of mothers and priests is fundamentally connected to specific people. It draws on philosophical ideas of contingent responsiveness and the virtues necessary for acting in concrete situations. The thesis also maintains that both practices draw on ways of thinking that have often been under-articulated and undervalued. It is my intention to use the

maternal model to illuminate good practice in ministry and to suggest attitudes, virtues and cognitive capacities that can aid good practice. The thesis draws on a wide range of writing from many different disciplines. There is not a clear body of work to turn to, so I have read widely and sought to allow ideas from systematic and practical theology, ecclesiology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, educational theory and writing for mothers to converse. This means that although this is a theological reflection, many of the conversation partners are drawn from outside the theological world and some will be extremely surprised, if not dismayed, to find they have been drawn into it.

In this thesis I will explore the metaphor by first looking at the theology of ordained ministry. In doing so I am looking at the Church of England with a particular focus on the work of a parish priest. I will argue that we have borrowed language about clergy from our Catholic heritage without always understanding the theological underpinning. In particular I will look at the doctrine of Apostolic Succession and its connection to an ontological understanding of the ordained as essentially different, at one level, from the laity. This clearly has implications for ideas of sharing ministry and developing a ministerial character. Drawing on Edward Schillebeeckx,²⁴ I will argue for an evolutionary understanding of ministry that has emerged from the Church and exists for the Church as part of the apostolic ministry that belongs to the Church as a whole. Using the theology of Karl Rahner, the Church can be understood as a sacrament of grace and this can allow an understanding of the ordained as ‘walking sacraments’. Noting the Anglican terminology of the particular ‘cure of souls’, I will conclude that ministry is best understood as a relationship defined by an acceptance of the responsibility to care for a particular community of people.

Chapter Two will discuss the historical use of a maternal metaphor for ministry, showing that although this may not be a familiar imagery, it has roots in the New Testament and in subsequent Christian writings. In chronicling such usage it becomes clear that, although mothering is a female term, it has been used by men to think metaphorically about their ministry. In the light of this,

²⁴ Schillebeeckx wrote two books on ministry: Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, London: SCM, 1981 and *The Church with a Human Face*, London: SCM, 1985.

Chapter Three looks at questions of gender difference and specifically how different understandings impact on the way mothering is understood. In particular I will note the problem of language and gender and use the work of Luce Irigaray to discuss this. She notes that women, and especially mothers, are rarely understood as subjects. Questions of gender and mothering involve acknowledging that there are experiences of becoming a mother that are specific to women's bodies. The gendered nature of these bodily experiences has led to subsequent assumptions about nurturing and caring for children that are also gendered. I will challenge the idea that mothering is an essentially feminine, instinctual response and suggest that this understanding of mothering has been a factor in dismissing the thinking behind the activity. Instead I will explore mothering as a learned practice arising out of a relationship and responsibility to care. Central to this relationship is the importance of developing attachment between the mother and child, which arises out of appropriate responsiveness and an intersubjective relationship.

In understanding mothering as a practice I will use Sara Ruddick's book *Maternal Thinking*.²⁵ Her definition of the threefold demands of mothering and the cognitive capacities and virtues connected to them are central to my thesis. Her approach, as I have already noted, is as a participant observer, but she brings to this her philosophical training and an Aristotelian understanding of virtues, which identify both the virtue and the associated temptations that pull in two directions. Chapter Four will expound Ruddick's work and explore the ideas of virtue and practice that underpin it. To better understand Ruddick's use of this terminology I will discuss Aristotelian ideas of virtue and the work of Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*.²⁶ Ruddick concludes that the demands of mothering are all good, but often conflict, thus the practice cannot be undertaken according to a set of abstract rules.

To further understand this contingent nature and the difficulties it presents to 'blueprint' ideas of mothering and, analogously, ministry, the activities of mothering can be understood through Hannah Arendt's categories of human activity. In *The Human Condition* she defines labouring, work and

²⁵ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*.

²⁶ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*, London: Duckworth, 1981; 3rd edition 2007.

action, with work being the realm of blueprints and products and action the realm of human community and relationship.²⁷ Mothering and ministry, I will argue, are primarily activities of ‘labouring’ and ‘action’. Having set out this framework of maternal practice, Chapter Five explores how the maternal metaphor and analogy can be used to look at the practice of parish ministry.

In exploring the metaphor it is also fruitful to look at the places where it seems inappropriate or where it disturbs. Chapter Six reflects on issues of dependency and asymmetric relationships of care, noting the commonly expressed fear that a maternal model may promote an infantilising of the laity. I also discuss the different nature of the relationship of a priest in terms of her being paid, being temporary and needing to be prophetic and evangelistic in her role. Lastly I ask whether there is a practice of ‘fathering’ and what it may offer to this reflection. In discussing the question of fathering I note that this thesis is written within the context of a society where attitudes to raising children are slowly changing. Thus some fathers play a significant part in the nurture and care of their children. Notwithstanding the importance of this shifting understanding of fatherhood, it is still clear that the majority of childcare and its associated tasks are carried out by women and it is still perceived as ‘women’s work’. It is clearly possible that over time a more gender-neutral way of understanding this work can be arrived at, but we are not yet in that place.

The last chapter offers some illustrations of the practice of ministry in an attempt to articulate aspects of the work that may be overlooked, especially in current leadership models. I note Naomi Stadlen’s book on mothering, *What Mothers Do: especially when it looks like nothing*,²⁸ and her assertion that mothers can find it difficult to properly assess the worth of what they do, let alone have it recognised externally, because they do not have the language to talk about it. This difficulty in articulating much of what is being done is also true of those engaged in parish ministry. Therefore I identify a number of ways of being and acting that are central to good practice in ministry but are rarely articulated as learned skills. In using imagery and language drawn from

²⁷ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958; 2nd edition 1998.

²⁸ Stadlen, Naomi, *What Mothers Do: especially when it looks like nothing*, London: Piatkus, 2004.

mothering, these practices can be highlighted as learned skills. This naming can then begin to counteract the way that many clergy fail to value the good they are doing and therefore do not find the necessary pleasure and affirmation in their work to sustain them through the ambiguities and stresses of a job that, on many levels, can never be completed. The intention of the thesis is to offer a model and language of practice that can better articulate the relationship and activity that builds up flourishing church communities in which Christians are encouraged to 'grow up in Christ'. In seeking to use a maternal imagery to articulate the intertwined relationship and activity of ministry I aim to provide a more coherent way of developing and assessing good practice.

Chapter One: Theology of parish ministry in the Church of England

Central to this thesis is the life and work of a parish priest in the Church of England. Anglicans retained the three orders of ministry – bishop, priest and deacon – when they separated from the Roman Catholic Church and, inevitably, much of the thinking and imagery about ordination has been shaped by traditionally Catholic theology. Yet the Church of England is also a reformed church influenced by Protestant theology, especially the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. For Catholic theologies of ordination, the important question has been about the authenticity of Anglican orders and thus the doctrine of Apostolic Succession has been a particular focus. For more Protestant theologies, which emphasise the priesthood of all believers, the increasing education of the laity and the decline in the social standing of clergy has led to questions about what distinguishes the ordained from the rest of the congregation and what kinds of models of leadership are appropriate. The ecumenical discussions of the late twentieth century raised issues about how clergy in different denominations were to be recognised and this has become an internal question as various lay ministries have become more prominent in the Church of England. What constitutes ministry and how do the ordained and the non-ordained collaborate constructively?

This chapter will look at how questions of clergy origins shape theological understandings of the ordained. If the origin of the priesthood is located in a ‘moment of creation’²⁹ by Christ, for instance the calling of the Apostles or their commissioning, then ordination is understood as a gift from Christ for the Church, rather than emerging out of the Church. Theologies that take this as a starting point tend to follow an essentialist view of ordination; the ordained become distinct, set apart and even ontologically changed through the grace of God at ordination. However, this understanding can lead to problems in articulating the relationship between the ordained and the wider Church and

²⁹ In using the language of creation and evolution I am drawing on the work of Martyn Percy in *Clergy: The Origin of Species*, in which he uses Darwin’s theory as an analogical way of exploring the development of clerical ministry as a profession, highlighting the problems with current uncertainties about what that is in today’s Church.

particular issues in talking about collaborative patterns of ministry. Alternatively, the role of the ordained can be understood as emerging from the early Church in a more 'evolutionary' way. Thus the clergy have arisen out of the Church's need for leadership and order. In this understanding the ordained should, ideally, serve the needs of the Church and adapt as the Church adapts over time. Yet, there is a danger that this theology can lead to a purely functional understanding of ministry, which loses sight of the sacramental nature of the role. It can also disassociate ministry from its tradition. The Church of England finds its sense of order in maintaining the traditional pattern of bishops, priests and deacons while authorising and encouraging new patterns of ministry. In exploring these questions it is important to note the kinds of imagery and language used about the ordained. Often the language used is connected to an underlying theology that may no longer be apparent or appropriate.

Apostolic Succession and the essential difference of the ordained

Anglicans in the past have either leaned heavily on the theory of Apostolic Succession to supply them with a theology of the ministry, or been quite content to have no particular doctrine of the ministry at all.³⁰

This comment from the Anglican theologian Anthony Hanson points both to the lack of serious theological writing about ordination in the Church of England and the importance that has been given to Apostolic Succession in the limited number of Anglican books on the theology of the ministry; such as Moberly's *Ministerial Priesthood*, in which he declares

Ministerial office is an outward and orderly institution, dependent for its validity upon transmission, continuous and authorised from the Apostles, whose own commission was direct from Jesus Christ.³¹

The ordination practice of the Church of England, with its emphasis on Episcopal lineage, points to the importance of succession. The authority to

³⁰ Hanson, Anthony, *Church, Sacraments and Ministry*, Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975, p. 101.

³¹ Moberly, R. C., *Ministerial Priesthood*, London: John Murray, 1907, 2nd edition, p. 115.

minister is passed from one generation to the next in an authorised way.³² These rites are shaped by the particular history of the Reformation in England and the continuity between the Roman Catholic Church and the emergent Anglican Church. The Church of England has, as Hanson says, leaned on the Catholic theology of Apostolic Succession and the continuity of orders to argue for the authority and authenticity of Anglican orders, particularly after Pope Leo XIII declared them null and void in a Vatican document of 1896.³³ However, the doctrine is about more than simply the transmission of authority. It carries with it a particular understanding of the origin and character of the ordained. Hanson's comment that Anglicans have *leaned* on this theory conveys the reality that it has often been adhered to without a proper understanding of its underlying theology.

The theology of Apostolic Succession shares with some more Protestant theologies of ministry in locating the origin of the ordained before the emergence of the Church, in Jesus' calling and commissioning of the Apostles. In the Catholic tradition, Jesus' resurrection encounter with Peter is particularly significant, as he is thrice told to feed or tend Jesus' lambs.³⁴ It is argued that as Jesus commissioned Peter and the other Apostles so, in turn, they commissioned their successors, through the laying on of hands, down to the bishops and priests of the modern Church. A Catholic theology emphasises the importance of the continuity of ordination; a more Protestant theology would look for conformity to New Testament patterns. Both would tend to favour a Christological model: the ordained successors of the Apostles are to represent Christ and tend his flock as he himself would do. The ordained ministry is thus instigated by Christ himself and Christ is the pattern and model for the ongoing practice. The ordained are to be like the Good Shepherd, tending the flock entrusted to them and the imagery of bishops and priest being shepherds continues to shape the language and metaphors used about ordained ministry.

³² Hence the very difficult debates about women bishops. If they are not recognised as real bishops they can threaten the continuity of Apostolic Succession, meaning that all clergy would need some kind of 'pedigree' to show that they had a proper Episcopal lineage.

³³ *Apostolicae Curae* is the title of the papal bull issued in 1896 by Pope Leo XIII, declaring all Anglican ordinations to be 'absolutely null and utterly void'.

www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113curae. (10th November 2011)

³⁴ John 21:15–17.

Notwithstanding that shepherding and pastoral images have been a rich and fruitful language through the Church's history, such language, as I have already commented, provides a model that is, on one level at least, fundamentally problematic. Shepherds are of a different species from their sheep, and clearly a superior species. This species difference is not accidental and is not simply a matter of language: it is a fundamental aspect of a theology of ministry that locates the origin of the ordained as separate and prior to the emergence of the Church. This theology of difference is spelled out clearly in some of the modern thinking about priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church and particularly in debates about the universal priesthood of all and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained. Clearly, the intention is not to argue for the superiority of clergy, but it is to maintain their essential difference. Jean Galot in his 1985 book *Theology of the Priesthood* connects the distinctive nature of the ordained to their Christological origin:

It is in Christ, then, that we must discover the distinctive attributes of the ministerial priesthood. In him we find the origin of this priesthood, not only because he is responsible for the institution of it, but above all because in his own person he gives the priesthood its initial and ideal configuration. The priesthood takes shape in him, so to speak, before taking shape in the Church.³⁵

The documents on the ministry in the Second Vatican Council used the terminology of a common priesthood of all the baptised and a ministerial priesthood. The two were to be understood as intimately connected but essentially different. The quote below is from *Lumen Gentium*, the document on the Church from the Second Vatican Council:

Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.³⁶

This common language of priesthood inevitably caused some confusion. Galot writes:

³⁵ Galot, Jean, *Theology of the Priesthood*, San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1985, p. 26.

³⁶ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on 21 November 1964.
www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en, (10th November 2012)

The phrases ‘universal priesthood’ and ‘ministerial priesthood’ can give rise to a confusion: the word ‘priesthood’ can be taken to refer to a reality identical in both priesthoods with only minor differences appended. But if we consider the data available in the gospels, we realise that a profound difference exists between the two realities involved.³⁷

He goes on to say:

It is true of course that Christ is the origin of both priesthoods. However, these derive from Christ along two lines essentially different: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.³⁸

Galot argues that those engaged in the ministerial priesthood are also, as disciples, part of the universal priesthood. However, he also emphasises that the ministerial priesthood is something set apart, with its origins prior to the Church. There is an essential difference or, as it is sometimes expressed, an ontological distinction, that comes about through the sacramental rite of ordination.

It is important to note here the language of difference, which will surface again in this thesis when considering questions of gender. Debates about how difference is understood in men and women, and whether such differences are essential, highlight the difficulties that we have in discussing difference and the tendency to define one as the opposite of the other, and the privileging of one over the other. It is perhaps not surprising that the language of masculine and feminine has been used by some writers to explore the distinctions between the ‘universal’ and ‘ministerial’ priesthood. The Church, the universal priesthood, is the feminine bride of Christ, receptive to the ministry of the masculine Christ mediated through male clergy.³⁹ It is also not

³⁷ Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood*, p. 118.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 119.

³⁹ A good example of this nuptial imagery being central to salvation and the Eucharist is found in *Inter Insigniores* - ‘Declaration of the sacred congregation for the doctrine of the faith on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood’ (15 October 1976). www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi, (10th November 2011) *For the salvation offered by God to men and women, the union with him to which they are called – in short, the Covenant took on, from the Old Testament Prophets onwards, the privileged form of a nuptial mystery: for God the Chosen People is seen as his ardently loved spouse ... Christ is the Bridegroom; the Church is his bride ... That is why we can never ignore the fact that Christ is*

surprising that traditionally Catholic and Protestant theologies that locate the origin of the ordained in Christ entrusting his mission to the Apostles tend to oppose the idea of women clergy. The issues of gender will be looked at in more detail later in the thesis, but what is important to note at this point is that the language of distinction, however much it stresses complementarity and equality of worth, tends to privilege one subject over the other. In terms of priesthood and ministry, the privileging is of the ordained; the ministerial priesthood. The laity or universal priesthood is defined as opposite or complementary to the ordained.

The Australian Anglican Stephen Pickard makes a valuable connection between the language of distinction between the universal and ministerial priesthood and the Christological nature of the theologies that it proceeds from. He argues that the tensions within this two-stranded theology of priesthood are inherent in a Christological model because they map on to the tensions in understanding the two natures of Christ.

The common priesthood from below and the representative priesthood from above correspond to the double reality of the humanity and divinity of Christ ... It is hard to resist the conclusion that the two-nature problem in Christology has been transferred into the two priesthoods of the Church, the ordained and the baptised. Given the long and contested history of attempts to develop an adequate account of the two-nature doctrine, it is no surprise that a doctrine of ministry indebted to this Christology will produce unsynthesised antinomies. The problem of the relations between the body of Christ and its representative ministry; between the ministry and ministries, cannot be unravelled on the basis of a defective or incoherent two-nature doctrine of Christ.⁴⁰

a man. And therefore, unless one is to disregard the importance of this symbolism for the economy of Revelation, it must be admitted that, in actions which demand the character of ordination and in which Christ himself, the author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom and Head of the Church, is represented, exercising his ministry of salvation – which is in the highest degree the case of the Eucharist – his role (this is the original sense of the word persona) must be taken by a man. This does not stem from any personal superiority of the latter in the order of values, but only from a difference of fact on the level of functions and service.

The fact that the image of the Church is female in this passage does not lead to any sense that it needs to actually be female in the way that the priest must in representing the bridegroom be male. The symbolism of a female priest could imply imagery of a relationship between the female Church and a feminine Christ, and thus undermine the nuptial image.

⁴⁰ Pickard, Stephen, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, p. 90.

Pickard argues that this two-stranded understanding of priesthood provides an inadequate model of the way the ordained relate to the wider Church and wider concepts of ministry.⁴¹ This has implications for the Anglican Church's stated desire to develop collaborative patterns of ministry between the ordained and the laity. If the authority of the ordained resides in their separate priesthood, it is difficult to see how that is shared or enhanced by the ministry of the laity. Hanson also emphasises this problem of relationship, declaring that in traditional Catholic theologies: 'The relation between the two is external, not integral; legal, not theological.'⁴²

It also follows that if the priesthood of the ordained is articulated in the language of Christ's divinity, using imagery like that of the shepherd, the priesthood of all believers tends to be articulated as 'other' and in some sense opposite to the ordained. Thus they become the flock, which is led and which responds by participating rather than initiating. We can therefore conclude that a different pattern of relationship between the ordained and the wider Church is needed; a more integral relationship, a different understanding of clergy origins and an ecclesiological rather than Christological model for ordination.

The ministry of the Church and the emergence of order

To understand the origin of the ordained from a more 'evolutionary' perspective is not to underplay the significance of the Apostles, but to acknowledge that the early Church began to develop appropriate patterns of leadership pragmatically, as well as inspirationally, as it grew and spread. The Acts of the Apostles notes the appointment of the first deacons to deal with a particular problem of order.⁴³ The pattern of Church leadership is not clearly delineated in the New Testament, although the terminology of episcopacy, presbyters and deacons is used in some places. Over the first few centuries the Church developed a threefold order of ministry using these titles, with recognisable rites of ordination, but these orders had *emerged* from the Church. They provided a pattern of leadership and ministry appropriate for its ongoing

⁴¹ Pickard links the problems in a two-stranded ministry to a Nestorian Christology, *ibid.*, pp. 112–13.

⁴² Hanson, Anthony, *The Pioneer Ministry*, London: SCM, 1961, p. 139.

⁴³ Acts 6:1–6. In this passage the appointment of seven men as deacons is described as a response to a particular tension within the Church community. A pragmatic decision was made and the men were authorised by the laying-on of hands.

life and work. The origins of ministry are therefore to be found in the life of the Church. They emerge with the blessing of the Apostles and early Church leaders out of the experience of the Church. Thus they are not different in essence from the wider Church, but exercise particular functions within the Church, within specified roles.

This is the understanding of clergy origins taken by the document *Call to Order*, published by the Church of England in 1989. This document was a theological reflection about the kind of ordained ministry that the Church needed. It set out an understanding of an emergent ministry.

Among the needs, which shaped the life of the early church, the called community, was the need for a representative order of ministry, an order which, by the second or third century became the threefold order of bishop, presbyter and deacon. This order grew out of the life of the community and reflected the being and character of God, a God of order and not of confusion.⁴⁴

The historical development of this order was gradual and complex, and owed much to forms of ministry already available in Jewish and Gentile cultures as well as to the special needs of time and place. Even when, by the second and third centuries, a threefold order of bishop, presbyter and deacon became the generally accepted pattern, it continued to function differently in different places and different ages.⁴⁵

These paragraphs show a clear understanding of the ordained ministry evolving out of the needs of the church and an acknowledgement of diversity in the way these ministries functioned.

The Roman Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx in two works, *Ministry* and *The Church with a Human Face*, provides a detailed exploration of the way that the ordained ministry emerged out of the early Church and has been consistently shaped by forces within and beyond the Church. He traces the evolving understanding of the role of the ordained from the New Testament through different stages of Church history. Schillebeeckx shows that although the terminology of orders has stayed the same, factors such as monasticism, the changing emphasis on the place of the Eucharist, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation have all played their part in the adaptation and evolution of the

⁴⁴ *Call to Order*, ACCM, p. 6, para 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para 61.

ordained. He particularly notes the shift from the presbyter as the recognised leader of the community, who therefore presides at the Eucharist, to the priest's ability to celebrate the Eucharist as his primary function. This also led to the practice of private masses where the priest is able to celebrate the Eucharist without a congregation.⁴⁶ The Protestant nature of the Church of England means that private masses and the idea of 'absolute' ordination⁴⁷ are not part of the tradition, so priesthood is understood subtly differently from the Roman Catholic position. An Anglican priest cannot preside at the Eucharist without a congregation, however small, and Anglicans are always ordained to serve a specific community, thus maintaining the sense of relationship. However, because the language and theology of priesthood is often borrowed from Catholicism, the significance of these differences may be understated.

Schillebeeckx's concern is the shift to ordination residing in the person of the priest and in their Eucharistic role rather than in relationship to the actual Church community. This underpins a theology that sees the ordained priest as distinct and separate from the shared priesthood of the community. He highlights the reality that, in today's Church, this distinctive, separate priesthood is declining in numbers, resulting in congregations being unable to have regular Eucharistic worship.

In comparison with the ancient church, circumstances here have taken a markedly different direction: a priest is ordained in order to be able to celebrate the Eucharist. In the ancient church it is said that he is appointed as minister in order to be able to appear as leader of the community; in other words, the community called him as leader to build up the community, and for this reason he was the obvious person to preside at the Eucharist. This shift is at all events a narrower legalistic version of what the early church intended.⁴⁸

Issues in the Anglican Church are different, yet as I argued above, an underdeveloped theology of priesthood that is particularly focused on affirming the authority of Anglican orders can have a tendency to draw on Catholic

⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, pp. 56–7.

⁴⁷ Canon 6 of the Council of Chalcedon 451 had said: 'No man is to be ordained without a charge, neither presbyter, nor deacon, nor indeed anyone who is in the ecclesiastical order ...' www.piar.hu/councils/ecum04.htm (28th February 2012) To disconnect the ordination from some kind of charge or title was to focus the ordination in the priest absolutely rather than in the relationship between priest and community.

⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, p. 194.

language without acknowledging these differences. Notwithstanding these differences, Schillebeeckx's history of the ministry provides a clear account of the ways in which those ordained as ministers in the Church have been shaped by factors within and without. He stresses the importance of the relationship between the ordained and the actual Church communities they serve. The apostolic tradition, then, resides not in the continuity of an unchanging priesthood, but in the continuity of the Church witnessing to the truth of the apostolic faith. Clergy are not the guarantors of apostolicity through an unbroken succession, but one of the ways in which the Church is able to function as the unbroken witness to the apostolic truths of the Christian faith. The ordained are thus not essentially separate from the laity; difference is located in role and function.

Schillebeeckx was well aware that a socio-historical study of priesthood would lead some to suggest that he was neglecting the sacramental nature of priesthood and reducing it to a functional role.

The tension between an ontological sacerdotalist view of the ministry on the one hand and a purely functionalist view on the other must therefore be resolved by a theological view of the church's ministry as a charismatic office, the service of leading the community, and therefore as an ecclesial function within the community and accepted by the community. Precisely in this way it is a gift of God.⁴⁹

I will return to the issue of the sacramental nature of ordination later, but note here that Schillebeeckx does not see a contradiction between understanding the ordained as 'an ecclesial function' with the idea that they are a 'gift of God'. To argue that the ordained ministry has emerged from the Church is not to deny the role of God in its institution and ongoing calling but to acknowledge that it is through the Church as the body of Christ that the Spirit has and continues to work.

Ministry as ecclesial function

In emphasising the connection between the ordained and the community of the Church the aim is to understand ministry as belonging to the Church with the

⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, p. 70.

ordained having 'an ecclesial function' within the whole. This removes the sense of ontological distinction between the ordained and the lay, but does continue to present linguistic problems about how the ministry of each is to be defined in terms of difference:

The whole church, as the people of God, has a ministry and priesthood. 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people'(1 Peter, 2:9). We should notice that this ministry and priesthood belong to the people as a whole. It is understood collectively. It is a mistaken individualism and egalitarianism that talks about the 'priesthood of all believers', as if this priesthood of the people could be divided up into equal shares among all the members of the people. We must never separate ministry and church, for the ministry is to be understood in the context of the church.⁵⁰

John Macquarrie comments thus on the corporate nature of ministry and the inappropriateness of talking about it as if it is somehow divisible. If, as I concluded above, the apostolic ministry is the ministry of the whole Church, then technically it does not make sense to talk about different ministries but, instead, the language should be about different aspects of ministry and differing roles within the collective ministry of the Church.

The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann writes out of a Reformed tradition and he also stresses the corporate nature of the Church's ministry. In *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* Moltmann describes the collective ministry of the Church. The Church community does not decide what it wants to do, but seeks to follow its calling to be Christ's messianic community. Moltmann argues that this involves certain charges, particular assignments, which are the work of the whole Church and can be summed up in no order of precedence as: the proclamation of the gospel, the practice of baptism and Holy Communion, and charitable work in the wider community. He connects these to the Greek terms *kerygma*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*.

The special assignments in the church are within and under Christ's liberty and authority, and therefore not simply an expression of the ideas of the existing fellowship ... They serve the kingdom of God and

⁵⁰ Macquarrie, John, *Theology, Church and Ministry*, London: SCM, 1986, p. 157.

not the interests of the existing church and the different human interests contained in it.⁵¹

In order for this collective ministry to be carried out, individuals may be given positions of particular responsibility.

The general commissioning of the whole congregation will go on to concede a special position and responsibility to the people with special charges, because otherwise the charges cannot be fulfilled.⁵²

Those commissioned to take on special responsibilities in the Church do so in order that the community may exercise these aspects of the collective ministry. Those commissioned also speak to the community of its connection with the wider Church across space and time. In Moltmann's understanding:

According to the powers and possibilities available, the charges we have named can be full-time or part-time. They can be carried out by men and women, by the married and the unmarried, by the theologically trained and people without any theological training. They can be exercised by individuals and groups.⁵³

This is a clear vision of collaborative patterns of ministry in which all kinds of people are engaged in roles that are collectively serving the kingdom. It offers no distinction between the ordained and the lay and therefore has no need to elaborate on their relationship. Yet clearly he is interested in those who speak to the community of the wider Church; this is not simply a Congregationalist view. It is a pragmatic and functional view in which people take on the charges and roles necessary to make the collective work happen.

The Anglican Church both wants to promote and affirm patterns of collaborative ministry that match the vision Moltmann sets above, but also wants to maintain a tradition of a threefold order of ordained clergy that sees the ordained ministry as more than simply functional. It is, then, constantly struggling with the tension: how do the ordained and the lay collectively minister together? And the more recent question, what distinguishes ordained

⁵¹ Moltmann Jurgen, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, London: SCM, 1977.

⁵² Ibid., p. 309.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 308.

ministers from authorised lay ministers? An ecclesiological understanding of the corporate nature of ministry is constantly undercut by the language of ‘two ministries’; the lay and ordained, as the Church struggles to find a language that maintains distinction without falling back into a notion of separation.

In his book *The Life and Work of a Priest*, Pritchard looks for ways of describing the distinctive work of the ordained as it relates to the corporate ministry:

It’s as if God is the supreme Artist, who invites us into his studio ... He promises to be constantly available as tutor, adviser and friend and then he says, ‘Let’s paint!’ Because this is a long-term project he also appoints a few people to act as convenors of the painting workshop, not because they’re any better at painting than anyone else but simply because he calls them.⁵⁴

Clearly, this affirms the corporate nature of the ministry; all are painting but some have the functional role of convenors, because God appoints them. The book offers fifteen different aspects of a priest’s work with a different image for each. While these sections contain useful reflections about the reality of the multifaceted life of a parish priest, they do not offer an integrated picture or any sense of how the variety is managed. This work highlights one of the major problems of a functional model of priesthood: it needs to deal with a role that involves many different tasks and modes of being and is therefore not easily defined. Can the role of a parish priest be reduced to a list of tasks or functions? What does a paint workshop convenor do, and how much is that shaped by the other painters? Returning to Macquarrie’s thoughts on ordination, we find that although he stresses the corporate nature of ministry, he argues that a purely functional understanding of a minister, defined by her tasks, is always inadequate. People are more than functional; they develop a character.

This is surely true of the Christian minister. We can list his various roles and functions – he is servant, proclaimer, priest; he preaches, baptises, presides at the eucharist, and so on ... If ministry were merely a role or a function or a collection of functions, then there might seem to be no need for a distinctive ordained ministry in the church. The church would consist, so to speak, of modular Christians, any one of

⁵⁴ Pritchard, John, *The Life and Work of a Priest*, London: SPCK, 2007, p. 7.

whom might, perhaps at a moment's notice, be fitted into any appropriate functional slot.⁵⁵

He suggests that we need to look at the *character* of the one doing all these things, an aspect that will be developed later in the thesis. At this point it is important to note that a purely functional definition of the ordained is inadequate. It is not even simply inadequate: it is, in fact, extremely difficult to define what a parish priest does. This in turn makes distinguishing the role of clergy from others sharing in the corporate ministry problematic and risks returning to the concept that a priest is merely defined by her liturgical and Eucharistic ministry.

The extreme difficulty of defining the function of clergy is one of the main issues of this thesis. It is difficult to accurately articulate what it is that clergy do – even clergy find it hard! Towler and Coxon published a sociological study of Anglican clergy in the late 1970s and wrote this:

Now the clergyman, more than anyone else on the contemporary scene, is a jack of all trades. He occupies a unique position, but the uniqueness of his position has nothing to do with unique skills, or even with unique competence. There is nothing which he does that could not be done equally well by a lawyer or bricklayer in the congregation whom the Bishop had ordained to the Auxiliary Pastoral Ministry. He does not have a job at all in any sense which is readily understandable today, and today, more than ever before, a person must have a job in order to fit into society.⁵⁶

Thus clergy do not have the same kind of recognisable skills as people in other professions may have. Both within and beyond the Church there seem to be people who can and are doing many of the same kind of things, albeit not as ordained priests. So how is ordained ministry to be defined? In a functional understanding of ministry there has been a tendency to simply describe the distinctive role of the clergy as leadership. A parish priest is thus to be the leader. Yet what does this mean? It can, of course, relate straight back to the image of shepherds leading their flocks, though as I noted in the introduction,

⁵⁵ Macquarrie, *Theology Church and Ministry*, p. 168.

⁵⁶ Towler, R. and Coxon, A. *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy: A Sociological Study*, London: Macmillan, 1979, p. 54. This study followed students from theological college through analysis of their future careers and questionnaires informed by the work of Eysenck and the Allport-Vernon-Lindsey study of values.

this does not answer questions about collaborative ministry well. A large strand of writing for today's clergy looks to leadership models from other professions, drawing on management and strategic leadership ideas from secular writing on leadership theory.

It is certainly true that parish priests are running organisations with the requisite need for many to manage staff, paid and voluntary, buildings, budgets and strategic planning. In some of the larger churches the numbers of staff, size of budgets and para-Church organisations can make this a considerable managerial task. It can therefore seem logical to draw on management and leadership thinking from the secular world. Such work can be helpful in thinking about the specifically managerial tasks of some parishes, but it does not necessarily help with the complex question we have highlighted about the relationship between the clergy and the laity. Leadership in the Church does not have the clarity of structure and purpose that we find in business or other secular models; the relationship is not based on patterns of employment, pay, contracts or productivity. The power structures are far more ambiguous and outcomes much harder to identify and measure. Martyn Percy writes:

Part of the difficulty for most clergy is that, unlike the conductor of an orchestra, or the CEO of a major corporation, they lack the powerbase to execute decisive initiatives or decisions ... Even the Archbishop of Canterbury is not analogous to being the chairman of a large company ... There is no relationship of compulsion between the leader of the church and the led. Some understanding of this dynamic is important for the study of ministry and its development. Clergy very seldom have the privilege of being strategic; they only have the possibility of being tactical and pragmatic. Moreover, even when they think they are being strategic in leadership, no assumptions can be made about the tactics and pragmatism of the laity in the congregation.⁵⁷

He concludes that clergy can only be 'partially professionalised', for their leadership role is always shaped and defined by the particularity of the community, by the way the community understands the role of the clergy and how much power they are prepared to accord to their vicar.

Percy also comments on how, in the Church, power is fundamentally connected to God; this means that we can find a conflation between the leader

⁵⁷ Percy, Martyn, *Clergy: The Origin of the species*, p. 166.

and God or, as he puts it, between ‘the giver and the gift’.⁵⁸ This means that although the starting point is different, functional models of ministry can, like essentialist models, end by imaging the clergy as more God- or Christ-like than the laity. They often draw on Christological patterns, drawing parallels between Jesus’ ‘leadership’ style and their own. Again we see the valuing of the traditional imagery of shepherd and, currently, the language of ‘servant leadership’,⁵⁹ which subtly aligns leadership to the language of Jesus as Good Shepherd and Servant King.

Defining the relationship

To summarise the discussion so far, a traditionally Catholic theology – which understands the authority of the ordained proceeding from a moment of origin, in Jesus’ commissioning of the Apostles, and a continuity of succession – has led to an essentialist doctrine that sees the ordained priesthood as fundamentally different from the laity. The relationship is then to be understood as complementary: the priest and laity together are the Church and they fulfil their respective roles because of their ontology. The priests’ authority is Christ-given and they are to represent Christ to the Church. However, beyond the liturgical roles, who defines what it is to be priestly or lay and is it possible to prevent the former being seen as superior to the latter, particularly being presented as more Christ-like than the laity? On the other hand, an understanding of clergy as emerging out of the needs of the Church is more pragmatic in understanding their role. They are to provide order, leadership and ministry to the Church. However, what exactly this means and how the roles are to be filled is still difficult to define, beyond liturgical and administrative tasks. There is also the increasingly important question of how the ministry of the ordained relates to the ministry of the non-ordained. A purely functional understanding of ministry seems to undermine the need for ordination. Do the clergy define the different roles, or does the wider church, and what part does God play? Austin Farrer, writing in the late 1960s, comments thus on the dilemma:

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁵⁹ A term borrowed from Robert Greenleaf, www.greenleaf.org.uk which has led to popular courses in the Church of England on developing a ‘servant leadership’ style of parish ministry.

There is nothing to stop a layman from being more learned and a more penetrating theologian than the priest of his parish; nothing certainly to prevent a layman from being a much more understanding helper of people in any sort of trouble or sorrow. What distinctive place does (the priest) hold in the mighty purpose of God?⁶⁰

This is a central problem in talking about ministry in the modern Church – if all share in the priesthood of believers and if many lay people share in the functional tasks of the ordained, what is *distinctive* about the clergy?

A report in 1987 commissioned by the Church of England's advisory body on ministry posed the question 'What ordained ministry does the Church of England require?'⁶¹ The question was addressed to the theological colleges and courses. The fact that the question was posed shows a clear understanding that the ordained ministry arises out of the needs of the Church and needs to be shaped appropriately by the Church of its day. The responses were then reflected on in a report offering a theological evaluation.⁶² As Robin Greenwood, reflecting on the history of the Church of England's theological understanding of ministry, comments, this report marked a definite move away from 'leaning on the Apostolic Succession'.

The document boldly turns on its head much previous understanding of ordination expressed in terms of the individual. Rather, it states that it is the nature of the Church itself that determines the nature of its ministry. It emphasises that ordained ministry should be discussed only in the context of ecclesiology, in that all ministry should be referred to the ministry of Christ in the Church.⁶³

The subsequent report, though understanding ministry in this corporate sense, still talked about 'two kinds of ministry', meaning that of universal priesthood and that of the ordained. Yet it tried to find a way of articulating the relationship to affirm the mutuality of a corporate ministry:

⁶⁰ Farrer, Austin, 'Walking Sacraments' in Loades, Ann & MacSwain, Robert, *The Truth Seeking Heart*, Norwich: Canterbury Press 2006, pp. 138 – 141, p. 139.

⁶¹ 'Education for the Church's Ministry', Advisory Council for the Church's Mission, occasional paper No. 22, January 1987, London: Church House, p. 24.

⁶² 'Ordination and the Church's Ministry: a theological evaluation', ACCM, 1990, republished as Advisory Board for Ministry paper No. 1 London: Church House, 1991.

⁶³ Greenwood, Robin, *Transforming Priesthood*, p. 56.

It is not that the clergy have the same kind of responsibilities and ministry as lay people in a more concentrated form. This reduces lay people to a *less* concentrated imitation or replication of the clergy. Rather, the ordained ministry has a different purpose and responsibility from that of the laity. This involves ordained ministers in contributing to all the other ministries, by helping to form and clarify the latter in such a way that the other ministries can exemplify and sustain the four marks of the Church.⁶⁴

The particular responsibility of the ordained is to be a means for the church as an institution to sustain its living tradition, its responsibility to Christ ... The ordained are not the sole means of achieving this but have this particular responsibility of holding up to the church its true nature and calling.⁶⁵

The report described the relationship as integral, with the ordained and lay 'interanimating' each other. As my thesis develops, the idea of intersubjectivity will resonate with this idea of interanimation and the sense that the interrelationship needs to be understood as central to the role of the priest.

It is through trying to articulate this interrelationship that the distinctive nature of priesthood can be explored, while affirming the collective nature of ministry and not reducing difference simply to tasks and functions. Yet finding a language and imagery to describe the relationship has proved difficult. Some theologians have turned to Trinitarian theology to provide a model for interconnection, mutuality and distinction. Greenwood provides a good example of a thorough and theological attempt to use such a Trinitarian theology to explore the relationship of the priesthood of the ordained to that of the wider Church. The particular Trinitarian concept that is drawn on is that of the Social Trinity and the communion or *perichoresis* they share. Greenwood defines it thus:

The Persons of the Trinity are unique and distinct, yet at the same time interdependent in a process of mutual love. Their identity and individuality, therefore are neither asocial nor presocial, but arise out of their relations and co-inherence. Each of the Persons is a social unity with specific characteristics uniquely theirs and yet simultaneously in community. In a relationship of *perichoresis* the persons exist only as they exist for others, not merely as they exist in and for themselves.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ ABM 1 (1991), p. 32.

⁶⁵ ABM 1 (1991), p. 34.

⁶⁶ Greenwood, *Transforming Priesthood* p. 82.

Greenwood draws on the work of Zizioulas, Boff, Moltmann and Gunton⁶⁷ in developing his understanding of the Social Trinity and the Church as a community that needs to reflect the Trinitarian *koinonia*. His analysis of the problems in the received Anglican understandings of ordination is good, and he notes the way that a predominantly Christological model leads to an individualistic understanding of the ordained and a subsequent prioritising of their status over that of the laity. His aim is to provide a theological framework that offers a more integrated vision of the Church's ministry and mission:

The relational Trinitarianism which represents Christian orthodoxy allows the Church to recognise and work with the complexity of God's activity in the world, avoiding inappropriate polarisations and dichotomies, notably between Church and the world and between ordained and non-ordained.⁶⁸

Greenwood is looking for a way to talk about ministry that is neither essentialist nor purely modal and functional. Thus it is in articulating the relationship rather than the functions that the distinctiveness of the ordained may be found.

In using a Trinitarian language he aims to define difference while affirming mutuality and interdependence. The clergy role is seen as 'overseeing' in a 'presidential' role, but what matters is the ongoing mutual relationship between the priest and those who accept this oversight:

A relational view of ministry presumes that authority establishes itself as a demand of the relationship itself. In these terms the Church becomes hierarchical only in the sense in which the Holy Trinity itself is hierarchical. The ordered relationship between clergy, and between clergy and laity, will not be one of domination when informed by mutual indwelling.⁶⁹

He notes that a parish priest has to be 'in charge' of a parish and also a member, and suggests that the Father in the persons of the Trinity can offer a model for holding this paradoxical way of being together:

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 152.

The understanding of God as a communion of personal relations in which none is ever in a permanent dominating role offers a vision for a concept of priesthood that is *primus inter pares* without being separate or superior.⁷⁰

Greenwood's vision of collaborative ministry is well-motivated and, as I will explore later, his understanding of a relationship that is seeking to avoid patterns of domination but understand necessary asymmetry is similar to my own arguments. Accepting the priority of the relationship between the ordained and those in the communities to which they are called and licensed is fundamental to understanding the role of the ordained. However, there are problems with his use of Trinitarian theology and particularly modelling patterns of relationship on the *perichoresis*, the internal relationship of the Trinity. There are also problems with the imagery of presiding he has chosen to use.

Karen Kilby coherently argues that there is a danger of using the concept of *perichoresis* in this way.

In short, then, I am suggesting we have here something like a three-stage process. First a concept, *perichoresis*, is used to name what is not understood, to name whatever it is that makes the three persons one. Secondly, the concept is filled out rather suggestively with notions borrowed from our own experience of relationships and relatedness. And then, finally, it is presented as an exciting resource Christian theology has to offer the wider world in its reflections upon relationships and relatedness.⁷¹

Thus we see how in Greenwood's case the concept of *perichoresis* is used to give theological significance to ideals of human relating. However, because the nature of the mutual relationship within the Godhead is defined by our human understandings of ideal relationships a theology based on this is inevitably open to projection and different interpretations. It also lacks any metaphorical resonances with relationships that we can recognise and experience.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.156.

⁷¹ Kilby, Karen, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity', *New Blackfriars*, 2000, Vol. 81, pp.432 – 445, p. 443.

Greenwood asserts that his vision is non-hierarchical, but that is because his understanding and concept of the Trinitarian relationship eschews any sense of hierarchy. He is motivated for good reasons to argue for a non-hierarchical, mutually affirming ministry, and his understanding of the Godhead correlates to this vision. However to liken the priest to the Person of the Father *will* carry with it a sense of hierarchy in less theologically nuanced understandings of the Trinity, conflating the clergy with the central figure of the Godhead. This is not helped by the choice of presiding as his analogy for the priestly role, which connects too easily to concepts of governmental presidents beyond the Church and Eucharistic ministry within it.

It therefore follows that a Trinitarian model of integrated relationship can fall into the same difficulties as Christological models; that is, the clergy begin to seem more like God or Christ than the laity, however much mutuality is stressed. Just as we saw in Christological models, the tensions in holding together complex theological paradoxes can all too easily simply get mapped onto the tensions inherent in the relationship between the priesthood of the ordained and the priesthood of all. As Pickard writes:

We might say that the Trinitarian field has been tilled extensively in recent years, however its yield has not been great ... Old problems remain trapped in patterns of meaning that tend to shore up pre-established positions. Little real progress in understanding can be made. This is evident in the knotty little problem of the relationship between those ministries for which people are ordained in the Church and those ministries exercised by the wider body of the baptised. I have never heard or read a single sentence that explains how the ministries of the baptised contribute and establish the ministries of deacons, priests or bishops. There is a disconnect here despite extensive explorations of the Trinitarian basis for all ministry.⁷²

Thus neither a Christological doctrine of representative ministry or a Trinitarian model of integrated ministry seems to provide a coherent language for exploring this interrelationship. Those like Greenwood who have argued for a Trinitarian model are, I suggest, right in arguing that the patterns of ministry need to be understood relationally rather than simply functionally. However I would maintain they are mistaken in trying to locate the pattern for that

⁷² Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, p. 125.

relationship in divine rather than human models.

A human model for a relational ministry

If we begin with the affirmation that all Christians share in the ministry of the Church and that there is a universal priesthood that shares in the priesthood of Christ, then it follows the ordained and the lay are essentially the same. As Cocksworth and Brown in *Being a Priest Today* declare:

Presbyters are not a caste outside the *laos*, they are a category within the *laos*. They are members of the *laos*, who are placed in a particular pastoral relation to the other members of the *laos* ... presbyters are defined by their relationship to other members of the *laos*.⁷³

The key point is that it is in the *relationship* that each is defined. This needs to be the starting point rather than attempting to define the roles separately and then relate them together. Cocksworth and Brown describe this relationship as ‘an intense for-otherness’ and speak about the reality of the interrelatedness:

The presbyter needs the people to be a presbyter. The people need a presbyter to be the people of God.⁷⁴

Though they stress this relationship in the earliest chapters, they do not articulate it more fully. They are helpful in discussing the need for clergy to develop an appropriate character for this relationship but, in seeking to affirm many different patterns of priestly ministry, they shy away from any of the particularities of ministry, resulting in a rather general appeal to priestly holiness. In discussions of the interrelationship of clergy and laity, the tendency is to focus on the role of the ordained without really looking at the type of relationship. Too often it is simply defined as a relationship between a leader and the led.

However, there is a better language available that understands being ‘in charge’ less as leadership and more akin to ‘caring for’. This responsibility to care is present in the terminology with which each parish priest is placed in relationship with a particular community by the bishop: ‘Receive this cure of

⁷³ Cocksworth & Brown, *Being a Priest Today*, p. 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

souls which is both yours and mine.’⁷⁵ The term ‘cure’ derives from the Latin *curia*, to care. The English word curate to describe a parish priest comes from the same root. In this sense caring and taking charge are about the responsibility of tending to the needs of others, at its best displaying that ‘intense for-otherness’ that Cocksworth and Brown highlight. It will involve, in certain circumstances, assuming appropriate authority and power, managing both people and resources, as well as planning and implementing strategies, but all of these are to be driven by the relational priority of caring for those entrusted to one’s care.

The terminology of a caring relationship does not immediately resolve the problem of describing a relationship of mutuality. Caring relationships are often asymmetric, as one has the responsibility of caring for others and reciprocity is not necessarily in kind. In later chapters this question of reciprocity will be explored more fully, drawing particularly on Nel Noddings’ ethics of caring. At this point I want to suggest that understanding the relationship between the ordained and the wider Church they minister to as a relationship of care can provide a better starting point for exploring the interrelation than the language of leadership. It can also begin to point a way forward to articulating the distinctions. As I explore it further in the thesis, it will become clearer how important intersubjectivity is for this caring role.

On one level what I am saying is nothing new. Ministry has traditionally been understood in its widest sense as a form of caring and pastoral work, and carries the imagery of careful tending. Yet, as I argued above, traditional pastoral imagery prioritises the distinction between the priest and those cared for: a shepherd metaphor can and should lead to a genuinely caring pattern of ministry, but the shepherd, at one level, does not see the sheep as like himself. In looking at the language of the priest as one who cares, it is important that the imagery offers a model that maintains the intimacy of the connection between priest and people. In order to take seriously the interrelation of the ordained and the wider Church, the language used needs to convey the sameness as well as the distinctions.

This is why I am arguing for an imagery taken from human

⁷⁵ These are the words used in a service of induction of a vicar or licensing of a priest-in-charge in the Church of England.

relationships, the image of a mother caring for her children. It is an intimate relationship characterised by love and kinship, a relationship that involves responsibility and is constantly adapting to the changing needs and strengths of the children. A mother is only a mother because she has children to care for and her mothering is dependent on the particularity of the children, who are not static but constantly growing, developing, challenging and rewarding. The rest of my thesis will unpack the analogy of a parish priest being like a mother tenderly caring; however, there are a few other questions about ministry that need to be explored before we move on to the substance of the thesis.

Firstly, it needs to be acknowledged that there is already a language widely used about priesthood based on human patterns of relating and kinship. This is the language of the priest as a father. This language has a long tradition. The father is understood as the head of the family and household, caring and providing for those he loves and is responsible for. In many parts of the Church the priest is simply referred to as Father. The title of Father is particularly associated with traditions where the priest is celibate and is seen to have foregone a family of his own so that he can more adequately focus on the family of Christians entrusted to him. However, the image of father carries very different cultural resonances to that of mother.

In modern western society ideas of parenting are beginning to change the perception of fathers, but there is still, for many, a legacy of distant, authoritarian and hierarchical models of fatherhood that colour the term. Patriarchal imagery has a problematic history in terms of women's access to authority and it is associated with a privileging of male over female. The use of the term father is also most often associated with churches that have a distinctive view of the priesthood, that do not admit women and that have a strong view of clerical authority in terms of doctrine and practice. For these reasons the language and image of the priest as a father does not primarily indicate a relationship of care. Furthermore, the language and imagery of father is used extensively to describe and address God. This means that it is all too easy for ideas about God as father and the priest as father to be conflated. The familiarity of these terms in the language about God and ministry means that they have, at some level, lost the power of an analogy; ways in which they

might be like a human father have been eclipsed by the long association with the divine and clerical.

Another traditional and popular human way of relating the priest to the laity is the image of the priest as a servant. Again there is Biblical imagery about Christ as servant and Christians as servants of Christ. A caring relationship could be understood in terms of service and *diakonia* is a common New Testament word for ministry and service. However, the role of a human servant does not resonate with mutuality. There may well be devotion and affection, but the premise is that a servant functions at a different status from those being served, out of duty and obedience. The relationship is defined by employment and the role is defined by the individual or community being served. There are plenty of interesting insights to be learned from reflecting on the role of servant, some of which will be picked up later in the thesis. However, the commonplace resonances of the model of a servant are mainly about status and a willingness to fulfil necessary tasks so that others do not need to do them. There are clearly aspects of ministry that do resonate with such service, but it does not offer a model for exploring an intersubjective relationship of collaboration and mutuality.

Grace and sacrament

In arguing for a human analogy for the way that a priest relates to the community she has the responsibility to care for, and in eschewing an essentialist view of priesthood, critics may well ask where is God's calling and God's grace in this view of the ordained. Farrer, whose quote above posed the question 'What distinctive place does (the priest) hold in the mighty purpose of God?' answered it by calling priests 'walking sacraments'.⁷⁶ In the last section of this chapter I will explore how we might understand the priest as a walking sacrament within the context of the earlier discussion of ministry. Our starting point is that the ministry clergy are engaged in is not a separate ministry to others in the Church, but is a part of the corporate ministry that all share in. However, through ordination, and through the licensing of the bishop, a parish

⁷⁶ This was the title of a sermon that Farrer preached at the first service of Holy Communion conducted by a newly ordained priest. Loades, A. and MacSwain, R. *The Truth Seeking Heart* pp.138 -141.

priest has been put in a particular relationship with a particular community, with responsibility for their spiritual care. In the ordinal of the Church of England we find a description of the ministry a priest is called to and the phrase, ‘You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God.’ The prayer of ordination asks God to send down his spirit to equip the individual for this work, which includes the sacramental ministry. How then do we understand the role of grace in the priestly ministry and in the sacraments? How does that relate to the concept of a ministry of care? And how does it relate to the corporate ministry? In order to answer these questions I will draw on Rahner’s theological ideas on grace and sacraments.

Rahner’s theology of grace arises from his understanding of divine self-communication. In creation and in the person of Christ, God is graciously giving himself to the world, inviting the possibility of relationship. This divine self-communication is experienced as grace and the pinnacle of God’s graciousness to humanity is found in Christ. Human beings are created in the image of God and therefore they seek self-communication, desiring relationships in which they can truly give of themselves. The fulfilment of this desire to relate is found in loving God. God reaches out to his creation and where people receive that communication and trust in God’s love, people are transformed. In her introduction to *Karl Rahner*, Karen Kilby summarises Rahner’s thinking:

Grace, then, is to be understood as God’s self-communication to us, and it is to be understood as occurring at the level of our transcendental experience. The third important feature of Rahner’s account of grace is its universality. According to Rahner, grace is not offered to some of us some of the time, but to all of us all of the time.⁷⁷

The universality of grace in Rahner’s theology maintains that grace is not a rare event but a part of the human condition. It is not poured out on the few, but abundantly:

It is quite conceivable that the whole spiritual life of man is constantly affected by grace. It is not a rare and sporadic event just because grace is unmerited. Theology has been too long and too often bedevilled by

⁷⁷ Kilby, Karen, *Karl Rahner*, London: Fount, 1997, p. 25.

the unavowed supposition that grace would be no longer grace if it were too generously distributed by the love of God!⁷⁸

It follows that God's gracious love is generously offered and any person can respond in loving God. Yet, Rahner insists, that loving God should not be understood as being in competition with human relationships: the love of our fellow human beings.⁷⁹

Rahner argues that God's grace is, in fact, present in human relationships in the selfless acts of compassion and kindness that reflect humanity as it was created to be. Such acts are therefore, in some sense, Christ-like. They are, he maintains, 'a concrete manner of actualising love for God'.⁸⁰ They are not rare acts, but they can happen in all sorts of ordinary and mundane encounters at moments in which the love for the other enables us to truly reach out to them, forgetting ourselves and focusing on their needs. In such moments and acts of love, God, by grace, is present. It therefore follows that in acts of kindness to our neighbour and in the ministry that should be part of every Christian life, the grace of God is present. This is true even where that is not explicit or even intentional on the part of the one acting. We cannot make claims on this grace, but we can affirm God's ongoing work in the world through the loving acts of his creatures towards others.

The Lord himself says that he is present, though, at times, unrecognised, wherever anyone shows compassion from one's heart to another.⁸¹

Rahner talks about both the reality of this grace and also its fragility. It is not possible to fully discern the motivations and true compassion of human acts and thus not possible to make definitive claims about a specific act being grace-filled. If it is genuinely an act of kindness it will be grace-filled, but we

⁷⁸ Rahner, Karl, *Theological Investigations IV*, translated by Kevin Smyth, London: DLT, 1966, p. 180.

⁷⁹ He explains this clearly in the chapter 'Who are your Brothers and Sisters' in Rahner, Karl, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbour*, translated by Barr, Robert, Slough: St Paul Publications, 1983, pp. 67 – 104.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.81.

⁸¹ Farmer, Jerry 'Ministry and Worship' in Marmion, Declan & Hines, Mary (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, Cambridge: CUP, 2005, p. 151.

cannot definitively ascertain the depths of even our own motivations; God alone can.

However, the Church traditionally claims that there are acts about which definitive claims can be made. In the formal sacraments of the Church grace is guaranteed. Rahner affirms this guarantee of grace in the sacraments and, as a Roman Catholic, accepts seven formal sacraments. He defends his position by locating the sacraments ecclesialogically. It is because the Church itself is a sacrament, a real symbol of God's grace that the sacraments it recognises and practises are themselves real symbols of grace. Kilby summarises Rahner's position thus:

The Church itself, he suggests, *is* a sacrament. It is the primary, fundamental sacrament, and the particular sacraments – the sacraments in the usual sense of the word – can be thought of as flowing from, and deriving their meaning from, this basic character of the Church.⁸²

Rahner locates the sacraments in the Church because it is 'the body of Christ'. As Kilby explains for Rahner the role of the Church is in 'making grace tangible, of symbolising grace'.⁸³ Clearly, the actual institution of the Church is a human construction with inherent failings, but it is not possible to neatly divide this human institution from the reality of the Church as Christ's body; the realities, though distinct, are not divisible. The efficacy of the sacraments does not depend on the holiness of the minister, but the holiness of the minister is part of the witness of the Church to its reality as the body of Christ, and this witness is necessary for the meaningful survival of the sacraments. Rahner comments that if none of the ministers of the Church witnessed to the graciousness of God the sacraments would lose their symbolism because people could not recognise them. So witnessing to the reality of God's grace is one of the responsibilities of the clergy.

So how do the formal sacraments differ from the work of grace in human acts of compassion and self-communication? Rahner describes them as 'real symbols' and 'sacramental signs' to express the fact that they do not simply represent a truth but also make that truth present. The sacraments that

⁸² Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, p. 46.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 47.

are recognised by the Church, and enacted by the Church, in explicitly witnessing to the self-communicating grace of God, do more than point to that truth, they also make present the reality of that grace:

The sacramental sign is cause of grace in as much as grace is conferred by being signified.⁸⁴

They are not simply pointers to God's past actions of self-giving, but continual experiences of a gracious self-communication that is ongoing. These formal sacraments bear witness to the ongoing grace of God and the reality of God's presence in the Church and because of that they guarantee the presence of grace. In this they contrast with the impossibility of defining or delineating the gracious self-communication of God which is at work in the acts of love present in human moments of self-giving. The Church and its sacraments are necessary witnesses and guarantees of God's graciousness that can help communities and individuals recognise and receive the grace that is always on offer.

As an Anglican I am not bound by a tradition of seven formal sacraments and I do not follow Rahner's commitment on this point. However, what I find particularly interesting is his theory of sacraments arising out of the sacramental nature of the Church, and it is from this understanding of sacrament that I maintain that the clergy can be understood as a kind of sacrament. As I have argued above, the ministry of the ordained arises out of and is part of the corporate ministry of the Church. The act of ordination authorises an individual to be a recognised minister and to bear explicit witness to the love of God as understood in the Christian faith. The authority ministers are given involves both a role in the formal sacraments of a given denomination and a wider ministry of pastoral care.

In the former the role is quite clearly delineated. For example, the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are shaped by the authorised rituals and symbols which themselves make the acts sacramental; God's grace is manifested and offered in tangible forms – holy water, bread blessed and broken – which are received literally and by faith. The priest's role in such

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

sacraments is clearly defined and, in a sense, simply needs to be enacted. Apart from basic training in how to conduct the appropriate services, using the accepted words and actions, the priest does not need any great skill to play her part in such sacramental ministry and, as I have already said, the efficacy of the sacraments doesn't depend on the holiness of the minister.

However, in order for the sacraments to be recognised as the grace of God the wider ministry of the Church and its representatives needs to witness to the graciousness of God. In the wider aspects of ministry, especially in pastoral care, the priest needs to rely on the same abilities as any Christian to act compassionately, seeking to love God and neighbour, bearing witness to God's reconciling love in Christ. As I will explore in later chapters, such acts of compassion are concrete and contingent so cannot be subject to a formulaic approach. Rahner comments on the way that changes in the world bring new situations where the Church has to reflect on what it means to respond graciously.⁸⁵ Yet, because of priests' authorised role to represent the Church, this wider ministry is also in some sense sacramental because the actions of the priest are received as symbolic of the actions of the Church, and thus of God. When a priest speaks words of forgiveness or blessing, offers comfort or a challenge, even when these are not said in a ritual setting, the words they say will be received not simply as their own words but as the word of the Church and, at some level, the word of God. This is part of the responsibility of ordination.

As we saw above, Rahner's theology is relational. God reaches out in self-communication, and humanity at its best responds with love for God and love of neighbour. Grace is freely offered but it also needs to be received. This relational character is witnessed to in the formal sacraments. Grace is freely and generously given, and although God's movement of grace is not dependent on either the minister or the recipient, both need to be present and in some sense co-operate in the sacrament. The minister does so by witnessing to God's presence and the reality of God's grace. The recipient does so by exercising her freedom to receive the grace. This sense of co-operation and reception is also

⁸⁵ He notes that the Church is constantly surprised by new situations, 'tasks which it has simply never preached from the pulpit in the "good old days" – tasks whose moment for Christianity has come but slowly to Christian consciousness'. Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbour*, p. 73.

true of Rahner's wider concept of grace flowing through human acts of love and compassion. The priest, in showing such acts of compassion, is like any other human being, yet through the authority of ordination she has the responsibility to name the transformative work of grace as the work of Christ so that it can be recognised as such.

It follows that the witness of the ordained and their ability to name the transformative grace of God arises out of their relationship to the Church; the sense in which they represent the Church and its ministry. The act of ordination makes them visible and representational. Many of their ministerial acts will flow out of their discipleship and their human ability to care, which they share with all Christians. Where these acts are authentic they will be grace-filled. Yet the priest will also be publicly and visibly representing the Church and its witness to Christ, which means that aspects of their ministry will not be received simply as acts of kindness and compassion but as manifestations of the Church's acts of kindness and compassion, which in turn witness to Christ's compassion and care. This is why, as I argued above, the priest can be understood as a kind of sacrament, both symbolising God's involvement in the situation and, by her real presence, witnessing to the actuality of God's presence.

It is not possible to provide a formulaic account of the sacramental nature of the priest's ministry in this general sense; it cannot be pinned to any particular tasks or functions of the priest's work. The grace that flows in and through priestly ministry is not different from the grace that flows through all human acts of compassion and goodness. It therefore follows that the ministerial acts of a priest, aside from the particular roles undertaken in the formal sacraments, are in essence the same kinds of acts of compassion and caring that should be part of all Christian lives and any good life. It is all the same ministry and the priest will receive grace through the acts of compassion and love of others within and beyond their congregation; a fact that most clergy would testify to.

In my understanding, ordination confers on an individual the responsibility of bearing witness to the nature of the Church and caring for particular communities, helping them to grow in their ability to act graciously and witness to the graciousness of God. In order for the priest to witness

effectively to the grace of God, the Church's ministry must be effective, which means that the individuals who make up the Church need to learn how to live and act in accordance with God's compassion and to bear witness to his reconciling love. God's grace is not dependent on the holiness of individuals, but the ongoing witness to that grace is a necessary part of the ability of others to participate in the reception of grace. It therefore follows that all Christians need to develop the capacity to act in loving and compassionate ways. They also need to be able to reflect on how such actions bear witness to God's love and graciousness. The ordained have a particular responsibility for reflecting on such behaviour and articulating the graciousness of God so that their own acts, the acts of the Church and the wider acts of goodness in the world can be understood as manifestations of God's love.

What is important to note at this point is that because grace is dependent on the free gift of God, no individual can quantify or control grace. Its flow is, in a sense, a mystery. To borrow a maternal image, it is like breastfeeding, in which the mother participates by offering herself to the child but has no actual control of how much milk she is producing or the child receiving. The needs of the baby stimulate the flow of milk, and the type of milk received. The mother cannot determine quantities; she can only fully know that the child is being well fed by looking for the signs of health and contentment in the baby. Even though I have argued that the grace can be, as Rahner puts it, guaranteed in sacramental acts, including the ministry of the clergy, all that clergy can do is offer themselves as bearers of God's love and compassion. How God's grace flows through these encounters and the way that the grace is received is a mystery that is firmly in God's hands. Yet where there are signs of transformation and of spiritual growth we can know that God's grace is flowing and being received. Therefore clergy need to learn to look for the signs of flourishing in the people they minister to.

The ministry is the ministry of the Church and it is God's ministry. The individuals who take on the responsibility of being 'walking sacraments' – naming and witnessing to the grace of God – are understood to be called by God. That is, they are not simply appointed by the members of a church, as a purely functional understanding of their role might suggest but, at some level,

chosen by God. Yet this sense of vocation is most often mediated through the community of the Church, through affirmations of an individual's ability to communicate and witness to the love of God. It is also tested by the wider Church with the assumption that God's will is discerned through human criteria that makes reasoned judgements about an individual's capacity to bear witness in this particular way to the grace of God at work in the world. This is not to diminish the work of the Holy Spirit, but to affirm the corporate nature of the Church in which and through which the Spirit works, in which and through which the ministry of Christ is made manifest. Grace is experienced in and through the relationships we have with others.

It follows that when individuals are authorised by the Church through ordination to take on the role of a priest, they need to learn in relationship with the wider Church how to live out that calling. If, as we have concluded above, the clergy need to hone their human skills of kindness and compassion in order to minister and bear witness to the gracious work of God, it follows that we can learn about ministry through drawing on human relationships of care. It also seems appropriate to draw on the relationship in which most people first experience care and begin to learn how to care themselves; mothering. The rest of this thesis will explore what can be learned from mothering that can help to illuminate and better articulate the work of a parish priest. Like any model, it has its limitations and these will be acknowledged. Yet I maintain that it can offer new insights and a rich imagery that can help articulate the role of a priest who has accepted the 'cure of souls' and seeks to live out the responsibility of the relationship carefully.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the theology of ordained ministry within the Church of England. I have noted that the Anglican Church has inherited much of its language about ministry from the Roman Catholic Church. It has also, throughout the twentieth century, reacted to the Roman Catholic Church's non-recognition of the validity of Anglican orders. This has meant that writing about the theology of ministry has in many cases been dominated by a perceived need to defend the authenticity and continuity of Anglican orders

using the doctrine of Apostolic Succession. This doctrine is underpinned by a theology of an essentially separate priesthood of the ordained commissioned by Christ for the Church. I noted that the image of the priest as shepherd, representing the Good Shepherd, caring for his flock is a predominant metaphor in this tradition. In separating the ministry of clergy from the ministry of the laity this theology has a tendency to promote clericalism and an undermining of the ministry of the whole Church. Despite attempts to emphasise that clergy are at the same time members of the laity and share in the priesthood of all believers, the language of separation can result in a binary of opposites that privileges clergy. The use of Christological imagery for the ordained tends to result in the priest being perceived as more Christ-like than the laity and thus conflation between the priest's authority and that of Christ

A more realistic understanding of clergy origins accepts that the traditional orders emerged from the practical needs of the early Church for order and leadership. Schillebeeckx's socio-historical study of the history of the ordained ministry shows how it has been shaped by forces inside and outside the Church. The official Church of England reports quoted above reflect this evolutionary understanding of the development of ministry. However they continue to use language about two ministries; that of the laity and the ordained, while struggling to define the difference. If the difference were purely to be understood functionally then it should be possible to describe the differences between what an ordained and lay person in a church community does. However, such clarity is not possible. There are a few liturgical roles specific to the ordained, but to define the ordained ministry by those liturgical functions is to provide a very limited account of what clergy do.

It follows that a purely functional understanding of the ordained does not clarify either the role of the ordained or the relationship between the clergy and the wider Church. Describing the clergy as leaders offers only a limited insight into the multifaceted work of parish ministry and presents the laity as the led. If we follow Schillebeeckx, Moltmann and Macquarrie, then we need to affirm that the ministry is not divisible but always to be understood as a corporate ministry of the Church, which is itself the Body of Christ.

Different members of the church share in the ministry in differing ways at different times but some individuals are given the responsibility, by the

wider Church, to care for a particular community and publicly witness in an authoritative way to the collective ministry. Aside from some specific liturgical roles, their share in the collective ministry of the Church is not different from the kinds of work others are doing, even though circumstances may enable them to be more fully focused and give more time. Following Rahner's theology of grace and sacraments, it can be affirmed that the grace of God flows through the priest and the laity in the same way, where genuine acts of compassion are undertaken and the love of God shown to others. However, the visible witness of the ordained means that they are 'walking sacraments', signs and witnesses to the life and work of the Church, the ongoing care and concern that God has for all his people. They are witnesses that signify God's ongoing work of grace in the community.

The parish priest has taken on a particular responsibility for a particular community and place. In order to understand this responsibility and the relationship it is based on, I maintain that we should take seriously the 'cure' or care of souls. This is a relationship of care and how it functions depends on the ongoing interaction between all those involved. The responsibilities are not static: they will be shaped by the particularity of the people and the contingent circumstances of life. To care for a community, to be charged with responsibility for its well-being, is a better language for ministry than leadership or being 'in charge'. In exploring this responsibility more fully I will draw on the metaphor of mothering. In this thesis I will show that by studying the maternal responsibility to care, insights can be drawn to inform our understanding of the role of a parish priest.

Chapter Two: Maternal imagery for clergy in the Christian tradition

In choosing to use a maternal model for ministry I am moving away from familiar images, but it is not a totally new language for thinking about ministry. Such language, while not central to the tradition, does exist. As this is not a dominant tradition, I am particularly grateful to the scholars and interest groups who have brought examples of maternal imagery to light. There may well be other examples that I have not found, but it is interesting to note for the purpose of this thesis that *any* examples can be found. In this chapter I will outline the documented examples of explicit maternal imagery for clergy, noting the particular aspects of mothering that are stressed. I will also draw attention to more implicit examples that associate the maternal with those in Christian leadership.

Within the Christian tradition, language about motherhood is most often used in relation to the Virgin Mary. It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore Marian imagery in any detail, but it is interesting to note strands of the tradition that have seen her as a model for priests, or as a prototype priest herself. Often closely connected to Marian theology is the idea of the Church as a mother, though this is rarely connected to an idea of the clergy embodying that role. There is a long tradition of using the term Mother Church to refer to the life-giving, nurturing role of the Church. However, in its modern usage, it is most closely connected to ecclesiology with specifically male imagery about the ordained. As will become clear, the examples explored in this chapter refer in the main to male clergy and do not make any correlation between maternal imagery for the role and any suggestion that women could or should fulfil the same role.

Yet there is one clear tradition of women in positions of leadership within the Church, not as priests but as leaders of religious orders. The title of 'Mother' has been and in many cases continues to be routinely used for women in such positions. It seems most likely that this was simply a feminine version of the male title of father rather than a deliberate attempt to understand the role as being mother-like. However, without any serious historical examination of

the use of the title it is hard to know how important the maternal imagery was to those who used it.

This chapter is inevitably sketchy, because there is no systematic study of maternal imagery associated with the clergy role. Some aspects are better researched than others. Caroline Walker Bynum's work on the Cistercians is scholarly and detailed.⁸⁶ An important strand of feminist scholarship has explored the use of maternal imagery in the Bible in relation to the divine. These theologians have offered insights into both our imagery of God and how we do, or do not, value maternal metaphors.⁸⁷ As I have shown in a previous chapter, there is often a tendency to use language associated with the divine to define the role of the clergy. Therefore language about God and the imagery used can often impact on the way clergy are perceived. Yet notwithstanding the value of this work, this chapter will focus on maternal metaphors and images specifically linked to the work of one who is a recognised minister in the Church, rather than maternal language for the divine. Recovering some of this language, however marginal, in the tradition may provide a foundation for exploring the imagery further in modern understandings of ministry.

St Paul: Like a mother

The New Testament offers a few examples of maternal imagery to talk about the work of ministry. These come from St Paul's description of his own apostolic work. The clearest example of this is in the first letter to the Thessalonians:

But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Walker Bynum, Caroline, *Jesus as Mother*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.

⁸⁷ I have already mentioned McFague and Soskice's work on models and metaphors for God. McFague *Metaphorical Theology*, particularly looks at a maternal model for God. Tribble, Phyllis, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, London: SCM, 1978 focuses on examples of feminine imagery for God in the Old Testament. Maternal imagery has also been important in aspects of spiritual writing. Julian of Norwich used maternal language to speak of Jesus in the fourteenth century in *The Revelations of Divine Love*. More recently, Janet Morley's prayers and reflections collected in *All Desires Known*, London: SPCK, 1988, offer examples of using maternal imagery for God.

⁸⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, RSV.

In modern English the full imagery of this text is often lost because we do not commonly use the term nursing for breastfeeding, which is the meaning of the term here. Commentators note that it is a nurse caring for her *own* children.⁸⁹ In this verse Paul likens his ministry to a mother breastfeeding her child and he goes on in the following verse to explore the metaphor. He stresses the affection in which the Thessalonians were held and the fact that in his ministry amongst them, he shared not simply the message of the gospel but himself, through a form of self-giving motivated by loving involvement. The image of a woman breastfeeding a child provides a strong picture of affectionate involvement and self-giving. As Best notes in his commentary on the passage:

We have a somewhat unusual picture of ministerial care, more tender than that of pastor or shepherd.⁹⁰

He also quotes Calvin's comments on this passage:

A mother in nursing her child makes no show of authority and does not stand on dignity ... (and) reveals a wonderful and extraordinary love, because one spares no trouble or effort, avoids no care, is wearied by their coming and going, and gladly even gives her own life to be drained.⁹¹

Thus we can see that the image of breastfeeding involves a close relationship. The mother holds her child and the necessary nourishment flows from one to the other. It provides an image of ministry that is nurturing and tender, a ministry that requires time and attachment. Beverley Gaventa comments that the Greek verb *τηαλπειν* is used, which means to warm, cherish, comfort.⁹²

Gaventa goes on to argue that this is not Paul's only use of breastfeeding imagery. In the first letter to the Corinthians he talks about feeding them with milk.

⁸⁹ Best, Ernest, *A Commentary on First and Second Thessalonians*, London: Black, 1972, p. 102.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁹¹ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 102 from Calvin, J., *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (trans. Ross Mackenzie), Edinburgh, 1961.

⁹² Gaventa, Beverly, *Our Mother St Paul*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2007.

But, I brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh.⁹³

Commentators have often connected this passage to philosophical debates about milk and solids but Gaventa draws attention to the fact that Paul speaks of himself as the one who supplies the milk. The only way for milk to be properly supplied to babies is through the process of breastfeeding. She notes that the idea of Paul as the one who feeds distinguishes his use of the imagery from that of other Hellenistic philosophers.

Paul does not speak with Philo's detachment about what food the soul requires or about the 'shape of instruction'. Neither does Paul cajole the Corinthians to cease their crying 'for mothers and nurses'. Instead, he images himself as the mother who nurtures, the one who knows what food is appropriate for her children. In other words, even though the image of milk and meat was current, Paul does something distinctive with it: he presents himself as the mother of the Corinthians ... And the language is unequivocal: Paul is the nursing mother of the Church.⁹⁴

It is not only breastfeeding imagery that Paul uses, but also the labouring of childbirth. In Galatians he uses a rather complex metaphor:

My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!⁹⁵

The Greek word used for 'travail', *οδινειν*, refers to the physical process of childbirth, including its accompanying pains. Here Paul seems again to stress his involvement with the people he is ministering to. Using imagery that is both maternal and physical, he underlines the depth of his commitment to these people and the desire that this will lead to new life. Gaventa argues that Paul uses maternal imagery to highlight the ongoing relationship necessary for nurturing Christian faith. She contrasts the way Paul uses maternal and paternal images:

⁹³ 1 Corinthians 3:1-3a, RSV.

⁹⁴ Gaventa, *Our Mother St. Paul*, p. 45.

⁹⁵ Galatians 4:19, RSV.

Maternal imagery appears in contexts referring to the ongoing nature of the relationship between Paul and the congregations he founded; paternal imagery, by contrast, regularly refers to the initial stage of Christian preaching and conversion.⁹⁶

She also argues that Paul was deliberately using metaphors that subverted ideas of hierarchy and authority, referring to himself with maternal images that seem shamefully inadequate for a male leader,⁹⁷ just as he frequently used the subversive image of himself as a slave. Paul's use of such maternal imagery is a minor aspect of his writing, but it is interesting to note that at times he turned to the nursing mother or the woman struggling in childbirth in order to convey something about the involved, nurturing care that was one aspect of his understanding of ministry. He was comfortable in using a specifically female image. Clearly, this is not a dominant Pauline image, but it is an image, as I will explore later, that others have taken from Paul and used in their own reflections on their ministerial role. It is also interesting to note, as Gaventa does, the contrast between an episodic relation – founding a church or making a convert – and the ongoing work of relationship involved in nurturing and strengthening a developing community.

Prelates and abbots as mother

As we will see from the other examples of this language, maternal imagery is often employed to stress the ongoing nurturing role and is at times used to complement male imagery. A good example of this is the work of Pope Gregory, who wrote a document about ministry in the early seventh century. This work, known as the *Pastoral Care*, utilised many different metaphors to explore the role of the clergy in their pastoral ministry. We find a maternal image used to stress the importance of gentleness in aspects of pastoral care:

But let those who are set over others shew themselves such that those who are under them may not blush to make known to them also their secret doings; that, when the little ones endure the buffets of temptation, they may run to the pastor's heart as to their mother's bosom, and wash away, by the comfort of his exhortation and the tears of prayer, that

⁹⁶ Gaventa, *Our Mother St. Paul*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 14.

wherein they see themselves beforehand to be polluted by the filth of sin that importuneth them.⁹⁸

This is clearly an encouragement to those in a position of spiritual leadership to be mother-like in their ability to comfort with compassion and tenderness. Further on he shows how maternal and paternal images need to be balanced in the work of Christian leadership.

For care is to be taken that a ruler should be exhibited to his subjects both as a mother by kindness and a father by discipline.⁹⁹

In using such imagery Gregory is seeking to say something about the quality of care that those with pastoral authority should exhibit. The imagery of a mother offered a recognisable metaphor for comforting involvement, kindness and nurture. The reference is one among many images and I would not wish to imply that it was a particularly prominent image for Gregory; I simply note that it was one he felt comfortable applying to the work of a male Christian leader. It conveyed particular notions about compassion and kindness.

Writing in the eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury draws on St Paul's maternal imagery both in terms of feeding and birthing. He connects this imagery to the importance of educating people in the faith:

You [Paul] are among Christians like a nurse who not only cares for her children but also gives birth to them a second time by the solicitude of her marvellous love ... Gentle nurse, gentle mother, who are these sons to whom you give birth and nurture if not those whom you bear and educate in the faith of Christ by your teaching?
... O mother of well known tenderness, may your son feel your heart of maternal piety.¹⁰⁰

In this meditative prayer Anselm focuses on how Paul is a mother to him and how in the same way Jesus is a mother. Yet both are also fathers and again we see the two types of imagery used to provide a rich balance:

⁹⁸ Gregory I, Pope, *S. Gregory on the Pastoral Charge: the Benedictine text*, translated Henry Ramsden Bramley, Oxford: J. Parker 1908 p. 73.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁰ Anselm, Prayer 10 to St Paul quoted in Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 114.

Both of you are therefore mothers ... For you accomplished, one through the other, and one through himself that we, born to die, may be reborn to life. Fathers you are then by result, mothers by affection; fathers by authority, mothers by kindness; fathers by protection, mothers by compassion. You [Lord] are a mother and you [Paul] are also. Unequal by extent of love, you do not differ in quality of love.¹⁰¹

This is a prayer and focuses on how Anselm relates to both Jesus and St Paul. It does not tell us if Anselm drew any parallels between his own roles as a minister with this imagery. However, it is interesting to note the way that the nurturing mother is connected to the 'education in faith' and again, in the second quote, how maternal imagery is used alongside paternal imagery to provide a more rounded image of the pastoral role. Anselm drew on the maternal imagery Paul used of himself, and he clearly found it a helpful image for his understanding of Paul's nurturing, compassionate care for those who he ministered amongst.

St Paul's metaphor of the nursing mother also seems to have been influential in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and a number of other Cistercians in the twelfth century. Caroline Walker Bynum in her book *Jesus as Mother* reflects on the maternal language that these monks used, particularly to talk about their role as abbots. In an extract from a letter we see Bernard using a nursing image for his nurturing work with a young monk:

I begot you in religion by word and example. I nourished you with milk when, while yet a child, it was all you could take ... But alas! How soon and how early you were weaned.¹⁰²

And more explicitly in an extract from a sermon, we see Bernard offering a maternal analogy to help others reflect on their pastoral role:

Learn that you must be mothers to those in your care, not masters; make an effort to arouse the response of love, not that of fear; and should there be occasional need for severity, let it be paternal rather than tyrannical. Show affection as a mother would, correct like a father. Be gentle, avoid harshness, do not resort to blows, expose your breasts: let your bosom expand with milk not swell with passion ... Why will the young man bitten by the serpent, shy away from the judgement of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁰² Bernard of Clairvaux cited in Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 117.

priest, to whom he ought rather to run as to the bosom of a mother? If you are spiritual, instruct him in a spirit of gentleness.¹⁰³

Again we see the pairing of maternal and paternal characteristics, yet here we see an expanded imagery about the maternal breast, which is both for feeding and for comfort.

Walker Bynum puts Bernard's writings in context. She notes that in medieval writing maternal language conveyed three basic images. Mothers are generative and sacrificial in giving birth, mothers are loving and tender towards their children and mothers are nurturing, feeding the child from their own body. She comments that this was a period where mothers were strongly encouraged to feed their own children rather than use wet nurses. There was a physiological understanding at the time of breast milk being made from the mother's blood. This physiological understanding, coupled with the knowledge that breastfeeding was necessary for survival and health, fed into imagery of Jesus as a mother feeding his people from his own flesh and blood.¹⁰⁴ For Bernard breasts were a symbol of self-giving, nurturing care and he reflected both on those who nurtured him, including Jesus, and on how leaders should nurture in turn those they cared for. Walker Bynum notes that Bernard used maternal imagery 'to describe Jesus, Moses, Peter, Paul, prelates in general, abbots in general, and, more frequently, himself as abbot'.¹⁰⁵ She comments in particular on the nursing metaphor:

Breasts to Bernard, are a symbol of the pouring out towards others of affectivity or of instruction and almost invariably suggest to him a discussion of the duties of prelates or abbots. Bernard not only develops an elaborate picture of the abbot (he usually has himself in mind) as mother, contrasting *mater* to *magister* or *dominus* and stating repeatedly that a mother is one who cannot fail to love her child; he also frequently attributes maternal characteristics, especially suckling with milk, to the abbot when he refers to him as father.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁰⁴ The imagery around Jesus as a mother feeding his people from his blood can be seen in the use of the pelican feeding her chicks as an image representing Christ. The pelican was believed to feed her young on her own blood, piercing herself in order for the blood to flow.

¹⁰⁵ Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

Bernard was not alone in using maternal imagery to describe the role of the abbot or prelate. Walker Bynum discusses the writings of Aelred of Rievaulx, Guerric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, Adam of Perseigne, Helinand of Froidmont and William of St Thierry. Aelred's dying words to his monks are reported as, 'I love you all ... as earnestly as a mother does her sons.' Bynum writes, 'Aelred, like other Cistercian authors, moves naturally from a discussion of parents and nursing to a discussion of the heavy burdens borne by religious leaders.'¹⁰⁷ She points out that the Cistercians using this imagery were abbots and often novice masters as well, and that the language points to some ambivalence in their attitude to their leadership position. Just as Gaventa saw Paul's use of this imagery as a way of adding a dimension to his understanding of his apostleship, so these abbots used maternal imagery to add the dimension of nurturing to their general conception of leadership. Bynum sees ambivalence to the pressures of pastoral care as part of the Cistercian tension between the active and contemplative life and also notes that their rejection of child oblates meant that they would be called on to offer spiritual guidance to those whose experience of the world was more complex. She concludes:

Cistercian abbots were in fact increasingly called upon to respond with qualities that medieval men considered feminine. Anxious, even guilty about ruling, these religious leaders tried to create a new image of authority (both their own and God's) that would temper that authority with compassion and 'mothering'.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, Walker Bynum notes the particular thinking about community that was part of the Cistercian movement. There was an emphasis on dependence and interdependence within a community – 'an interdependence in which all are servants and learners'. She maintains that the use of maternal imagery arises out of the need to articulate this dependence and interdependence, which was shaped by love.

The Cistercian conception of Jesus as mother and abbot as mother reveals not an attitude toward women but a sense (not without

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.123.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 158; see also footnote 159.

ambivalence) of a need and obligation to nurture other men, a need and obligation to achieve intimate dependence on God.¹⁰⁹

Although women in religious life during this period also used maternal imagery about Jesus, they did not use this language to discuss ideas of the role of a leader. The imagery is used in spiritual meditations on Christ and his relationship with the believer. These women were not in a position to be priests or prelates; they were not, for the most part, even abbesses, though they often offered spiritual advice. Thus Walker Bynum's work implies that the maternal imagery for some abbots was a way of stressing the nurturing aspects of the Christian leader and emphasising the importance of compassion, kindness and gentleness in the role. She comments in a footnote that this supplementing of authority with nurture and harshness with affection also has parallels in twelfth-century descriptions of bishops. Again, nursing images are used to describe those in authority caring and nurturing their flock.

The work of Walker Bynum has made the Cistercian use of maternal imagery accessible and it is much harder to discover whether it has played a part in enriching the imagery around pastoral leadership in other communities. Her work looks specifically at the explicit use of maternal imagery, so in writing about women in religious orders she notes those who write about Jesus as mother. She does not comment on the use of the title 'mother' by female abbesses and other leaders of religious orders. It does not appear to have been a subject for written reflection, so it is hard to know whether the women who took on the title of mother, in taking responsibility for a particular community, consciously drew on maternal imagery in fulfilling their leadership role. The title of *mater monasterii* or *mater monachorum* appears to have been the accepted term for the leader of the earliest female religious communities.¹¹⁰ Later many used the title of abbess, but the abbess would still be known as 'mother'. Clearly, these spiritual mothers, although not authorised to any priestly sacramental duties, were engaged in pastoral oversight of Christian communities.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

¹¹⁰ Schaus, Margaret, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: an Encyclopaedia*, London: Routledge, 2006. See the entry for abbesses.

The abbess exercised supreme domestic authority not only over the nuns of the community, but also over the canons or priest living there, the servants and all the families of the monastery's dependencies ... The abbess was responsible for the mundane welfare of the women whose care was entrusted to her and also for their eternal salvation.¹¹¹

It has not been possible to find any commentary about the use of the title 'mother' for women engaged in this role, which the historian Margaret Strauss in her encyclopaedia of medieval women, calls 'a kind of female father with paternal rights'. It is most likely that it was simply both a term of respect and a female equivalent of 'father'. Yet it is interesting to note that this was a widely used title to refer to women engaged in Christian leadership, managing communities, nurturing and educating those in their care and often offering wider spiritual advice. Consciously or unconsciously the title must have had some resonance with cultural ideas about actual motherhood, though of course those who carried the title had foregone the opportunity to give birth and nurse themselves.

Mary: mother and priest?

The image of mother within Christian thinking would not only resonate with understandings, usually idealised, about maternal love. They would also resonate with imagery associated with the Holy Mother, Mary the mother of Jesus. It is not possible in the limits of this thesis to explore the rich imagery that surrounds the figure of Mary. However, there are two aspects of Marian imagery that I wish to note in this discussion of maternal imagery for Christian leaders. The first is, like the discussions above, a minor aspect of the tradition that has been highlighted by a particular interest group. This is a history of devotion to Mary as a prototype priest. The second is part of mainstream tradition and this is the association of Mary with the Church, which links to the maternal imagery of Mother Church.

For the idea of Mary as a priest I am indebted to the work of the Campaign for the Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church.¹¹² This organisation has highlighted what it calls the latent tradition of honouring Mary as a priest. Their website holds a collection of devotional and theological

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² www.womenpriests.org (12th February 2011)

writings on the subject. It also includes extant images that show Mary wearing a bishop's pallium or a priest's chasuble and stole. These date from the sixth century onwards. The popularity of such images must have continued into the twentieth century because in 1916 Pope Benedict XV banned them.

After mature examination the Eminent Cardinals, general inquisitors of the Holy Office, have decided that images of the Blessed Virgin Mary wearing priestly vestments are not approved.¹¹³

His successor, Pope Pius XI, reiterated the position on devotion to Mary as a priest in response to an article in 1927.

An article on 'The true devotion to the Virgin Priest' that appeared in the *Palestra del Clero de Rovigo* (vol. 6, pp. 71ss) has come to the attention of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. On this subject, the same Sacred Congregation has ordered that your Excellence must draw the attention of the editor of the periodical to this article and warn him that the devotion concerned is not approved and may not be promoted, in conformity with the decree of the Holy Office of the 8th of April 1916.¹¹⁴

The timing of the ban is perhaps connected to changes in other Christian denominations. In the early twentieth century women were being admitted to ordained or authorised ministry in a number of denominations while in others the question was being raised. This may have been the reason for the Vatican suppressing a devotion that envisioned any kind of female priest, however exceptional the priesthood of Mary was seen to be.

From the references to this devotion that have been translated and collected by the Catholic women priests' organisation, it is clear that Mary's priestly identity was seen in both her bringing Christ to birth in the flesh and in her offering of him in the temple and at the cross. One example shows this threefold sense of Mary as the priest:

Mary is no stranger in anything that belongs to the Eucharist. She was the first priest to call down the Word from heaven to earth and to bring forth Jesus Christ in this world through an act of her will. Therefore she has been called Virgin Priest, *Virgo Sacerdos* . . . Just as she has been the first priest

¹¹³ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 8 (1916), p. 146, quoted on www.womenpriests.org, (12th February 2011)

¹¹⁴ Quoted on www.womenpriests.org (12th February 2011)

to bring forth Jesus Christ, she will be the first priest to offer him. She was the first sacrificer as she had been the first consecrator . . . On top of the holy mount of Calvary, she stays upright in the posture of a sacrificer standing before the altar, that is: the cross, where the first Mass is celebrated and where our redemption was accomplished . . . The Virgin Priest who has given us the Eucharist, the Virgin Sacrificer who has validated Mass for us, is also the Virgin of holy communion.¹¹⁵

Although Mary's motherhood shapes these aspects of her priestly image, especially her ability to make 'the word' flesh, beyond this her motherhood is relevant only in the sense that it heightens the depth of her sacrificial love. This devotion is primarily focused on the role of the priest in the Eucharist, in a moment of transformation for the elements. It is thus focused on a sacrificial event rather than an ongoing pastoral relationship. In this way it contrasts to the examples we have been looking at before. Here the imagery is about episodic moments in Mary's life when she offers Christ to the world. Attention is drawn to Christ's birth, his being offered in the Temple and his crucifixion and Mary's role in each of these occasions. These sacrificial moments resonate with a priestly theology that is rooted in offering the sacrifice of the mass. Thus, although the devotion to Mary as a priest or as a model for priests is rooted in her motherhood, it does not draw on the ongoing nurturing role of a mother that is the primary subject of this thesis. Where Mary's ongoing role as a nurturing mother is used, it is more likely to be connected to Mary as a prototype of the Church, which itself is described as the mother of its members, rather than as a prototype priest. It is important to note that the devotion to Mary as priest was not offered as an argument for ordaining women; her unique relationship to Christ makes her an exception. Tina Beattie, however, suggests that this devotional tradition may in fact offer an interesting theological perspective on ordaining women as priests; the possibility of understanding sacrifice as leading to birth and not simply death.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Bishop Morelle, *Troisième congrès marial breton*, Saint-Brieuc 1911, pp. xiv-xvi, quoted on www.womenpriests.org (12th February 2011)

¹¹⁶ Beattie, Tina, *The Month* 257 (December 1996), pp. 485–93, quoted on www.womenpriests.org See also Green, Ali, *A Theology of Women's Priesthood*, London: SPCK, 2009. Green looks extensively at the symbolism of a female priest celebrating the Eucharist.

Mother Church

If we turn from Eucharistic imagery to the ongoing life of the Church then we find that maternal language is used of the Church rather than the clergy. This maternal Church is often linked to Marian imagery, but we find that it is not confined to Marian theology. Henri de Lubac sets out to trace the tradition of Mother Church in *The Motherhood of the Church*.¹¹⁷ He notes how the term ‘mother’ is used of the Church in the patristic period to describe how Christians are both born and nourished.

We are born from her womb, nourished by her milk, animated by her spirit.¹¹⁸

The Church is a mother for us ... It is from her that we are born spiritually.¹¹⁹

On occasions this motherhood is linked to the motherhood of Mary:

Who has given birth to you? I hear the voice of your heart: it is the Mother Church, this holy, honoured Church who, like Mary, gives birth and is virgin ... If the one gave birth to the only son, the other gives birth to numerous sons who, by this only son, are gathered into one.¹²⁰

De Lubac goes on to show how the maternal imagery of the Church is linked to its educational role. He quotes Delahaye:

For Hippolytus, the Church is a mother through the transmission of baptism. For Tertullian, she is again mother in her care to educate afterwards.¹²¹

He also notes the complexity of the analogy in which Mother Church is constantly giving birth, but this birth does not necessarily expel her children from her womb. He quotes Irenaeus:

One must cling to the Church, be brought up within her womb and feed there on the Lord’s Scripture.¹²²

¹¹⁷ De Lubac, Henri, *The Motherhood of the Church*, San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982.

¹¹⁸ Cyprian De Ecclesiae catholicae unitate c 5 (Hartel 1:214) cited in de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church* p. 48.

¹¹⁹ Augustine, cited in *ibid*, p. 50.

¹²⁰ Augustine, cited in *ibid*, p. 57.

¹²¹ De Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, p. 62.

So the Church as mother is both birthing her children and nurturing them, whether by holding them in her womb or by nursing them with spiritual food.

The language of Mother Church, though now most closely associated with Catholic and Orthodox theology, is also present in the writings of Luther and Calvin. In a sermon of 1528, Luther, reflecting on the Lord's Prayer, states:

The Christian church is your mother, who gives birth to you
and bears you through the Word. And this is done by the
Holy Spirit, who bears witness concerning Christ.¹²³

In the *Institutes* Calvin draws on the patristic imagery of Mother Church, birthing and nurturing the faithful:

I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith.

...

But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title 'mother' how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah and Joel testify.¹²⁴

It is perhaps due to the way that Marian theology and the idea of Mother Church have become intimately connected in much theological writing, that despite Luther and Calvin's acceptance of the term, it is not a feature of current Protestant ecclesiology.

In Anglican theology we see examples of maternal imagery for the Church in the Tractarian movement. A Tract published in 1838 by an

¹²² Ibid., p. 69.

¹²³ Pelikan, Jaroslav and Lehmann, Helmut T. (eds.), *Luther's Works*, St Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955–72, p. 166.

¹²⁴ *John Calvin Works and Correspondence*, electronic edition, Charlottesville, Virginia USA: Intelix Corporation, 2002, pp. 1012, 1016.

anonymous author is titled: *The Church of England the Nursing Mother of her People*.¹²⁵ The Tract describes how throughout an individual's life the Church is there to administer the necessary sacraments or offices to nurture and sustain the 'child'. Yet this imagery of the maternal Church is increasingly connected to a definitively male clergy. It seems that the motherhood of the Church depends not only on the fatherhood of God but also on an exclusively male clergy who symbolise that fatherhood. De Lubac makes this very clear following the chapter in his book entitled 'Motherhood of the Entire Church' with 'Fatherhood of the Clergy':

It is always owing to the immediate mediation of pastors that this maternal function of all and of each one can be exercised, whether in relation to the Word of God in the individual soul or with regard to the community as a whole.¹²⁶

As I noted in the previous chapter, this thinking is connected to a theology of ordination in which the priest is essentially different in his priesthood from the common ministry of the Church. The pastors as 'fathers' continue the apostolic tradition. The Apostles 'begot sons' through the preaching of the Gospel and the current clergy take on from them the paternal role of leadership. Commenting on Vatican II de Lubac writes:

Here again we observe the coincidence between the teaching of the ancient Fathers and that of the last Council. Both establish the same relationship, although sometimes with different words, between the motherhood of the whole Church and the fatherhood of those who receive the mission of directing her ... Those who are called to exercise this 'pastoral' ministry have a share in the responsibility of Christ, the unique Mediator.¹²⁷

This language can become quite complex as the Church, which contains men and women, is described in feminine language as Mother and Bride while the clergy, who are at the same time both part of this maternal Church and symbolically father/bridegroom representing Christ, must be male.

¹²⁵ *The Church of England Nursing Mother of her People* London: SPCK, 1838.

¹²⁶ De Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, p. 85.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

It follows that imagery about the Church as a mother, nurturing and feeding her children, does not seem to lead to maternal language to describe those leading Church communities. This is due to particular theologies of ordination that have been discussed already, in which clergy are *other* to the Church in both origin and ongoing relationship. This otherness is then expressed as masculine, in contrast to the Church and ordinary believers being feminine. Yet it does seem strange that the work of the Church can be described as birthing, nurturing, feeding, educating and comforting like a mother but the people who embody this by dispensing spiritual food and teaching in word and sacrament, offering spiritual comfort in pastoral care and absolution are not seen as mother-like. Mary Daly comments ironically on the feminine roles of masculine priests in her article ‘The Looking-glass Society’:

Recognising the ineptitude of females in performing even the humble ‘feminine’ tasks assigned to them by the Divine Plan, the Looking-glass priests raised these functions to the supernatural level in which they alone had competence. Feeding was elevated to become Holy Communion. Washing achieved dignity in Baptism and Penance ... These anointed Male Mothers, who naturally are called Fathers, felt maternal concern for the women entrusted to their pastoral care.¹²⁸

Conclusion

As women have begun to play more significant roles in leadership in wider society and in some areas of the Church, they themselves have shown ambivalence to maternal language. Although some female priests in the Catholic wing of the Anglican Church use the term Mother in the way their male colleagues use Father, this has by no means become standard. It has even been dropped as a title in some female religious orders as they try to explore different patterns of leadership from those of the past. Women do not want to be defined or limited to motherhood for reasons that I will explore in the next chapter. Yet it is a rich image that in the past has been found helpful for reflecting on the ongoing nurturing relationship between a minister and a congregation, an abbot and those he is teaching and responsible for. The

¹²⁸ Daly, Mary ‘The Looking-glass Society’ in Loades, Ann, *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, pp. 189 – 192, p.190.

insights we can draw from some of the past usage can inform current ideas about ministry that may prove helpful for those engaged in Christian leadership.

Maternal imagery for Christian ministry has not, in the past, been linked to questions about the gender of the minister. Instead it has been about finding a metaphor for kind, caring, and involved nurturing. As Gaventa says of Paul's use of maternal metaphors, they describe the ongoing relationship, rather than the initiating ministry. Walker Bynum notes that for the Cistercians they spoke of ambivalence towards the power of leadership and arose out of a desire to express a more interdependent style of community.

Where the Church is described as mother it reminds Christians of their dependence on her for ongoing sustenance, and creates an image of a comforting, holding love in which her members are, in some sense, repeatedly born anew. Clearly, this imagery draws on fairly traditional ideas about mothering, especially where kindness and compassion are attributed to mothers and discipline to fathers. Yet, notwithstanding the traditional imagery, maternal images of the Church remind us that an important aspect of the ordained is to continually care for and nurture those entrusted to them and this involves a self-giving ministry. The image of breastfeeding is important here, for this self-giving, like breastfeeding, may be tiring at times but is not about diminishment. What is needed flows from mother to child and is replenished so long as the child needs feeding and the mother maintains her health. As I noted in the previous chapter, this breastfeeding imagery has something to say to us about grace, about being with and for the other and trusting that they will receive through that ministry what they need in order to flourish.

Chapter Three: Mothering – gender and culture

In the last chapter I explored examples of maternal imagery being used as an analogy for Christian ministry. As, historically, ministry has been a male preserve, these examples showed men drawing on female imagery to reflect on their own role. In the Church of England the roles of deacon and priest are now open to women, and the debate about women bishops is ongoing. The opening up of ordained ministry to women has been, and continues to be, contentious. Gendered metaphors for the role of the ordained are therefore contentious. Those who assert the importance of retaining an all-male priesthood are wary of any feminine language about ministry, and women in ministry feel ambiguous about gendered images and particularly the language of motherhood. In this chapter I will explore theories of gender that underpin the contention and ambiguity of using feminine imagery and, particularly, the language of mothering. The issue of how to discuss difference is paramount. Are gender differences essential, part of the natural order and, if so, to what extent do these differences dictate the roles appropriate to men and women? Or are gender differences a product of social construction? And where does the experience of motherhood and mothering fit into these debates? These are complex questions and there is a wealth of literature exploring gender and how it can be understood. Within the limits of this thesis I will not be able to do justice to all aspects of the debate, but I will endeavour to outline the main issues that impact on how motherhood and mothering are understood.

Essentialism – A male-only priesthood

In the debates around the ordination of women, both to the priesthood and now as bishops, it is clear that many of the opponents have an essentialist understanding of gender difference. To defend a male-only priesthood is to assume that there is a difference between men and women that makes one suitable and the other unsuitable for the role of a priest or bishop. Essentialist theories of gender are then often combined with theories of ordination that rest in a moment of Creation. This tends to be strongly Christological or rooted in a fixed interpretation of New Testament patterns of ministry. Thus it is argued

that Jesus Christ was male and so his representatives need to be male. The twelve Apostles were male, therefore Jesus only authorised men and this needs to be continued. New Testament household codes point to man's headship of women, therefore men must be in authority over women.¹²⁹

All the above assertions depend on a clear difference between men and women, a difference that is not altered by women's education or liberation. Theologically this difference is located in Creation.¹³⁰ Men and women are affirmed as being made in the image of God, which confers a level of equality in humanity, but it is an equality that is manifest in sexual difference. This difference is seen in the centrality of reproduction: men beget children, and women conceive, birth and feed them. It is argued that these reproductive differences are signs of deeper differences. Essentialists can therefore affirm the equal worth of men and women while asserting that they are to be understood as complementary, each offering a difference that together makes the whole of humanity.

The late Pope, John Paul II, offers an example of an essentialist understanding of gender derived from God's creation of humanity as male and female. In a letter seeking to affirm the worth of women he wrote:

Womanhood and manhood are complementary *not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological*. It is only through the duality of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' that the 'human' finds full realisation.¹³¹

This ontological difference, a term that I noted was also used of the ordained priesthood, is a difference in the very being and nature of men and women. Defining men and women as ontologically different implies that they are different in ways that cannot be changed. Humanity, according to John Paul II's understanding, is fully realised in the duality or complementarity of the masculine and feminine. From the same letter he writes:

¹²⁹ The listed twelve Apostles are all male: Mark 3: 16–19. Household codes in the New Testament suggest women's submission to their husbands: Col 3: 18; 1 Cor 11: 3–16.

¹³⁰ The two Creation accounts in Genesis 1 & 2 both note the creation of humans as male and female. Genesis 1: 27 simply states 'male and female he created them', while Genesis 2: 18–23 describes the creation of woman out of Adam's rib.

¹³¹ Letter of Pope John Paul II, *To Women*, from the Vatican, 29 June 1995.
www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paulii/letters (12th March 2011).

In the Church's outlook, women and men have been called by the Creator to live in profound communion with one another, with reciprocal knowledge and giving of self, acting together for the common good with the complementary characteristics of that which is feminine and masculine.¹³²

The assumption is that such complementary characteristics are clearly understood but, as we saw when discussing difference in terms of ministry, it is easier to assert difference than to define it. Outlining the differences becomes difficult, especially when education and broader cultural experiences seem to undermine historical assumptions. There are also interesting questions about who decides what the differences are.

For those who oppose women's inclusion in the ordained ministry, the essential differences between men and women reflect, at some level, truths about God and how God orders the world. Christ's masculinity is therefore an essential aspect of the incarnation. As we saw in the first chapter, such a theology of ministry is usually Christological, so it follows that if Christ's masculinity is significant, priests need this same essential masculinity in order to represent Christ. Quoting John Paul II again, we find that, in his understanding, representation requires 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.¹³³

This is elaborated in modern Catholic theology by nuptial imagery, particularly through the writing of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Christ is the bridegroom who through his male priests 'comes to the Church, to make her fruitful'.¹³⁴ This theology can become quite complex in its imagery, as men and

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ *Inter Insigniores*, October 15th 1976, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, www.papalencyclicals.net paragraph 5. (27th November 2012).

¹³⁴ Quoted in Beattie, Tina, *New Catholic Feminism*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, p. 133. Beattie outlines the complexity of this nuptial imagery and particularly the way in which men can represent both the masculine priesthood and the feminine Church, but women can only be receptive. 'A female body cannot be priest because the priest is male, but a male body can be bride because the bride is feminine but not necessarily female,' p. 139.

women are both feminine in the laity of the congregation, receiving the ministry from masculine priests, who must be men. To challenge the masculinity of these priests or to use feminine language about their role would be to undermine the distinctively masculine activity that is claimed to be essential to priesthood. Though what this is does not seem to be clearly articulated.

A traditionally Protestant opposition to women's ordination is focused less on sacramental representation, revolving instead around ideas of male headship. An example of this can be found in an article by Carrie Sandham, a permanent deacon in the Church of England. She affirms God's ordering of male and female difference as Biblical, pointing to creation and New Testament codes.

Adam was created first as leader/provider (he gave the animals their names), and Eve was created second as the only suitable helper for him (she accepted both her generic name from him, as well as her specific name – see Genesis 2:23 and 3:20). Neither one was superior to the other, both were made in God's image and both were necessary to fulfil the creation mandate to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1).

This establishes the Biblical principle of male headship which is to be modelled in the Church (see 1 Corinthians 11 & 14, Titus 2 and 1 Timothy 2). Men are to take the position of overall leadership and will demonstrate their authority through teaching the whole congregation, while women are to help them in that role and, specifically, are needed to teach and train the women.¹³⁵

Conservative groups such as Reform, on whose webpage Sandham's article is posted, espouse this view of women's different role and speak of a 'complementarian' view of ministry. They would argue that it is not about the subordination of women, though the passage above does seem to imply that, but the right understanding of male and female characteristics as God intends. Men and women are understood to be equally valid in God's sight but in Creation God determines different ways of being and therefore different roles and areas of ministry.

¹³⁵ Sandham, Carrie, 'The Biblical Pattern for Women's Ministry', published on the Reform website www.reform.org.uk Reform is an Anglican evangelical organisation founded in 1993, just after the Church of England vote to allow the ordination of women as priests. (15th November 2011).

The language of complementarity is used here by both Catholic and Protestant theologians to assert that differences in gender determine differences in ministerial role. This is a key aspect of essentialist views of gender; claims are universal and deterministic. However, they are not always used to argue for the subordination of women. An essentialist view of difference and complementarity can also be used to argue for women's inclusion in ministry. If women are different and humanity is only fully realised in both, then it can be argued that specifically female gifts are needed in ministry to reflect a fully rounded humanity. The feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that this is the view taken by 'romantic feminism'.

This romantic notion of femininity as more altruistic, less egotistic, and less prone to sin lends itself to a bewildering spectrum of different social platforms and programs in Western societies.¹³⁶

What she terms a 'reformist romantic' view maintains that women need to enter the male spheres of power to transform and change them. Such a feminist position idealises the accepted view of women's difference, particularly seeing women as nurturing and caring, and argues that these should be prioritised. Women are needed in the workplace and the Church to bring feminine values that will critique traditionally male ways of working. Thus we find one aspect of the writing in favour of women's ordination is the need for feminine ways of being to play their part in shaping and changing the Church.

Essentialist and constructivist theories of gender

Clearly, it is not just in theological discussions that assumptions are made about feminine and masculine characteristics. Popular culture provides many books, articles and media discussions about the differences between men and women, often affirming traditional ideas about male assertiveness and rationality as opposed to female nurturance and increased ability to relate.¹³⁷ There is an increasing interest in studying female and male brains and trying to locate the points of difference, though neuroscientists will also point out that

¹³⁶ Radford Ruether, Rosemary, *Sexism and God-Talk*, London: SCM, 1983, p. 105.

¹³⁷ A popular example is Gray, John, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, London: Harper Collins, 1992, which sets out to explain relationships in terms of male and female difference.

this still cannot tell us what is essential or developed through the experiences of typical men and women. The majority of people would affirm that there are biological differences between men and women relating to hormones, sexual maturation, sexual organs and the roles played in reproduction.¹³⁸ The question is whether and how these differences determine broader characteristics. Following from that is the question of whether the differences should define the kinds of roles that women and men should fill.

Historical shifts in attitudes to women have challenged and changed the assumptions made about what women are naturally capable of doing. The movement of women's liberation has opened up education and many different spheres of work to women in many parts of the world, and challenged stereotypes that define all women as less rational or more nurturing. The movement towards equality between the sexes has raised important questions about what is assumed to be masculine and feminine, leading to a more fluid and less traditional understanding of characteristics and roles. Yet the lived experience of men and women continue to point to differences that seem to be present from childhood. Even when it is acknowledged that claims about male and female behaviour are not universal, they are often shown, at some level, to be general. Popular writing and academic studies seem to show that even if men and women are not universally different, there is enough generality to claim that there are women's and men's ways of doing things.

This has been important in trying to articulate ways in which women are subtly disadvantaged. Carol Gilligan's research on the making of moral decisions appears to show a general difference in the way women think. Her book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* has had a significant impact on thinking about the ways women's patterns of thought are assessed. In it she concludes that young men are more likely to use abstract ways of making decisions while young women explore the contextual and concrete issues, looking for a relationally satisfying answer. The traditional way of assessing the maturity of moral decisions favours the abstract, therefore defining the girls as less mature.¹³⁹ Another influential study, *Women's Ways*

¹³⁸ It is important to acknowledge that some individuals are born with indeterminate sex.

¹³⁹ Gilligan, Carol, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982. In this book she critiques Kohlberg's

of *Knowing: the Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*,¹⁴⁰ explores the experience of women in higher education. This study concludes that women do less well under the adversarial style of teaching present in American universities and prosper under a more discursive pattern of learning. These studies resonated with many women's personal experience in the 1980s and continue to influence thinking today. Though some have criticised the size of the studies and the homogeneity of the subjects in terms of culture and race, they seem to confirm differences in the way women and men encounter the world.¹⁴¹ Yet they do not necessarily suggest that these differences are essential or natural.

In asserting general differences in women's ways of thinking and acting, some feminists have argued that these are not the outer expression of biological differences or natural characteristics but are, instead, results of social and cultural conditioning. The theory of socially constructed gender argues that behaviour, patterns of thinking and acting, and even perhaps brain development, are shaped by the reinforced assumptions of socially accepted gender stereotypes. Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* is often referred to as a foundational text for this view, especially the oft-quoted line, 'One is not born, but becomes a woman'.¹⁴² According to this theory, girls and boys, women and men learn to behave in ways that accord to cultural assumptions about their gender.

Iris Marion Young's article 'Throwing Like a Girl'¹⁴³ provides an interesting comment on how early these gender assumptions begin to cement patterns of behaviour that conform and therefore reinforce gender characteristics. She explores how girls and boys learn to use their bodies

Stages of Moral Development, which assumes the more abstract reasoning showed a greater moral maturity.

¹⁴⁰Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R. and Tarule, J. M., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, New York, NY: Basic Books, 1986.

¹⁴¹The Womanist movement, which grew out of responses to the novel *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker, published in 1982, is one of the movements to critique these studies. Womanist theory arises out of the experience of black women and argues for a proper understanding of the role that race and class plays in oppression, so white women's experience cannot be seen as definitive of black or other marginalised groups. Gilligan and Belenky's work is seen as primarily white, educated and middle class.

¹⁴²De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, London: Cape, 1953, p.301.

¹⁴³Young, Iris Marion, 'Throwing Like a Girl' in Welton, Donn *Body and Flesh*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp.259 -273

differently pre puberty when, in fact, there are few bodily differences. Differences, she concludes, are not inherent, shaped by biology, but are learned through the subtle processes of reinforcement in which boys and girls generally conform to expected gender behaviour. Thus, boys learn to throw with their whole bodies while girls, taught to contain their bodies, simply throw with their arms. Through the role models offered and the affirmations given, boys learn to be masculine and girls feminine according to the cultural norms. Young's reflection on the bodily ways children learn to behave is a useful reminder about how human beings learn and develop through imitating those they aspire to be like.

The anthropologist Mauss studied the way humans learn and concluded that even the most basic bodily functions, like walking, are learned through a combination of sociological, biological and psychological factors. Children and adults imitate those they trust and in the end develop movements that seem 'natural'; they have become entirely unthinking but might well have been subtly different if learned from someone else in a different cultural setting.

The child, the adult, imitates actions, which have succeeded, and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him ... The individual borrows the series of movements, which constitute it from the action executed in front of him or with him by others.¹⁴⁴

Mauss calls this 'prestigious imitation' and notes that it stretches from practices that an individual had knowingly copied to ways of behaving that had been learned without conscious reflection. He was not writing about gender differences, but cultural ones; however, knowing that even seemingly natural bodily movements are learned is helpful in thinking about how gender differences are inhabited. So if girls and boys are encouraged through social expectations to imitate older members of their own gender, they will begin to behave bodily in ways that correlate to what is recognisably masculine and feminine within their culture. Because this happens at a level that is not articulated or necessarily reflected on, it can appear to be natural, and through habitual behaviour the body itself adapts to what it has learned. If we follow

¹⁴⁴ Mauss, Marcel, *The Notion of Body Techniques in Sociology and Psychology*, translated by Brewster, Ben, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 101.

Young's examples of throwing balls we can find that a girl brought up in a family full of boys may well be labelled as a 'tomboy' because she inhabits her body in a more recognisable masculine way and throws like her brothers. She may be indulged in this, but cultural norms might also suggest that at some point she needs to re-educate herself into more feminine behaviour. Thus gendered behaviour, even where it can appear natural, can be understood as being socially constructed. As cultural acceptance of different ways of being masculine and feminine develop, so differences may be more easily tolerated.

However, to accept that gender behaviour is socially constructed does not remove the many issues that exist because of sexual differences. What it does mean is that once gender differences are not seen as fixed by nature, they can be challenged and diversity can be encouraged. A socially constructed understanding of gender differences can also allow gender to be seen as part of a variety of differences, like race, culture, class or wealth, and may not be the most important or pressing factor in addressing particular issues.¹⁴⁵ A socially constructed view of gender critiques ideas about universal gender behaviour, acknowledging that different cultures can affirm very different patterns of 'the feminine'. It also follows that because gender characteristics are shaped by culture, the language of complementarity is misleading; instead the equality of human beings is stressed and role stereotypes are challenged. Theologically this position finds its basis in the common humanity created in the *imago Dei*. What matters is that we are all created as human. Specific characteristics and ways of behaving are not allocated to each sex but are human, and therefore men and women can learn from each other and develop similar human capacities.

There is both historical and cultural evidence to support many of the assertions of socially constructed gender theory. Through opening up education and the workplace to women it is clear that women are able to do and to think in ways that were previously assumed to be unfeminine. Different cultures offer different assumptions about the feminine and masculine so that in some parts of the world women are deemed weak, unable to engage in heavy manual

¹⁴⁵ Womanist theology, for instance, will say that there are many issues where the colour of someone's skin is a more significant difference than their gender. Where racial oppression is prevalent, black men and women have more in common than a white woman and a black woman in terms of the ways they have been categorised and oppressed.

work, while in other places they are expected to carry heavy loads. Understanding different cultural assumptions about gender can challenge stereotypes and open up new possibilities for women and men. Yet gender difference, however it is construed, is still significant across cultures. Babies are recognised, with rare exceptions, as male or female at birth¹⁴⁶ and the later experiences of puberty and, for many, childbearing further define the differences. The assumptions about gender mean that men and women are often shaped by different experiences that then feed into the ways in which they think and act.

It therefore follows that a socially constructed theory of gender still has to contend with the lived experience of sexual difference. In defining the origins of this difference in culture rather than nature, a socially constructed view challenges both the universalism and determinism of essentialist theories. This is important, as it makes it possible to challenge the ways in which gender stereotypes have and still can lead to the oppression of women and minorities that do not conform to culturally accepted norms. However, when difference is minimised or dismissed, in order to affirm the equality of men and women, areas of experience that have been predominantly female can be marginalised or silenced. This is of particular interest for the subject of this thesis, as motherhood and mothering are clearly connected to both physical sexual difference and cultural assumptions. Is there a way of highlighting such embodied differences of women that does not lead to a complementarity that marginalises or idealises women's lived experience?

The problem of difference – Irigaray and questions of subjectivity

It is this question of how we can try to find a middle path through essentialist and constructivist ways of understanding difference that interests the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Her contention is that when common humanity and working for equality becomes the primary focus, then the actuality of women's experiences, especially bodily experiences, and the differences that are part of many women's lives may, in fact, be ignored – to the detriment of women. She poses the question: what does equality mean?

¹⁴⁶ Like most new mothers, the first thing I was told about my newborn baby was his sex and that determined the name I gave him.

Demanding equality, as women, seems to me to be an erroneous expression of a real issue. Demanding to be equal presupposes a term of comparison. Equal to what? What do women want to be equal to? Men? A wage? A public position? Equal to what? Why not themselves ... Egalitarianism, in fact, sometimes expends a lot of energy on rejecting certain positive values and chasing after nothing.¹⁴⁷

Thus even though the language of equality is at one level challenging the language of complementarity, it may simply continue to compound the undervaluing of predominantly female ways of thinking and acting.

Irigaray maintains that this is a linguistic problem. We do not have a language that can talk meaningfully about difference. Thus the question is less about trying to understand the origins of gender difference and more about finding a language of intersubjectivity. This is difficult because difference is most often articulated through binaries, where one thing is different from the other, making one the subject and the other the object. In the earlier chapter on ministry I noted how difficult it was to articulate the difference between the ordained and the laity without resorting to such binaries. In that example, as in the example of gender, there is a tendency to privilege one over the other, using one as the norm from which the other differs. Thus men become the norm from which women are different.

Irigaray is not alone in asserting this as a problem. Many writers have noted the way that gender differences are associated with other binaries and the way that these privilege the masculine. Male/female connects to soul/body, rationality/emotion, and culture/nature. This has been particularly noted by feminist theologians because women have generally been associated with the body and matter, while the divine is imaged as masculine. Irigaray maintains that the first word in these binaries is set up as the 'true' and 'masculine', while the second is seen as opposite to the first and, by implication, the 'not true' and 'feminine'. She claims that the experiences of women's lives are underarticulated and thus undervalued, because woman is the object, never the subject. Thus, Irigaray argues, we cannot fully challenge these divides without finding a way of articulating women as subjects in their own right. What is

¹⁴⁷ Irigaray, Luce, 'Equal or Different' in Whitford, Margaret (ed.), *The Irigaray Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, p. 32.

needed is a way of speaking about differences that does not lead to defining a norm and its other, that doesn't resort to opposites. Margaret Whitford comments on Irigaray's writings:

She warns against displacing the male/female binary before the female side has acceded to identity and subjectivity. To omit the question of the woman-as-subject and her identity in thought and culture is to leave in place a tenacious and damaging imaginary structure.¹⁴⁸

It is for this reason that Irigaray focuses on the physical differences between men and women as a starting point for reflecting on sexual difference. She asserts that bodily differences matter. She reflects on the very different nature of male and female genitalia and sexual pleasure, asserting that women's bodies point to a plurality and openness; what she calls 'this sex which is not one'.¹⁴⁹ She critiques Freud's understanding of female development and sexuality and its assertion that 'penis envy' offers a satisfactory account of female development. She also reflects both on the importance of mothers and the ways in which they have been silenced and subjugated. She concludes that mothers have been reduced to 'a mere function',¹⁵⁰ and elsewhere says that they have been 'defined as a thing'.¹⁵¹ Women, she argues, need to find their subjectivity and mothers need to find ways of not losing their sense of their own selves as women in the role of mothering. I will return to the importance of this in the following chapter when discussing child development. That chapter will look at other critiques of Freud and argue for an intersubjective understanding of the mother/child relationship.

Critics accuse Irigaray of essentialism because she affirms that there *are* sexual differences and that women's bodily differences are significant. However, she is not claiming a universalistic or deterministic view of difference. Instead she is critiquing the way the language of equality, while challenging important issues of female oppression, has unwittingly colluded in

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁴⁹ Irigaray, Luce, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1977; Irigaray, Luce, translated by Porter, Catherine, *This sex which is not one*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985.

¹⁵⁰ Irigaray, Luce, 'Women – Mothers: the Silent Substratum', pp. 47-52, in Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, p. 50.

¹⁵¹ Irigaray, Luce, 'Sexual Difference', pp. 165-177, in Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, p. 169.

undervaluing women. Attempts to de-gender language still perpetuate oppositional binaries that privilege traditionally masculine attributes. Irigaray writes in French, so is using a language that is more obviously gendered, and she notes that when a crowd is mixed, even if the majority of people are women, in French it takes the masculine form. Thus, she argues, gender-neutral terminology tends to perpetuate the idea that things are more valid when men participate. This is one of my reasons for consciously using a gendered term in this thesis. A gender-neutral term like parenting changes, at some level, the way care of children is viewed, because it no longer defines the work with a feminine word.

In retaining this feminine term for describing the practice of caring for children I am not suggesting that men should not or cannot participate. There has been a welcome cultural shift in expectations about men's engagement with children. However, a gender-neutral term fails to acknowledge both the reality that child-rearing is still principally undertaken by women and still undervalued because it is women's work. Men who have taken on the primary care of their own children recognise this undervaluing. Yet we find it difficult to accept that a feminine word could be used to positively describe work undertaken by men as well as women. Child-rearing has a female tradition and a history that connects to women's bodily experiences.

As the thesis unfolds it will become clear that the practice of mothering is made up of ways of thinking and acting that are not gender-specific, though they may be more commonly practised by women. However, it must be acknowledged that the specifically female bodily experience of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation all impact on women's readiness to mother and can shape some of these ways of thinking and acting. It follows that to talk about mothering and to find ways of articulating and privileging some of the ways of thinking and acting that arise from the practice, it is necessary to understand and acknowledge that this is an area where sexual difference exists. Women's bodily experience in childbearing is an essential sexual difference. In fact, one of the main complexities of mothering is that it doesn't fit into a neat binary. The bodily experiences of having a child do not have an equivalent in male experience. It is perhaps for this reason that motherhood has been idealised as a way of separating it off from other forms of human practice. Yet in doing so

the actuality of the practice has been diminished. This idealisation of mothers has tended to subjugate and silence their experience and has not lead to a proper valuing of the learning, work and skills involved in the practice.

Irigaray argues that women in general have been elided with mothers, and mothers have not been seen as subjects.

Mothers, and the women within them, have been trapped in the role of she who satisfies need but has no access to desire.¹⁵²

It therefore follows that writing about mothering raises particular issues of gender understanding. In acknowledging its difference I still want to resist the language of complementarity, because to acknowledge that aspects of human life arise out of the reality of sexual difference is not to assume that the things learned through such experiences belong to either gender. In particular, it does not follow that women are in any way more naturally caring.

Another problem of complementarity is seen if we return to the subject of women and ordained ministry. In these discussions an essentialist view of sexual difference is used to limit women. They are not perceived as being able to cross gender divides, but the same is not true of men. Thus Sandham's conservative view of women's ministry argues that women's natural calling is to teach women and children. However, she then goes on to say that men can also do this, and she particularly stresses the need for men to be involved in the teaching of children. Men can and should teach women, but women should not teach men. In the Catholic nuptial imagery for the Church both men and women can be the feminine church receiving ministry but only men can represent Christ. Complementarity, therefore, seems to imply that women can complement men, rather than the other way round. Women are, at some level, an addendum to the masculine norm.

One way of challenging the determinism of essentialist differences is to locate the difference in characteristics and ways of thinking and acting. These are designated as masculine or feminine even though they can be appropriated

¹⁵² Irigaray, Luce, 'Women-mothers, the Silent Substratum' in Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, p. 51.

by men and women. Thus it is sometimes said that a man who is caring and empathetic is 'in touch with his feminine side'. Despite the seeming freedom for characteristics to be utilised by both genders, the assumption that they are gendered in themselves perpetuates binaries and unhelpfully categorises ideas like empathy as feminine and rationality as masculine, whether possessed by a man or a woman. Ruether writes:

There is no valid biological basis for labelling certain psychic capacities, such as reason, 'masculine' and others, such as intuition, 'feminine'. To put it bluntly, there is no biological connection between male gonads and the capacity to reason. Likewise, there is no biological connection between female sexual organs and the capacity to be intuitive, caring, or nurturing.¹⁵³

In discussing motherhood below I will look further at female bodily influences on caring, but at this point it is important to note that allocating a gender to ways of thinking and behaving perpetuates the idea that these attributes are in some ways opposite and that they still relate at some level to normative ideas about men and women. Imaging these differences as opposites means people are assumed to be either more rational or more intuitive, rather than being able to be intuitively rational. Gendering such attributes means the stereotypes of masculine ordered rationality opposed to feminine empathy and intuition are maintained with all the history of privileging objective rationality over feelings. Irigaray challenges the assumption that there has to be an either/or. Yet she also argues in favour of exploring the areas designated feminine. For unless the characteristics designated as feminine are valued, women are urged to find equality by adapting to masculine capacities without the resources to critique them. As Ruether concludes:

Women, through the opening of equal education and political rights, have indeed demonstrated their ability to exercise the 'same' capacities as men ... Liberalism assumes the traditional male sphere as normative and believes it is wrong to deny people access to it on the basis of gender. But once women are allowed to enter the public sphere, liberalism offers no critique of the modes of functioning within it.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 111.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

It follows that there is a complex task involved in challenging stereotypical ideas about what is masculine and feminine while at the same time articulating and valuing ways of being that have arisen out of the experience of women. In doing so, it is important to challenge the notion of opposition; to think rationally does not need to equate to thinking abstractly and disinterestedly. To make space for feelings and emotions is not to lose sight of reason, but may involve reasoning differently. This, as Ruether argues, is a better way of understanding the fullness of humanity than complementarity.

Redeemed humanity, reconnected with the *imago Dei*, means not only recovering aspects of our full psychic potential that have been repressed by cultural gender stereotypes, it also means transforming the way these capacities have been made to work socially. We need to recover our capacity for relationality, for hearing and receiving, and being with and for others, but in a way that is no longer a tool of manipulation and self-abnegation. We need to develop our capacities for rationality, but in a way that makes reason no longer a tool of competitive relations with others.¹⁵⁵

The constructivist view of sexual difference reminds us how much that appears to be natural is in fact learned. In reflecting on motherhood we find a complex mix of biological bodily difference and culturally conditioned learning. This has meant that many women have developed ways of thinking and acting that are different from men, whose bodily and cultural experiences have been very different. Thus women, who have been engaged in caring for children, have had to cope with very different ideas about change and fluidity from men or *women* who have not shared these experiences but have instead been involved in manufacturing products or abstract thinking. So it is possible to talk about ways of thinking and acting that have been predominantly female because more women have had to develop such ways of thinking and acting in order to manage the experiences and responsibilities of their lives. The difficulty is in finding the language to articulate such experiences without them being marginalised and relegated to 'women's stuff'. In finding an appropriate language, the idea that there is a normative experience of humanity needs to be challenged and the value of diversity of experience needs to be taken seriously.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

To summarise the discussion so far, we note that although the significance of sexual difference is present across cultures, defining such differences, beyond basic biology, is problematic. The historical dominance of men means that such definitions tend to privilege the masculine norm over the feminine other. Changes in education and society have clearly highlighted that universal and deterministic claims about male and female roles linked to their gendered capacities are unfounded. Yet differences persist. Cultural assumptions and the subtle ways that these are reinforced can explain many aspects of gender difference but despite the claims of some,¹⁵⁶ bodily differences also play a part. Through a complex mix of these factors many women have developed capacities for thinking and acting in ways that differ in certain circumstances from the predominantly male tradition. Irigaray makes an important point in arguing that such ways of thinking and acting are often under-articulated and defined as other or inferior to a masculine norm.

It also follows that in rejecting simplistic concepts of male and female nature, the human capacity to learn how to think and act in different ways is affirmed. Thus ways of being and behaving that have been attributed to a particular gender can potentially be learned by both men and women. And just as women can learn from male experience, so men can learn from the insights and experiences of women. Irigaray also argues that we need to move away from either/or language. Instead we need to explore ways of allowing there to be more than one subject, and especially finding ways for women, particularly mothers, to be seen as subjects.

At the beginning of this chapter I noted that in using maternal imagery and language for ministry I am challenging assumptions about the essentially male nature of the priestly role, but I am not seeking to claim a privilege for women in ministry. The preceding argument has made it clear that drawing on a female image does not directly correlate to the gender of the priest. We saw in the previous chapter that on occasions men were comfortable in drawing analogies between their ministry and maternal experiences. I would argue that the inclusion of women or the possible inclusion of women, in the role of priest

¹⁵⁶ Butler, Judith, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, 1990, introduces the concept of gender performativity, which claims that gender is never fixed and even the physiological differences traditionally accepted as fixed points of difference can be challenged as constructions of gender.

has made many men and women more resistant to such metaphors because it is assumed to be a privileging of the female. As Reuther argued above, and Irigaray implies, access to traditionally male spheres for women has usually involved encouraging a gender-neutral stance that downplays specifically female experiences. Clare Walsh's paper, which looks at the way women were depicted before and after the inclusion of women in the priesthood in the Church of England, notes the desire to de-gender their role once they are in the male sphere of ordained ministry.

Some women priests have chosen to distance themselves from the identity criteria of sex, sexuality and gender that were necessarily to the fore in the pre-ordination campaign. Instead, they emphasise the institutional force of their ordination as priests and insist that gender is largely irrelevant to the exercise of many aspects of their sacerdotal role ... The implication is that the gender-marking of what should be a gender-neutral occupational role is an unnecessary distraction.¹⁵⁷

She quotes one of the women she has interviewed: 'whether you're a woman or a man shouldn't make any difference at all – I feel your gender should disappear in a service' and goes on to comment about 'her rejection of the "feely" and "personal" aspects of some women's approach to ministry, and of their propensity to "go on endlessly about birth"' ¹⁵⁸. Walsh comments that this de-gendering of the role is particularly interesting, as the role of priest seems to embody characteristics that have been traditionally designated feminine. She comments on the reluctance of the women she interviewed to use any feminine analogies:

This is particularly paradoxical, since priestly ministry is, in many ways, a feminine occupation. Indeed, priesthood can be seen as an instance of socially and institutionally sanctioned gender-crossing behaviour by men.¹⁵⁹

Fears expressed by male priests that the increase in women clergy is 'feminising' the Church points to a continuing sense that areas that are labelled

¹⁵⁷ Walsh, Clare, *Speaking in Different Tongues*, a Sheffield Hallam Working Paper on the Web, www.shu.ac.uk (12th March 2011) She is quoting one of the ordained women she interviewed.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

as feminine tend to be seen as less valuable and for women only. Yet, I would argue, by failing to acknowledge the ways in which parish ministry equates to the kind of care that is evident in mothering, we are in danger of privileging aspects of ministry that relate to more traditionally masculine ways of working at the expense of much that has been and is valuable in the day-to-day ministry of parish priests as it has been done by men and now, also, by women.

Exploring motherhood and mothering

In this thesis I am taking a female image and deliberately using feminine language to explore the role of priest as undertaken by men and women. In choosing to use the term mothering as a metaphor for ministry I have consciously chosen to use a gendered term. It would have been possible for me to choose the gender-neutral term 'parenting' to explore child-rearing. However, following on from the discussion above, it is important to acknowledge that child-rearing has been and continues to be a predominantly female area of responsibility. Therefore many of the skills learned and ways of thinking developed have been designated as female, with associated implications for the ways they are valued. I also want to acknowledge that the majority of mothers have had the bodily experience of pregnancy and childbirth; many will also have breastfed their children. As I will argue later, I do not think that these experiences are a necessity for good mothering, but they are a factor that impacts on those who have experienced them.

For the majority of people, the care they received as young children was predominantly carried out by a woman or women. Patterns of child-rearing are changing and many fathers participate in caring, but it is important to acknowledge the cultural assumptions that still designate childcare as women's work. In time this position may well seem dated, but at present the reality is that childcare is mainly undertaken by women, and the men who engage in full-time childcare are seen as unusual. While acknowledging that the elision of women and the maternal has been a problematic stereotype, it is important to resist the silencing of maternal experience and the lack of recognition of all that the practice and imagery can offer.

As has been said above, the physical process of bearing children is a uniquely female experience, an example of specificity and difference.

Although women's bodies are, on the whole, configured so that they can have children, not all women want to have children and some women want them but find that they are unable to have them. Yet all children are born to a woman. Cultural differences will play their part in how pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding are experienced and narrated, but they will always be experiences that are specific to female bodies.

The relation of motherhood to the biological process of pregnancy and birth is as clear-cut as its relation to the meanings attached to the process is unclear.¹⁶⁰

So writes Cristina Grenholm in *Motherhood and Love*, stressing both the specifically female experience and the ongoing ambiguity of what that implies. It is because children are born to women, alongside women's ability to lactate in order to feed them, that it has been assumed that women have a special ability to nurture and care for children. This physical reality has been underpinned by the presumption of a maternal instinct, which implies that there is a *natural* response from a mother to care for her child. An essentialist view of gender might well go further and say that it is this maternal instinct that enables women to care for more than just her biological children; women are naturally nurturing. Yet, the term instinct, I would argue, undervalues mothering because it implies an unthinking response and a reactive behaviour. Therefore I will suggest that mothering should not be understood as an instinctual reaction but as a commitment to a relationship.

The gender-neutral term 'parenting' is emotively different from the language of mothering and it is not usually understood as instinctual. Through books and courses it is implied that parenting skills can be learned; you can attend parenting classes and courses or read books on improving parenting skills. In a helpful article Caroline Whitbeck comments thus:

When people talk about maternal instincts, what they seem to be discussing are the inner promptings, which induce women to care for their offspring. All this is frequently supposed to be connected with love in some way, and may even be considered a particular species of love. What complicates the matter is that whereas we do speak of parental affection, and paternal as well as maternal feelings, there is no

¹⁶⁰ Grenholm, Cristina, *Motherhood and Love*, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011, p. 27.

talk of *paternal instincts* ... It would seem, therefore, that while certain feelings may be viewed as characteristic of parents of both sexes, in women this parental affectation is viewed as augmented or enhanced in some special way.¹⁶¹

It is this idea of an augmented or enhanced maternal love that is popularly understood to make women, naturally, more able and willing to nurture and care for young children. This instinct is offered as an explanation for women's desire to have children and her inbuilt capacity to nurture them.¹⁶² However, female experience does not always correlate to assumptions about an instinctual ability to love and care for one's child. The anxiety, ambivalence and difficulties that some mothers have with all aspects of mothering and many have with some aspects, points to a more complex process of learning how to care for infants.¹⁶³ This ambivalence has been well documented in feminist writings on motherhood many of which have sought to challenge accepted ideas of maternal love¹⁶⁴. Thus although it is certainly true that the majority of caring for babies and young children is carried out by women, frequently the biological mother of the child, it does not necessarily follow that this is because women are simply allowing a natural instinct to kick in, or that they are uniquely capable of providing such care.

Why do women mother; is there a maternal instinct?

Socially constructed theories of gender have sought to understand mothering by seeking to minimise the bodily experience and focus on social, political and psychoanalytical ideas about why mothering is predominantly considered

¹⁶¹ Whitbeck, Caroline, 'The Maternal Instinct' in Trebilcock, Joyce, *Mothering*, Totowa, NJ: Rowan and Allanheld, 1984, p. 186.

¹⁶² The terminology may be changing as the role of fathers change, so that there is some discussion of paternal instinct. BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* on 13 June 2008 involved a phone-in on whether there was a difference between paternal and maternal instincts. The majority of callers assumed that they were very different.

¹⁶³ This is true even of the physiological aspect of breastfeeding. It is clear that many women find a process that is at one level natural extremely difficult to establish. Women may well need help and advice to *learn* how to breastfeed.

¹⁶⁴ Rich, Adrienne, *Of Woman Born*, New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1976, looked at the way the institution of motherhood, which she saw as a product of patriarchy, oppressed women and limited their capacity to experience positive aspects of mothering. In her book she speaks of the ambivalence she felt at times towards her children, 'the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves and blissful gratification'. The subject of maternal ambivalence continues to be a cause for challenging idealised views of mothering. Rachel Cusk's 2001 *A Life's Work* explored in detail her complex, ambiguous feelings towards the experience of motherhood.

women's work. They have thus dismissed ideas of maternal instinct. Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* argues that a maternal instinct is a social construct. It is worth noting her use of the term parenting rather than mothering.

When we evaluate claims for the instinctual or biological basis for parenting, it turns out that evidence is hard to find.¹⁶⁵

She uses psychoanalytical theory to argue that because it's predominantly women who care for children, both men and women are conditioned into stereotypical gender roles in parenthood. Her work has been influential in arguing that women take on the role of mothering because women have mothered them rather than due to a maternal instinct. This, she claims, has an impact beyond mothering, from how boys and girls are socialised to ideas about caring. Following Freud she discusses the way that boys individuate from their mother by becoming different, while girls seek, in the end, to be like their mothers. Her theory is based on mothers identifying in a particular way with children who are the same sex. Because, in Chodorow's understanding, mothers see girls as like them, girls learn to identify with their own mothers and to internalise the importance of the nurturing role, especially in terms of childcare. Boys, on the other hand, develop their sense of self by differentiating from their mothers, and in doing so, need to distance themselves from the maternal tasks. This, she maintains, is internalised, with boys learning to see practical nurturing care as women's work.

Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalised, psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure.¹⁶⁶

Chodorow uses a basically Freudian theory of child development for her understanding of the differences in male and female identity. Freud's theory of developmental stages has been particularly important in explaining sexual difference. He maintained that infants pass through different stages of

¹⁶⁵ Chodorow, Nancy, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978, new edition 1999 p. 23.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

fixation, driven by subliminal sexual desires, beginning with an oral stage, focusing on the pleasure of being nursed, moving on to an anal stage, connected to potty training, and then the phallic or oedipal stage. It is this last stage in which Freud argued that boys and girls learn to differentiate their sexual identities. Boys, he argued, are frustrated by their mother's desire for their father and feel, firstly, anger towards the father as a rival for her love and then, recognising the father's power, they desire to become like the father. In doing so they reject the mother, who has no penis and whom they fear might castrate them. Through this process boys identify themselves as masculine and individuate themselves from the world of the maternal.

Freud was less clear about female development, offering an oedipal theory sometimes referred to as the Electra complex. Girls at this stage, he argued, became aware of their lack of a penis and that their mother also shares this lack. This leads to desire for the father, anger towards the mother, who they hold responsible for this castration, and eventually a movement to be like the mother because that is who the father desires. Freud maintained that girls never fully resolve this oedipal stage and that the desire for children replaces the ongoing sense of a lack of a penis.

Freud's theories have had an important impact on ideas about child development and, especially, the need for a child to separate from the world of the mother in order to find their own sense of identity and autonomy. For Chodorow this rejection of the world of the mother on the part of boys has been problematic, as it leads men to reject caring, nurturing roles, associating these with the maternal world. Chodorow differs from Freud in claiming that a girl's process through the oedipal stage does not require the repression of her earlier attachments, meaning that she develops a more complex ability to relate, care and nurture. Altering the care that children receive in these early years of development so that both men and women nurture the young, she claims, could allow a more complex relational attitude in boys as well as girls, changing, in time, the way men and women view caring and nurturing roles.

As I noted earlier, Irigaray criticises Freud because his developmental theory offers a very limited understanding of women and their sexuality.

The feminine is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex. Hence that all too well-known 'penis envy'. How can we accept the idea that women's entire sexual development is governed by her lack of, and thus her longing for, jealousy of, and demand for, the male organ? Does this mean that woman's sexual evolution can never be characterised with reference to the female sex itself? All Freud's statements describing feminine sexuality overlook the fact that the feminine sex might possibly have its own 'specificity'.¹⁶⁷

She also maintains that Freudian theories of individuation from the mother have denied the subjectivity of the mother. They suggest that healthy adult development must involve a rejection of the mother and the pre-oedipal maternal world. Irigaray talks about a theory built on 'matricide'; on the suppression of all that is owed to the mother. Jessica Benjamin, a feminist psychoanalyst also challenges the assumption that separation or rejection of the mother is a necessary part of human individuation.¹⁶⁸ She, like Irigaray, argues for a sense of inter-subjectivity and an understanding of the mother/child relationship that is based on mutual recognition. I will explore her ideas and issues around individuation further in the next chapter.

Chodorow's underlying explanation that locates the reasons for women choosing to mother in the oedipal stage do not seem convincing. However, she does raise important points about how boys and girls are socialised into attitudes towards parenting roles and caring roles in general. Her work has been influential in arguing the salient point that because the majority of people have a primary caretaker who is female, most often the biological mother, this leads both male and female children to assume mothering is female work and to extrapolate that caring in general is a feminine task. Many would concur with Chodorow's conclusion that a move to child-rearing that is equally shared between men and women could alter attitudes to both child-rearing and more general caring roles.

Clearly, role models, social expectations and culturally reinforced assumptions about women's capacity to mother plays an important part in the

¹⁶⁷ Irigaray, Luce 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine' in Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin, Jessica, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, New York, NY: Pantheon, 1988. She stills sees issues around individuation and assertion of independence but these arise out of a relationship of mutual recognition and are about a failure in intersubjectivity.

way that women tend to assume the major responsibility of caring for their children. Yet I do not think that it is possible to explain why women mother without reflecting on the bodily experiences connected to mothering. I would argue that specific physical differences between the sexes do play a part, not through a biological instinct, but through the particular way that women become mothers. As Caroline Whitbeck concludes:

Parental affection or attachment is influenced by experience, and this experience is not confined to socialisation experience, but includes, in large measure, bodily experiences that are the same cross-culturally; i.e., all women have special bodily experiences that are likely to enhance those feelings, attitudes, and fantasies, which induce people generally to care for their infants.¹⁶⁹

She comments that ‘these experiences do not readily fall into either the nature category or the nurture category’.¹⁷⁰ Sarah Blaffer Hrdy would concur with this:

Instead of old dichotomies about nature versus nurture, attention needs to be focused on the complicated interactions among genes, tissue, glands, past experiences and environmental cues, including sensory cues provided by infants themselves and by other individuals in the vicinity. Complex behaviour like nurturing, especially when tied to even more complex emotions like ‘love’, are never genetically predetermined or environmentally produced.¹⁷¹

Hrdy is a socio-biologist. In *Mother Nature* she uses a Darwinian understanding of natural selection to look at the role of mothers in various species, including human beings. As we see from the quote above, she concludes that mothering in humans cannot be explained simply as instinctual behaviour, yet the bodily experience matters. She explores the impact of this experience, including the hormones released in pregnancy, birth and lactation. All these, she argues, are meant to promote a sense of attachment to the baby and have an effect. However, these hormones cannot fully explain why women commit to the care of their children; their impact is not significant enough. She also shows that human mothers are most likely to abandon their baby immediately after birth or in the very early days when one would assume a

¹⁶⁹ Whitbeck, *The Maternal Instinct*, p. 191.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁷¹ Hrdy, Sarah Blaffer, *Mother Nature*, New York, NY: Pantheon, 1999, p. 174.

hormonal, biological instinct ought to be kicking in. Unlike herding animals, the human mother and baby do not instantly bond, but instead develop attachment as the mother commits to the child and begins to build a relationship with her. It is not instantaneous, but happens over time. The next chapter will explore attachment theory as described by the child development specialist John Bowlby, but it is important to note here that it is about a responsive relationship. As Hrdy comments:

Whereas Bowlby focused on how *infants* become attached to their mothers in the months after birth, ‘bonding’ posited a rapid process whereby *mothers* form an emotional attachment to infants in the hours right after birth.¹⁷²

Hrdy argues that human mothers need to choose to commit to their child and begin to develop this relationship. The period of gestation and the physical investment a mother has already made by the time the child is born means that in a majority of circumstances the mother is already committed to the well-being of the child, so is likely to commit to caring for her. The process of having a baby is physically costly for women. It takes up substantial time and energy and towards the end of pregnancy limits what a woman can do. Hrdy claims that, as a consequence of this investment of time and energy, mothers have a primary desire to invest in the future of the infant they have produced, so long as the circumstances are right. This desire to invest time and energy in the reality of a life that has already taken up time and energy promotes a relational attachment that enables the mother to respond attentively to the infant’s needs. The hormones help, as does the vulnerability of the infant, yet predominantly a woman’s prior experience encourages her to continue to invest in the infant’s future. For a woman who feels positive about a pregnancy, the sense of attachment can begin before the child’s birth, albeit as a projection. The reality of this attachment is established in the early days and weeks of a

¹⁷² It is true that the term bonding is used of human mothers and babies. Mothers are often encouraged to hold their babies as soon as possible to promote bonding. Ideas about bonding came from studies of goats and sheep that need to imprint their scent on their offspring very soon after birth so that they can recognise and feed their own. It was at one stage assumed that this was also true for humans, so flesh-to-flesh contact between mother and baby was encouraged as soon after birth as possible. Although bonding theories are now discredited in humans, the language and some of the practices continue to be encouraged in maternity wards. See *ibid.*, pp. 157–161.

child's life, where closeness to one caregiver will begin to develop recognition in the child, which in turn strengthens the emotional bond between the mother or caregiver and that particular infant. What begins as a projected relationship, or even as an anticipated relationship, becomes a real relationship in which the responses of the baby play an important part.

If human mothers were automatically nurturing, their infants would not need to be so attuned and keenly discriminating ... An infant's basic survival instructions include not just attaching to mother but appealing to her.¹⁷³

Infants need to be cared for and, Hrdy argues, human babies have evolved to appeal in ways that will strengthen the relationship with their primary caretakers. We will see when we look further at mothering how important the relationship and reciprocity between a baby and her primary caretakers is. Hrdy points out though that 'caretakers need not be the mother, or even one person, but they have to be the same caretakers'.¹⁷⁴ She concludes:

Rather than some magical 'essence of mother,' what makes a mother maternal is that she is (invariably) at the scene, hormonally primed, sensitive to infant signals, and related to the baby. These factors lower her threshold for giving of herself to satisfy the infant's needs. Once her milk comes in, the mother's urge to nurture grows stronger still ... These factors make the mother the likeliest candidate to become the primary caretaker. *But they do not constitute an unyielding prescription.*¹⁷⁵

The reality is that if the mother does not take responsibility, others have to, or the baby will not survive. There is good evidence that women and men who are not the biological mother of a child can become the primary caregiver and invest in caring for and nurturing the infant.¹⁷⁶ It is also clear that mothering can be shared between a small number of individuals. Hrdy also notes that in

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 389.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 508.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 500.

¹⁷⁶ Adoption of babies by relatives or through formal adoption programmes has long been part of human culture, especially where mothers die in childbirth, or have too many children. There has also been a long history of wealthy families entrusting the care of infants and children to paid nannies. What has been less satisfactory is where babies and infants are cared for in environments where they do not have consistent caretakers.

circumstances where a woman feels unable or unwilling to care for the child she has borne, she may choose to abandon the child or, in extremis, kill it.¹⁷⁷

Hrdy's description of the complex mix of biological and social factors that make it likely that a woman will take responsibility for the care of her infants offers a middle way between essentialist and constructivist views. Clearly, any position that speaks generally of the effects of hormones and bodily experiences specific to women is making some kind of universal claim about women and their sexual difference. Although biology alone cannot explain why women care for their children, cultural and social factors will affect how women interpret their bodily experiences of pregnancy and birthing. Yet, these bodily experiences are specifically female. And I would agree with Blaffer Hrdy that these experiences are significant factors in a woman choosing to take responsibility for nurturing her children. Yet alongside these bodily experiences are the wealth of cultural and social assumptions and expectations about gender roles.

Non-biological factors play a significant part in the assumption that the mother should become the primary carer. It follows that whoever commits to the child and accepts the responsibility to care and nurture does not do so instinctually, but has to develop the relationship and learn how to care. Again, social expectations and modelling may well make it easier for women to learn these skills, but that does not mean they are essentially female skills. Due to the vulnerability of the infant, somebody has to care for it. The physical and emotional differences between a woman who is caught up in the experience of having a child, and a man or woman who is not, does make it more likely that the particular woman will take on the responsibility of caring. However, there is an element of choice: a choice that is circumscribed by social expectations and the particularities of the mother's situation. Where a mother chooses not to, or is unable to, become attached to the child, someone else will need to take on the responsibility.

¹⁷⁷ Abandonment or infanticide is a reality of most cultures, especially in times of poverty or where bearing a child in the wrong social situation would make it hard to acknowledge the child. In some cultures the gender of the child or her disability may lead to a decision to neglect or abandon her.

The ongoing work of caring for a baby, and later a child, develops because of the commitment to the relationship. As Whitbeck and Hrdy both point out, the experience of having the baby predisposes many women to that commitment. However, even those who have given birth to a child need to learn the myriad of skills needed to nurture its growth and development. It is this aspect of mothering that I will turn to in the next chapter. Whereas the birthing experience draws on specifically female attributes, the ongoing work of care and nurture, aside from breastfeeding, cannot be connected to any female physiology. Sara Ruddick, whose *Maternal Thinking* is central to this thesis and will be introduced in the next chapters, draws a distinction between these two aspects of mothering.

By 'birthing labour' I mean everything a woman does to protect and sustain her foetus, the culminating moment and defining hope of the work is the act of giving birth. Neither pregnancy nor birth is much like mothering. Mothering is an ongoing, organised set of activities that require discipline and active attention ... Pregnant women – especially if they look forward to mothering – often take a maternal attitude toward the foetus, becoming deeply attached to an infant they have yet to meet. These eager mothers usually engage projectively in maternal tasks ... But these tasks relate directly not to the foetus but to the baby it will become. A mother takes care of a foetus by taking care of herself.¹⁷⁸

Here it is important to note that while pregnancy involves a woman in both investing in the future child, as Hrdy would put it, and projecting a maternal relationship onto the foetus, it is essentially different from the ongoing work of mothering. The former experience may well play a significant part in why and how women take on the responsibility of mothering. It can, I suggest, mean that mothers begin to think differently about bodies, time, and what can and cannot be controlled, which may help them adapt to the ways of thinking necessary for mothering, but often the experience of pregnancy leaves women feeling unprepared for the reality of the child. The experience of becoming a mother does not automatically equip a woman with the skills necessary to nurture that child. Whoever takes on the primary care of the infant enters a steep learning curve as they develop the necessary skills to enable the child to

¹⁷⁸ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 50.

flourish. These skills must be learned through practice. This is true whether the biological mother or another caregiver takes up the responsibility.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter I discussed the fact that mothering is a term that men and women find ambiguous and at times contentious. Women have been traditionally defined by their biology in ways that have limited their opportunities and led, in many ways, to subordination. In choosing to use the gendered term 'mothering', I am acknowledging that the care and nurture of children has historically been understood as women's work and continues to be predominantly the responsibility of women. This raises questions about sexual difference. Are women essentially maternal? Do they act out of a maternal instinct? Or is a woman's care of children yet another example of a role assumed through social conditioning? In order to speak meaningfully about women's lived experience it is important to acknowledge sexual difference and to be able to make generalisations where appropriate. However, any discussion of female experience needs to be aware of the way that deep-seated social and cultural assumptions shape our understanding of gender and the language with which we speak about it. Theologically, discussions of gender need to take into account a belief in the goodness of God's creation, including human bodies with their differences.

An essentialist understanding of women assumes mothering to be part of women's nature and is often the defining aspect of women's nature. This, I would argue, has meant that women's capacity to develop and learn the skills and virtues of mothering has been under-articulated. What is natural is perceived to flow inevitably from women's essentially maternal being. Women's failure at times to love and nurture their children is seen as unnatural. According to this view, mothering has been idealised, based on the potent force of mother love, but also silenced. As Irigaray would claim, it has been difficult for mothers to be allowed to have their own subjectivity, and women in general have been elided with the maternal. Clearly, the experience of bearing a child is an example of bodily sexual difference. Men cannot gestate, give birth or breastfeed. All children are born through these experiences that are particular to the female body. However, this bodily particularity has then been extended

to assume that the ongoing care and nurture of children is women's work because women are naturally suited to provide such care and nurture.

These ideas about women's maternal nature have been quite rightly challenged. Changes in women's roles over history and differences in gender roles in different cultures have clearly shown that universalistic and deterministic claims about what is natural in women and men can be better understood as constructs of social and cultural assumptions. These have, inevitably, also challenged theological ideas about how human beings created in the *imago Dei* are to be understood, leading to a greater stress on shared humanity. The fact that women take on the major responsibility for child-rearing is therefore less about nature, or Godly ordering, and more about social expectations, and assumptions of gender-appropriate roles. Children are predominantly cared for by women, which feeds into their own assumptions about who should care for children. This view challenges ideas of maternal instinct and acknowledges that the ability to mother is not innate but is learned. As women grow up within societies where women mother, they are encouraged to develop the skills and capacities to nurture and care for children. Expectations of male and female patterns of behaviour shape understanding about how men and women react to babies and their needs and often have implications for caring roles beyond mothering.

Theoretically, this constructed position allows a better appreciation of the skills and virtues developed in mothering, but the desire to challenge the essentialist assumptions of women's naturally maternal nature has led, not to a proper evaluation of the skills of mothering, but to a different kind of silencing. As women are encouraged to strive for equality with men, so the particular bodily experiences of pregnancy, childbearing and breastfeeding become problematic, involving time out of the workplace, altering for a period what a woman is capable of doing. And this problematic understanding of the bodily aspects of mothering all too easily extends to the ongoing care of children, which is defined as non-work or very low-skilled work, categorised with other domestic tasks like housework, which need to be fitted around paid work. The marginalisation of the particular experiences of mothering in the cause of women's equality is understandable. Yet this undermines an important aspect of human experience and seems to silence the lessons that can be learned from

mothering, or the rewards involved, just as firmly as the essentialist position it seeks to challenge.

This is why I find the insights of Irigaray helpful. To simply dismiss sexual difference ends in silencing women's particular experiences. It can also fail to challenge the tendency to define characteristics, and ways of behaving, in binaries that privilege a normative or better way of being. Women's bodily experiences are particular and impact on why women commit to caring for children. These experiences, and the ongoing work of caring for children that many women assume in response to them, can also lead to the development of ways of thinking and acting that challenge the male-dominated sphere of work. It is unhelpful to assume that these relational, concrete and empathetic ways of thinking and acting are natural to women, but it is also unhelpful to assume that they are necessarily in opposition to traditionally masculine ways of being. That is why the language of complementarity is problematic. Even though it appears to argue for a balancing of different ways of thinking and acting, it doesn't offer a vision of synthesis; any kind of rethinking of how, for instance, feelings and rationality can relate. Allowing women to become subjects doesn't mean challenging the subjectivity of men, but looking for a better understanding of mutuality and intersubjectivity, ideas that I think can be learned from revisiting mothering. Accepting sexual differences affirms the theological understanding of the goodness of Creation, but by rejecting a simplistic notion of complementarity I am arguing for a richer and more complex understanding of how differences, including sexual difference, can relate.

It therefore follows that in writing about mothering, sexual difference needs to be acknowledged. It must also be acknowledged that mothering has been and continues to a great extent, to be predominantly a female way of being and doing. This is why a seemingly gender-neutral term like parenting will not do. Yet, I would maintain, the practice of caring for children from infant to adulthood is not innately female: men can do it and can learn from it. It is not possible to delineate how much the significant difference in the physical way that women usually become parents impacts on women's desire and ability to nurture the child they have borne. We cannot assess these experiences outside the considerable complexity of social and cultural

expectations. However, this should not detract from the reality of the difference, nor the understanding that this difference is more than a social construct. Acknowledging this difference does not mean that women and men are necessarily differently able in their ongoing ability to care.

It is, though, through the complex mixture of women's bodily experience, social expectations and cultural history that mothering has been and continues to be a predominantly female practice. Because of this it has been undervalued and under-articulated. I maintain that it is only through understanding mothering, as women have practised it, that we can begin to draw insights from the practice that can help to illuminate aspects of nurture and care in ways that can benefit men and women. In exploring the practice of mothers I will inevitably talk in generalities. This is not to underestimate the vast differences between individual mothers, or to downplay the significance of cultural influences in the practice of caring for and nurturing children. It is however, an attempt to articulate a widespread practice that has been silenced both by essentialist theories of women's innate maternal instinct and by those who, in their laudable quest for sexual equality, have tended to marginalise the sexual differences that are a reality of bearing children and to undervalue a practice that has been so clearly associated with women's oppression. In allowing the use of generalised language to talk about what mothers do, it becomes possible to recognise that the skills learned in the practice of nurturing children are transferable human skills that can offer insights and models for other areas of life.

Chapter Four: Mothering – a relationship of care

Maternal practice begins in a response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a ‘mother’ is to take upon oneself the responsibility of childcare, making its work a regular and substantial part of one’s working life.¹⁷⁹

Thus Sara Ruddick defines mothering in *Maternal Thinking*. In doing so she highlights the sense of response and responsibility involved. In this chapter I will explore the characteristics and quality of the relationship of mothering. Through a better understanding of the maternal relationship and responsibility it will then be possible, in subsequent chapters, to draw analogies between this relationship and the relational characteristics of parish ministry. A central concept of the mother/child relationship, whoever is doing the mothering, is secure attachment. Attachment is a term first coined by John Bowlby and subsequently accepted as a way of describing the development of an ongoing committed relationship between the primary carer or carers and the child. Secure attachment is developed through contingent responsiveness. It involves a relationship in which both mother and child respond and, at its best, develops mutuality and intersubjectivity. This chapter will provide a brief overview of this relationship, exploring the concepts of attachment, being ‘a good enough’ mother and intersubjectivity.

In focusing on the relationship of mothering it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it is also an activity. Mothers care for their children through a complex mix of practical tasks and creative practices. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt’s categories of labour, work and action can offer a framework for thinking about the activities of mothering. The definition of action as the area of human inter-action that creates community and develops webs of human relationships reinforces the premise that developing an appropriate character is central to good practice in this realm. Ruddick helps to understand this character in maternal terms through looking at cognitive capacities and virtues. This chapter will conclude with an exploration of how virtue and practice can be defined to further an understanding of the maternal

¹⁷⁹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 17.

relationship. I will use that understanding in the rest of the thesis to better articulate the virtues and practice that should characterise the parish priest. Ruddick constantly reminds us that to name virtues is not to possess them but to better understand good practice and resist the temptations of degenerate practice.

In the previous chapter it was argued that although the specifically female experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation made it more likely that a biological mother would commit to the responsibility of caring for her child, others could take on the role of mothering. Many aspects of mothering can be shared with others; children can attach to a small number of caring adults who together provide the loving, responsive care that they need. So, in using the term mothering and referring to mothers, I am including those men who are fathers but take on substantial responsibility for childcare and those men or women who through adoption, fostering or employment provide day-to-day care for children to whom they are not related by birth. I acknowledge that there may well be subtle differences in the way biological fathers or mothers relate to the children they care for, but I do not believe these differences are any more significant than the differences that might be found between those who wanted or didn't want children, those of different social or educational status, or those who are financially secure and those who are not. I follow Ruddick in maintaining that despite these myriad differences in the circumstances and expectations of those mothering, they are all engaged in a relationship that demands care. For Ruddick this demand for care is threefold and later in the chapter her theory will be explored more fully. At this point I will simply quote her summary of the demands imposed on anyone doing maternal work.

In this sense of demand, children 'demand' that their lives be preserved and their growth fostered. In addition, the primary social groups with which a mother is identified, whether by force, kinship, or choice, demand that she raise her children in a manner acceptable to them. These three demands – for *preservation*, *growth*, and *social acceptability* – constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

Attachment and intersubjectivity

Central to the practice of mothering is the relationship between the mother and child. I noted in the previous chapter that Freudian theories have played an important part in ideas about child development. Freud focused on the internal and subliminal perceptions of the child: what the infant projected onto his mother, father and other caretakers. Those caring for the child could help or hinder development to a certain extent by how well they met the child's needs at each stage, but Freud's focus was firmly on the internal life of the child and the child's perceptions of others. He understood the pre-oedipal relationship of the mother and infant to be one in which the identities were merged; that is, mother and child experienced themselves as one. As we will see, this concept of merged identity tends to suppress the subjectivity of the mother, who is seen to lose herself in the child.

Freud's work was developed through working with adults reflecting back on their childhood experiences. Melanie Klein, having worked as a Freudian psychoanalyst in Germany, moved to London shortly before Freud's death. She analysed children as well as adults and claimed that the infant's sense of his own separate ego developed earlier than Freud's oedipal stage.¹⁸¹ Klein argued that the young infant, at the nursing stage, was already involved in a complex mixture of love for the mother and fear of losing her, thus beginning to understand her separate reality. These feelings could be experienced as aggression towards the mother. Much of this was focused on the mother's power to withhold the breast. This is Freud's oral stage, where mother and child are still supposed to be merged, but Klein maintained that by this stage the child perceived the mother, or her breast, as a separate object that could be both loved and hated.

Klein therefore pushes back the stage at which a child begins to perceive the mother as other. However, both Freud's and Klein's models of infant development focus entirely on the inner life of the child. They place great importance on the mother's ability to satisfy and frustrate the infant. Yet neither is interested in the mother as a subject. The mother, or other primary

¹⁸¹ Anna Freud, Sigmund's daughter, also analysed children and did not accept Klein's theories. This led to a split between the 'London School' and the 'Viennese School'. Klein's theories were supported by the 'London School', which became the predominate model for psychoanalysis in Britain. The 'Viennese School' remained the stronger influence in USA.

carers, help or hinder the proper development of a separate ego, but they are objects. This development is claimed to be a linear process of individuation. The infant, it is maintained, needs to move from a sense of being at one with the mother in some kind of merged reality, into a differentiation from the mother, which is usually characterised as a form of repudiation and rejection of the maternal. This sense of separation, it is argued, comes through processing the experience of being frustrated when desires are not met. As Chodorow comments:

The infant achieves differentiation of self only insofar as its expectations of primary love are frustrated. If infants were not frustrated, it would not begin to perceive the other as separate.¹⁸²

The process of developing subjectivity is thus understood to arise out of perceived failures in response and a growing independence rather than a developing understanding of response and interdependence.

John Bowlby was a student of Klein's but moved away from the standard psychoanalytical position through his observation of how children *actually* react when they miss their parents. In studying children separated from parents during World War II, he came to profoundly disagree with the psychoanalytical fixation on a child's inner life.¹⁸³ The mother was not, he argued, simply an object to satisfy or delight the child but was, at best, a person who the child could trust to be there and care for them. He developed what is now called 'attachment theory', asserting that from very young, infants try to form a secure relationship to a reliable, caring adult. Separation from this carer is distressing to infants but when attachment is secure, the relationship becomes a base from which to explore the world around them.¹⁸⁴ Bowlby acknowledged that attachment did not necessarily need to be with one adult –

¹⁸² Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 69.

¹⁸³ In 1949, the World Health Organisation commissioned Bowlby to write a report on the mental health of homeless children in Europe. The resulting work, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, was published in 1951, and in it he wrote '... the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment'.

¹⁸⁴ John Bowlby developed the theory of attachment and loss as outlined in a trio of books published between 1969 and 1982.

Attachment and Loss Vol. 1: Attachment, New York, NY: Basic Books, 1969.

Attachment and Loss Vol. 2: Separation, New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973.

Attachment and Loss Vol. 3: Loss, sadness and depression, New York, NY: Basic Books, 1980.

This is now an accepted way of understanding children's relationships to their caregivers. Secure attachments enable children to develop well.

there could be a few reliable carers – what mattered was their nearness and consistency in responding to the child. As I noted in the previous chapter, attachment theory is not the same as ‘bonding’. It is not instantaneous, but develops in the early days, weeks and months of an infant’s life.

Bowlby’s theories were built on by the work of Mary Ainsworth and, later, by that of Daniel Stern.¹⁸⁵ They helped to establish, by careful observation of mothers and children, that the security of attachment is dependent on the *responsiveness* of the carer. As the psychologist Daphne de Marneffe points out, this is now an accepted view of the needs of infants and children.

These widely validated patterns of attachment arise in the interaction of parent and child, and they reflect the impact of the parent’s responses to the child’s attachment-seeking behaviour ... When the caregiver’s demands are in tune with fostering the baby’s security and growth, things work out well for the baby.¹⁸⁶

Bowlby’s work established that an infant requires more than simply being fed and physically cared for; he needs a secure social relationship from the earliest period. Bowlby argued that, in the earliest years, infants learn what to seek and expect from future relationships based on their experience of being cared for. Neglect or inconsistent and disorganised caring in the early years could lead to ongoing issues about relating to others in adulthood. Stern describes the way that this relationship develops at its best as attunement; mother and child tune themselves to each other, learning to read and understand the particularity of this mother and this child.

Modern research continues to affirm the importance of a secure attachment in the early years. Sue Gerhardt’s book *Why Love Matters* draws on current research about infant brain development. A baby’s brain develops rapidly in the early years as pathways and areas of emotional processing are developed. She argues that research points to the fact that the emotional

¹⁸⁵ Mary Ainsworth (1913–99) was a developmental psychologist who worked on attachment theory and developed the strange situation procedure for assessing attachment in children. Daniel Stern is a professor of psychology specialising in the work of early childhood and is noted for *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, New York, NY: Basic Books, 1985.

¹⁸⁶ De Marneffe, Daphne, *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love and the Inner Life*, Virago: London, 2006, p. 77.

capacity of the human brain is shaped by the social experience in early childhood.

The kind of brain that each baby develops is the brain that comes out of his or her particular experiences with people.¹⁸⁷

Drawing on neurological and behavioural research, she maintains that the security of a child's attachment has a physiological affect on the construction of pathways in the brain that enable the child to begin to regulate and manage feelings of excitement, stress and pleasure. These pathways have ongoing implications for how well a child and, later, adult can manage their own emotions and relate emotionally to others. She writes:

So the first 'higher' brain capacities to develop are social, and they develop in response to social experience. Rather than holding up flashcards to a baby, it would be better at this stage of development to simply hold him and enjoy him.¹⁸⁸

Before exploring ideas about attachment and relationship further it is worth noting the work of another child development pioneer who stressed the importance of the mother/child relationship. The paediatrician Donald Winnicott was also influenced by the work of Melanie Klein, but he, too, focused on the actual relationships the child experienced rather than the inner projections. Writing in the 1950s and '60s, Winnicott challenged the way that psychoanalysts focused on the child in isolation, saying there is 'no such thing as a baby', there is only a baby and a mother in a relationship. In observing mothers and children in healthy relationships he noted what he called 'maternal preoccupation' – a focusing on the baby so that the mother came to know and respond to *her particular* child. He referred to the concept of 'holding', which includes physical holding but encompasses far more. He wrote:

It includes the whole routine of care throughout the day and night, and is not the same with any two infants because it is part of the infant, and no two infants are alike. Also it follows the minute day-to-day changes

¹⁸⁷ Sue Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters*, Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2004, p. 38.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

belonging to the infant's growth and development, both physical and psychological.¹⁸⁹

It is important to note here the particularity of each child, 'no two infants are alike' and the constantly changing nature of the infant. In contrast to Klein's elision of the mother and the breast, Winnicott argued that the relationship was based on a much more complex and subtle mixture of attending to the child. Winnicott *did* think that this ability to focus on the child was instinctual but, as we saw in the last chapter, to describe this process as instinctual seems to imply that it just happens. Naomi Stadlen, a modern observer of mothers and babies, maintains the way a mother learns about her child from simply holding him doesn't fit a definition of an instinct.

They sit quietly for long stretches of time because this seems to keep their babies contented. It may feel like doing nothing at the time. But afterwards mothers realise that they have learned a great deal. It is often called 'instinctive knowledge' or 'intuitive knowledge' when the mother has acquired it. Perhaps this is because it is usually non-verbal and therefore *like* instinct and intuition. But instinct and intuition are quick reactions, whereas maternal understanding grows slowly.¹⁹⁰

Winnicott's work has also been important for maintaining that infants do not need a perfect response from their mothers. Still following a linear process of individuation in understanding a sense of self, he believed that the child needed to develop the capacity to separate himself from the mother, so the mother's failure at times to respond to the child were part of a healthy relationship. Mothers needed, he claimed, to be 'good enough' rather than perfect. That is, consistent enough in responding appropriately to the child. The gradual acceptance of this from the child would allow him both to trust that enough needs would be met but also learn to comfort himself.

The good enough mother ... starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less

¹⁸⁹ Winnicott, Donald, Woods, *The Maturational Process and the Facilitating Environment*, London: Hogarth, 1965, p. 49.

¹⁹⁰ Stadlen, *What Mothers Do*, p. 93.

and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure.¹⁹¹

It is interesting to note the use of the word failure. As we look further at how mothering can be understood, we will return to the concept of failure. Winnicott's focus was on the perceived perception of the child and he still assumed a sense of merged identity between mother and child. In his understanding, the fallibility of the mother, her lack of perfection, enables the child to begin to experience his separate identity. Winnicott's work has been important in acknowledging the importance of maternal care and acknowledging that it should be marked by continuity, reliability, graduated adaptation and 'provision for realising the child's creative impulse'. With a good enough mother, the infant will grow and eventually become a secure adult.

Mothers with babies are dealing with a developing changing situation; the baby starts off not knowing about the world, and by the time they have finished their job the baby is grown up into someone who knows about the world and can find a way to live in it, and even to take part in the way it behaves, what a tremendous development.¹⁹²

Winnicott acknowledges that mothers do not do this work alone; they, too, are part of a wider social network of support and care, and child-rearing can be a shared work. Yet what he is stressing is the centrality of a relationship in which a mother or another takes on the responsibility of care.

Important as the mother is in Winnicott's and Bowlby's theories, the relationship is viewed from the child's point of view with little exploration of what the mother gains from the relationship. The mother or carer is seen as one who plays a vital part in helping or hindering the child's attachment and sense of security. Yet assumptions that her part in this relationship is instinctual or intuitive, as we argued before, fail to credit her with an active role beyond the fulfilling of the necessary tasks. Jessica Benjamin's work is helpful in suggesting that this lack of interest in the mother's side of the relationship arises out of the continuing belief that the mother and baby have a merged

¹⁹¹ Winnicott, Donald Woods, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*, London: Pelican, 1964, p. 44.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

sense of self, which the baby has to grow out of into his own subjectivity and the mother has to let go of. In *The Bonds of Love* she challenges accepted psychoanalytical ideas about a merged state of mother and baby, arguing convincingly that this is not how most mothers view the relationship.¹⁹³ Winnicott had argued that mothers saw their baby as ‘a bit of my own self’ but this is an assumption about mothers, not a reflection on their experience. Benjamin argues that a baby is not an extension of the mother’s self; he is always recognised as a separate, albeit dependent, self. I would concur with this from my own experience and quote Stadlen’s observations of babies and their mothers.

Mothers and babies behave, from the start, as if they recognise each other as separate people ... They may describe themselves and their babies as ‘we’, for example in a sentence like: ‘We’ve had a really nice day together.’ The whole point of this kind of sentence is that it describes two different people who are learning to understand each other and to get along. The mother’s use of ‘we’ does not deny her baby’s separateness, but affirms that they have found a way to be together nevertheless.¹⁹⁴

Like Stadlen, Benjamin observes that mothers treat babies and children as others; unique individuals who show unique characteristics from the earliest days.¹⁹⁵ Mothers are looking to build a relationship from the outset; Benjamin observes that mothers learn to know their babies by looking for a response of recognition from the child.

In this early interaction, the mother can already identify the first signs of mutual recognition: I recognise you as my baby who recognises me.¹⁹⁶

...

From the beginning there are always (at least) two subjects.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 46-48.

¹⁹⁴ Stadlen, *What Mothers Do*, p. 100.

¹⁹⁵ Although the experience of pregnancy is not necessary for good mothering, it can be argued that one of the ways it prepares women is through the complex reality of carrying another person in one’s body. For most women, once the movement of the baby begins to be felt, the reality of the otherness of the child is established. Mothers ‘talk’ to this other and assign characteristics to the movements. The sense that what is being carried in the body is not simply a part of the woman but is a person develops through pregnancy. It is, of course, only after birth that the reality of the person can be properly encountered, but the sense of separate subjectivity begins before that.

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Benjamin's view of mutual recognition is affirmed by the psychologist de Marneffe. In *Maternal Desire* she reflects on current research into the mother/child relationship:

Contemporary researchers view babies and mothers as engaged in complex interactions from birth ... This mutual responsiveness of baby and caregiver, of self and other, runs throughout the baby's development ... An important theme underscored by this mother–infant research is that human psychological experience does not follow a linear progression from fusion to autonomy; rather, feelings of oneness and separateness oscillate throughout life.¹⁹⁸

De Marneffe suggests that there is a tendency to confuse the importance of attachment with psychoanalytical ideas of a merged state.

It is important to distinguish between a baby's desire to *maintain proximity*, on the one hand, and his desire *to deny that the mother is a separate person*, on the other (if he indeed has such a desire), conflating them distorts how we see the mother's relationship to her child.¹⁹⁹

It also, I would argue, undermines the activity necessary from the mother in getting to know the child. A merged sense assumes that the mother has no need to actively seek to know her child and also perpetuates ideas that a mother is devastated by the child's desire to break this merged state and therefore tries to keep the child as a dependent infant.

Central to Benjamin's understanding of the relationship is the subjectivity of mother and child. The relationship is, she claims, based on growing mutual recognition and therefore needs to be understood as intersubjective from the start. Such a theory allows for two subjects to be present and it challenges psychoanalytical assumptions about the necessity of individuation through separation.

It [intersubjective theory] focuses, not on a linear movement from oneness to separateness, but on the paradoxical balance between them.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ De Marneffe *Maternal Desire*, p. 67.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁰⁰ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 49.

It maintains that for a child to develop a healthy sense of self he needs to recognise the self that is his mother. The games that are played and the mother's speech patterns in talking to her pre-lingual child all presuppose a mutuality and give and take.²⁰¹ Children learn to understand that there are similarities with the mother but also differences.

One of the most important insights of intersubjective theory is that sameness and difference exist simultaneously in mutual recognition. This insight allows us to counter the argument that human beings fundamentally desire the impossible absolutes of 'oneness' and perfection with the moderate view that things don't have to be perfect, that, in fact, it is better if they are not.²⁰²

This provides a more realistic and affirming language for mothers than Winnicott's use of the term 'failure'. In relationships, desires and expectations don't always coincide. Even from the earliest years mother and baby need to develop complex patterns of negotiation and compromise as the needs of each, and of other subjects in the broader family, are prioritised and met.

Yet despite Benjamin's rejection of a linear movement towards separation, she stresses the fragility of the intersubjective relationship, especially at the toddler stage, which she labels 'rapprochement'. At this point she sees a struggle between the toddler's sense of self and the mother, which can lead to a breakdown in mutuality. I will return to her insights on this when exploring power, control and the virtue of humility. At this point it is important to take from Benjamin the definition of the mother/child relationship as intersubjective, based on recognition of the reality and uniqueness of each subject. And also the sense that maturity is not a linear process from merged identity and dependence to autonomy and independence, but a far more complex process of mutual interdependence and recognition of the importance of relationships. As I noted in the previous chapter, from Irigaray's writing, where mothers are seen simply as those who meet desires and needs, as in much psychoanalytical theory, they lose subjectivity and are silenced. They

²⁰¹ Work has been done on studying the way mothers talk to their children before they develop speech. 'Motherese' has rhythmic musical patterns that can be seen across cultural and language differences. This involves communicating with the child, not simply talking at her. See de Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, pp. 96–7.

²⁰² Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 47.

become mythologised as good or bad mothers and, as Ruddick comments, this devalues the reality of maternal work.

The myth that mothers are naturally good or wickedly bad inspires contempt for the actual work that mothers do.²⁰³

Benjamin argues that the mother/child relationship is important, not simply for stabilising the emerging ego, but because mutual relationships are satisfying to humans.

But very early on we find that recognition between persons – understanding and being understood, being in attunement – is becoming an end in itself.²⁰⁴

As human beings we are social and find value from social relationships. De Marneffe asserts that in fact mothers can find their own sense of self and subjectivity enhanced through the relationship with her child. She is concerned that Benjamin, especially in her focus on ‘rapprochement’, implies that the mother’s sense of subjectivity needs to be maintained by her willingness to leave her child; that her subjectivity is derived from outside the maternal relationship and needs to be, in some sense, protected from it.

For the most part, Benjamin conceives a mother’s independent identity in terms of those desires and aspirations that are distinct from her activities as caretaker for her child. She is not primarily concerned with how caring for children might express a woman’s autonomous desires rather than thwart them.²⁰⁵

While acknowledging that experiences aside from mothering feed into and shape a mother’s sense of self, she argues that the experience of caring for children can itself be a means of developing a mother’s sense of subjectivity.

In fact, de Marneffe claims that the mother–child relationship is one in which mothers can find purpose and meaning. She acknowledges that child-rearing has been and may still be oppressive for women who feel they have no

²⁰³ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 32.

²⁰⁴ Benjamin, Jessica, *Like Subjects, Love Objects; Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 32.

²⁰⁵ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, p. 75.

choice or little support. She also acknowledges that many aspects of domesticity have been elided with childcare in ways that are not helpful for articulating maternal work. Yet she is concerned that challenging the way that motherhood can be oppressive has, in many instances, colluded in undervaluing and marginalising all that can be rewarding in maternal work. In *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love and the Inner Life* she seeks to redress this balance, articulating why mothering can be fulfilling work that enhances a sense of self. Looking again at research on attachment in infants she comments:

In minutely describing the process by which mothers and babies together create a satisfying pattern of interaction, the research brings into focus some of the capacities that mothers bring to these interactions. And these capacities conform, in all relevant particulars, to the characteristics we commonly associate with a sense of self; the ability to reflect, to interpret, to enact goals, to respond flexibly and creatively, to share pleasure.²⁰⁶

She talks about mothering as a practice that those engaged in it can find meaningful:

Mothering is one of many kinds of work perceived as meaningful by its practitioners even when society doesn't reward them handsomely. Artists are rarely well paid, but people continue to make art because it has intrinsic value that is of greater meaning to them than the rewards of the marketplace.²⁰⁷

In an interview discussing her book de Marneffe reiterates her view that it is in and through the relationship of care that mothers can find their subjectivity. I note, in the light of the previous chapter, that this involves resisting oppositional statements and finding new synthesised ways of viewing the world.

The purpose of my book was to foreground the mother's experience of relatedness to her child. My essential point was that too often in discussions of motherhood, a woman's self-assertion and her care for others have been artificially placed in opposition. This doesn't capture the way that mothering puts women in a different subjective position, in that caring for their child and meeting the child's needs and desires often comes to be experienced as a way of meeting their own desire ... In other words, it is important not to limit our discussion of a mother's sense of self to those things she wants for herself apart from her baby.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

What she wants with and for her baby is integral to what she wants for herself. In some ways this is not a simple idea, because we are so used to either/or thinking: Either it's for the baby or it's for the mother. Both culturally and psychologically, it is so hard for us to stay in the realm of relatedness, to hold in tension the reality of two whole people, in a relationship.²⁰⁸

A relationship of caring

It is this sense of mothering as a rewarding, intersubjective relationship that provides the basis for re-evaluating maternal work. It is a relationship that is aiming towards mutuality but it is also a relationship that is asymmetric, in which the child is dependent and in need of care. Before looking further at mothering and the idea of it as a meaningful practice, I want to explore what is meant by caring and how, despite this asymmetry, caring is intersubjective. The ethicist and educational writer Nel Noddings in *Caring*²⁰⁹ and in a number of subsequent books, explores these ideas. She writes:

I started out thinking of care as a primary, even universal human attribute. After discussion with Jim Gibbs, a Stanford anthropologist, I was convinced that caring may not be universal. What is universal, Gibbs said, is the desire to be cared for, the desire for caring relations. There is nothing moral about the desire in itself. But its universality makes it reasonable to posit caring relation as a primary good.²¹⁰

For Noddings, care is an intersubjective relationship. She speaks about the one-caring and the one cared-for; they have different roles in the relationship, but both contribute. The one-caring is motivated by feelings for the other and these lead to action that involves attending to the other's needs. This 'feeling for the other' Noddings calls 'engrossment'. It involves recognising the reality of the other and a temporary motivational displacement. The focus shifts from self to the reality of the one cared- for. This engrossment is about attending to the other and allowing the priority of their needs.

²⁰⁸ 'Maternal Desire', an interview with Daphne de Marneffe, published on www.moothermovement.org (15th March 2011)

²⁰⁹ Noddings, Nel *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

²¹⁰ Noddings, Nel, *Educating Moral People*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2002, p. 88.

It therefore follows that there is in caring ‘a moving away from self’. Noddings quotes Gabriel Marcel, who calls this attitude ‘disposability’.²¹¹ But Noddings states ‘one who is disposable recognises that she has a self to invest, to give ... She is *present* to the carer’. So this moving away from self is not about self-abnegation, but about a shift in focus. The one-caring focuses her *attention* on the one cared-for and the reality of her situation. I will look in more detail at the importance of attention when I explore Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking*. At this point it is worth noting that attention is about being present for the other and recognising their particularity. Noddings writes:

Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s. When we care, we consider the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves.²¹²

This attentive focus needs to be received by the cared-for who, in recognising the attitude of the one-caring, has the freedom to respond. Thus reception of caring is not passive but involves an active response. It is important that the one cared-for recognises that they are being treated as a subject and not as a problem, which would objectify them. In confirming that the one-caring has recognised the need and the reality of the other, the caring action can be received as care. This is the reciprocity in the relationship and is confirmed by the sense that the care given has been received in a way that helps or enhances the other. Noddings maintains that:

What the cared-for gives to the relation either in direct response to the one-caring or in personal delight or in happy growth before her eyes is genuine reciprocity.²¹³

It follows that this relationship is reciprocal but also asymmetrical. In order to maintain the reciprocity, the relationship needs to be *intersubjective* despite the asymmetry. That means the one-caring needs a sense of their own self and an ability to recognise the feelings and needs of the other as a genuine

²¹¹ ‘Disposability, the readiness to bestow and spend oneself and make oneself available, and its contrary indisposability’, quoted in Noddings, *Caring*, p. 19.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

subject. The moving away from self to focus on the other is a *temporary* process, a necessity of the particular act of caring, not a requirement of the ongoing relationship. Some relationships of care will mean that one person is most often in the role of the one-caring. This is true in mothering, where the dependence of the child shapes the balance of the caring, but this doesn't mean that the relationship is not mutual in the sense that each finds themselves recognised and enhanced through their interactions. Mothers do not have to lose their sense of self in meeting the needs of their dependent child. Caring is not passive, but active, as de Marneffe writes:

Is action in the world – political, economic, and artistic action – of a fundamentally different character from action whose goal is the care of intimate others? Are our active energies rendered passive simply because they are directed at caring for others?²¹⁴

Noddings and de Marneffe are both arguing for a reappraisal of the way we view caring; seeing it as active, purposeful and rewarding. Both write about the possibility of delight and joy through seeing another flourish as a result of genuine caring. De Marneffe sees the caring role of mothering as a creative practice. She comments:

Like any creative practice rooted in human necessity, at its best, caring for a child involves physical engagement aligned with intention towards a valued purpose.²¹⁵

Labour, work and action – insights from Hannah Arendt

De Marneffe's quote above points to mothering as being both a physical process of caring, which inevitably involves a lot of mundane tasks, and also a creative, meaningful activity. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt's definitions of human activity offer a framework for exploring these aspects of mothering further. They can also help to identify why mothering is so often seen as non-work or menial work. In *The Human Condition* Arendt divides human activity into three categories. Labouring deals with the most immediate

²¹⁴ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, p. 32.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

servicing of human needs, while work, or fabrication, provides the opportunities for making lasting objects and products. Finally, action is about human interaction – the possibilities of speech, relationships and politics – in the broadest sense of the word. I find it easiest to begin with her definition of work, perhaps because this is closest to the way society currently understands and values productive activity.

Work for Arendt is about the fabrication of things. She distinguishes between the ‘work of our hands and the labour of our body’. Work is often about fabrication. It is skilled and is carried out under the guidance of a model or blueprint, which precedes the work and survives the work, enabling it to be used again for the fabrication of more products. This allows for multiplication, which she defines as very different from repetition. There is a beginning and an end, and the end is a product that has some kind of longevity and stability.

To have a definite beginning and a definite, predictable end is the mark of fabrication, which through this characteristic alone distinguishes itself from all other human activities.²¹⁶

Craftsman and architects or master builders are ideal examples of workers. A cabinetmaker starts with a blueprint and ends with a piece of furniture. He can then, if he chooses, use the same blueprint to make another piece that will be the same. Work is essentially individual or, as Arendt describes it, isolated, in that it needs an individual to design the blueprint and direct the work according to the model. Delegation is possible and often necessary; the craftsman may well involve others in carrying out aspects of the job under his direction; but it is very different from teamwork, which, Arendt claims, is both alien and ‘destructive to workmanship’²¹⁷. Work is about wresting things out of nature and about the end justifying the means.

Here it is indeed true that the end justifies the means; it does more, it produces and organises them. The end justifies the violence done to nature to win the material, as the wood justifies killing the tree and the table justifies destroying the wood. Because of the end product, tools are designed and implements invented, and the same end product

²¹⁶ Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958 (2nd edition 1998), p. 144.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

organises the work process ... everything is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and for nothing else.²¹⁸

The freedom for humans to work as fabricators involves others in engaging in labouring, for in contrast to work, labouring is about the activity involved in maintaining human existence. It is about maintaining the necessities of life.

The least durable of tangible things are those needed for the life process itself.²¹⁹

Whatever labour produces is meant to be fed into the human life process almost immediately, and this consumption, regenerating the life process, produces – or rather, reproduces – new ‘labour power’ needed for the further sustenance of the body.²²⁰

Labouring therefore needs to be understood as cyclical and repetitive. It also lends itself to being shared or, Arendt would say, it is collective. This means that individuals can pool their resources and can, when exhausted, pass on the tasks to another. They share the workload by adding their labour together or passing the burdens on. There are no blueprints in labouring, though there are clearly patterns that can be followed, but these are always open to modification. There is often no clear sense of where things begin and end. Anything produced is non-durable, or any kind of durability is incidental. The ongoing point of labouring is the sustenance of life and it is driven by necessity. Domestic work is labour, as is agriculture: both involve that repetitive, cyclical process aimed at keeping life going. Arendt points out that it is this area of activity that humans have, in the past, allocated to slaves or servants and therefore it is judged to be menial.

For Arendt, labouring is the lowest form of human activity and the highest form is action, which involves speech and the creation of webs of human relationships. It is in acting and speaking that humans explore both their unique distinctiveness and their plurality.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 153.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 96.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

Actions and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: 'Who are you?'²²¹

Communities and webs of relationships develop through human action and the ability to talk about it. The telling of our own story and the interaction of that story with the stories of others is how we make sense of action, and of who we are and who others are. These stories are 'not made up' and are in some sense intangible; they are the 'product' of action but are ongoing, unfinished, and they are always being shaped by new beginnings, new people who are born into the world. The two necessary components of action, according to Arendt, are the ability to forgive and the ability to make promises. This is because action is creative and contingent; there needs to be the ability to forgive mistakes and the willingness to trust others in order for communities and relationships to flourish. Action, Arendt reminds us, is about morality, about how we choose to act and how we make sense of our interactions. It is in our actions – our praxis – that relationships and communities are built up and politics in the widest sense of that term finds its place.

Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act. Action and speech need the surrounding presence of others no less than fabrication needs the surrounding presence of nature for its material, and of a world in which to place the finished product. Fabrication is surrounded by and in constant contact with the world: action and speech are surrounded by and in constant contact with the web of the acts and words of other men.²²²

It is work or fabrication, she concludes, that offers the model of the autonomous, isolated man. Labouring involves unthinking co-operation and action involves the kinds of intersubjective relationships central to this thesis.

As the analogy is explored in more detail in the subsequent chapters I will make use of Arendt's categories. But here it's important to note that mothering involves a mixture of labouring and action with very little work or fabrication. It is not involved with making a product. This is why ideas about work that value blueprints, formulas and measurable targets are unhelpful in

²²¹ Ibid., p178

²²² Ibid., p. 188.

assessing maternal practice and one of the reasons it is often undervalued. The labouring aspects are very apparent in the physical caring the child needs and these often overshadow the ‘action’: the meaningful activity of helping the child to develop their sense of being a person in relationship. It is easy to make a list of the tasks that are involved in the labouring aspects of mothering, but harder to articulate the action. This is why, as Stadlen suggests in her book title, much of what mothers do can ‘look like nothing’.

Practice and virtue

In order to better articulate this action and develop the sense of mothering as a meaningful activity, the philosopher Sara Ruddick describes mothering as a practice. Her motivation for writing is to show that the kind of caring activities that make up mothering are not antipathetic to reason and rationality but instead encourage particular ways of thinking. A large part of the ‘nothing’ that mothers are doing involves developing ways of thinking and acting that shape good practice. They need to develop the capacity to think and act in concrete situations, deal with contingencies and maintain a secure, realistic relationship with a growing, developing, changeable human being. These ways of thinking and making decisions do not often conform to the kind of abstract reasoning that has been prioritised, but Ruddick argues that we need to value these different ways of thinking as appropriate and necessary for work that is focused on human relationships. One of the most important aspects of Ruddick’s work is her assertion that the demands of maternal work are all good but often not compatible. Thus it is necessary to hold together the reality of conflicting ‘goods’. There are rarely right answers. Instead, mothers constantly make judgements about what to prioritise; how to protect their child while helping her take the necessary risks for growth and development, and at the same time educate her about the limits and expectations of the society she is part of.

In *Maternal Thinking* Ruddick uses the philosophical terminology of a practice, which she defines thus:

Practices are collective human activities distinguished by the aims that identify them and by the consequent demands made on practitioners committed to those aims. The aims or goals that define a practice are so central or ‘constructive’ that in the absence of the goal you would not have the practice. I express this intrinsic dependency when I say that to engage in a practice means to be committed to meeting its demands.²²³

In using the terminology of a practice she describes how maternal work requires particular ways of thinking and particular virtues.

These demands shape, and are in turn shaped by, the metaphysical attitudes, cognitive capacities, and identification of virtues that make up maternal thinking²²⁴.

Before looking at the demands, virtues and temptations she connects to mothering I will explore more generally the use of these terms by discussing Aristotle’s definition of virtues and Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory of practice.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the importance of virtues, the characteristics that enable a man to live a ‘good’ life. His assumption was that actions are directed towards an end or *telos* and this end was a universal good.

Every act and every inquiry, every action and choice seems to aim at some good; whence the good has rightly been defined as that at which all things aim.²²⁵

The aim or *telos* of a good life for Aristotle was defined as *eudaimonia* and a man needed to possess the virtues in order to achieve that end.

The virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward that *telos*.²²⁶

He argued that virtues are necessary because many choices in life require judgement: choosing what is the right thing to do, at the right time, in the right way. The necessity of judging, and choosing well, arises because it is not possible to achieve *eudaimonia* simply by applying a set of rules. Life is full of

²²³ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 14.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

²²⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by H. Rackham, London: William Heinemann 1926, p. 3.

²²⁶ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*, London: Duckworth, 1981; 3rd ed 2007. p. 148.

contingencies. Altering circumstances and applying rules would not necessarily lead to ‘good’ choices. Following rules may at times lead to good outcomes, but the individual will not necessarily have thought about or understood why they are good. Virtues involve the ability to think about why something is appropriate. Unlike rules, virtues involve finding the appropriate mathematical mean between two corresponding vices in a given situation. Thus courage is a mean between rashness and timidity, but finding this mean and understanding how to be courageous in a given situation is contingent on the concrete circumstances. What might be judged courageous in one setting may be seen as rash in another; the criterion for assessing the choice is not formulaic.

For Aristotle it is the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* that underpins contingent choice, enabling an individual to make the appropriate, virtuous response to particular circumstances. This virtue is intellectual but, because it deals with contingencies, it cannot be learned in abstract as other intellectual virtues can. It needs to be learned through experience and the ability to reflect on that experience. It is a way of thinking that is always associated with action, for the exercise of this virtue is about judging how to *act* appropriately in specific situations in order that these actions are in accordance with the overall aim, which in Aristotle’s case was *eudaimonia*. *Phronesis* is concerned with the rightness of the means used to further the end and, as it is concerned with changeable and contingent situations, it is a necessary virtue in speaking about human interactions both in the household and in the wider community.

In revisiting Aristotle’s ideas about virtue it is particularly worth noting this concept of virtue as a ‘mean’. The tradition has developed – within the Church and beyond – of listing virtues alongside a list of vices or sins. This listing of contrary virtues and vices implies that virtue can be understood simply as an opposite to a sin or vice. Thus humility is often understood as the virtue contrary to pride. However, the concept of opposites loses the subtlety of an Aristotelian ‘mean’ and can lead to a mistaken assumption that anything contrary to pride is thus humility. As MacIntyre says of Aristotle’s definition of virtues:

For each virtue therefore there are two corresponding vices. And what it is to fall into a vice cannot be adequately specified independently of

circumstances: the very same action which would in one situation be liberality could in another be prodigality and in a third meanness. Hence judgement has an indispensable role in the life of the virtuous man which it does not and could not have in, for example, the life of the merely law-abiding or rule-abiding man.²²⁷

When we return to Ruddick's use of virtue we will see that she understands this Aristotelian mean. Each of the virtues that she identifies in the practice of mothering is explored alongside its 'degenerate forms'.

For Aristotle, the good end of a man's life, the *telos*, was expressed as a universal aim. However, it wasn't open to all; his particular worldview meant that only the free, educated man was capable of living in such a way. In revisiting Aristotle's virtues, the philosopher MacIntyre retains a teleological understanding, but sets that within the concept of human practices. In living a life that aims to be good, people may be engaged in a number of practices. Each practice has a *telos*; the *telos* is purposeful, but may be specific to the practice. It follows that there can be different practices aiming at different particular 'goods', with different equally valuable aims. In each case the practice provides the background and context for the 'good', and allows for the possibility of conflicting goods.

In defining the concept of 'good', MacIntyre distinguishes between the 'internal goods' of a practice and the external goods. The latter can be achieved in a number of ways; they are not specific to the practice. For example, an architect could achieve fame and fortune through his work, but he could have achieved fame and fortune through a different area of expertise. These external goods are also seen as the possession or property of the individual. To achieve fame is to do so as oneself; competition means that if one has more fame or fortune another has less. In contrast, internal goods can only be achieved through the specific practice, they can only really be judged by those experiencing the practice and although they may arise through competing to excel, 'It is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice.'²²⁸ Virtues, in MacIntyre's understanding, are acquired human qualities that enable a practitioner to achieve the goods internal to the practice.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 154.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 191.

Thus virtues are related to the internal good of the practice. They are the characteristics that help a practitioner to act in a way that enhances the aims of the practice. And although these virtues may be characteristics that further the aims in many practices, they need to be understood within the demands of a given practice. These virtues may lead someone to act in ways that do not fulfil external goods, i.e., they may not always appear to serve an individual's self-interest for success or wealth, but they aim for what is good within the practice. Thus a virtuous practitioner will make choices that lead to better practice; his aim is to fulfil the demands of the practice to the best of his ability.

Virtues then stand in a different relationship to external and to internal goods. The possession of the virtues – and not only of their semblance and simulacra – is necessary to achieve the latter; yet possession of the virtues may perfectly well hinder us in achieving external goods.²²⁹

Aristotle's position did assumed that conflict arose out of failures in virtue that were character flaws. MacIntyre suggests that by understanding the possibility of multiple good practices conflict is not necessarily a failure or sign of a flawed character. This means that conflict can arise out of the demands of different practices and competing 'goods'. Conflict can thus be part of the process of honing a practice. MacIntyre is clear that this is not an argument for relativism, for although the characteristics of a given virtue need to be understood in the light of the particular practice, they also need to be qualities that contribute to the goodness of the whole of an individual's life and, that can be recognised as good, within an ongoing social tradition. As noted above, Ruddick goes further than this and says that conflicting goods are part of the practice of mothering. The internal conflict about which good to prioritise is a defining aspect of the practice. It is because of the need to make contingent choices about which good to prioritise that maternal practice requires virtues that can enable the development of wisdom so that the conflicting goods do not undermine the ongoing purpose of the practice.

The wisdom of a practice comes in part from the tradition. Practices are inherently social and they are collectively shaped and defined. As MacIntyre writes:

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 196.

It was important when I characterised the concept of a practice to notice that practices always have histories and that at any given moment what a practice is depends on a mode of understanding which has been transmitted often through many generations. And thus, insofar as the virtues sustain the relationships required for practices, they have to sustain relationships to the past – and to the future – as well as in the present. But the traditions through which particular practices are transmitted and reshaped never exist in isolation from larger social traditions.²³⁰

The tradition of a practice is not to be confused with any kind of rigid conservatism. MacIntyre speaks of a living tradition, which is,

... an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.²³¹

The combination of this living tradition and the presence of other practitioners inform and shape an individual's practice, as they participate in this ongoing 'argument' or conversation about what is good practice. Thus understanding and making good choices about how to act is inherently social. Clearly, for some practices the discussion of what makes for 'good practice' will be more straightforward than for others and the tradition more clearly articulated. MacIntyre talks about various professions and sports and these often have well-articulated rules and mechanisms for debating and revising the practice. The living tradition of a practice like mothering is far more complex. It is though, according to MacIntyre's definition, possible to understand mothering or sustaining family life as a practice.

In the ancient and medieval worlds the creation and sustaining of human communities – of households, cities, nations – is generally taken to be a practice in the sense in which I have defined it. Thus the range of practices is wide; arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept.²³²

In *Dependent Rational Animals* MacIntyre acknowledges that in order to live and make choices in a virtuous way, individuals need to develop the

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 221.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 222.

²³² Ibid., p. 188.

capacity to be ‘independent practical reasoners’. This is akin to the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis*, that ability to learn to reflect on experience in order to act well contingently. He acknowledges that this is learned initially in the home through a relationship of recognition and responsiveness:

The ordinary good mother provides the child with a setting in which the child is secure enough to test out, often destructively, what can be relied upon in its experience and what cannot. In so doing the child becomes self-aware, aware of itself as the object of recognition by a mother who is responsive to its needs, who is resilient and nonretaliating in the face of its destructiveness, rather than insisting that the child adapt to her.²³³

He, like the other writers I have discussed, maintains that maturity isn’t a movement away from dependence towards autonomy. He writes that ‘acknowledgement of dependence is the key to independence’. He would argue that mature practical reasoners continue to be involved in complex networks of relationships that involve dependencies of caring and being cared-for.

We know from whom it is that we have received and therefore to whom we are in debt. But often we do not know to whom it is that we will be called upon to give: our parents and teachers perhaps, if they survive; our children, if we have children; those whom contingency and chance put into our care. And we do not know just what they will need. We can set in advance no limit to those possible needs, just as those who cared for us could at an earlier time have set no limits to what our needs might have been.²³⁴

So developing the capacity to think and act well arises out of being cared for. It is in and through relationships of reciprocity that human beings become mature.

Mothering as a practice

The practice of mothering shapes the relationship of care in which a child or children grow to maturity. It aims, in MacIntyre’s terms, to enable children to develop, for themselves, the capacity to think and act virtuously as independent moral reasoners. For Ruddick, the starting point for looking at the virtues that shape good practice in mothering is in understanding its three constituent

²³³ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings need the Virtues*, London: Duckworth, 1999, p. 90.

²³⁴ Ibid., p.100.

demands. The first of these is to preserve the life of the child. The second is to 'nurture its emotional and intellectual growth'. The first involves keeping a child safe, meeting its physical needs and can be characterised by 'holding'. The second involves broadening the child's world, allowing her to take risks, to explore and consequently can be characterised by a loosening of the hold. Ruddick's third demand is more complex and, as she notes, is made not by the needs of the child 'but by the social groups of which a mother is a member'. Ruddick calls this acceptability: the aim of a mother to bring up a child who can find a secure place in the world of the family and the world beyond the family.

These demands, Ruddick claims, require disciplined ways of thinking, even if many mothers would not use this terminology. At times, as I have already noted, these demands conflict. To keep a child safe means minimising risk, while to foster growth means allowing risk-taking. To foster growth means to encourage the pushing of boundaries, but to maintain acceptability means helping the child to recognise where certain boundaries exist. To preserve a child's unique identity may mean challenging social norms on behalf of the child and even challenging the mother's own set of beliefs and values. These issues present the one mothering with constant choices shaped by the question: What is the best thing for this child, at this moment, in this situation? She is dealing with contingencies and needs to act appropriately both contextually and within the wider understanding of what it is to be a good, or 'good enough', mother. Even though, in many cases, these thoughts may not be clearly articulated, Ruddick maintains that they can be understood as a discipline of thought particular to the demands of mothering.

The discipline of maternal thought, like other disciplines, establishes criteria for determining failure and success, sets priorities, and identifies virtues that the discipline requires. Like any other work, mothering is prey to characteristic temptations that it must identify. To describe the capacities, judgements, metaphysical attitudes, and values of maternal thought presumes not maternal achievement, but a *conception* of achievement.²³⁵

²³⁵ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 24.

It is important to note that what she offers is a *conception* of achievement. As Ruddick constantly asserts, to name the virtues is not to claim to possess them but to begin to articulate the complex temptations and aims that are part of maternal practice. Clearly, there will always be cultural differences in aspects of what is understood as good mothering; however, Ruddick claims, and I agree, the demands she outlines can be understood across cultural differences. Cultural and social factors will lead to different ways of expressing the love, care and discipline involved in maternal practice. Yet, for all mothers, these have to be worked out within contingent circumstances with particular children who are undergoing changes as they develop and grow. As Noddings comments:

Suppose we start with Ruddick's maternal interests ... A maternal figure (female or male) must respond to three great demands (or needs) of the child: preservation, growth, and acceptability. These needs are both practical and universal, but their explication – their filling out – involves us in personal, cultural, and practical complexities.²³⁶

Ruddick's language of maternal practice and associated virtues offers a way of articulating how mothers aim to respond appropriately to their children in the concrete situations of everyday life. She is affirming that maternal practice involves ways of reasoned thinking and acting and cannot be described in formulaic language. In the previous chapter I concluded that mothering cannot be reduced to a biological instinct but requires a process of learning through practice. Constant choices of action or inaction – understood as a conscious choice not to act – need to be made and this is where the language of virtues is useful. As MacIntyre writes about these kinds of contingent choices:

Such choices demand judgement and the exercise of the virtues requires therefore a capacity to judge and to do the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way.²³⁷

²³⁶ Noddings, Nel, *Starting at Home*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, p. 62.

²³⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 150.

I noted that this ability to act well contingently is akin to the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis*. Ruddick does not use this terminology. She does, however, write about judging tenderly and learning to reflect through developing conscientiousness. These abilities, and the thinking necessary to respond appropriately, could be conveyed by the virtue of *phronesis*. Jean Porter, using the translation ‘prudence’, defines it thus:

A virtue of the practical intellect, which has as its distinctive matter the application of general principles to particular actions with an aim to the overall perfection of the agent’s life. As such, prudence is necessarily concerned with contingent singulars, and even at its most perfect, the deliberations of prudence lack the certainty of science, which deals with universals ...

The prudent person applies moral rules through a process of judgement rather than employing a decision procedure similar to that of a mathematician, because *there is no other way to apply rules* of this kind.²³⁸

This contrast between prudent judgement and formulaic rules does not imply an insufficiency in the former, but affirms that when dealing with contingent singulars, the certainty of science is not an option.

It also follows that acting well in contingent circumstances involves the capacity to think in concrete ways. I noted, when looking at issues of gender, that those who assert differences between men and women tend to stress women’s tendency to think concretely rather than abstractly. Gilligan’s work on moral decision-making made this very point. Yet, rather than posit essentialist gender differences, it makes sense to suggest that the generalisation about women’s more concrete thinking is connected to the caring roles that have more often been assumed by women, particularly child-rearing. These roles call for concrete thinking not because it is ‘better’ than abstract thinking in any definable sense, or because women are not capable of abstract thinking, but because it is the *appropriate* way of thinking to sustain a practice such as mothering with all the contingent choices it involves. As Ruddick comments:

It seems a plausible working hypothesis that children’s minds would call forth an open-ended reflective cognitive style in those who try to

²³⁸ Porter, Jean, *Moral Action and Christian Ethics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, p. 150.

understand them. A child's acts are irregular, unpredictable, often mysterious ... A mother who took one day's conclusions to be permanent or invented sharp distinctions to describe her child's choices would be left floundering. The virtues of abstraction and concrete cognition vary with the contexts of thinking.²³⁹

It therefore follows that in terms of an ongoing human relationship of nurturing care, abstract thinking is often neither appropriate nor sustainable. So concrete ways of decision-making, prudent judgements, are necessary to a practice that, because it deals with human relationships, always requires a contextual approach. This is true for mothering and in the following chapter I will argue it is also true for parish ministry. Both practices deal with the complexity of caring for real people in real situations. Abstract ideas may offer helpful insights but must always be contextualised by the concrete realities of particularity and contingency.

To respond well contextually means being able to attend to the reality of particular people and circumstances. As we saw in the earlier discussion of attachment and intersubjectivity, a mother has to get to know her actual baby and continue to get to know her child through all the changing circumstances of his life. Ruddick quotes the psychologist Jean Baker Miller:

For an infant and then a child to grow there must be someone who can respond to the child. As the child grows, one's responses must change accordingly. What sufficed today will not suffice tomorrow. The child has come to a different place, and the caretaker must move to another place too. If you are the caretaker you keep trying to do so. Thus in a very immediate and day-to-day way women *live* for change.²⁴⁰

This ability to respond to who the child is now involves what Ruddick calls the cognitive capacity and virtue of attentive love. Her idea of attentive love is drawn from Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*. Neither Ruddick nor Murdoch writes from a Christian perspective, but they both hold to a sense of overarching goodness. Murdoch writes:

I think it is more than a verbal point to say that what should be aimed at is goodness, and not freedom or right action, although right action and

²³⁹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 96.

²⁴⁰ Miller, Jean Baker, *Toward a New Psychology for Women*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975, p. 54.

freedom in the sense of humility, are the natural products of attention to the Good.²⁴¹

Ruddick draws on Murdoch's use of the term 'attention', which Murdoch herself has borrowed from the writings of Simone Weil on prayer:

I have used the word 'attention', which I borrow from Simone Weil, to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality. I believe this to be the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent.²⁴²

Attention is, in Murdoch, about seeing the reality of the other and not the fantasy that we so easily project. It is, in a sense, about seeing the subjectivity of the other. Murdoch connects attention to love and reality; to seeing the other properly:

It is in the capacity to love, that is to *see*, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists. The freedom which is a proper human goal is the freedom from fantasy, that is the realism of compassion. What I have called fantasy, the proliferation of blinding self-centred aims and images, is itself a powerful system of energy, and most of what is often called 'will' or 'willing' belongs to this system. What counteracts the system is attention to reality inspired by, consisting of, love.²⁴³

This attention is akin to Noddings' ideas about engrossment and motivational displacement: a moving from self-centeredness to really focus on the subjectivity of the other, to see them as themselves:

Apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring from the view of the one-caring. For if I take on the other's reality as possibility and begin to feel its reality, I feel, also, that I must act accordingly; that is, I am impelled to act as though in my own behalf, but in behalf of the other.²⁴⁴

We will return later to the importance of feelings in this kind of thinking. At this point it is the *reality* of the other that I particularly want to

²⁴¹ Murdoch, Iris, *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 70.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁴⁴ Noddings, *Caring*, p. 16.

note. Ruddick builds on the way that Murdoch relates *attention* to both reality and love. She describes attentive love as the overarching virtue that ‘knits together’ maternal thinking. Reflecting on Weil’s description of the Grail legend in which the defining question to the suffering knight²⁴⁵ is ‘What are you going through?’ Ruddick writes:

The ordinary secular mother also learns to ask ‘what are you going through?’ and to wait to hear the answer rather than giving it. She learns to ask again and keep listening even if she cannot make sense of what she hears or can barely tolerate the child she has understood. Attention is akin to empathy ... However, the idea of empathy, as it is popularly understood, underestimates the importance of knowing another *without* finding yourself in her.²⁴⁶

Noddings makes a similar point, stressing that empathy carries with it the idea of recognising one’s own feelings in the feelings of another so that one can feel with them.²⁴⁷ She prefers the word ‘sympathy’ and Ruddick, ‘compassion’. Both terms convey the idea that we recognise and feel with the other even when the other’s feelings are not like our own. In both cases what they are stressing is the ability to attend to and feel with another by focusing on what they are feeling.

In the earlier discussion of attachment I stressed the importance of attending to the real child, getting to know this particular child. This is described by some writers as attunement; the recognition between mother and child that is necessary for secure attachment. It is mainly emphasised in the early years, but it continues to be important as the child develops and grows, requiring continuing attention and attunement to the changing reality. As

²⁴⁵ Simone Weil, the philosophical and mystical writer, discusses ‘attention’ in connection to the Grail legend in ‘Reflections on the Right Usage of School Studies in View of the Love of God’ in *Waiting on God*, translated from the French by Emma Crauford, London: Fount 1977, pp. 53 – 61. ‘In the first legend of the Grail – a miraculous stone which has the virtue of a consecrated wafer that sates all hunger – it is said that the Grail belongs to the first person to ask the stone’s guardian, a king almost completely paralysed by a painful wound, “What is your torment?” The fullness of love for your neighbor, is simply being capable of asking them “What torments you?” It’s knowing that the *malheureux* exists, not as one of many, not as an example of a social category labeled *malheureux*, but as a man, exactly like us, who was struck one day and marked by the inimitable mark of *malheur*. To do this it is sufficient, but indispensable, to know to cast a certain gaze upon him. This gaze is first an attentive gaze, where the soul empties itself of all its own content in order to receive in itself the being who it looks at as he is, in all his truth. This can only be done by those capable of attention.’ p. 60.

²⁴⁶ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 121.

²⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion see Noddings, 1984, *Caring*, pp. 30–32.

Ruddick argues it takes a level of *discipline* to see the child as she is, not as you might like her to be or fear she may be. This involves letting go of the fantasy child who comes from our own expectations of how the child should be, how others describe her and from the descriptions of other people's children or those described in the childcare literature. Sue Gerhardt, focusing on the early years, reflects on the need for mothers to learn to care for the actual baby they have. This means finding an appropriate mean between neglect, ignoring her needs and over-intrusive care; meeting needs the baby hasn't actually expressed but the mother projects on to her. Reflecting on current research into infant development she writes:

Researchers have refined our knowledge to the point where we can now say that babies need not too much, not too little but just the right amount of responsiveness – not the kind that jumps anxiously to meet their every need, nor the kind that ignores them for too long, but the kind of relaxed responsiveness that confident parents tend to have ... What is more, the best responsiveness for babies is the 'contingent' kind. This means that the parents need to respond to the actual needs of their particular baby, not to their own idea of what a baby might need ... Each baby needs a tailor-made response, not an off-the-shelf kind, however benign. ... Each situation requires its own appropriate, contingent response, suitable for the personality of this particular baby.²⁴⁸

This connects to finding an Aristotelian mean; the right amount of responsiveness in any concrete situation. In this case the mean involves an appropriate balance between neglect and intrusion, which I will look at in more detail in the next chapter. There is also the emphasis on attending to reality. This enables the one-caring, the one mothering to respond contingently and appropriately to her child.

Such appropriate responsiveness requires a proper assessment of the place of feelings in acting well. Feelings can often be dismissed as antithetical to reason, but in mothering, and in all caring, feelings need to be taken seriously and there needs to be a better understanding of how some kinds of reasoning utilise and value feelings. In describing caring Noddings states, 'We do not begin by formulating or solving a problem but by sharing a feeling.'²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters*, p. 197.

²⁴⁹ Noddings, *Caring*, p. 31.

And it is at this level of feeling that we relate to the other. She goes on to say 'Feeling is not *all* that is involved in caring, but it is essentially involved.'²⁵⁰

Ruddick writes:

In protecting her child a mother is besieged by feelings, her own and her children's. She is dependent on these feelings to interpret the world.²⁵¹

She notes that there has often been a false dichotomy between reasoned thinking and emotional feelings. Mothering calls for a synthesis of reason and feeling in which feelings are the basis on which reasoned action is both enacted and evaluated.

Rather than separating reason from feeling, mothering makes reflective feeling one of the most difficult attainments of reason. In protective work, feeling, thinking, and action are conceptually linked; feelings demand reflection, which is in turn tested by action, which is in turn tested by the feelings it provokes. Thoughtful feeling, passionate thought, and protective acts together test, even as they reveal, the effectiveness of preservative love.²⁵²

The importance of utilising feelings to motivate and evaluate action means that such action cannot be rule-based. Thus mothering cannot be reduced to formulas; instead Ruddick draws on the language of virtues. She outlines her understanding of the virtues necessary for the practice of good mothering, virtues that help mothers meet the demands of the practice guard against the temptations and choose wisely how to respond to the contingent needs of their particular child. They are characteristics developed through the practice and the reflection on the practice. A reflection that is attentive, feeling and motivated by love.

Ruddick's maternal virtues

As I noted above, the practice of mothering and therefore the necessary virtues are shaped by a threefold demand. In describing maternal virtues Ruddick outlines how they are shaped by these demands. She also discusses the

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁵¹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 69.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 72.

degenerate form of each virtue; that is the temptation, often for seemingly good reasons, to move either side of the mathematical mean into a way of acting that is not life-giving. The temptation to intrusive care or the degeneration into neglect are both breakdowns in the intersubjectivity of the relationship and thus do not help the mother and child to flourish. Ruddick's concept of degenerative forms of the virtues and the temptations faced by mothers to fall into these forms provides an insightful way of looking at best practice.

We can see this in Ruddick's discussion of the maternal virtue of humility. The first and, Ruddick would claim most basic, demand of mothering is to preserve the life entrusted to her care. However, this presents the mother with complex questions about what can and cannot be controlled in order to keep a child safe. Mothers must contend both with the independent will of the child and the many uncontrollable aspects of the world in which they live. The reality is that they cannot control everything in order to protect the child. This leads Ruddick to identify humility as a primary maternal virtue.

Mothers identify humility as a virtue when they recognise in themselves the delusive, compulsive efforts to see everywhere and control everything so that the child will be safe. With 'humility' a mother respects the limits of her will and the independent, uncontrollable, and increasingly separate existences she seeks to preserve.²⁵³

Notwithstanding all that is beyond her control, a mother, she argues, cannot simply relinquish control. The virtue of humility helps her to find the balance between an excessive control and a passive abnegation. For Ruddick the virtue of humility is linked to the mother's recognition of the subjectivity of the child, 'the independent, uncontrollable will of the other'. The temptations, the degenerate forms, of the virtue of humility are either to domination – asserting the mother's will regardless of the child, or a submissive passivity in which she is dominated by the child or by the expertise of others. In terms of the wider world beyond her control the temptation is to try to limit all risk or to despair and relinquish control to others or simply abnegate responsibility. These degenerate forms connect to Gerhardt's ideas about finding an appropriate

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 72.

balance between neglect and intrusion in caring for a child. In describing humility Ruddick quotes Murdoch's definition:

Mothers are also beset by the multiple temptations of passivity ... When mothers are despairing or powerless, silenced and silent, their humility may well degenerate into passivity, 'a peculiar habit of self-effacement, rather like having an inaudible voice'. At its best however, humility is a 'selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central of virtues', a way of preserving and controlling in an exhausting, uncontrollable world.²⁵⁴

The temptations of domination and passivity are the same ones that Benjamin identifies as arising out of the breakdown in intersubjectivity. Domination is a result of a fantasy, but that does not mean it stems initially from wrong motivation. For the mother, as Ruddick notes, it is the fantasy of perfect control and for the child the belief that he can move beyond any kind of dependency. In both cases there is a tendency to move from relationships of mutuality and interdependence towards assertion of one will over the other. Passivity is also a failure in intersubjectivity; the inability to take responsibility for what is within one's control. The mother's motivation to protect is good but it needs to be tempered by letting go of the fantasy of perfect protection and acknowledging all that is beyond her control, the reality of chance, unpredictability and the independent will of the other. Ruddick writes:

Mothers protect where protection cannot be assured, where failure usually means disappointing someone they passionately love, where chance and unpredictable behaviour limit their efforts, and where their best efforts are flawed by their own impatience, anxiety, fatigue, and self-preoccupation. Recognising how close protectiveness comes to giving up on itself and recognising as well the cost of that surrender, mothers identify cheerfulness as a virtue.²⁵⁵

She draws on Spinoza for her choice of cheerfulness as a maternal virtue, quoting his comment that 'cheerfulness is always a good thing and never excessive'. It is a less familiar word for a virtue but, I suggest, can be

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

seen as akin to the theological virtue of hope, though in Ruddick's secular view it has nothing to do with the divine. She defines maternal cheerfulness thus:

Cheerfulness is a matter-of-fact willingness to accept having given birth, to start over and over again, to welcome a future despite conditions of one's self, one's children, one's society, and nature that may be reasons for despair.²⁵⁶

The degenerate forms of this virtue are 'cheery denial' or despair. Cheery denial is another form of fantasy in which the dark and difficult is denied and children are not then enabled to understand and explore the more difficult emotions. The virtue of cheerfulness enables mothers to resist both this denial of the difficulties of life and, on the other hand, the lack of hope that leads to despair. In doing so, Ruddick claims, they aim to confront reality with 'resilient clear-sightedness' and here Ruddick does use the word hope.

To be cheerful is to see a child hopefully and to welcome her hopes; for children, hope is as important as breathing.²⁵⁷

This hope, and ongoing belief in the possibilities of and for the child, is connected to what she calls a mother's double focus. This is an ability to be immersed in the here and now but always with a larger vision; a 'simultaneous, or at least rapidly shifting, double focus on small and great, near and eternal'. These virtues of humility and cheerfulness are necessary in mothering throughout the child's changing life. As we noted above she characterises preservative love as 'holding': 'To hold means to minimise risk and to reconcile differences'. This way of being is a necessity from the earliest days of a baby through to protecting and preserving the lives of teenage boys. Understanding the reality of what is controllable and practising the virtues of humility and clear-sighted cheerful hope involves the ongoing struggle to resist the temptations to domination or despairing abnegation of responsibility.

Following on from, but often in tension with, the demand to preserve the child's life is the demand to foster growth and to 'nurture a child's unfolding, expanding material spirit'. Ruddick writes:

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 74.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

Children demand this nurturance because their development is complex, gradual, and subject to distinctive kinds of distortion or inhibition. The belief that children's development is complex in these ways is culturally variable and individually contested.²⁵⁸

She maintains that the central tasks of fostering growth are 'administrative'. They revolve around creating a home and organising the places and times for socialising beyond the home.

Whatever its' particular structure, a home is the headquarters for a mother's organising and a child's growing. Home is where children are supposed to return when their world turns heartless, where they centre themselves in the world they are discovering.²⁵⁹

Fostering growth requires a welcoming attitude to change and the capacity to think concretely in ways discussed above. It involves the capacity to let 'a child grow into her life – which also means growing away'. Thus we see that it can often be in tension with the desire to protect. The holding aspect of mothering discussed above needs to be tempered with this ability to let children go and grow to ensure that it does not become clinging. Yet, as Ruddick suggests, there is a responsibility on the part of the mother to resource the child for his explorations in the world. One of the ways she suggests that mothers do this is through storytelling; narrating a child's own life and setting that within the stories and narratives of other lives.

This storytelling requires the recognition of subjectivity. Stories help the child to understand that their life has a coherence that is ongoing and can be narrated, but that their story is just one of many in which others are also subjects. MacIntyre describes subjectivity thus:

To be the subject of a narrative that runs from one's birth to one's death is ... to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narratable life ... The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. Moreover, this asking for and giving of accounts itself plays an important part in constituting narratives.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 217.

Both MacIntyre and Ruddick maintain that a child learns how to make sense of her own narrative through conversations and storytelling. Thus mothering involves telling stories and listening to the child's stories and accounts of life. MacIntyre, in reflecting on how children can grow and develop into what he calls, 'mature practical reasoners', stresses the importance of their being able to reflect on their own life, but also to hear stories that challenge their perceptions and help them to imagine different futures and outcomes. Storytelling and the kinds of conversations in which each is asked to tell what they have done and why are important aspects of mothering. These stories are both the fictional kind that helps to fire the imagination and posit alternative realities, and the narration of the children's own lives. Ruddick claims that storytelling at its best 'enables children to adapt, edit and invent life stories of their own'.²⁶¹ She also points out that it is through conversations with other mothers, and others who are concerned for the child, that mothers develop ways of thinking and narrating their own practice. As they narrate the experiences of their mothering to others, they can begin to reflect on the practice.

In their storytelling, mothers share and elaborate their observations, making a coherent, often amusing, dramatic, or poignant story of their children's particularities.²⁶²

I would also note that an interesting feature of the stories mothers tell each other about their children is the way that failures are shared as collective wisdom. Ruddick comments that isolated mothers do not benefit from a collective experience in which the stories told can be 'collectively judged and improved'. She is concerned that social pressures that lead to a lack of time for maternal chatting make it harder for mothers to help their children learn to narrate their own life and appreciate the complexity of the lives of others.

It is in the context of maternal storytelling that Ruddick notes a set of maternal virtues: realism, compassion and delight. We have already seen how realism is a central aspect of attentive love and of cheerfulness. In the context of maternal storytelling, realism is the virtue that guards against a falsely cheerful over-editing or an uncaring and inappropriate confrontation with

²⁶¹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 98.

²⁶² Ibid p. 98.

aspects of the adult world. A mother's storytelling must be trustworthy and deal with the complexity of life and its range of emotions but told with care and concern for the child. This is why mothers need to cultivate the virtue of compassion. Ruddick links compassionate storytelling to the capacity to forgive.

Children who learn about themselves through compassionate stories may develop a maternal generosity towards their lives, learning from their mothers the capacity to appreciate the complex humanness of their plight, to forgive themselves as they have been forgiven.²⁶³

Here again we find Ruddick using language that relates to theological ideas, connecting compassion with the capacity to forgive and to be forgiven. It is also interesting to note Arendt's use of the same concept. In her account of action, which connects to the ability to speak and interact through speech she, like Ruddick, identifies the capacity to forgive and to be forgiven as an essential component of the ability to form human relationships and communities. Both writers acknowledge that human interaction is fraught with the possibilities of not reading the other right or responding inappropriately and, as Arendt comments, forgiveness enables us to move on. I will return to this in the context of parish ministry.

Alongside realism and compassion, Ruddick links this narrative task to 'delight', which she describes as a virtue and a discipline. In her definition 'delight' involves shared pleasure and an ability to respond to the child's pleasures, which may well be very different from one's own.

It might seem that delight in their children would come too easily to mothers to count as a virtue ... Yet delight is often a disciplined response. When children are very young, it often takes a patient curiosity even to identify the accomplishments of which they are proud. Later, it requires imaginative generosity ... to appreciate what children present ... With older children, aesthetic incomprehension of 'strange' tastes and appearances may pervasively inhibit delight.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 100.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

As the mother of two teenage boys I would concur with this! She argues that the virtues of realism, compassion and delight need to be cultivated to guard against many temptations.

As they talk to and about their children, mothers often fail to resist many temptations: they deny their own confusion and children's failure, punish or pity rather than sympathise, manipulate or prematurely console rather than speak truthfully, delight too half-heartedly and too late out of self-preoccupation or perfectionism. If mothers count realism, compassion and delight as virtues of the stories they tell, then they recognise and set themselves to resist such temptations.²⁶⁵

Clearly, I would add, this storytelling is not done by the mother alone. Children learn to hear and enjoy stories from other sources, learn to narrate their own lives through talking to others. Yet it is an important aspect of mothering. The consistency and familiarity of the mother and child means, at best, that the mother becomes a trustworthy narrator and listener, helping her child make meaning out of the complexity of their own and others' lives.

Ruddick's third demand of 'acceptability' is the most contested. It involves teaching, training or educating a child to take her place within the wider society, passing on values and shaping a moral character.

Many mothers find that the central challenge of mothering lies in training a child to be the kind of person whom others accept and whom the mothers themselves can actively appreciate.²⁶⁶

This area is contentious because it raises issues about how one instils moral or religious values and whether children learn best through strict routines or more fluid discipline. It will be clear from earlier discussions that Ruddick is not primarily interested in routines that teach a child to conform but the more complex issue of how to instil conscientiousness in one's child. Again it is worth noting that this correlates to MacIntyre's description of a 'mature practical reasoner'. As Ruddick says, the hope is that you raise a child who behaves well when you are not there and in circumstances you do not control. She writes:

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

When acceptability is taken to demand the education of a responsive nature rather than the domination of a hostile one, then the work of training can become, in a double sense, a work of conscience: a mother aims to foster and then protect her child's conscientiousness – her ability to identify, reflect on and respect the demands of conscience ... A mother's conscientiousness becomes a model for the child's own.²⁶⁷

It follows therefore that a mother has to develop the capacity for self-reflection as she teaches her child to reflect. She also needs to accept the possibility of her own values and beliefs being challenged. In order to foster conscientiousness mothers need to practice authenticity and the virtue of 'proper trust'. Ruddick identifies the degenerate forms of this virtue as unquestioning obedience or blind trust.

Proper trust is a relation between mothers and children for which in the first instance, a mother is responsible. A child cannot trust a mother who is capricious, manipulative or mean. Mothers are of course each of these some of the time.²⁶⁸

Mothers also need to trust their children and guard against the temptations to constantly suspect the worst or to be too trusting, failing to name what is not acceptable. Ruddick goes on to say:

Proper trust is one of the most difficult maternal virtues. It requires of a mother clear judgement that does not give way to obedience or denial. It depends on her being reliably goodwilled and independent yet able to express and to accept from her children righteous indignation at trust betrayed.

This proper trust connects to Arendt's argument that the ability to make and keep promises is a necessary component of action. Again, I will explore this more fully in connection with parish ministry. I simply note at this point how Ruddick's maternal practice connects to Arendt's realm of action.

We saw earlier that Aristotle identified the virtue of *phronesis* as the intellectual capacity to act virtuously in contingent circumstances. Ruddick does not use the term, but she talks about developing the capacity to 'judge tenderly yet with confidence'. This is learned through attending to the child,

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

practising compassion, being able to feel with the other, and trying to understand them even if we don't ourselves comprehend their pain or confusion. It also involves the virtues of realism and delight. It is an ongoing process and, as mothers develop their own sense of what it is to be virtuous, they are simultaneously engaged in teaching their children how to be virtuous. They need to judge tenderly but well in order to find the difficult balance between instilling their own values in their children while allowing the children to question, challenge and posit alternatives so that they become morally mature as themselves. It is, I would say, one of the delights of parenting when your children act unprompted in ways that show their conscientiousness to others. The temptation to insist too strongly on conforming to the mother's deeply held values or of giving in too lightly to their challenges are real temptations that mothers need to guard against. Ruddick writes:

Conscientiousness – the ability to identify, reflect on, and respect the demands of conscience – is slow to develop and unpredictable in its growth. The capacity for guilt and shame seem necessary to developing conscientiousness.²⁶⁹

Thus we note again the importance of forgiveness, of seeing failures as opportunities to develop wisdom and of teaching children to make amends and to start again.

Ruddick's book is titled *Maternal Thinking*²⁷⁰ but she concludes her discussion of this thinking, which I have summarised above, by pointing out that mothering is about doing.

To love a child is to *do* whatever is required to keep her safe and help her grow. Maternal attention is prompted by the responsibility to act and, when it is most successful, gives way to the action it informs.²⁷¹

By beginning with thinking, Ruddick has challenged perceptions about mothers simply reacting to their children in some instinctual way or that child-rearing is unskilled and irrational work. Instead it is possible to affirm that in order to

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁷⁰ The first two parts of *Maternal Thinking* deal with Ruddick's exploration of maternal practice. The final part uses a 'maternal standpoint' to reflect on peace and the politics of war.

²⁷¹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p.123.

raise children mothers, and others who engage in mothering, need to develop capacities to respond appropriately in contingent circumstances. They need to constantly adapt to a changing individual, altering the kinds of care and involvement required. They need to help children make sense of a complex world and come to terms with their own and others' failings. Ruddick makes a compelling case that this involves developing ways of reasoning and recognising virtues that can help a mother act well. As she points out, to identify a virtue is not to possess it, but in finding ways of articulating the temptations and struggles it helps to reflect on the practice and the aim of being good enough.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at child development and argued that psychoanalytical theories of an initial merged mother/child state do not correlate to the real experience of mothers and their children. Instead, from their earliest days infants are seeking a relationship, what Bowlby termed an attachment, to one or a few people who they can rely on for care. For this relationship to lead to a secure attachment it needs to be intersubjective, a relationship in which each recognises the subjectivity of the other. This does not necessitate a relationship where each plays the same role. In mothering the vulnerability and dependence of the infant requires a relationship of care in which one is predominantly caring for the other. However, this does not preclude intersubjectivity. It is the mutuality of the relationship, the response of each to the other and the growing recognition and love that is rewarding for both mother and child. De Marneffe challenges the assumption that the mother's sense of subjectivity needs to be established outside the experience of mothering, claiming instead that maternal work is purposeful and can help mothers develop a sense of selfhood and subjectivity. Noddings would concur that caring is meaningful work. She stresses the importance of the one-caring and the one cared-for being in an intersubjective relationship. This involves reciprocity even while it involves the carer moving from self-focus to focusing on the needs of the other. For Noddings this attention to the other is called engrossment; it is temporary but for the necessary period motivates the one-caring to act to meet the needs of the other.

In the particular caring role of mothering, babies need appropriate contingent responsiveness from their primary carers. It is through the reliability of such response that babies and infants build up a secure sense of attachment and begin to develop an ability to manage their own emotions. This means that mothers have to develop the capacity to respond contingently in concrete situations. De Marneffe talks about mothering as a creative practice, but it is in the work of Sara Ruddick that the idea of mothering as a practice is most clearly set out. Her philosophical background provides insights into understanding both the demands of mothering and the kinds of concrete thinking and naming of virtues that this practice requires. She understands virtues as 'means', guarding against twin temptations and acknowledges that to name them is not to possess them but to clarify the aims of the practice and its degenerate forms. Noddings stresses the importance of engrossment in caring and Ruddick talks about attention. Both affirm that a synthesis of feelings and reasoned thought are a necessary component of such attentive caring. Ruddick sees the maternal capacity to attend lovingly to the reality of the child as the overarching virtue of maternal practice.

Her conclusion is that maternal thinking leads to maternal doing. Often, in discussions of ministry, being and doing are set up as opposites. I would maintain that is a false dichotomy. Ruddick's work reminds us that in mothering the character of the one mothering is deeply important to all that they do. This is a relationship and an activity: the mother cannot just be, she has plenty to do, much of it routine and menial. Child-rearing is full of tasks. Here Arendt's categories of human activity provide a language for understanding the labouring tasks of mothering and the action involved in building up the relationships in which children can grow and flourish. It is in this 'action' that maternal thinking and striving to be 'good enough' requires the practice of maternal virtues. Mothers need to learn how to welcome the constant changes and challenges of a unique individual, how to balance the competing demands and avoid the myriad temptations.

Ruddick is clear that many mothers do not articulate these challenges or evaluate all they have learned and are learning. Stadlen would say that this is because they often have no language to describe what it is that they think and do. This lack of language makes it hard to value and reflect on the practice,

either from within or without. She would also conclude that in modern western society childcare is so different from other forms of working that it is becoming even harder to think and talk about it in meaningful ways. I maintain that in this it has some very interesting parallels with parish ministry. As clergy struggle to make sense of what they do in a culture that stresses measurable targets and short-term goals, I think they can learn from mothering. Stadlen's book is called *What Mothers Do: especially when it looks like nothing*. In the next chapter I will take the insights from these writers who have sought to articulate maternal practice, especially Ruddick, and use them to reflect on what clergy do, especially when it can look like nothing.

Chapter Five: Using a maternal analogy to explore parish ministry

At the end of the first chapter I concluded that to be a parish priest was to take on the responsibility of care for a particular community of people. I also argued that the role of the priest needed to be understood as a relationship. In the subsequent chapters I have looked at the particular relationship of care that is mothering, challenging ideas about instinctual care and exploring the ways in which those mothering have to learn to think and respond appropriately. I noted that mothering involves an intersubjective relationship which, although asymmetrical, is reciprocal. I will now use the insights from mothering to look at the role of a parish priest. In drawing on the philosophical work of Ruddick, mothering can be understood as a relationship and an activity that includes many tasks but also calls for particular ways of thinking, and the development of appropriate virtues. Naming these virtues can help to promote good practice and guard against the temptations to degenerate forms. In exploring the practice of parish ministry the aim is to find a way of articulating good practice that takes seriously both the being and doing of clergy.

Priests, of course, carry out their ministry in a number of different settings. Some are based as chaplains in different kinds of sector ministry. Some are combining secular jobs with parish ministry, offering different amounts of time depending on circumstances. Those engaged in parish ministry may have the care of one church and one parish or a number of different buildings, communities, parishes and responsibilities. In this thesis the focus is specifically on the work of a parish priest, envisaging someone who has received the cure of souls for a particular parish or group of parishes. I hope that those whose priesthood is carried out in a different set of relationships can draw insights from what I am saying, but I know from my own experience that the relationship of a chaplain to the community she serves is different at certain levels from that of a vicar.²⁷² It is therefore important to

²⁷² A chaplain is invited into a community that exists for a particular purpose, for instance, a hospital, caring for the sick, or a university engaged in research and education. This involves the chaplain in a different kind of relationship from the people of the community, who are

understand the context of priestly ministry being discussed. Many of the books on ministry try to cover all aspects of priestly ministry and thus fail to provide a grounded picture of contextual practice.

In mothering there are tensions over the terminology used about ‘full’ or ‘part-time’ work and we find similar difficulties in talking about ordained ministry. Debates around how we speak about ‘working’ and stay-at-home mothers have parallels with the difficulty in finding the right language to use about those who are not engaged in full-time stipendiary ministry. How we find a better language and appreciate the complexities of different working patterns and relationships for non-residential clergy, or those who are not as available because of commitments elsewhere, is an important task for the wider Church. However, they are not questions that I can explore in this thesis. So, for the purpose of this piece of work, when I talk about a priest I am particularly thinking of an incumbent; the language I use will reflect on relating to a parish and I hope those who care for many will be able to translate this into a large, vibrant family of parishes.

The demands shaping the practice of parish ministry

If parish ministry is to be understood as a practice then it is important to identify the demands that shape the practice. Notwithstanding what was said above about particular contexts of ministry, it seems appropriate to begin to identify the demands by looking at the description of a priest’s calling as set out in the Ordinal. The current service for the ordination of priests or presbyters used in the Church of England has a number of paragraphs to describe the expectations of priestly ministry. As I noted in the introduction, these offer a multiplicity of images and tasks. The opening paragraph reads:

Priests are ordained to lead God's people in the offering of praise and the proclamation of the Gospel. They share with the bishop in the oversight of the church, delighting in its beauty and rejoicing in its well-being ... they are to sustain the community of the faithful by the ministry of word and sacrament, that we all may grow into the fullness of Christ and be a living sacrifice acceptable to God.²⁷³

gathered through the common purpose of the institution, not through a common faith. The responsibilities are different, as are the levels of accountability.

²⁷³ This and the extracts below are from *The Ordination of Priests also called Presbyters, Common Worship*, 2000, www.churchofengland.org (12th January 2012)

Later in the service the role of a priest is again explored; she is:

to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God's new creation. They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord; they are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for His family, to search for His children in the wilderness of this world's temptations, and to guide them through its confusions, that they may be saved through Christ for ever. Formed by the word, they are to call their hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ's name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins.

Priests are 'to tell the story of God's love'; 'to baptise and nurture people in the faith'; 'to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God'; 'lead the people in worship and preside at the Eucharist and Bless in God's name'.

They are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, and intercede for all in need. They are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death. Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith.

These descriptions of the priestly role present a mixture of overarching aims and practical tasks. Within these descriptions it is clear that priests have a responsibility for others, for 'the community of faithful' who are to be nurtured and sustained, fed, taught, admonished so that 'we all may grow into the fullness of Christ'. There is also a responsibility for a wider concept of the 'family' of the Lord, which includes both those who are involved in the Church and those beyond. Priests are to guide people, care for them, foster their gifts and, above all, build up the Church. The sacraments are to be used to sustain and nurture the community of faith, as well as to proclaim the mighty acts of God and tell His story. The overarching aim can be summarised as a ministry through which the people of God, in the widest sense of the term, are helped to grow into 'the fullness of Christ and be a living sacrifice presentable to God'.

The phrase the ordinal uses of the priest's responsibility for sustaining the community 'that we all may grow into the fullness of Christ and be a living sacrifice acceptable to God' is drawn from New Testament imagery. In

Ephesians 4, Paul talks about the need for Christians to leave behind childhood and grow up into ‘the measure of the full stature of Christ’.²⁷⁴ In Romans 12, verse 1 Paul speaks about ‘presenting our bodies as living sacrifices’. It is interesting that both of these passages also contain lists of ministries within the Church. John Muddiman, commenting on the passage in Ephesians writes:

Christ’s gift of ministries in the Church is intended to enable Christians to achieve a mature faith measured by the full stature of Christ himself.²⁷⁵

This, then, offers an insight into the calling of clergy: they are to sustain and help all of the Church to grow up, to develop a mature faith. This is clearly about both individuals and the corporate life of the Church. It is possible to conclude that the gifts of ministry are given because Christians need to grow up within relationships and communities that nurture and foster that growth. If shaping and sustaining such relationships and communities is at the heart of the calling of the ordained then the demands of the practice will reflect this. Looking at the practice of mothering has enabled reflection on the kind of relationships and environment in which human beings ordinarily grow up and mature. We have seen that committed, attentive, responsive relationships provide the best environment for humans to become mature and flourish. It follows that similar relational responsiveness may provide the best environment for Christians to develop maturity, thus the ‘growing up’ of the Christian community needs those who accept the responsibility to care for and nurture the faithful.

We noted in previous chapters that in order for a child’s needs to be met, someone has to have committed themselves to that child. This commitment offers, at best, an intersubjective relationship, in which the unique particularity

²⁷⁴Ephesians 4: 13-14 describes this aim of maturity measured by the full stature of Christ. Tom Wright in Wright, N.T., *Virtue Reborn*, London: SPCK, 2010 explores this concept of Christian maturity, linking it to an Aristotelian idea of virtuous living. His book offers a detailed exploration of how the Biblical passages can be understood in terms of the Christian calling to develop and practice the virtues in the aim of becoming mature Christians who can play their part in God’s coming kingdom. Although he acknowledges the part that the Christian community, worship and study play in developing Christian virtues, he has nothing to say about the role of those who lead the worship and build up the community. It offers a somewhat isolated image of a Christian’s struggle for maturity.

²⁷⁵ Muddiman, John, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Black’s NT Commentaries), London: Continuum, 2001. p. 201.

of each is recognised and valued. These relations can be, and often need to be, appropriately asymmetrical. A reciprocal relationship doesn't mean a relationship in which each is bringing the same. Relationships of care, as Noddings argues, find their reciprocity in the giving and receiving of care; in the ways in which the cared-for flourish as a result of care given. Mothers do not provide the sole relationship in which a child grows up, but they, or those who fulfil that role, take on the responsibility to ensure that care happens and for that reason they are pivotal. I would argue that the practice of priesthood, as set out in the ordinal, assumes that priests will be pivotal in taking responsibility for the care necessary for the 'growing up' and 'building up' of the communities entrusted to them.

Clearly, there are some difficulties in using this language about growing up and moving to maturity, because any given priest will be working with congregations and communities that include individuals who are more mature both in years and faith than they are. I will return to this issue in the next chapter. But it's important to point out that there are parallels between on one hand, the maternal demand to create and maintain the relationships and environments in which children themselves can develop towards maturity, and on the other, the parish priest's role to create and maintain the Christian community of the local church in which and through which people are able to grow ever deeper in faith and understanding. To quote Muddiman on Ephesians 4 again:

This ecclesiastical use of the metaphor of childhood and parenthood should be kept in mind ... household and Church are closely related ideas.²⁷⁶

In both the home and the church, the mother or priest is a facilitator. It is the children and people who themselves do the growing and maturing. Yet there is an important role for the ones who shape and sustain the relationships, spaces and communities in which the growing-up happens.

It is because of these parallels in facilitating growth and maturity that the demands Ruddick outlines for maternal practice can provide a way of

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 205.

reflecting on the practice of parish ministry. If we explore her idea of preservation, fostering growth and acceptability, they can easily translate into parish ministry. There is a demand to preserve and protect the faithful, to provide the necessities to sustain their life and to have a ministry of ‘holding’ and comforting. There is also a demand to foster and nurture growth, to provide an environment in which individuals and communities can explore, grow and mature. This requires a willingness to let people be themselves, to take risks and to embrace change. Alongside these demands is the third, acceptability. Within the context of Christian ministry this is about teaching and maintaining the boundaries of faith. The priest represents the authority of the wider Church; she is to bear witness to the apostolic faith and to teach people the truths of that faith, its virtues and values. There is a requirement to work within the structures of the denomination and wider Christian family with all its complexities. Acceptability for a parish priest also has another dimension, for the priest has a duty to God. Her ministry and the lives of those she cares for and encounters are the ordinal states, ‘to be a living sacrifice acceptable to God’.

It follows that, as in mothering, these demands are all good, but may often conflict. This internal conflict between goods is an important point for clergy to grasp. It means that they need to develop the capacity to respond well *contingently*, and to judge wisely, which is the most important and appropriate demand to meet for these people in this place at this time. In learning how to lovingly preserve, encourage growth and hold true to the inheritance of faith, a priest has to develop the capacity to think and act as an authentic priest in a myriad of different circumstances, working with unique individuals. She will serve individuals and communities who are constantly changing and who are trying to live out their faith in an unpredictable world. In this chapter we will look further at these demands and the cognitive capacities and virtues that can help clergy in this practice.

Labouring and action

In the first chapter I noted that it is difficult to define what clergy actually do. If we follow the analogy outlined above, then clergy, like mothers, work at maintaining and sustaining the relationships and environments in which people

can grow and flourish, but this work is often difficult to quantify and articulate. De Marneffe points this out in terms of maternal practice.

In our society, mothers themselves must create the context in which their mothering takes place; and both structuring the environment and directing the activities within it are indeed hard work. Further, the goals of mothering activity are more open-ended, and the application of skills less quantifiable and more improvisational, than those usually provided by jobs.²⁷⁷

Thus she identifies both the difficulties in quantifying maternal work and the way that mothers have to create the context in which their mothering takes place. By this she means more than simply maintaining the home, although that is included, this involves the many tasks and attitudes that shape the spaces and relationships in which a child develops and grows. If clergy are engaged in a kind of spiritual homemaking, in the broadest sense of the term, then this chapter needs to explore how parish clergy create the context in which their *ministry* takes place, structuring the environment and directing the activities within it. The theologian Bill Countryman maintains that for parish clergy:

The central task, then, is the custody and maintenance of the sacred places, times, and rites.²⁷⁸

It is interesting at this point to note that clergy and mothers face a similar problem in trying to define what this creation and maintenance of their context consists of. As I said in the first chapter, it is possible to come up with a list of tasks that clergy need to do. These will involve both generic tasks, organising services, presiding at the sacraments and engaging in routine pastoral work, and also tasks specific to that place and community. However, it was clear in the opening chapter that this purely functional account of parish ministry was unsatisfactory. Alongside the tasks of ministry are all the more ephemeral aspects of building up the people of God. It is here that Arendt's categories of human activity – labour, work and action – can provide an insightful framework for understanding the role.

²⁷⁷ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, p. 114.

²⁷⁸ Countryman, William, *Living on the Border*, Harrisburg PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999, p. 161.

The practice of mothering and the practice of ministry both involve a complex mix of labouring and action with very little work or fabrication. Neither practice is involved with making a product. This is why ideas about work that value blueprints, formulas and measurable targets are unhelpful in assessing maternal or ministerial practice. Accepting that there are not tangible outcomes is an important part of ministry, as is acknowledging that the work is never finished. There may well be projects that end and tasks that can be completed, but they all lead on to more projects, more tasks, new things, new needs and a never-ending process of living. I will return to this issue later in the chapter. It therefore follows that mothering and ministry are not about making products; instead they are about creating the spaces and relationships in which individuals and communities can grow and flourish. This does require what Arendt calls labouring: the cyclical repetition of tasks that are involved in the sustaining of life. For mothering this means the daily round of domestic chores: feeding, washing, tidying up and maintaining all the necessities of daily living. Such tasks can be rewarding, but in reality can often feel mundane, tedious and menial. Arendt reminds us that this is the kind of work assigned to servants or even slaves.

If we look at the work of parish clergy, then it may appear sacrilegious to refer to the ongoing round of services as labouring, but this is at one level accurate. Though each event may need careful crafting, they are passing occasions in which people's necessities for being sustained in word and sacrament are met. As the name implies, these are *services*, organised to serve God and the people, not for their own sake. The spiritual feeding, cleansing and 'tidying' that is provided by the regular services of the Church are the ways in which life is sustained and nourished. And behind the actual events of Church life are the practical preparations and the regular maintenance of clean and tidy places. Aspects of ministerial practice therefore involve the menial tasks of domestic labour, from dusting the pews to ensuring that there is wine in the sacristy and the linen is clean. It is in this aspect of ministry that clergy are most truly *servants*, providing the sustenance that others need for their lives.

Arendt reminds us that labouring is collective. Clearly these tasks can, and usually are, shared. They can be done collectively, but someone has to know that they will be done. Whoever does them needs to be acknowledged

and thanked, for the preservation of life depends on such labouring. It is inappropriate to be dismissive of the maintenance involved in parish ministry, especially when it is implied that it is opposed to the mission of the Church.²⁷⁹ Maintenance of buildings and the regular work of cleaning, preparing and servicing the church's services are integral to parish ministry. An untidy, dirty and uncared for church speaks to those within and without about a lack of care and a neglect for God's mission.

However, neither mothering nor parish ministry can be understood as labouring alone. For the purpose of each is not simply to create tidy places, but to build and sustain networks of relationships and communities in which people can grow and mature. This is the area of activity that relates to Arendt's category of action. It is far harder to describe or to delineate because it is about the interaction of people and all the possibilities that arise from such relationships. In terms of the Church it goes beyond Arendt's categories, for it is also about the possibilities that arise out of human relationships with God, who in Christ has revealed himself as one who relates. So, aspects of the services of the Church are at the level of labour, in that they sustain life, but at the same time they are the means by which people engage with each other and with the living God. Out of these engagements individuals and communities grow and flourish through the deepening and renewal of the relationships between God and neighbour. In Chapter Seven I will look further at the labouring, housekeeping aspect of ministry. This chapter will explore the ways of thinking and acting that shape good practice in the *action* that is central to parish ministry.

Particularity and attention

At the beginning of *The Human Condition* Arendt writes:

²⁷⁹ Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank reflect on this inappropriate opposing of mission and the maintenance of the Church in *For the Parish*, London: SCM, 2010. They quote Sally Gaze's reflections on *Mission-shaped Church*. 'The mission of God is not only a higher calling than the maintenance of the Church. It is the very reason for which God brought the Church into being.' And they perceptively comment that this divorces mission from the Church, making it an idol. The Church then becomes something that is a tool for mission and mission becomes a goal in itself. See pp. 53–55.

Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live.²⁸⁰

Because relationships are at the heart of *action*, one of the fundamental virtues necessary for the parish priest is the capacity Ruddick calls attention. She describes attentive love as the overarching virtue of maternal practice and defines it as both a virtue and a discipline. This attention is necessary for recognising the subjectivity of others and the particularity that arises out of plurality. Such recognition is important in building up and sustaining relationships and communities. Attention, as Ruddick defines it, drawing on Murdoch and Weil, requires the ability to attend to the real and particular and to eschew the fantasy. This ability to attend to the other is a necessary component of intersubjective relationships and, particularly, relationships that involve caring. It takes discipline to maintain this intersubjectivity; it is all too easy to objectify the other, especially where relationships are asymmetrical, an issue that will be explored in more detail later in the chapter. The temptation to objectify others is also more prevalent when dealing with a multiplicity of encounters. Noddings notes how relationships of care, especially when institutionalised, can degenerate into objectivity.

To be treated as ‘types’ instead of individuals, to have strategies exercised on us, objectifies us. We become ‘cases’ instead of persons. Those of us who are able to escape such situations do so with alacrity, but escape is not always possible. The fact is that many of us have been reduced to cases by the very machinery that has been instituted to care for us.²⁸¹

It follows that for such relationships to be intersubjective, the particularity of the other needs to be constantly kept in mind through an attention to their reality. Martin Buber defined it as the difference between the I–it relationship and the I–you.

Whoever says You does not have something for his object ... But he stands in relation.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 8.

²⁸¹ Noddings, *Caring*, p. 66.

²⁸² Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1970, (2nd edition), p. 55.

The *attending* involved in parish ministry is necessary in both ongoing relationships and fleeting encounters. Some relationships involve attending over time, learning the particularities of individuals and communities, building up a knowledge that helps the priest respond appropriately. Such relationships can also involve the priest in learning how to help others articulate and understand unexpressed needs. Yet even sustained relationships need to allow for surprises and new insights, for people change and circumstances are different. In the more fleeting encounters clergy need to quickly attend and ascertain what is required, judging how to respond appropriately. All of this takes discipline and practice. Many priests do this well, but it is rarely acknowledged as a *discipline* and *skill* that takes time, patience and openness to learn. Clergy need to constantly guard against the temptation to treat people as types, to make lazy assumptions about what they require. On the other hand, they need to guard against being over-intrusive in offering care, which, as we saw in mothering, can stem from a projection of needs due to a lack of proper attending to the real situation.

In parish ministry clergy are not just attending to people as individuals but also relating to a community and congregation. We saw in Ruddick's work that attention meant an eschewing of fantasy and recognition of the reality. This is a particularly important issue for clergy in relating to the congregations and communities they care for. Many clergy find it relatively straightforward to attend well to individuals; an interest in people and a capacity to care are often part of what draws people into the role in the first place. What can be harder is realising how important it is to let go of fantasies about the congregation or the parish. One of the fundamental attitudes that a parish priest needs to develop is attending to the *actuality* of the given parish. This involves letting go of the fantasy parish, the one in her head, the one the books are about, or the bishop described, or even as the parish profile described! It definitely means acknowledging that even if this looks a bit like a previous parish, it is not the same.

Mothers soon learn that a second child, however similar he may look, has his own character and will need different responses from her. Just as mothers need to learn through trial and error how the actual child differs from

the abstract child of the antenatal classes or the ones described in the childcare books, so clergy need to learn through practice about the real parish and people entrusted to their care. This involves taking context seriously and trying to understand the story and stories that make up this place and this community. Ruddick stresses that mothering involves a valuing of concrete ways of thinking, and this is essential in moving from general ideas about how churches and parishes behave to the reality of *this* place and *these* people

Clearly it is possible to learn about ways of doing ministry through looking at generalised situations and listening to the experiences and practices of others. There will be many practices that can easily be transposed between different people, places and circumstances. Many things that worked in one place may well work in another. But it must also be acknowledged that many things will not work. Or they need to be explained differently or adjusted appropriately. There are immense overlaps in the way I respond to my two children, but there are also recognisable differences. Strategies that worked with one have never been helpful with the other; the things that delight and stimulate each are in certain ways very different. I have needed to learn through practice what is right for each one.

Clergy can come to a parish with many resources, things they have learned in training, things they have learned through practising ministry elsewhere, but they still need to attend carefully to the particularity of this place and accept that it is a new relationship which will call for some different ways of thinking and acting. The differences may be subtle but the failure to acknowledge them often accounts for tensions and conflict between clergy and their communities. It is no good blaming the people if a particular project that flew in one place fails in the next; instead there needs to be reflection on what is different and why.

We have also noted that this is about an intersubjective relationship, so the reality and actuality of the priest also impacts on the relationship and the way the community develops. I bring to my mothering and my ministry who I am. In attending to the other, the priest needs to adapt to this community, but there also needs to be a developing relationship that enables the community to adapt to the strengths and weaknesses of the priest, who is not going to be the same as the one before. Honesty about oneself can help in managing the

expectations of others and make it easier for them to see the real person they are relating to. Clearly, not all conflict is a result of failure to attend; there are other reasons for conflict, which I will return to. However, disappointed expectations for clergy and their congregations result from a failure to eschew fantasy and attend to the particularity and context.

Nicholas Healy explores this issue in *Church, World and the Christian Life*. He argues that in talking about ecclesiology, the concrete context of the real Church needs to be acknowledged. What he calls ‘blueprint’ ecclesiologies are a kind of abstract thinking. They play a necessary part in thinking and writing about the Church in general, but there is no such thing as an abstract Church; a Church that does not have a concrete reality. Any models are shaped, to some extent, by an imaginative understanding of Church, which is often unacknowledged. As he says:

The concrete Church, living in and for the world, performs its tasks and discipleship within particular, ever-shifting contexts, and its performance is shaped by them.²⁸³

Therefore any ‘blueprint’ ecclesiology needs to be treated with care. If such models do not allow for concrete contextual adjustments, he claims, there can be a misjudgement of the focus of ministry when the blueprint is used to shape the ministry in a real place.

A given blueprint ecclesiology may indeed respond adequately to its context. But, again, the lack of such analysis increases the likelihood that it will not, even though it may be consonant with Scripture and tradition. In such a case the theologian would have misconstrued the historical movement of the Church and its present shape, or misinterpreted the ecclesiological context or both. As a result the blueprint, although fine as a presentation of doctrine, would be unfruitful or impractical in the concrete in that like most bad judgements, it would respond to what is peripheral rather than to what is central. And because the blueprint is developed without explicit consideration of the ecclesiological context, it may well take longer to recognise its inadequacy.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Healy, Nicholas, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical–Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Cambridge: CUP, 2000, p. 39.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

This is important when assessing the kinds of initiatives around mission and church growth that often fail to fully acknowledge the complexity of contextual ministry. Healy uses the terminology of blueprints and it is interesting to note how this relates to Arendt's work category, which, I argued, is not principally applicable to parish ministry. I will explore this further later in the chapter when looking at the difference between delegation and collaboration. At this point it is important to stress the centrality of concrete thinking and contextualisation in the practice of parish ministry.

Although the importance of contextual ministry is increasingly emphasised, initiatives from diocesan offices or courses on Church leadership can imply that *there are* formulas and measurable outcomes that fit all churches.²⁸⁵ Just as all people are unique, so are all parishes and congregations. There may be many similarities, but no two places are the same and no parish stays the same because they are made up of people. To attend properly to the particularity of a parish means time spent in what might look like 'doing nothing'. Stadlen suggests that this is how observers perceive a mother's need to spend time simply sitting and looking at her child; it appears as if she is doing nothing but in fact she is looking, listening and learning.

Just so, parish clergy need to look, listen and absorb the community they are called to serve. It means listening to the stories of people and watching how they interact. It means in practical terms time spent visiting, drinking coffee, reading old accounts of the parish and local history. It means learning the geography of the place, seeing where people spend their time and spending time with them. It means finding out what they are proud of, what delights them and what disappoints or shames them. It takes time and is ongoing.

Clergy who spend a long time in a place may know it well but they, too, have to attend to the changes, shifts in demographics and local self-understanding. Good clergy do this attending, often without consciously setting out to. Their interest in people and their stories means that they are keen to listen and to understand the particularity of a place. In arriving to work in a

²⁸⁵ The Church of England's General Synod discussed Mission Action Plans at its July 2011 meeting and whether to have a national Mission Action Plan. These do include an assessment of context, but have a tendency to become formulaic and driven by only one aspect of parish life: that of numerical growth. There is an assumption that a five-year action plan can fix the parishes' priorities, which seems to leave little room for contingent circumstances.

new church, clergy need to learn that it is not always the people who are most ready to tell you 'how it is' who have the most accurate vision. It involves putting together a picture from a multiplicity of images and accounts, many of which will be biased and some positively skewed. As the priest attends to the community's own stories, she can begin to help interpret their account of the church and the parish. Yet the story is ongoing and changing, so time spent attending to the concrete reality of a community is always part of the centrality of ministry. It may look like *doing nothing* but it is a vital aspect of creating and maintaining the relationships and community of the local church.

Loving attention and asymmetric relationships

Ruddick links attention to the virtue of love. It is not simply to recognise the other's subjectivity, but to look at them lovingly with compassion and a willingness to care. It seems much easier to understand loving attention in the context of a mother and child than it does in the complex relationships of a parish priest. Noddings, in expounding an ethics of care, notes that in some caring relationships it is relatively easy to care – it feels 'natural'. This, she would say, is usually true of maternal caring, yet there is, she claims, an ethical caring, when we have to deliberately choose to care for another whom we don't easily love by making ourselves think about how we would respond to them if we did love them. This is done by drawing on previous experiences of caring and of being cared for, but also through a deliberate discipline.

A person not only needs experience in caring to do this, she or he also needs to have made a commitment to be a caring person.²⁸⁶

Through ordination clergy have made a commitment to care. In accepting the responsibility of a given parish they have made a commitment to care for this place and these people. 'Receive the cure of souls which is yours and mine', the bishop says. In order to attend lovingly to these people clergy need to utilise the capacity for ethical caring, but they do so using theological resources. At the heart of the Christian faith is the belief that each person we encounter is already loved by God and in some way bears the image of God.

²⁸⁶ Noddings, *Starting at Home*, p. 30.

Although it is still necessary for a priest to draw on her own experience of past caring encounters, there is this added theological dimension to help her care. These people are beloved of God who Himself loves and cares for her. Noddings would firmly reject this theological ethic, but for clergy it is a central motivational factor in attending to the other. To recognise that the other, however difficult we may find them, is precious in God's sight does not blind us to their faults; instead we are told to recognise the Christ in their needs and in loving Him we can love and serve our neighbours. This involves a cognitive capacity and a virtue, the capacity to think theologically about the worth of each person and acknowledge their kinship and the virtue of love, particularly love of neighbour.

There is, of course, a danger in this theological position. It might work against recognising the subjectivity of the other and could lead clergy into seeing people and situations as types. This temptation to slip out of intersubjective relationships into ones that, however benignly meant, objectify others is made more likely by the asymmetrical nature of many of the encounters clergy engage in. Although the actual status of clergy may be ambiguous, the reality is that once ordained, people relate to them as having a certain authority. As they engage in the activity of parish ministry clergy find themselves in asymmetrical relationships of caring, of teaching, of leading and ministering. That is not to say that *all* relationships within the parish will be asymmetrical. Clergy will have many different relationships of friendship, collegiality and individuals who provide *them* with care and nurture, but the role means that they have responsibilities that place them consistently in a position where others are, albeit transitionally, dependent on them for a variety of reasons.

Asymmetric relationships are valuable because they provide the luxury of transitional dependence. That is, they are the kind of relationships in which, for a period, we can rely on the other for something that we need. The mother/child relationship needs to be asymmetrical because the child is in need of care and protection. It is asymmetrical for a long time, but the aim is that the child gradually does grow and the levels of dependency shift and change. However, it is not just children who need the luxury of transitional dependence; there are many encounters that we have as adults where the relationship works

because, at some level, one is caring and the other cared-for. Noddings talks about such relationships being ‘generously unequal’. She discusses this in her role as a teacher.

Occasional equal meetings may occur between teacher and student, of course, but the meetings between teacher as teacher and student as student are necessarily and generously unequal.²⁸⁷

That is, the student does not have a responsibility for the teacher of the same kind that the teacher has for the student. The teacher’s role is to free the student by the way that she cares for him; there is no expectation of the student reciprocating in kind. At one level such relationships are clearly unequal, but where they are motivated by the desire to free the other and to enable them to flourish, the inequality is in role, not in substance, as Alistair McFadyen in *The Call to Personhood* points out.

In dialogue, equality refers to a formal identity between the partners, to the quality of their intersubjective engagement. It does not refer to their material identities, or to an equality in the quantity of the social space-time they occupy ... A purely quantitative notion of equality issues in a tit-for-tat understanding of personal relationships where every communication has to receive a response equal in quantity, where every gift has to be returned.²⁸⁸

Thus it follows that asymmetric relationships, especially when shaped by role, can be intersubjective. Where the role requires an asymmetry in the relationship, there is a particular responsibility on the part of the one who has the power, who is able to do something, to focus on the subjectivity of the other. This involves recognising them as a unique individual in a unique set of circumstances, however similar they may be to other people or other situations.

The vast majority of relationships formed during parish ministry will be at some level asymmetric, in which the priest has a responsibility to care, because she is the priest. Many encounters are intended as relationships of

²⁸⁷ Noddings, *Caring*, p. 67.

²⁸⁸ McFadyen, Alistair, *The Call to Personhood*, Cambridge: CUP, 1990, pp. 144–45. Like Noddings, McFadyen looks at how different professional relationships demand asymmetry in order to work. He uses the example of a consultant doctor: ‘The social space-time appropriate to each is quite properly bounded by the professional relationship orientated towards the health needs of the patient.’

pastoral care in which the priest is expected to attend carefully to the other. However, in *all* relationships and encounters with people the priest is aware that she is available to be used in this way and that her role requires her to respond appropriately to the other. This does not mean that she has to do everything or meet every need herself, but it does mean that she has to practise the discipline of attending to the particular and the real. This is the reality of the relationship and the responsibility of ordination.

One of the complexities for parish clergy is that the encounters they have do not have clear boundaries. The asymmetric relationships of teachers to students, doctors to patients or counsellors to their clients are usually carried out in specific places and times, but parish clergy, like mothers, live within the context of their work. Stadlen comments that for mothers this means they learn to be ‘instantly interruptible’.²⁸⁹ In making this statement she is acknowledging that one of the most overwhelming aspects for new parents is that they are not in control of the times they are needed by the child. This is not the same as being constantly engaged with the child, though sometimes it can feel like it. There will be times when the child sleeps and, later, time when she plays on her own and, still later, long periods when she is responsible for herself and there is little the mother actually has to do for her. However, a vital aspect of the relationship is that sense of being expected to switch on full attention when needed. Sometimes the signals are clear – the child demands attention – but at other times it needs a careful reading of the particular child and their circumstances to know that some response is needed. This interruptibility and the need to suddenly switch into an attentive responsive role is a recognisable aspect of parish ministry.

Attentiveness needs to guard against being obtrusive. Ruddick talks about a mother’s ability to scrutinise and the need to learn how to do so unobtrusively. As children become older attentiveness involves that ability to hear or see a difference in the child. Are they ill? Are they worried about something? Do they need reassurance or leaving alone? Intense attention is therefore not a continuous process, but it involves an ongoing awareness of the other and the ability to scrutinise without interfering. It also requires the ability

²⁸⁹ Stadlen, *What Mothers Do*, chapter 4.

to be alert so that it is possible to switch into focused attention when necessary, and a willingness to be interruptible.

Clergy may have more boundaries than mothers, but they also have far more people to attend to. The reality of the relationship means they find themselves expected to focus on the needs of the other in unplanned and unexpected circumstances. Some encounters are, of course, planned and organised, but the way in which clergy live and work amongst their parishioners means that they need to develop the ability to notice when a conversation moves from general smalltalk to something specific that needs attending to. They need to learn to look and listen and notice. This doesn't mean that they indiscriminately drop everything for anyone who wants to talk. There needs to be prioritising and sometimes, with both adults and children, suggestions can be made about appropriate times to talk further or explore an issue more deeply or to take issues somewhere else. What it does mean for both mothers and priests is that the moments that require deep attention to the other are not easily scheduled and happen in the midst of the mundane and ordinary. When these moments happen they require what Noddings calls 'motivational displacement'; a willingness to put aside one's own focus for a limited timespan so that the other becomes the centre of attention.

It is important to note the limited timespan of such motivational displacement. The 'putting aside' of one's own needs is a necessary but time-limited aspect of attending to the other. Intersubjective relationships need two subjects. Clergy need to find a sense of their own subjectivity both in and beyond the practice of their ministry. To be available for others does not necessitate losing sight of one's own needs and concerns. It is important, therefore, that there are ongoing and momentary relationships in which the priest is cared for herself and where she can rest on the generosity of others. Central to her ministry is prayer and worship, those experiences in which she is able to refresh her experience of being cared for and dependent on God. Through such experiences her own sense of being valued needs to be maintained. In caring there is a temptation to lose one's sense of self, which can lead to an over-intrusive caring; the need to be needed. In describing the discipline of attentive love in mothering Ruddick writes:

Attentive love is prey to the self-loss that can afflict maternal thinking; indifference, passivity, and self-denial are among its degenerative forms. Attentive love is also a corrective to many defects of maternal thinking, including an anxious or inquisitorial scrutiny, domination, intrusiveness, caprice, and self-protective cheeriness.²⁹⁰

In this description of the degenerate forms of attentive love Ruddick speaks of passivity and domination, issues that will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. She also notes self-denial, which is relevant to the above discussion about retaining the priest's own subjectivity. Loving attention, being interruptible and focusing on the other necessarily involves times of self-renunciation, but this is not the same as self-denial or self-sacrifice.

To court self-denial for its own sake perverts rather than expresses attentive love. Mothers are especially prone to this perversion, since they are rewarded for self-sacrifice. They are familiar with the danger of denying their own needs only to find they have projected them onto their children ... The soul that can empty itself is a soul that already has a known, respected, albeit ever-developing self to return to when the moment of attention has passed.²⁹¹

What Ruddick writes here about mothers is also true for parish priests. They bring to their work a whole language about servanthood and self-sacrifice. This can mean that clergy are often tempted to 'court self-denial', equating this with *agape* and Christian service. The danger is also similar in that this kind of self-denial can often result in projecting their need to be needed onto the people they serve. Those cared for become necessary for validating the sense of sacrifice. The priest can then begin to look for her own sense of subjectivity through the dependence of others. It is this kind of perverted attention that unwittingly seeks to keep people dependent. It can easily lead to manipulative behaviour and sometimes a deep resentment towards those who are being served.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 120.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 122.

²⁹² An insightful article on this tendency for self-sacrifice to degenerate into manipulative behaviour is written by Brita Gill-Austern, 'Love understood as self-sacrifice and self-denial: what does it do to women?' in *Through the Eyes of Women*, ed. Jeane Stevenson Moessner, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996, pp. 304 – 321.

It is important in ministry, therefore, to acknowledge the difference between the time-limited experiences of self-renunciation that attentive love calls for and the self-abnegation that is one of its degenerate forms. To be there for another *is* time-limited even if in some relationships, like mothering, the timespan is great. This shift of focus away from the self and onto the other is set in a concrete situation that exists in a particular time. Different levels of need and vulnerability will dictate how long one needs to attend to the other. However, what Noddings describes as ‘a motivational displacement’ is not the same as an ongoing attitude of self-denial and self-sacrifice unconnected to specific people and situations. To court sacrifice for its own sake is not a Gospel imperative, while to be prepared to lay down one’s life for a friend is. Christians are all called to love our neighbours and to be focused on the ways in which we can help others, and for some this may mean living lives of heroic self-giving and even acts of martyrdom. What is essential is the relational aspect of such acts and the concrete situation. Caring, times of self-sacrifice and being at the disposal of the other are all called for and motivated by the *actual* needs of a *genuine* other, not a projection of one’s own need to be needed or a false belief that all sacrifice is somehow Christ-like.²⁹³

Thus it follows that clergy need to be ready to attend, ready to care but also confident in their own subjectivity. This is important because the ability to attend to others’ needs often involves the capacity to see things from a wider perspective. Clergy need to be able to both feel for the other but also offer a reflective response to them. This involves recognising and attending to feelings that are different from one’s own but are real and valid to those caught up in them. Many pastoral encounters will involve people facing situations that are outside the priest’s personal experience and people will react and respond to such circumstances in different ways. In attending to people and communities the ability to both sympathise in the true sense of the word and yet offer perspective means that the priest needs to have a dual focus.

²⁹³ The essay by Beverly Wildung Harrison ‘The Power of Anger in the Work of Love’ in *Making the Connections* (ed. Robb, C. S.), Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985, pp. 3 - 21, esp. p.19 which explores the way sacrifice and crucifixion become confused with imagery of love.

When I attend in this way I become, in an important sense, a duality. I see through two pairs of eyes, hear with two sets of ears, feel the pain of the other self in addition to my own.²⁹⁴

So writes Noddings. In saying this she is affirming the one-caring's ability to genuinely recognise and sympathise with the reality of the other's needs while still being able to see things from outside the situation. This involves the capacity to reflect on and articulate emotions and feelings. It is this ability to both recognise and value the feelings of others but not be overwhelmed by the other's emotions that is useful in being able to comfort and support them.

Recent studies looking at attachment in mothers and children has some interesting light to shed on the mother's sense of self. De Marneffe comments on the findings of interviews with parents about their own childhood experiences.

What appears decisive is not, as one might expect, the actual attachment experiences parents had with their own caregivers. Rather, it is how parents are able *to think and talk about* these experiences – in other words, their ability to reflect on and communicate about their experiences – that relates to the security of their child. This says something quite striking about the importance not simply of a mother's custodial care, but also her subjectivity ... If a mother can reflect, she can more accurately perceive and understand her own and others' thoughts and feelings. This in turn, makes her more likely to be able to respond sensitively to her child.²⁹⁵

Thus it follows that a sense of self and the ability to care for others requires reflective thinking that takes feelings seriously. It involves being able to reflect on concrete situations in one's own and others' lives and use the wisdom learned to respond appropriately in new situations. Such reflection also alters the way that failure is understood. Bad experiences, failures in love and care, mistakes and missed opportunities can all become, through reflection, opportunities for wisdom. This way of thinking acknowledges that sometimes we only learn to get things right through having experienced times when we or others have got things wrong. By this I mean not deliberate wrongdoing, but

²⁹⁴ Noddings, *Starting at Home*, p. 14.

²⁹⁵ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, pp. 77–8.

the inadequacies of human response that arise through our failures to attend or simply lack of experience and wisdom.

It is through this ability to learn from one's own and others' experiences by careful reflection that a priest builds up the wisdom and *phronesis* necessary for good practice. She learns not to be overwhelmed by the other's feelings, so caught up in them that she cannot respond, while continuing to be compassionate. Attending leads to a response that may be practical, or it may simply be the ability to acknowledge the reality of the other's feelings and assuring them that someone is there, for however short a time, being with them. This involves that generous inequality possible through the asymmetry of the relationship. Those being cared for know that there is no expectation that they need to shift their focus onto the one-caring.

The asymmetry in parish ministry arises out of the relationship shaped by ordination. Just as a child receives her mother's attention and love because that is what the relationship suggests a mother provides so, at best, people can rest on the care of the priest because priests are there to provide such care; it is who they are and what they do. The multiplicity of such encounters means that priests learn through the wisdom of practice to recognise the complexity of the different experiences of human life and to offer comfort and hope to those in the midst of them. And as we saw in mothering, parish ministry involves learning to use feelings as a way of assessing situations, judging appropriate responses and evaluating action.

To summarise this section, I have been arguing that parish ministry, like mothering involves a relationship centred in particularity. Clergy accept the responsibility to care for a particular set of people in a given place. This means that they need to value concrete thinking and the ability to attend to the other. They are called into relationships which, for periods of time, are asymmetrical and it is important that such relationships remain intersubjective. This means a proper recognition of the other and the ability, for a necessary timespan, to focus on the reality of who they are and what they need. This does not require an ongoing attitude of self-denial, but needs careful maintenance of the priest's own sense of being a loved self.

Mutuality is found in the giving and receiving of care. It involves taking seriously the importance of feelings and allowing feelings to be part of

the reasoning behind action and assessing action. The practice of caring ministry means that clergy start with the theological knowledge that they are caring for those whom God already cares for. As they grow in the practice, the motivation to focus and care can begin to feel natural, though there will be times when it is not easily forthcoming and then they need to return to that theological perspective. This reminds them that each person is beloved of God and helps them to look for what is valuable in those they find hard to love. The knowledge that in caring for the least of these we care for Christ can enhance this ability to care, so long as it does not degenerate into forgetting the reality of the one being cared for. The ability to respond well appropriately, to attend lovingly to the other and to value concrete thinking are all aspects of ministerial practice. Teaching, training and preparation can help affirm the importance of these aspects of ministry but they are learned and honed through practice and the ability to reflect on practice. And, as Ruddick reminds us, to name them is not to possess them, but to point to both the temptations to be guarded against and the good practice to be aimed for.

The virtue of humility and the issue of power

So far it has been argued that the creating and maintaining of the relationships that make up communities needs to be intersubjective and this means recognising the subjectivity of the other, even when the relationship is asymmetrical. The virtue of attentive love is, I have argued, central for holding on to the subjectivity of the other. As Ruddick writes:

Attention lets difference emerge without searching for comforting commonalities, dwells upon the *other*, and lets otherness be. Acts of attention strengthen a love that does not clutch at or cling to the beloved but lets her grow.²⁹⁶

Attentive love, like all virtues, needs to guard against the temptations of its degenerative forms, including the temptation to self-denial. Ruddick also lists passivity and domination as degenerative forms of loving attention. We also noted that the virtue of humility is particularly important for guarding against these temptations. In the previous chapter this virtue was identified as guarding

²⁹⁶ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 122.

against the temptation of intrusive, over-protective mothering or neglectful and ineffectual care; these are particular manifestations of domination and passivity in mothering that have strong parallels in parish ministry.

When Ruddick speaks of virtues she constantly points out that to name a virtue is not to possess it, but to acknowledge what the struggles are and to point towards good practice. She explores humility within the context of a mother's fantasy that perfect control is possible; that she can do everything to keep her child safe. Mothers have to learn that the world is complex and much is beyond their control.

In a world beyond one's control, to be humble is to have a profound sense of the limits of one's actions and of the unpredictability of the consequences of one's work.²⁹⁷

Ruddick defends her use of the word 'control' in the context of caring for children, but in the context of parish ministry I will use the term 'responsibility'. A parish priest without humility may become frantic in her efforts to be responsible for everything but she cannot, out of degenerative humility or passivity, relinquish the responsibility that comes with her charge. And for a priest humility not only means acknowledging the unpredictability of chance but also the inability of knowing the overarching plans of God. Humility, therefore, is about having a proper understanding of what falls within an individual's capacity to act and is therefore connected to ideas of power. Misunderstandings of power can lead to dominating patterns of leadership or passive inabilities to exercise authority appropriately. The virtue of humility guards against these temptations to misuse power.

To explore this idea further it is important to acknowledge that the asymmetric nature of many clergy encounters and relationships are ones that involve power. Power is an ambiguous term for both mothers and clergy. It can be hard for mothers to acknowledge the power they have over dependent and vulnerable children and this very power can, at times, be so overwhelming that, in fact, they feel powerless. This sense of powerlessness is compounded by their social status and the many 'experts' who seem to know how they should

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

be doing things better. And, above all, discussions of power and control can seem out of place in a relationship that is meant to consist of love.

I would suggest that clergy, too, have ambiguous attitudes towards power. They, too, feel a complex mixture of powerlessness in the face of a role that is never complete, carried out within a context where many 'experts' seem to hold up impossible expectations. Power can also be a complex word in a practice that is meant to be shaped by service and love. And yet, if they are honest, they can acknowledge that they have great power in people's lives. They act as gatekeepers to the sacraments and rituals of the Church, they speak in the name of God with the power to forgive and to bless, and through their teaching, preaching and leading of the congregational worship they shape people's attitudes to God, to themselves and to others. As parish priests they have authority within the Church and the community but, as we saw in the first chapter, this authority is circumspect. They may at one level be 'in charge' but this charge is held within a complex set of relationships within and beyond the parish.

In these relationships clergy need the virtue of humility to guard against the temptations to use their power to dominate or to abdicate responsibility. Arendt maintains that in the realm of action, the interaction of human relationships and communities, power is always present, but it is not understood as necessarily negative. She draws a contrast between power and force:

Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men in existence ... if it could be possessed like strength or applied like force instead of being dependent upon the unreliable and only temporary agreement of many wills and intentions, omnipotence would be a concrete human possibility.²⁹⁸

For Arendt force belongs in the realm of work. It is appropriate in the making of products, but not in human action.

In looking at Arendt's categories we saw that parish ministry has little to do with the realm of work with its tangible ends. This is important in trying to understand how power in the relationships of ministry must be utilised

²⁹⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 200.

collaboratively; it must not be understood as strength or force. These belong in the realm of work, which is non-collaborative. Where aspects of work are inappropriately imported into the realm of action then relationships of collaboration can break down. Work or fabrication is the appropriate realm for blueprints and conformity to a predetermined plan. There is a danger that when these ideas and terminology are applied to parish ministry, power inevitably becomes corrupted at some level. For instance, if a priest sees her role in leading the parish as implementing a vision or strategy that has been reached as a form of definitive blueprint, rather than through the speaking and reflecting of the people, even for the best of reasons, then she will not be working within constructive power relationships. Instead she is seeking to lead by strength or, at the worst, a form of force. This will also be a degeneration of humility into a form of domination. A battle of wills may then follow.

Arendt's understanding of power offers an important corrective to misconceptions; she notes that power 'can be divided without decreasing it':

For power, like action, is boundless ... Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with. For the same reason, power can be divided without decreasing it, and the interplay of powers with their checks and balances is even liable to generate more power, so long, at least, as the interplay is alive and has not resulted in a stalemate.²⁹⁹

Power in human relationships thus has the capacity to be shared and to be generative. Where humility is practised there is a right understanding of power, which should enable collaborative relationships to flourish. Such collaborative relationships should be central to creating and maintaining the community of the local church, where good practice must include generative power-sharing. The Church of England has developed structures for this; elected officers, PCCs and various deanery and diocesan bodies are meant to share power generatively to build up the Church. Alongside these formal structures are the informal networks of relationships within any parish – with complex power dynamics. The parish priest has particular responsibilities within all these structures. As I said in the first chapter, the current understanding of parish

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 201.

ministry is of collaborative decision-making and strategising. In order to do this, priests need to understand the difference between delegation and collaboration. They need to understand the difference between learning how to negotiate vision and imposing a plan. They also need to acknowledge the shared nature of parish ministry.

The importance of collaborative patterns of ministry is central to Pickard's work, which we looked at in the first chapter. Like Arendt, he sees the power that arises from human interaction as potentially generative.

Life in relation to others involves the exercise of power. Contrary to popular rhetoric these days power per se is not a bad thing, nor is it a necessary evil ... A collaborative approach to ministry requires both sharing of power and a generous bestowal of power. This is a deeply regenerative action and increases the power available. However, this dynamic is counter-intuitive and something most of us resist out of fear of our own diminution.³⁰⁰

Here he identifies the potential for breakdown in power relations arising out of a fear of the loss of a person's own sense of subjectivity. Interestingly, he, too, sees this degeneration moving in one of two directions: 'either autocratic or unhealthy submissive forms of relation'³⁰¹. These degenerative ways of relating connect to the ideas of domination and passivity, the fantasy of perfect control or the despair that leads to abnegating responsibility that were outlined above and in the previous chapter in terms of maternal practice. He writes:

The autocratic way in ministry deals with fear and anxiety about loss of control by the exercise of power over others. Power may be released and authority delegated, but this is more often not true delegation but task assignment ... The autocratic leader uses the gifts of others but creativity, where it is allowed, is carefully managed.³⁰²

Pickard thus comments on how the desire to hold on to control, most likely a fantasy of perfect control, leads to a kind of over-management of others. This task assignment and micromanagement resonates with Arendt's work realm and, therefore, the autocrat tends to replace genuine power with strength or force. Where ideas that more properly belong in the realm of fabrication are

³⁰⁰ Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, p. 2.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

imported into the activity of parish ministry, it is not surprising that an autocratic, isolated managerial style results.

In contrast to the autocratic or dominant way Pickard describes the passivity that is unable or unwilling to take appropriate responsibility.

The alternative to autocratic leadership is often an unhealthy submissiveness in which a person's gifts and creativity for ministry are continually suppressed; the voice is lost, vision wanes, stasis sets in, energy levels diminish, creativity dies. In this scenario collaboration is thwarted due to lack of confidence that a person has anything to contribute to shared life and ministry.³⁰³

In this scenario the leader has lost her sense of her own subjectivity and is therefore allowing others to dominate her. It is an inability to take seriously the responsibility that comes with the role and therefore equates to a form of neglect and a failure to care. He goes on to say:

Both of these defaults feed off isolationist and individual approaches to ministry. There is little or no understanding of what it means to be members 'one to another' (Romans 12:5) orientated towards the other as the ontological foundation of life and ministry.³⁰⁴

It follows, therefore, that in ministry, as in motherhood, the reality of the responsibilities inherent in the relationship can lead to the temptation to domination or passivity. It is also true in both practices that these degenerative forms of relating can often arise out of genuine desire for good practice. Domination in mothering can be motivated by the desire to protect the child, to help her fit in socially, to minimise risk and pain. The tendency to passivity may come from a belief that others know better what is right for the child or that the child's independent freedom makes boundaries inappropriate. Similarly in parish ministry, autocratic styles of leadership may be motivated by a sincere belief that the priest knows what is best to preserve the life and faith of the people, that her role and training means she has a duty to impose a particular vision. This may be shaped by an adherence to a strict tradition so that conformity is valued over exploration. Also priests may believe that their

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

understanding of God or their theology of priesthood demands an autocratic style of leadership. Where theology prizes conformity to a narrowly defined understanding of a proper Christian, it is easy to see how ministerial work falls more easily into the realm of 'work'. The aim, in that case, is to produce a recognisable finished article; the danger is that people become commodities.

On the other hand, priests may move into unhealthy, submissive patterns of ministry because they believe that this is what it means to be a servant. Or they may not trust their own judgements or vision and fear imposing boundaries that limit people's freedoms. This can also arise out of a fear of conflict and a misguided belief that love is never angry. As Pickard suggests, this passivity can often lead to lack of clarity and vision or to circumstances where others in the community assert their own agendas in domineering ways. Clearly there are also those, in both mothering and ministry, who dominate because they have learned that such behaviour makes their life easier or at some level they feel validated by having power over others. And there are those who move to passivity for an easier life, allowing others to fill the vacuum and make the difficult decisions. It is also true that even the best of mothers or clergy can manifest aspects of domination or passivity in certain situations. Tiredness, overwork and lack of affirmation can all lead to failures in collaboration and a move to impose one's will or simply give up on a particular issue. Ruddick suggests that humility is a key virtue in guarding against the temptations to domination or passivity in mothering, and I suggest it is also a key virtue to guard against the similar temptations of ministry. As perhaps is the need to get adequate rest and sleep!

To name a virtue is not to possess it but to be aware of the aims of good practice. For priests to practice humility does not, of course, guarantee that others will also practise the virtue, but if a priest models a characteristically humble way of relating, it is more likely that others may see the benefits. In the responsibilities of helping others to mature, priests themselves need to practise and model the virtues. Humility, therefore, is about a realistic acceptance of who one is and what one is called to do. It involves acknowledging the power that is intrinsic to the relationship and using it in ways that generate life and growth. If we turn to one of the Pauline passages mentioned at the beginning of

this chapter, we find that before the list of ministries in the Church, there is an exhortation to have a realistic sense of self:

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.³⁰⁵

Christians are called ‘not to think of yourself more highly’ but to have a ‘sober judgement’ that acknowledges one’s own sense of faith and responsibility within the diversity of gifts. This right sense of subjectivity is connected to the virtue of humility. It precedes Paul’s use of the body image, a metaphor for interdependency in building up the life of the Church. Thus, having a right sense of self and being properly humble is necessary if we are to be a community in which we are ‘members one of another’. This brings us back to the importance of maintaining intersubjective relationships that require respect for the reality and particularity of others while guarding against the temptation to dominate. These relationships also require a sense of one’s own worth and subjectivity and recognition of one’s own gifts and calling, in order to resist the temptation to loss of voice and degeneration into passivity.

Forgiveness and trust

In *Maternal Thinking* Ruddick connects the virtue of humility to that of cheerfulness. In the last chapter I maintained that this could be understood as the virtue of hope. The capacity to continue to believe in new and good possibilities and for Christians to believe that in God all will, in the end, be well. Cheerfulness for Ruddick was the virtue necessary to guard against the temptations of cheery denial on the one hand or despair on the other.

Cheerfulness that encourages children to deny their sadness and anger or that protects them from truths they will have to acknowledge only

³⁰⁵ Romans 12: 2–5, NRSV.

confuses and inhibits them; cheerfulness that allows a mother herself to mystify reality drains her intellectual energy and befuddles her will.³⁰⁶

Thus the virtuous cheerfulness she describes needs to be clear-sighted and resilient. It is also connected to a willingness ‘to start over and over again’.³⁰⁷ It is generative, connected to birthing imagery; Arendt calls this ‘natality’ and connects it to hope. Although, neither Ruddick nor Arendt write from a Christian perspective, their emphasis on a realistic understanding of the world and human nature means that they acknowledge the fallibility of humans and, therefore, the necessity for human relationships to negotiate failure and to hope in new beginnings. These two writers’ different understandings of resilient cheerfulness and natality connect to theological ideas about the reality of hope despite human fallibility. To acknowledge that humanity is fallible can encompass an understanding of sinfulness in both an individual and structural sense allowing for a theological understanding of forgiveness leading to the hope of redemption. Neither writer sees redemption as an aspect of divine action, but Arendt in particular focuses on the necessity for forgiveness within human interactions as an essential component of new life.

Arendt notes that action, human relating, has to deal with ‘the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done’ and ‘unpredictability ... the chaotic uncertainty of the future’.³⁰⁸ That is, human relationships and communities need to be able to cope with the mistakes, failures and sins of human fallibility while maintaining the hope that working together will be fruitful and generative. Action is, therefore, clearly connected to contingency. She names the remedy for these two predicaments as the ‘faculty of forgiving’ and the ‘faculty to make and keep promises’. She is particularly interested in forgiveness as a necessity for the sins and mistakes that are made unknowingly and unintentionally as we misread others and trespass against them. She looks to the teachings of Jesus on forgiveness, while distancing herself from Christianity, seeing his understanding of forgiveness as the clearest philosophical teaching on the subject. She distinguishes between crime and willed evil on the one hand and trespassing on the other. The former,

³⁰⁶ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 75.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁰⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 237.

she says, ‘according to Jesus ... will be taken care of by God in the last judgement’.

But trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action’s constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly.³⁰⁹

It follows that in any generative relationships in the home, church or wider community forgiveness is a necessary component. It allows relationships to flourish despite the inevitable failings at times to recognise and respond appropriately to the other. Arendt states:

Forgiving and the relationship it establishes is always an eminently personal (though not necessarily individual or private) affair in which *what* was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it. This too, was clearly recognised by Jesus ... and it is the reason for the current conviction that only love has the power to forgive.³¹⁰

Thus forgiveness involves the ability to attend properly to the ‘who’ of the other and is therefore deeply intersubjective. Arendt notes that it may not be possible to love everyone but it is possible to *respect* the other and to forgive out of that respect.

Yet what love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs.³¹¹

This sense of respect for the other connects to ideas discussed above about valuing the other and recognising the worth and value of another as one made in the image of God and loved by God. This ability to forgive connects to the virtue of humility in which each person is able to accept and acknowledge their fallibility and limitations. Within mothering it is necessary for a mother to acknowledge to her child when she gets things wrong, just as she seeks to teach her child how to admit his failings and take responsibility for his wrongdoings. Mothers can only be ‘good enough’. Ruddick writes:

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 241.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 243.

Only if children and mothers alike know how to make amends and start again will children become moral and able to take pleasure in themselves and their friends.³¹²

For clergy the ability to forgive and to be forgiven within the human relationships of the parish is vital for growth, development and maturity. This means developing the humility to admit both genuine failings but also to accept and acknowledge the mistakes in relating made through ignorance or the failure to attend; the ways in which they have trespassed. Too often admitting mistakes or accepting responsibility for things that have generally misfired can be perceived as weakness. Yet it is often through accepting such responsibility that individuals and situations are freed into new life. At times this means being generous in seeking forgiveness in situations where others may well have overreacted or misunderstood. For a parish priest, in ministering to a large number of very different people, it is almost inevitable that sometimes individuals will be intentionally or unintentionally overlooked, misunderstood or marginalised, and it is important to be able to genuinely recognise their feelings and acknowledge any hurt. To forgive and be forgiven is a *discipline* and it is shaped by the virtues of humility and hopefulness.

We can therefore conclude that collaborative patterns of ministry that promote mature congregations and communities involve the practice of forgiveness; a readiness to admit mistakes and to be hopeful about new beginnings. This requires a particular way of understanding failure and risk. In mothering we see that apparent failures can be shared as wisdom. They are an aspect of trial-and-error ways of learning. This is not a lesser way of learning; in fact, sometimes it is the only way practice and wisdom can be developed due to the contingency and particularity of human relationships. In parish ministry, mistakes, failures, projects that did not quite work can be regarded as tools for learning and developing wisdom, meaning communities can be kind to each other as they look realistically at why certain things did not work, compassionately naming errors, forgiving mistakes and starting again. This means having the humility to accept our limitations and fallibilities and to

³¹² Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p.109.

continue to respect others despite their fallibility. It also means valuing this way of learning, understanding that learning wisdom through practice is very different from following a set of rules or proscribed behaviours. To accept this means eschewing fantasies of perfection while not letting go of the vision and hope that things can be better and people can flourish.

Where Ruddick identifies ‘cheerfulness’ as a virtue, I would suggest that in ministry it correlates to the virtue of hope that for Christians is grounded in the promises of God. It is in hope that we forgive and are forgiven, trusting in the possibilities of redemption and new life both within our earthly relationships and in the eternal realities of God’s kingdom. In experiencing God’s constant forgiveness and trust in us we find the capacity to continue to forgive and trust others. Hope is intricately linked to the ability to trust in the promises of God and it involves us in learning to trust others and be trustworthy ourselves. We find these concepts of trust in the philosophies of both Arendt and Ruddick. Arendt sees trust as the faculty to make and keep promises. This, she concludes, requires the virtues of faith and hope. Ruddick identifies the maternal virtues of ‘proper trust’ and conscientiousness.

In looking at Ruddick’s understanding of the virtues of trust and conscientiousness in maternal practice we can find helpful insights for how naming these virtues can help good ministerial practice. She argues that mothers need to both be trustworthy and to trust their emergent child; to be conscientious in helping a child to develop their own conscientiousness. The temptation to a degenerate form of these virtues involves giving up on trust and seeking instead blind obedience from their children. Discussions of obedience and conscientiousness inevitably raise issues about how moral values are instilled in children. There are clearly schools of parenting that maintain that strict obedience is the most effective way of instilling appropriate values and shaping a child’s life. It is also true that there are theological traditions that would see similar training in obedience as a good model for making disciples. Yet there is a danger that while these models may help people act appropriately in recognisable circumstances, they may not develop their capacity to deal with new and ambiguous situations where learned rules cannot be easily applied. So blind obedience is not an effective way to develop a child’s own conscientiousness and his capacity to act well in situations that do not fit neatly

into the parameters of his upbringing. In terms of discipleship, such models may leave individuals struggling with circumstances that conflict with rigid understandings of right belief. Maturity involves developing the capacity to make good choices in contingent situations, what MacIntyre calls becoming an independent practical reasoner. It links to the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis*, the intellectual capacity to act virtuously in contingent concrete situations. For people to develop such a capacity, they need to be trusted and helped by those they find trustworthy.

If blind obedience is a degenerate form of proper trust, then it is also important to name the temptation in the other direction. A failure to model values and to challenge behaviour would arise from a lack of conscientiousness on the part of the mother and an abnegation of her responsibility. There are boundaries that need delineating for both safety and acceptability. Failure to take this responsibility, Ruddick suggests, arises out of a lack of confidence in a mother's own sense of values and, therefore, an inability to provide a consistent or robust role model. She becomes inauthentic and does not help her child develop the capacity to discern moral values and make good judgements. Clergy, too, may be tempted to neglect their calling to teach that faith has boundaries – albeit boundaries that can be discussed and explored. The Christian faith involves espousing Christian values and these need to be modelled and taught. At their best mothers try to model an authentic and trustworthy way of behaving in the home and the wider world while allowing the kinds of challenging conversations that can enable a child to develop his own sense of authentic behaviour and morality. This authenticity and willingness to allow challenging conversations should be part of good clergy practice.

To be trustworthy and authentic does not rule out conflict. Blind obedience sees conflict as a form of disobedience, challenging the received wisdom, whereas a descent into inauthenticity means that there is no confident place from which to manage conflict and to provide appropriate values with which to judge action. A proper acceptance of the subjectivity of others means that questions and challenges are necessary aspects of developing authenticity and conscientiousness. They are part of the reality of human interaction and the

realm of speech that Arendt sees as essential to building up communities. Ruddick writes:

Her children's differences require the most demanding of a mother's many balancing acts: alongside her own strong convictions of virtues and excellences she is to place her children's human need to ask and answer for themselves questions central to moral life ... To judge tenderly yet with confidence is, from the earliest years a primary maternal task.³¹³

She also notes that this process of learning will inevitably involve feelings of guilt and shame, which will need forgiveness and hope. It may also involve mothers having to rethink their own values and admit their own prejudices.

Clearly the maternal task is different from that of ministry, but there are similarities. Priests need to understand how to foster individual and community capacities to become mature and this involves both trusting and being trustworthy. A priest is called to live the Christian life authentically, and has a responsibility to teach others how to live such a life for themselves. At her ordination she responds to the question, 'Will you endeavour to fashion your own life and that of your household according to the way of Christ, that you may be a pattern and example to Christ's people?' with the words, 'By the help of God, I will.' This is one of the many promises made that a priest endeavours to keep; the ongoing attempt to live an authentically Christian life amidst those she cares for. In doing so she is attempting to be trustworthy.³¹⁴ She needs to be open to the challenges and questions of others, able to reflect on and defend the values by which she lives, and in doing so help those she cares for develop their Christian conscience and practice.

The calling to lead an authentically Christian life is no different for the priest than for any Christian, but what is different is the sacramental nature of the priest's role, which makes her a public sign. As we noted in Chapter One, this is a form of 'walking sacrament'. Through ordination a priest commits herself to being a public witness of trustworthiness and faithfulness. Many clergy wear the

³¹³ Ibid., p. 108.

³¹⁴ Pickard (*Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, pp. 217–8) connects ordination to promise-making, drawing on the work of Arendt and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

clerical collar as a recognition of this sign, an acceptance that they are to be visible as a Christian presence. Her life is meant to signify the reality of God's grace and the possibility of living an authentic Christian life. As with mothers, this is not simply a job or time-limited role. It is a way of being that is consequential to ordination. There is a level of scrutiny about their lifestyle, their families and how they spend their time that would not be relevant to most other caring professions. As we noted earlier, pastoral encounters are not all planned. Clergy may be stopped in the supermarket, while walking the dog or standing at the school gates. In fact, such encounters can often be places of rich ministry. This means that living authentically has a particularly public element for parish clergy. Their trustworthiness needs to be manifested by people's ability to recognise that what they teach is being practised in their own lives. The role of the priest is about developing a priestly character, developing virtuous habits that mean that one is able to act well contingently. The public scrutiny of a priest's authenticity, like children's scrutiny of their mothers, means that a priest has to behave in a virtuously Christian way often enough for people to both trust her judgements and believe that they, too, can live such a virtuous Christian life. They need to be counted on and accountable to the communities they serve, the denominations who have authorised them and, above all, to God, who has called and trusted them to serve faithfully.

Within a given church community others will be sharing in the process of 'growing up into the fullness of Christ' and trying to develop their own authenticity. To facilitate this a priest needs to be a trustworthy listener and also respect the differences of other personalities and experiences. Character is not the same as conformity, and the attempts of others to live virtuous lives may challenge assumptions and open new possibilities for the priest. Yet the priest also has a role in naming what is not good. The description of a priest in the ordinal includes a requirement that they are to admonish. Within her ever-deepening understanding of the Christian faith and her care for people a priest, at times, has to name what is wrong in others; behaviour that is hurtful or unjust. At the same time she has to engage in honest self-reflection. In the demand of 'acceptability' there needs to be a realistic setting of boundaries and a willingness at times to speak out where unacceptable behaviour is manifested. The temptation to be

over-critical of others needs to be guarded against, as does the fear of speaking out, which so often leads to a collusion with damaging ways of behaving or a failure to offer guidance to those who are lost.

The virtues we have described already can help guard against these temptations. Through growing in virtue a priest learns to speak out of a realistic humility that respects the individuals or communities being spoken to, to judge compassionately and to speak authentically, always being prepared to listen and learn. She also needs to remember that these people entrusted to her care are to be acceptable to God, as she herself needs to be, and that their lives are a witness and sign to others of the way God's grace works in the world. Too often a failure to name and challenge damaging behaviour in church communities at local and wider levels diminishes the witness to the reconciling love of God and the values of the kingdom. The ability to be trustworthy connects to Arendt's concept of making and keeping promises, which she sees as the ability for people to experience freedom in human relating. The function of the faculty to make promises, she claims, is to deal with the two-fold limitation of human interaction and to counteract the temptation to domination.

Man's inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all.³¹⁵

Delighting in the achievement of others

Arendt describes above the joy of mutual interdependence. Recognising that this joy is one of the rewards of building up human relationships and communities is important, but at times this recognition itself requires a disciplined approach. In mothering Ruddick calls it the virtue of delight. Sometimes it is easy to delight in the unfolding world of the child, but at times it is necessary to delight in the child's successes and pleasures that fall outside one's own particular interests. Joy and delight will sometimes be spontaneous, but they can also require

³¹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 244.

particular ways of looking at and valuing difference. In maternal practice one of the rewards is this capacity to gain joy from seeing the successes of the child. Some such successes are a direct result of gifts that have been deliberately nurtured, but other delights are surprising and personal to that child as they grow into particular skills and abilities that they themselves have developed. Finding ways to acknowledge and delight in the other are essential for the development of the relationship and the love that sustains it. The temptations of perfectionism and competitiveness can make delight difficult. They can lead to over-critical attitudes or an inability to acknowledge the child's own achievements.

The virtue and discipline of delighting in the achievements and development of others should also be a rewarding aspect of parish ministry. Some of this will be easy, especially where people's growth and accomplishments chime with the interests and tastes of the priest, but sometimes it will require discipline to delight in the genuine growth of others and the areas that they excel in. Such delight may mean accomodating practices that wouldn't initially occur to the priest into the life of the parish. It may divert attention from the priest's own pet projects onto areas that others are taking the initiative in and gaining the glory for. It may also mean allowing people to do things themselves that the priest knows she could do better or quicker.

In practising delight clergy need, like mothers, to resist the temptation to become competitive with their congregation and colleagues. Arrogance that assumes they are the expert or insecurity that finds it difficult to allow others to excel both make it hard for clergy to let people take the initiative or share the strain. Many clergy end up overworking because they find it difficult to let others help or take responsibility for aspects of the work. They can also find it difficult to let others care for them. Perfectionism can also undermine the offerings of others. It is important for clergy to ensure that things are done properly and well, but when perfectionism leads to an over-readiness to criticise and a pickiness with the offerings of others, it limits growth and works against mutuality. Clergy are meant to facilitate and free the gifts of other people in the service of the Church and the kingdom. To do so they need to delight in their achievements, to acknowledge their successes and to sympathise with their

failures in ways that encourage new attempts and new directions. Action is creative.

The virtue of delight in Ruddick connects to maternal storytelling, the ways in which mothers help the child to articulate his own story and the ways in which they make sense of their practice through storytelling to others. This relates to Arendt's understanding that action is closely connected to speech. She notes that the realm of work values products and can therefore often dismiss the importance of human speech and storytelling. She comments that they 'will incline to denounce action and speech as idleness, idle busybodyness and idle talk'. Yet it is in the ways in which the ongoing life of the parish is narrated that people learn to reflect on what it means to be part of this community. A community with a history and a future shaped by the plurality of people involved. Such stories can find joy in that plurality, celebrating successes and also modelling forgiveness by reflecting on mistakes and failures. Within the Church the ongoing interaction between current narratives of life and community and Biblical stories and Church traditions enables authentically Christian life to be affirmed and judged. Both the formal and informal ways in which stories are told in parishes is vitally important. The latter may at times feel like idle chatter, gossiping and time spent 'unproductively', but it is essential for building up the life of the church, sustaining relationships, promoting reflective ways of learning, affirming achievements and holding out new possibilities.

Conclusion

In seeking to understand parish ministry as both a relationship and an activity this chapter has focused on the ways of thinking and relating that can sustain good practice. Through reflecting on the ordination service it is possible to note the centrality of helping people grow up in Christ. Thus priestly ministry is concerned with enabling individuals and communities to become mature Christians so that the Church can be built up. The clergy have a pivotal role in creating and sustaining the kinds of relationships and spaces in which mature growth is both possible and best facilitated. This requires the careful maintenance of intersubjective relationships, especially when such relationships are asymmetric due to differences in role. Ruddick named various virtues that could

help mothers guard against the temptations that could destroy the necessary intersubjectivity of the relationship. In this chapter we have seen how these virtues and ways of thinking can help clergy guard against similar temptations.

The temptations are similar because the practice of ministry and motherhood both aim to help real people develop and mature within constantly changing circumstances. Thus, I suggest, the practice of parish ministry can be understood by using the threefold demand Ruddick identifies as shaping maternal practice. These demands are to preserve life, to foster growth and to guide people towards acceptability. They are connected to the New Testament calling to help people grow up in Christ, and to build up the body of Christ, in which each member is an integral part. Because these demands are carried out in relationships with real people in real places undergoing concrete, contingent experiences, abstract ideas about how churches work, and how people can be disciplined must be tempered by concrete thinking and appropriate contingent responsiveness. The demands are good but cannot always be acted on at the same time, and may conflict, so clergy learn to develop the virtue of *phronesis* by reflecting on their actions and learning how to prioritise and choose well. In doing so they accept that there will be failures in such judgements. Proper humility, and the ability to forgive and be forgiven can ensure that failures become part of the learned wisdom feeding in to the ongoing willingness to start again.

Parish ministry involves responsibility for the ongoing, everyday ‘domestic’ tasks of maintaining buildings, services, and community life. Much of this work connects to Arendt’s definition of labour and can be shared collectively, but must be done. Yet creating and maintaining communities involves far more ephemeral aspects, which link to Arendt’s definition of action. By its nature, such community-building is collaborative. Collaborative ministry needs intersubjective relationships of respect. Such relationships are prey to temptations of domination or passivity and the virtue of humility, alongside realism, compassion and delight, can guard against the degeneration into autocratic or submissive patterns of leadership. The priest in the parish, in collaborative relationships and ongoing pastoral encounters, needs to be

trustworthy and thus to practice authenticity. She will be scrutinised as a public witness to the Christian life and needs to exhibit enough faithfulness to her calling to be trusted. Authenticity also calls her to name what is inauthentic, with compassion, forgiveness and a hope that all may flourish.

At one level, all that has been said in this chapter can be seen as obvious. Of course priests need to be attentive, forgiving, caring and compassionate. However, too often these characteristics have been assumed to come automatically through the grace of ordination or simply be part of an individual's personality. What I am stressing in this chapter and thesis is that character is learned through practice. And the desirable characteristics of a parish priest need to be better articulated so that reflection can lead to good practice and to a sharing of good practice. Where the language to value good practice is not easily available much of what matters can be dismissed as 'doing nothing'.

It is also important to note that action is always interactive and therefore good practice is learned in relationship. It is in and through the relationships of priest to people and communities that the character of that priest is shaped and honed, just as the community's character is shaped by the myriad of different individuals who play their part, including the priest. The character of my mothering is shaped by the particular children I have, just as they are shaped by having me as a mother. My priestly ministry has been shaped by the particular communities in which I have ministered and those communities reflect aspects of my character as well.

A priest's character needs to be developed through practice, reflection on practice and through attending to the realities of people and places. This development does not negate the grace of God working in a priest's life; it is about learning to recognise that grace and to enhance the opportunities for its outworking in the community served. When mothering is assumed to be an instinctual practice it tends to be both undervalued and over-idealised. The same can be true for the role of a priest. When the grace of ordination is understood in similar terms to maternal instinct, there is a failure to understand the process of learning the practice, of honing skills and developing appropriate virtues. The role can then be both idealised while also being subtly undervalued as a skill-set. In Chapter Seven I will look in more detail at some

of these skills and use maternal language to better articulate them. The skills are intricately connected to the virtues. This is a being and doing that cannot be separated into a binary of opposites. The one who is a priest acts in priestly ways by doing what is appropriate to fulfil her role of caring for the entrusted community.

This chapter has focused on the way in which a priest understands the importance of developing an appropriate character. Michael Sadgrove calls it ‘the habitus of wisdom’, which needs to be developed.

We all know that this does not simply happen, and is not miraculously imparted with the laying on of hands. It is hard won, the outcome of serious ‘heart work’. Learning this habitus of wisdom seems to me an absolute priority for all ministers who are serious about their calling.³¹⁶

Grace is necessary for priests, as for all Christians, to help in resisting temptations, developing virtues, enabling forgiveness for failings and providing the hope necessary to continue. Yet grace does not preclude the hard work of learning and developing the ways of thinking and feeling that enable clergy to respond well to the contingent circumstances and real people entrusted to their care.

³¹⁶ Sadgrove, Michael, *Wisdom and Ministry*, London: SPCK, 2008, p. 9.

Chapter Six: The limitations of a maternal model

Any model and metaphor has limitations. To suggest that priests can be 'like a mother' in practising their parish ministry is neither to claim that they should be the same as a mother nor to imply that mothers make better priests. It has been my intention to use the practice of mothering to articulate the practice of ministry. I have not sought to present a radically different way of doing ministry but, instead, a radically different way of talking about it and valuing it. In doing so I hope to affirm and articulate the kind of good practice that many priests are already engaged in. I have also tried to highlight reasons why some language about parish ministry can unwittingly offer priests unworkable models. This is particularly true when well-intentioned formulaic or blueprint models of ministry are followed with the expectation that they will result in collaborative relationships. In offering a maternal analogy I have suggested taking a relational attitude that should more easily lead to collaborative patterns of ministry. Yet I am aware that there are aspects of the analogy that may appear to suggest an unhealthy attitude of superiority of the clergy to the laity. There are also issues about whether the analogy is too focused on the pastoral relationship. In this chapter I will seek to address these issues before moving into the final chapter, where the maternal language can offer new ways of articulating skills and practices that have been too easily overlooked.

Being dependent

Using a maternal analogy for ministry suggests to many the danger of infantilising the laity. Countryman in his book on priestly ministry claims that any parental imagery for clergy risks this. He characterises its tendency to offer a stern 'father knows best' domination or a liberal 'anything goes' failure to provide boundaries. The result, he fears, is an infantilising of the laity due to an assumption that only the ordained are grown-ups.

The laity are thus permanently relieved of any necessity to grow up and take responsibility for their own faith. They can continue indefinitely to be dependent on the clergy ... The clergy are strong and mature, the

laity weak and dependent. If the laity are to become mature Christians themselves, they can show this only by being ordained.³¹⁷

He is right to raise concerns about a model based on a relationship that is clearly about aspects of dependency and in which the mother is always older and more experienced than her child.

However, before I look at the issues around age and maturity, I would like to address what is a common distortion attributed to mothers. This is an assumption that mothers want to keep their children young and dependent, a view of mothering that connects to the psychoanalytical ideas I addressed in an earlier chapter. I noted there that an important strand of psychoanalytical theory maintained that subjectivity arises out of a struggle to emerge from the world of the mother. It is understood to be a linear process of moving from a merged dependency on the mother into an autonomous independence. Language about rejecting, repudiating and distancing oneself from the mother is therefore seen as a necessary part of gaining selfhood. Within this model mothers are often portrayed as those who resist this process, seeking to keep their children unhealthily attached to them. Yet to look at the mother–child relationship as a struggle for separation is to misconstrue the intersubjectivity of the relationship. Through modern observation of mothers and children, and through critiques of Freud’s assumptions about the inner world of the child, the idea of a merged identity can be seen as an inaccurate description of the relationship. As Benjamin writes:

Although the baby is wholly dependent upon her – and not only on her, but perhaps equally on a father or others – never for a moment does she doubt that this baby brings his own self, his unique personality, to bear on their common life. And she is grateful for the baby’s co-operation and activity ... Later, as baby is able to demonstrate even more clearly that he does know and prefer her to all others, she will accept this glimmer of recognition as a sign of the mutuality that persists in spite of the tremendous inequality of the parent–child relationship.³¹⁸

In fact, modern observations of secure attachment in children find that those who feel securely attached are more able to explore the world and engage with those beyond their tight inner circle. Mothers are aware of the otherness and

³¹⁷ Countryman, *Living on the Border*, p. 97.

³¹⁸ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 14.

individuality of their child from the start. They understand that an important aspect of fostering growth is allowing the child to move away while continuing to be able to trust in the security of attachment. Secure children move between separation and closeness, knowing that they can rely on the comfort of their mother and other close caregivers when they need reassurance.

As children grow more adventurous and independent, mothers may experience a sense of loss as each stage passes. Yet they are usually keen to see their children grow and develop, gaining independence and taking their place in the wider world. As this happens, the ways in which they need mothering change, and part of the practice involves the ability to adapt and respond appropriately to such changes. Most mothers will feel a sense of loss as some of the intimacy and intensity of the baby's needs are replaced by the more independent toddler and, eventually, by the teenager's need for his own space. Yet they will also be rejoicing in the freedoms that come as the child is less physically dependent; what mother doesn't rejoice in her child's faltering steps and take pleasure as he learns to walk, run and play? There are also immense pleasures as well as challenges as her child learns to talk and things can be discussed, negotiated and shared. My older children need far less physically, but now the demands draw on my ability to help them make sense of the complexity of life and emotions, to make choices for their future, and the pleasures come from their ability to be good company and, at times, a good source of support. The different stages of a child's development bring losses and gains, changes in the ways dependency is manifested and what needs the mother must attend to.

Each mother, whatever her roles, must find a way to balance togetherness and separateness, and the feelings of love and loss that go along with them, in her own life and with her children in ways that are appropriate to their stages of life and her stage of motherhood, and find a way both to mourn the losses and embrace the opportunities that accompany her children's growth into more independent people.³¹⁹

Good enough mothers will find a way to balance these gains and losses so that the growing child feels loved and supported but not smothered. In a

³¹⁹ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, p. 85.

society where a mother's role is undervalued and where perhaps a woman is unsure about who she will be and what she will do once her children's need for her diminishes, it can be tempting for mothers to try to maximise their child's need of them into adulthood. This sometimes manipulative need to be needed is not part of good practice but is a result of a mother's lack of subjectivity. She has lost sight of the real child and is projecting her need to be needed onto the relationship, finding her validation in an inappropriate sense of ongoing control over the child's life, even into adulthood. It is most often associated with feelings of powerlessness in the wider context of life. As we saw in previous chapters, a failure in intersubjectivity results in patterns of domination or passivity; both can manifest as distortions of a caring relationship.

I would conclude that it is a distortion of mothering for a mother to seek to infantilise her children, though it is a temptation, as Ruddick says, 'to depend emotionally on their children's dependence on them'. To be needed by another can provide a powerful sense of validation and just as mothers are tempted to depend emotionally on their children's dependence so, in turn, those engaged in caring ministries can be similarly tempted. In mothering the stages of letting go and allowing a child to move on usually happen within a recognisable progression as the child grows up. Circumstances can and will mean that an older child may well need more 'hands on' care at certain times. Illness and emotional traumas may make a child more dependent at a stage when they had been pretty independent. Yet on the whole there is a progression. As I have argued before, this isn't a progression to autonomy but to more sophisticated patterns of interdependence in which adults give and receive care, moving between dependence and independence. As the practical theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore concludes:

Human growth does not involve a movement from dependence to independence. Rather, growth entails learning more and more sophisticated modes of relating, with a movement from immature dependencies to more mature dependencies and attachments.³²⁰

In parish ministry the priest will be engaged in a complex mix of relationships with equally complex and varied patterns of dependency. As I

³²⁰ Miller-McLemore, Bonnie, *Also a Mother*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994, p. 184.

noted in the previous chapter, the priest acts as gatekeeper to the sacraments and rituals of the Church and pronounces words of forgiveness and blessing. This means, to some extent, all those who are seeking God through the rituals of the Church are dependent at some level on the priest to provide for them and nurture them. Clergy, therefore, need to resist any temptations to be manipulative or capricious in the access they provide to the sacraments, worship and ministry of the Church. As we noted in the previous chapter, in their dealings with those who also help to care for and sustain the ongoing life of the parish, priests need to be respectful and collaborative, resisting any temptations to assert their own will over others or to allow others to dominate or bully them. Proper respect accepts that relationships may be asymmetrical but intersubjective. As McFadyen comments:

Asymmetry in a relation need not be an indication of distortion provided it is intended as a momentary rather than a permanent structure: that is, provided the asymmetry is informed by a formal reciprocity in the partners co-intending of one another.³²¹

The structure of asymmetry may be built into the role of relationships or it may be shaped by the needs of one of the parties but, even if it is ongoing, it is not permanent.

Pastoral ministry will provide the most intense cases of temporary asymmetric relationships shaped by need. Such encounters need specific relationships of dependence when people are vulnerable and look for care from the clergy. As we noted in the previous chapter, these relationships require the luxury of asymmetry, what Noddings calls 'generous inequality'. People are looking for someone to care for them without expecting to take any responsibility for the carer's needs. These relationships can take up time and energy, but they can also be affirming and exhilarating. To feel needed is a powerful experience and in a job where it can often be hard to measure the fruitfulness of one's efforts, the instant gratification of intense pastoral relations can be validating. There is, however, a danger if the priest has a low sense of her own subjectivity; she may want to prolong such experiences to increase the affirmation of her role. In attending to the other in the ways I have

³²¹ McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, p. 147.

explored in previous chapters, the priest needs to be able to read the signs that require her to begin to let go before the other feels a sense of obligation or begins to feel smothered.

Whereas in mothering the losses in intimacy are at best replaced by new depths to the ongoing relationship, in ministry these intense pastoral encounters may not lead to rich ongoing relationships. In fact, in some situations where an individual has been particularly vulnerable and needy for a period of time, they may well seek to distance themselves from the priest, who reminds them of this difficult episode in their life. Thus clergy can find themselves deeply needed for a period and then distanced. This can mean that the losses of dependency for clergy may feel similar to rejection. A household suffering a devastating bereavement may for a short time see the priest as a central part of life, a welcome visitor who brings comfort and practical advice into a chaotic and frightening place, but the time will come when that need is over and clergy need to know how to gracefully allow normal patterns of relationships to resurface and withdraw.

It therefore follows that parish priests need to know how to name and manage the feelings that surround periods of intense transitional dependence. In order to manage these feelings a priest needs to have ongoing relationships of interdependence and places where she can be sustained. Such relationships can allow her to acknowledge the adrenalin present in intense pastoral experiences and how good it can feel to be needed and, subsequently, how difficult it can be to let go. Other caring professions tend to have clearer boundaries and more robust systems of managing such relationships and feelings. The fluidity of boundaries for clergy with those who are part of the community, and probably the congregation, can make letting go and renegotiating the relationship harder. There are no clear rules about how this is done, and wisdom, experience and self-reflection are necessary to develop care that is neither disinterested nor over-intrusive. Again we see that it is about resisting the temptation to degenerate forms of love and care out of self-protection or self-validation. To be needed and to provide care for those in need is a fulfilling and enriching aspect of human relationships, but it must always be remembered that dependence is transitional and the aim of good ministry is to enable people to develop maturity.

Parish clergy at any one time will be juggling a mixture of intense pastoral relationships that vary in timespan and depth of need, alongside the ongoing relationships required to make and sustain a community. Within the congregation they care for there will be people of different ages, those who have been Christians for differing lengths of time, those who have far wider experiences than them and are confident and self-assured, as well as those who are continuing to feel vulnerable and insecure. The ability to attend well to all these people requires recognising their very different needs and requires humility in assessing an appropriate response. Part of this humility is recognising that a priest's role is not to be the focus, but to provide the places and spaces where people can have their needs met by God. Dependence on other human beings is at times appropriate but recognising that our dependency on God is ongoing is a central aspect of the Christian faith. Many of those who come to church simply require the priest to facilitate the kind of worship experience that enables them to renew and affirm their dependence on God. They want to receive the grace necessary for them to continue to develop as Christians in the world. The reality of the Christian faith is that all of us are God's children and our deepest attachment needs to be focused on God's care and love for us.

Bruce Reed explores this in *The Dynamics of Worship*.³²² He maintains that clergy need to understand how human beings oscillate between independence and dependence. Worship, he maintains, should provide a ritualised experience of this in relation to our overall dependence on God. Drawing on Bowlby's attachment theory, which we have previously discussed, Reed notes the way in which children at play often come to stand near their mothers momentarily before then going back to play as if 're-charging their courage batteries'.³²³ The mothers often did nothing: they were just there. He maintains that adults, as well as children, need to move between times of extra-dependence – when assurance and reorientation is needed from beyond us, and

³²² Bruce Reed was the founder of the Grubb Institute of Behavioural Studies, which encourages the use of systemic thinking to look at how communities and organisations work. In *The Dynamics of Worship*, London: DLT, 1978, Reed set out his oscillation theory of worship in which he sees the Eucharist as an experience that enables worshippers to move into a dynamic experience of their dependence on God in order to be able to re-internalise that dependence as they are sent out into the world to confront its complexities.

³²³ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

intra-dependence – where we have internalised our values and can draw strength and meaning from what has become part of us. For most of the time internalised values give people the strength to cope with the experiences of the world. Christians can draw on the internalised knowledge of how the world works and the personal faith relationship they have established with God.

However, situations happen that make people distressed or uncertain and they may need external help in making sense of such experiences, both in terms of world view and in terms of the Christian faith. If this is done well, the internal faith and values will be modified, renewed or strengthened so that an individual can face the world again. Clearly, this reorientation can happen in many different ways; however, within Christian discipleship, where developing and maintaining a relationship with God is central, he maintains that the Church's worship plays a key part. The sacraments and rituals of the Church and the ministry of the ordained should provide an external experience of being dependent on God and blessed by God, sending individuals and communities back out into their world with a stronger internal faith. In a sense, the priest's role in this is not to get in the way, but to enable the worship of the Church, the reality of the sacraments, the preaching of the word and the strength of the fellowship to regularly feed and reassure, challenge and re-order people's internal faith and practice.

This does involve the priest in being available, and in making sure that the diet provided in church is varied enough and rich enough for the breadth of experience of the congregation. As the worship experience is part of maintaining the sense of attachment to God, it also needs to offer the kind of familiarity that enables people to comfortably rest on God. A priest needs to attend to the needs of the long-time worshipper and the newcomers, practising a hospitality that draws people in while not being over-intrusive into the worshipping lives of those who know what they are doing. She needs to recognise that changes in worship can be unsettling to those who have found certain practices helpful and yet, sometimes, new ways of doing things and new ideas may provide people with stimulus to deepen their faith and understanding. Her role also means having the humility to listen to and learn from the older and wiser Christians within her congregation. It is important not to patronise those who, outside the church, deal with complex issues and

weighty responsibilities. Thus, in preaching and teaching, the kinds of questions and issues that impact on the real lives of those who come need to be addressed, enabling them to find their concerns connected to the ongoing story of Christian faith. Clergy need to be mindful of the fact that although they will move on, many of the congregation will stay, sometimes worshipping in one place their whole life; this is *their* church.

Thus the relationship of clergy to their congregation has important differences from, the mother–child relationship, especially in its earlier stages. At one level it will have far more parallels with the kind of relationships between mothers and adolescents or adult children. There is a stage in life where a child is independent in many areas where he used to be dependent. My teenage children want a fully stocked fridge with the right sort of food, clean washing and frequent lifts. I can be a good mother simply by getting this right and staying out of the way! When I am tired or unwell they will make me cups of tea, take some interest in my concerns and show some care. They also engage in interesting conversations that can stretch and challenge me, share in common interests and provide adult company. However, something may trigger a greater need of me and the almost-adult needs for a while to be a child again. A good parish priest will have a multiplicity of rich, interdependent relationships. For some what is necessary is that the worship is well prepared and the spiritual food regularly and generously provided. Others will want the stimulation of talking, arguing, sharing and enjoying time together in relationships of equality while some will through caring attend to the priest's well-being. Yet she is still their priest, so when life circumstances unsettle or undermine, then she needs to be ready to offer the dependency they need for as long as *they* need it.

When clergy leave, and the issue of financial reward

While a mother is managing her relationships with her children with the assumption that they will be lifelong, clergy are constantly aware that at some point they will leave. The commitment a priest makes to a particular parish is temporary. A priest may stay for very many years, but at some point in a congregation's life the priest will leave and will need to renegotiate relationships in order not to undermine the new priest who will come. Thus

there is an element of fostering about the relationship. Priests arrive into the midst of a congregation and parish community, which has a history. The point of leaving will be determined by factors outside the control of the congregation and parish. It will inevitably mean that some people feel let down because they are not ready for a change, and this is not a good point for them to lose someone they have come to depend on. For the priest it will mean that some projects, relationships and plans are left incomplete because ministry is not something that can be neatly finished. Although this is very different from the experience of mothering, with its ongoing relationship, the kinds of attitudes and virtues already discussed can help clergy to leave well. They will need the humility that accepts that others will be able to carry on the work and care for the people. Thus they need to be mindful that they are not indispensable. They will also need a proper sense of their own subjectivity so that they can acknowledge and honour people's sense of loss and manage the process of letting people go well.

The knowledge that clergy leave should always be a part of the parish priest's understanding of her role. This means that the life and work of the parish should not revolve entirely around the competencies of the priest, but in drawing on and encouraging the gifts of others, a properly collaborative ministry may flourish. The temptation to micromanage is a form of domination, an attempt at controlling all that happens in the parish. Letting things grow and develop through other people's initiatives or helping others to take on and own aspects of ministry are important for building up the church. Inevitably this will mean that some things are not done quite as the priest would have done them. In some cases this may lead to new and fruitful possibilities. At other times it may mean mistakes have been made and ideas need reformulating but, as I argued in the last chapter, mistakes can be used for wisdom if there is proper respect and the willingness to forgive and be forgiven. There are aspects of ministry that belong to the role of the priest, but there is much that can be done collaboratively and many tasks that can be done better by people other than the priest. Attending to the concrete reality of the parish, recognising the gifts of the particular people and working out together how to be the church in that place should make it easier when it comes time for the priest to move on and someone new to take her place. However, in resisting the temptation to

make oneself indispensable, clergy need to avoid becoming disinterested and disengaged.

Clergy are paid! Of course, as I acknowledged at the start of the last chapter, not all parish clergy are paid. Some are working as house-for-duty and some are entirely self-supporting, but the bulk of parish clergy are paid to be parish priests. They are provided with a house and a stipend and need to negotiate expenses of office with the PCC. This clearly places a different dynamic in the relationship and it can be a complex one. In some contexts clergy are well housed and well paid in comparison to the rest of the parish. They also have job security in a world where many may be uncertain about future work and housing. In other parishes the clergy may seem inadequately remunerated in comparison to other professionals who have similar educational backgrounds. The limits of their stipend may put pressures on how they manage their household, and their children may not have the same opportunities as those around them.

The stipend is a living allowance and therefore the pay scale of parish clergy is flat. Pay does not increase with experience. Systems for 'promotion' are complex and limited. The stipend works very differently from most of the pay scales of those who they minister amongst. There are no financial incentives to work harder or better. Expenses are paid out of the giving of the congregation. A priest has to justify her claims from the people she is caring for and this can place clergy in complex relationships with those in the parish who have the power to scrutinise what is claimed and pass judgement on the work done. Although stipends themselves are paid by the diocese, increasingly parishes are made aware of the rough cost of a stipendiary priest and this is factored in to the money that they must give into the common diocesan purse. Thus a priest is dependent on the financial generosity of the people in her congregation and those in the wider diocese.

The issue of encouraging parish giving is also connected to the difficult work of fundraising for the ongoing maintenance of buildings and ministry. Parish priests have to engage in raising money for buildings they might find impractical and unlovely, as well as buildings of great beauty and architectural significance. They have to understand the depth of feelings others have for buildings, balance at times competing issues from those who view the building

as an architectural gem and those who would like it to be easier to use week by week for worship. Many conflicts in parish ministry arise over attitudes to the fabric of the church and all that belongs in it. Within the Church of England the faculty system can lead to feelings of frustration between the local and the diocesan church.³²⁴ Fundraising for buildings, ongoing ministry costs and for the diocesan purse, out of which the stipend is paid, can place clergy in theological tensions. They preach the generosity of God and the freedom of grace while constantly asking people to put their hands in their pockets to give.

The complex issues around clergy stipends, regular giving and fundraising mean that clergy can feel anything from guilty that they need to take money from those who have little, or resentful that they are expected to do so much for so little return. They and their ministry are financially dependent on the giving of others. This financial dependency is even more complex because the lines of accountability are not clear. Clergy are not employed by the congregation. This all adds to the contested nature of responsibility and authority.

The issues around clergy pay and clergy employment are not the subject of this thesis. Clearly, to be paid and to be employed under some kind of licence makes ministry a different kind of relationship from mothering. However, the many ambiguities around how a stipend is understood, who clergy are employed by and whether they are employees at all, can mean that similar kinds of uncertainties about how the work is valued can be found in mothering and ministry. There is also the assumption that because it is a vocation, and articulated as work done out of love and service, then to query and question issues about how it is valued is to undermine the nature of the calling. In a culture where pay and promotion are the standard pattern of rewarding good work, it can at times be hard to work in practices that do not reward in that way and where affirmation and acknowledgement may be in short supply.

³²⁴ The faculty system is the Church of England's internal planning procedure. Any building work, repairs or new additions to the fabric must be scrutinised and approved by the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

The prophet and evangelist

In using a maternal imagery for ministry I have deliberately drawn parallels between domesticity and the life of a local church. Mothers are engaged in the making and maintenance of homes and clergy are engaged in the making and maintenance of spiritual ‘homes’, the places where people can come to be fed, nurtured and re-confirm their dependence on God. I argued above that an important aspect of the parish priest’s work is to run the local church in such a way that mature Christians can find what they need to sustain their ongoing relationship with God. They share this maintenance work with others. Yet, there are voices in the Church who claim that maintenance as an attitude is problematic; it is understood to speak of stasis and an introverted focus that will in time simply lead to a well-managed decline. There is, then, an inherent tension between the role of creating a safe, secure and nurturing place for those who already feel they belong and knowing how, at the same time, to fulfil the mission element of the priest’s role. As the ordinal states:

They are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.³²⁵

We noted that one of the demands of the practice of parish ministry was to foster growth. In ministry, although this encompasses the growth of individuals towards a deeper, more mature faith, it also means developing the ongoing life and witness of the church community. In terms of a church congregation, if it is not to gradually atrophy, growth necessarily involves drawing new people in. For a church to continue to be an active witness to the grace and glory of God, it needs to continue to have active members. Some new members will come through the nurture and education of the young, children brought up in households of faith. Thus knowing how to teach the faith and inculcate good practice in children and young people is a vital aspect of a congregation’s life. Yet, even where children grow up to share their parents’ faith, modern patterns of mobility mean that often they will leave the

³²⁵ *The Ordination of Priests also called Presbyters*, www.churchofengland.org

congregation that nurtured them. It therefore follows that growth will also necessitate encouraging new adults into faith. Clearly, simply keeping the Church going isn't a good motivation for mission. The imperative to evangelise is a belief that all should be aware of the good news of the Gospel. Yet in order for the Gospel to be proclaimed and God's love in Christ revealed, the Church needs to function as both a nurturing environment and a witness to the world. Congregations need to be evangelistic, proclaiming the Gospel and making new disciples.

This is an aspect of ministry that, although very different from anything involved in mothering, can draw upon ways of thinking and virtues that have already been highlighted. The ordinal in outlining the priest's role says:

With all God's people, they are to tell the story of God's love. They are to baptise new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith. They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the Word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God.³²⁶

Although aspects of this account are specific to the clergy's ministerial and sacramental role, it is clearly stated that telling God's story of love is to be done with *all* God's people. Thus it is a collaborative task, as priest and people learn how to tell God's story in ways that can draw people to God. Parish clergy have particular responsibilities for maintaining the place of worship and nurturing the spiritual life of the church. The laity and clergy in chaplaincy and sector ministries will have the most natural opportunities to share faith with those they encounter beyond the church; work colleagues, friends and neighbours. Thus an important aspect of a priest's role is to equip and encourage the Christians in her care to 'tell the story of God's love'. This can be culturally difficult where faith has been relegated to the private and domestic sphere. A priest needs to think contextually and attend well to the uncertainties and fears of those who are seeking to live out authentically Christian lives in places where faith is little understood. Together they need to reflect on what it means to 'tell the story of God's love' within the particular places and relationships they encounter.

³²⁶ Ibid.

The Church of England recognises that some individuals have a particular calling to evangelism hence the recent designation of some as pioneer ministers. However, current fears about declining congregations mean that all parish clergy are expected to prioritise church growth in numerical terms. Ruddick's threefold demands of mothering articulate the reality that good demands and right priorities could be in conflict. Parish clergy faced with an emphasis on a particular form of growth will inevitably find that this is, at times, in tension with the demand to nurture and care for the life of the parish as it is and to honestly present the realities of the Christian life, which may call for prophetic statements that challenge current social values.

Thus the issues of Church growth are complex. How are new people both attracted by and integrated into the current congregation? How does time spent in evangelistic work beyond the congregation detract from the pastoral care that long-serving individuals desire? How does the priest balance the demands of mission with the responsibility of maintaining an historic building with dwindling financial resources? How does the priest attract people without compromising the prophetic challenge of Christianity? Much is made of the tensions between maintenance and mission and, as noted above, the current Church of England climate seems to suggest the latter is more important.

Yet closed buildings or unkempt and uncared-for churches send out very negative messages about the Christian faith to which they bear witness. These buildings and the work of clergy are reliant on the generous giving of faithful congregations, who need to be cared for and stimulated in their own growth in faith. It may well be frustrating at times that the Church of England has to contend with so many ancient buildings with all their inherent expenses, but they are also resources that speak to people of the tradition and faith that has shaped the history of our country, and maintaining them well can enable a continuing witness to the relevance of that faith. Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank in *For the Parish* critique current ideas about mission and urge a proper valuing of the traditional parish church. They describe these buildings thus:

It is a stony sacrament of hospitality and a resource of incomparable value. It is important to state that even without its people, the church building is *already* a symbol of the out-flowing of the divine life, and everlasting love of our heavenly Father.³²⁷

The tensions around maintaining buildings are clearly very different from those of maternal practice, but the latter can remind us that there are not easy answers when it comes to prioritising conflicting demands that are all good. Contingent responsiveness arises out of proper attending to the multiplicity of demands and seeking to ensure that one is not allowed to dominate and undermine the others. Thus a mother, aware that her child needs to take risks in order to grow in independence, does not lose sight of her responsibility to be mindful of his safety and negotiates with him over acceptable levels of risk, preparing herself to comfort him when he falls and to justify her allowance of his freedom to those who criticise. Understanding the importance of church growth must not undermine the need to care for and preserve the community of faith already in existence, with its traditions and securities. To maintain the church as an exclusive group to which outsiders felt unwelcome would neither serve preservation or growth, but the call to be evangelistic must always be connected to the importance of building up all aspects of the body of Christ.

The missionary work of a parish priest is therefore threefold. It involves ensuring that the place of worship where people can encounter God provides an accessible and welcoming hospitality to newcomers. It involves equipping the regular worshippers to be able to reflect on and articulate their faith so that they can respectfully share their story of God's love with others they encounter beyond the church and they can grow up into an ever more mature faith. It also involves the priest in being able to articulate the grace of God in her own encounters beyond the worshipping community. As we noted in the first chapter, clergy have a particular responsibility to be a public sign of God's ongoing works of grace in the world. As 'walking sacraments' they are to be a visible and recognisable sign of the Christian life and, as the ordinal states, they are to 'preach the word of God in season and out of season and to declare

³²⁷ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, p. 150. They also offer a fuller discussion of the way that maintenance is dismissed as less important than a narrow view of mission, which seems to be an end in itself.

the might acts of God'. This means that a priest needs to be prepared to speak both prophetically and compassionately about God's love for the world and the values of God's kingdom in all sorts of places and all sorts of encounters. And as we have noted above, they need to do this with humility, reality, compassion and authenticity.

The call to be prophetic and evangelistic can lead to conflict within and beyond the church. To welcome people into the church's family is inevitably to precipitate change, which may unsettle cherished ways of doing things. To address how faith interacts with the public as well as the private sphere is to challenge assumptions and practices, which may face people with extremely difficult choices. To encourage people to reflect on all parts of their life in the light of faith and to think about how things may look from another's point of view will be uncomfortable for many. To name ways of behaving or treating people as wrong can mean upsetting and alienating individuals and communities. A parish priest needs, therefore, to be confident in her own integrity, knowledgeable and wise in both matters of faith and the wider world, and authentic in her own discipleship. She also needs to be humble, to listen and attend to the wisdom and experiences of others, to judge tenderly and compassionately and, above all, respect the subjectivity of those she addresses or speaks about. As Ruddick says, to name such attitudes and virtues is not to possess them but to 'reflect on the *struggles* that revolve around the temptations to which they are prey in their work'.³²⁸

To be prophetic also raises issues about how both the priest and the church challenge the values and the injustice of the society in which they live. Again, this should be a collective calling, but at times the public witness of the ordained may mean that their voice carries a particular authority. Such a prophetic calling may well lead to very difficult choices in whether to prioritise the holding safe of those entrusted to the priest's care or to foster growth and challenge what is understood as acceptable. The virtue of humility guards against the temptation to challenge for the sake of one's own importance or to fail to be prophetic out of an abnegation of responsibility.

³²⁸ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 25.

Living up to the calling

Clergy go through a process of discernment and selection before training and then being ordained. Part of this discernment involves examining their sense of calling. To believe that one is called by God to be ordained and to have that belief confirmed by the processes of the particular denomination means that to be a priest carries an element of obedience. It is also seen to be a special calling and a privilege. Individuals have often given up other professions or possibilities to dedicate themselves to the life of a priest. Yet the reality of the working life of a parish priest is that it does not always feel special and clergy can have ambivalent feelings about the people and places they care for, the wider Church and even, at times, the God who has called them. To be ambivalent is to experience complex feelings of love and hate for the same people or things. Such ambivalent feelings may not be fully recognised or articulated and may not be as strong as love and hate. Feelings of frustration, boredom, anger and disappointment towards people one is supposed to love and cherish are an aspect of committed relationships that can be hard to admit. For clergy who feel called and specially blessed by God for the task of ministry, such feelings may seem to be inappropriate to their calling and signs of their sinfulness or inadequacy.

The process of becoming a mother may involve careful thought and discussions with a partner about the responsibilities ahead or it may simply be a result of lack of planning. Unlike ordination, it is a fairly normal occurrence, but it is prey to expectations of joyful loving service that may not be realised in the actuality of day-to-day experience. Preparation may be carried out in the months leading up to the birth, but the reality of the baby can be overwhelming. In recent years much has been written about ambivalence in mothers. Such writing is a reaction to idealised images of motherhood that assume maternal love and care comes naturally to all mothers and that women should feel fulfilled by their mothering role. Books such as Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work*³²⁹ describe mothering as a dark experience in which the mother struggles to find any reward in caring for her 'tyrant' baby. She expresses the difficulty for a professional woman in adjusting to the very different rhythm of caring for a

³²⁹ Cusk, Rachel, *A Life's Work, On Becoming a Mother*, London: Fourth Estate, 2001.

child and, in this case perhaps, a child who needed a lot of attention. The contrast between a general language about self-fulfilment and the ideals of mother love can present new mothers with a difficult adjustment. De Marneffe comments on such works, saying:

Exacting ideals, it is argued, pressure mothers to aspire to continual availability, devotion, and patience, and to feel ashamed if they can't achieve it.³³⁰

So although the way that mothers and ministers arrive in their roles is very different, they are both dealing with expectations of the fulfilment to be gained from the role and the belief that love and commitment will somehow flow from them. There is also that moment for each when anticipation and preparation for the role is replaced by the reality that they are now a mother, or they are now ordained. For clergy there is the added expectation that God will be working in them and through them.

The reality for most clergy is that aspects of ministry will be rewarding, and that individual people and particular encounters will offer palpable experiences of God's grace flowing. Joy can be found in the ways that people and places grow and flourish, in simple things done well and in generous efforts appreciated. Clergy will come to love and be loved by individuals and communities. Yet at the same time there will be frustrations, difficult people and lack of appreciation, feelings of marginalisation, rejection and manipulation. As I have argued above, some of this can be as a result of the priest's own inability to respect and work collaboratively with others, setting up struggles of domination and submission. But much will simply be the result of working in a role where there is always more to be done and measures of success are often intangible.

What De Marneffe says of mothering may well ring true for many clergy as they reflect on parish ministry:

It is hard sometimes to feel recognised for the value of our work in the day-today activity of mothering. And anything that makes our sense of

³³⁰ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, p. 123.

competence more tenuous can evoke doubts about our effectiveness and worth in an even stronger way.³³¹

She makes the valuable point that often tiredness, a multiplicity of things to be done and the social sense that others do not see and recognise the efforts one is making, can all add to doubts about the efficacy of the practice. I would maintain that it is also the inability, at times, to articulate properly all that is being done. The next chapter will explore the importance of trying to find better ways of articulating the practice. Yet, the reality is that when the practice does not involve the tangible end products of Arendt's work, but instead involves the ongoing labour of sustaining life and the complex action of building relationships, it is always going to be harder to assess success. And when the fruits of one's efforts may take a long time to emerge, it can be hard to know whether time and energy spent has been well used. De Marneffe goes on to say:

Bone-tiredness, the endless round of viruses, or even the inability to make a dent in one's lists can dampen or temporarily extinguish the pleasure to be had in mothering. But often the greatest effect of such states is their power to intensify our existing conflicts ... If our self-esteem comes from doing our job well, then the taxing demands and divided attention motherhood introduces can make us feel like we do everything badly.³³²

Again these words about mothering ring true for parish ministry, where the pressures of pastoral needs are not controllable and the build-up of responsibilities at some times can lead to exhaustion and a feeling that nothing is being done to the standard one expects of oneself. It is at these times in ministry when people can become irritants, or worse, and the temptation to dominating patterns of control can feel like a useful way of preserving time and energy.

For clergy, the added dimension of obedience to God means that ambivalent feelings and concerns about efficacy in ministry can lead to doubts about their calling or their openness to God. The language used about ministry plays a significant part in the expectations of others and of the priest herself. If

³³¹ Ibid., p. 120.

³³² Ibid., p. 120.

she is to be a servant to God and to others, how does she address feelings of being undervalued and under-appreciated? If self-sacrifice is central to Christian theology, how can she complain about being overworked? If she is to love and care for those whom God loves, what does she do about the people she dislikes? If she is to pronounce God's forgiveness, how does she deal with those who have hurt her and let her down? And since everything is caught up in the ongoing work of God's grace, how does she begin to know what is happening because of her and what would simply happen despite her? All of these myriad questions can, on a bad day, leave clergy feeling uncertain about themselves and the adequacy of their ministry.

We noted in the previous chapter that a sense of self-respect and subjectivity is important for a priest in order for her to be able to minister well for others. Isolation and a lack of opportunity to talk honestly and meaningfully to other practitioners can erode self-confidence and skew perceptions. Clergy need people who can help them get their perspective on the parish and its myriad problems. They need people who can help them refocus on God, as one who loves and values them, not as one who expects more than they can give. These people come in various forms: family and friends – inside and beyond the parish, colleagues – inside or beyond the parish, spiritual directors and theological mentors. As I also suggested in the previous chapter, clergy need those who can understand the ways in which failures can become part of wisdom when they are properly reflected on with realism and compassion. They also need help in thinking about what constitutes success and how to relate this to their sense of calling and obedience to God. Ruddick notes that mothers can misidentify virtues and can mischaracterise success and failure because of their own and others' expectations of the role. This same misidentifying is an ever-present reality of parish ministry. She writes:

I ascribe to mothers not only a humanly ordinary failure to fulfil appropriate ideals but also, and more seriously, the articulation of ideals that dangerously misidentify what counts as 'success' or 'failure' in the first place.³³³

³³³ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 104.

Thus clergy need the kinds of relationships with others that help to correct such misidentification and to recognise their own and others' good practice.

It is in this area that, I would suggest, the hierarchy of the Church needs to find better ways of caring for the clergy. Unfortunately, in many instances, it is lack of recognition from the senior clergy that can exacerbate the sense of being under-appreciated. Diocesan initiatives can appear to simply add pressures to the clergy, often unintentionally implying that there are better ways to do parish ministry with little consideration of context and particularity. The recent introduction of appraisals in most dioceses, and ministerial development reviews as part of the new terms and conditions of the Church of England, are intended to address some of these issues. However, in reality there is a lot of poor practice, and the hierarchical nature of such reviews in many dioceses can militate against an honest discussion of the difficult feelings around ministry. I would also suggest that, as in mothering, a failure to find the kind of language that can affirm the everyday, ongoing work of building and maintaining relationships and communities can mean that appraisals focus on the wrong kind of questions and can sometimes add to an individual's feeling of inadequacy.³³⁴

The reality is that clergy are ordinary human beings working with people who bring their own characters and insecurities into the complex community of church and parish. The ongoing pressures of working in a job that is never done will inevitably mean that there are times when it feels overwhelming and perhaps impossible. Inherited patterns of ministry that favour isolation can place unreasonable expectations on individuals to do and be everything. This is also true in mothering, and such unrealistic expectations and lack of sharing will inevitably compound the pressures and potential sense of inadequacy. The conflation of theological ideas of sacrifice with an unfocused, continuing sense of self-denial can make it hard for clergy to even seek and accept the affirmation that they need to keep going. 'Cheery denial' from others about the genuine costs of ministry will undermine the reality of generous self-giving. The palpable rewards of ministry can be manifold, but

³³⁴ See my chapter, 'What Clergy Do: especially when it looks like nothing' in Rees, Christina & Percy, Martyn (eds.) *Apostolic Women, Apostolic Authority*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010, pp. 137-146.

are not arrived at without commitment and hard work, which needs to be better named and honoured. Clergy also live with the double demand to respond appropriately to the expectations of those they minister to and to live up to the trust that God has placed in them.

What about fathers?

In an earlier chapter I discussed why I was using a gendered term for the care and nurture of children. Taking Ruddick's demands, I define mothering as the practice involved in preserving the life of a child, fostering her growth and enabling her to find an acceptable place in the wider world. In doing so I argued that mothering could be undertaken by women or men, although the majority of those who take on the responsibilities of child-rearing have been and continue to be women. My contention is that if a child only has one parent, it doesn't matter what gender they are – they will be engaged in mothering. If they are male, that may impact on the ways in which they carry out the practice, but not necessarily any more significantly than other factors including cultural heritage, education, social class and wealth. Yet children do have two biological parents and if both are involved in the care of the child does the father bring something different; is there a practice of 'fathering'? This question has been raised for me by a number of those with whom I have discussed my work as a limitation to my analogy. So at this point I will briefly look at how fathering may be understood.

In common English usage, to father a child refers to begetting a child rather than to the way a father cares for his children. In this it differs from mothering, which is usually understood as encompassing the care and nurture of a child on an ongoing basis. In societies where wealth and status are inherited from one's father, the most important thing a father gives his child is his lineage. Traditionally, alongside this lineage has come the father as a role model and as one who trains his children, particularly boys, to follow in his footsteps or encourages training that will take the family name to higher status. The father is seen as the provider and protector who moves between the outside and the domestic worlds, encouraging the young to explore while protecting them from danger.

In modern western society, shifts in gender expectations make it harder to give clear definitions of the roles of a mother or a father. Infants need intense nurturing care in the early years and ongoing care and nurture as they develop. They also need role models and training to help them take their place in the wider world. None of this, I would suggest, is gender-specific. A father may share in all the aspects of child-rearing that we have identified as mothering – he may even be the primary carer. The skills developed in good mothering are not gender-specific though they may come easier to those socialised to care. But this still leaves the question of whether there is a fathering role that may also transcend gender but be more typically associated with a male parent. Certainly, studies show that children benefit from two committed parents. The traditional role of one major breadwinner may be shifting, but the ability of one parent to be able to focus primarily on earning money to provide for the well-being of the family has a significant effect on the children. Secure finances create more stable home lives and tend to enable more opportunities for the children as they grow up. The parent who takes on this role tends then to bring into the domestic setting more of the world beyond. Studies show that this affects the kind of interaction they have with their children. Play is often more stimulating and can be more boisterous, encouraging risk-taking and pushing boundaries. Language in conversations may be richer, encouraging the children to develop a wider vocabulary. Of course, this is only true if the parent makes time to engage with the child.

The luxury of two parents can enrich the relationships at the heart of the home. Mother, father and child, at best, can learn to appreciate difference and to adapt and accommodate each other in relationships of mutual recognition and interdependence. Clearly, these relationships can also be problematic, especially where the caring role is understood to be of lesser worth. Yet as I have already noted, mothering should not be an isolated practice and, increasingly in our own culture, parents are sharing tasks and roles. The labouring involved in caring for children needs to be collectively shared and the interactive relationships benefit from plurality. In my personal experience of mothering I have shared the practice with my husband, with employed nannies and supportive friends and family. All brought differences into the

relationship with the children and between the adults, which, on the whole, has led to a rich and secure pattern of being mothered collaboratively. It may well be that in ministry teams the same adaptation between clergy can happen so that the practice of ministry can involve the collective sharing of some tasks, as well as specialisation, drawing on particular gifts and strengths in others. For it to work well it needs proper trust and respect.

The concept that the father is someone who has a focus outside the domestic home but also a fundamental role within it may in the end have some very helpful things to say about self-supporting clergy and authorised lay ministry. The perspectives of individuals who spend time working in different environments and very different organisations, yet who have also taken on the responsibilities of relating to people as priests or ministers, can and should bring enriching insights into the sometimes insular life of the church. In their realms of work they face different challenges and can help members of the congregation think about living as Christians in the workplace in ways that full-time stipendiary clergy cannot. Sadly, too often, such insights are not encouraged. The tendency to separate the domestic sphere from the public and for religion to be relegated to a similar private sphere means that often the very necessary insights from the world beyond the Church are not welcomed. Thus there can be a lack of stretching and an inability for the teaching of the Church to deal adequately with the complexity of people's lives.

Conclusion

The practice of parish ministry and mothering are, of course, different. Mothering involves a committed relation to one or a few children, who develop from the vulnerable dependency of a baby into the maturity of an adult. The relationship is ongoing into adulthood and continues, at best, to be mutually rewarding. Parish priests are committed to a multiplicity of relationships. They relate to individuals who are at different stages of life and faith experience, and the two do not always correlate. Thus a priest may be relating to someone considerably older and worldlier, but who is very young in faith. They will also be relating to people older, wiser and more spiritually mature. These individual relationships have to be held within corporate relationships in which a priest holds responsibility for a whole community. These multiple relationships mean

that the priest has to be able to move easily between those who need different levels of attention. She also has to manage the intense relationships of transitional dependence that arise out of pastoral encounters and people's life crises.

The relationship of a priest to the people entrusted to her care is also complex because of the nature of pay and expenses. In order to maintain the finances that provide stipends and maintain the clergy housing it is necessary for clergy to raise funds, run giving campaigns and encourage people to give to the diocese. Fundraising is also necessary for the maintenance of the church buildings and for the ongoing ministry of the congregation. This can be a burdensome aspect of parish life and may provide an uncomfortable tension in the relationship between clergy and congregation. Clergy also have responsibilities to the work of the wider Church, which may not always be understood by the local community. All of these issues add to the contested nature of power and authority for clergy.

Notwithstanding the many differences in the relationships, the attitudes and characteristics that shape maternal practice are, I have suggested, valuable for the ongoing practice of ministry. Valuing intersubjectivity is important to guard against temptations to dominate others or fail to take responsibility for them. The virtue of humility leads to an appropriate sense of self-confidence and proper respect of others. Recognising that dependence is transitional means that action is always predicated on the desire that the other will, in the future, be more independent. Yet it also acknowledges that there are times when all of us need to be cared for and know the luxury of generously unequal relationships. As a priest, providing such care is an important aspect of ministry. It can be an affirming and validating experience to be greatly needed and clergy must be aware of not prolonging dependence as a way of feeding their own emotional needs. They also need to find the support they need to guard against feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

Parish priests, though focused on the need to provide ministry that sustains the faithful, must also be engaged in mission. Mission is a collaborative responsibility of the whole church community and clergy need to equip people to tell God's story. They also need to be witnesses themselves, practising authenticity as they learn to listen to others and share with them the

story of God's love. This involves learning to tell stories that are shaped by realism, compassion and delight and to engage in reflective conversations. As public signs of the grace of God at work in the world, clergy need to be prophetic and evangelistic as they witness to God's care and concern for the world and its people. Yet they need to resist the suggestion that mission and maintenance are in opposition. They are in tension, but it is not a straightforward case of prioritising one over the other; it is rather a complex practice of managing the competing demands of preserving life, fostering growth and acceptability within the context of their ministry.

Clergy who have taken on the primary responsibility for a parish as stipendiary incumbents need to guard against isolation and a false sense that they have to do everything themselves. I suggested that self-supporting clergy and lay ministers can bring some 'fatherly' insights. That is, they can bring aspects of the wider working world into the sometimes insular world of the church, deepening and broadening understanding. Patterns of collaborative ministry should ensure that tasks are appropriately shared and undertaken collectively. People should be adequately appreciated for what they do and a culture of generous acknowledgement and thanks maintained so that individuals do not feel taken for granted. Clergy themselves need to find those who can help them manage inevitable feelings of ambivalence and encourage them to make realistic and compassionate assessments, even of their own work.

To be a parish priest is not the same as being a mother, but the insights of one can, I maintain, help explore even some of the areas of difference. Both practices are carried out within a culture that mostly understands work, achievement and success through using criteria that simply cannot be applied meaningfully to mothering or ministry. Both practices have to deal with idealised expectations of goodness and self-sacrificial love. Clergy have the added expectation that they have been chosen by God and equipped by his grace. Thus feelings of inadequacy can impact negatively on the very faith that they are called on to preach and nurture in others. The good news is that the majority of mothers and clergy are what Winnicott called 'good enough'. One of the tasks of senior clergy is to make sure that enough of them know it.

Chapter Seven: Using maternal language to articulate aspects of parish ministry – some examples

In this thesis I have explored the practice of mothering and shown the ways in which it is analogous to the practice of parish ministry. Both practices are a complex mix of relationship and activity; of repetitive tasks within complex contingent situations. Neither practice is involved with making products and therefore cannot be assessed by tangible measurements or formulaic criteria. Good practice needs to be assessed through looking at the ongoing health and well-being of those being nurtured and cared for. In both cases it requires the honing of skills and the development of virtues. As these are practised they may appear to be natural, but they need the constant development of an appropriate character.

Chapter Five explored how looking at the practice of mothering could provide a rich language for understanding the kinds of thinking and development of virtue that should shape good practice in parish ministry. In Chapter Six I noted that there are limitations to a maternal analogy but that the language of virtues and practice outlined in Chapter Five can still offer insights into those differences. In this chapter I will turn to some examples of how maternal language can offer new ways of articulating some of the skills developed in the practice of parish ministry. These are skills that have strong similarities to those learned through mothering, albeit carried out in more complex multiple relationships. It is, to some extent, because these ways of acting involve being like a mother that they are under-articulated.

In previous chapters I have said that it is not helpful to reduce mothering or ministry to a list of tasks, so these skills are as much about attitudes and ways of being as they are about what is done. It is my contention that clergy often undervalue what they do because there is a difficulty in finding words to express these skills, meaning that they often go unrecognised. Drawing on the experience and language of mothering, I will suggest a number of different terms that can articulate skills that are important in the good practice of ministry. Some terminology is straightforward and simply needs to be claimed and celebrated. Other skills are under-articulated in mothering as

well as ministry and I have, therefore, tried to coin or borrow phrases to express them. Stadlen maintains that if mothers themselves do not have a language to describe meaningfully the activity that takes up their time and energy, they dismiss it as *nothing*.³³⁵ By re-examining some aspects of ministry that are assumed to be instinctual, incidental or ‘nothing much’, this chapter seeks to provide a way of valuing and affirming such activity and maintaining that good practice can be learned and improved.

The art of cherishing

One of the assumptions made about mothering is that mothers cherish their children out of a profound almost mystical mother-love. In looking at mothering in Chapter Four, I noted that this love is not automatic. It requires a mother to choose to commit to her child. The experience of pregnancy, birth and hormones can all help this, but it continues to require her commitment, attention and response. There will, for most mothers, be many times when it is easy and rewarding to cherish her child but also times when it is difficult; where the response can feel more dutiful than joyful. To cherish means to hold something as precious and sometimes that involves looking beyond the immediate moment, drawing on the long-term relationship in expectation of its ongoing rewards. It also means recognising that the child is at some level a gift as well as a responsibility.³³⁶ Cherishing involves both an attitude and practical expressions of that attitude. To be cherished is to feel cared for and valued. It is also to *be* cared for.

Having noted that intersubjectivity is essential to the building up of relationships and community in parish ministry, it follows that ways of affirming the subjectivity of the other are important. Thus the ability to cherish is a primary skill in maintaining such relationships. Parish ministry is about cherishing the people God has given and, through doing so, helping them to know that they are precious. Cherishing requires attentiveness and it requires

³³⁵ Stadlen, *What Mothers Do*, see especially pp. 19–26.

³³⁶ Bonnie Miller-McLemore reflects on the Christian understanding of children as gifts in *Let the Children Come*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003. She maintains that it is because children are gifts that there is an ongoing responsibility to them, they require ‘unearned gifting’, p. 102. She writes, ‘In other words, the gift of children involves paradoxically a corresponding and sometimes costly duty,’ p. 104.

the ability to recognise that though we might not find it easy to love everyone in our care, they are all at some level a gift and held as precious by God. So, parish priests need to practise an attitude of valuing people as God's gift to this place and this church. Some are easy to cherish because knowing and loving them is rewarding, and their help and support are clear gifts which are easy to thank God for. But it is also important to learn to cherish the difficult people, the marginalised and the ones who, for whatever reason, are annoying. This is not to deny the reality of one's feelings or to fail to acknowledge that some people are sometimes difficult and some unlovely. It is to take seriously the Church as the Body of Christ in which all members matter and to take the responsibility for the cure of souls, which is not limited to the easy ones. In my experience, learning to find ways in which the people I found difficult enhanced the ministry of the parish was an important attitude and one that I could consciously improve. By recognising individuals as a gift to the particular parish and ministry, I learned to acknowledge that some challenged me to concern myself with issues or areas I would otherwise neglect. Some taught me to find new ways of seeing people and new ways of valuing people, challenging my own and others' prejudices. Others simply encouraged me to pray and to trust God.

In any church community there will be some people who may not feel cherished beyond the church; the lonely and unloved, the widowed, or those who have found life disappointing. One of the responsibilities of the parish priest is to find ways to particularly cherish these people. Fears about the decline of church attendance amongst younger generations can sometimes imply that the elderly who come to church are not that important. Yet they are gifts of God, often rich in prayer and wisdom, kindness and faithfulness. It is often by them that priests find themselves cared for and sustained in prayer. Simple things like calling people by name, remembering previous conversations and particular interests can matter immensely. It is a discipline and a skill to learn to remember such details. Like all skills, some will find it easier to master than others. Developing techniques that aid memory, writing notes, using trusted people to fill in forgotten details can all help in the process of making people feel cherished.

As a curate our training incumbent expected us, by the end of our first year, to be able to name each person as we gave them Communion. There were usually about 150–200 communicants on a Sunday. He did not ask if we were good at learning names, he simply assumed that we would find a way to learn. His reason was that there was not always time to speak to everyone after the service, but through this naming at the Communion rail, each one had been recognised and, at a simple level, cherished. It also meant we concentrated on who was there, noted newcomers and visitors and found opportunities to talk to them. Another example reminds us that clergy can find ways of sharing the cherishing of people through developing good systems of cherishing. Again during my time as a curate, the Bishop of St Albans used to write to every member of the clergy the week before their parish came up in the prayer diary, asking if they had any specific requests for prayer. I assume he had a good secretary who kept the diary, produced the letters and collated the responses, but that did not detract from the sense of being cherished and personally prayed for.

The importance of cherishing is a corrective to ideas that detachment is a necessary attitude to parishioners. There is within the Christian tradition an understanding of *agape*, love as selfless love, and this has sometimes led to a privileging of detachment. Yet, as we have already noted, there is a difference between the kind of engrossment in the other that is characterised by focusing away from oneself onto the other, and detachment. Love and care is always hoping for a response, for reciprocity and a desire to deepen the relationship.³³⁷ The way of Christ involves self-giving and suffering; these are not ends in themselves but expression of a love that desires relationship, that longs to draw people deeper into knowledge and life with him. Detachment from people is therefore not a good discipline for a ministry that needs to maintain multiple ways of strengthening and sustaining human relationships. There is, however, a discipline involved in ensuring that, as far as it is possible, all feel cherished.

³³⁷ See Gudorf, Christine, 'Parenting Mutual Love and Sacrifice' in Andolsen, B. H. et. al. (eds.). *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience*, Minneapolis, MN: Seabury Books/Winston Press, 1985. pp. 175 – 191. In this article she reflects on her parenting of her severely disabled children. She writes, 'Christian love should not be constructed as disinterested or set apart from other love as essentially self-sacrificing. All love both involves sacrifice and aims at mutuality,' p. 185.

Therefore the easy relationships must not be allowed to degenerate into cliques and inner circles that exclude others.

Another specific example of the art of cherishing is apparent in the conducting of funerals. Taking funerals is, for many, a regular part of parish ministry. In some parishes it will be a large and, at times, onerous task. Many of these funerals will be of people the priest has never met. In urban and suburban parishes the priest may not even know anyone who knew this person. The finality and awfulness of death means that many still turn to the Church for a Christian funeral, even if they are uncertain of their own or the deceased's beliefs. In order to take a funeral well the priest or minister has to find a way of *cherishing* the deceased. She does this by listening attentively to the bereaved as they talk about the person and allowing that person to become real to them. She has to listen to more than the actual words, hearing the notes of affection and possible areas of hurt, interpreting the way the deceased is talked about in order to sense their place in the family and the community. She needs to pick up on the character of the person, noting aspects of humour, patterns of behaviour and what that person would see as their delights and achievements. The people speaking may be articulate or incoherent with grief. Carefully the priest needs to ask appropriate questions and build for herself a narrative of that person. Then, reflecting on all she has heard and seen, she has to develop a sense of that person's reality and particularity. By the time of the funeral she has to have found a way of knowing him and, if appropriate, warming to him, so that when she speaks of him to those who knew him, he is a real person.

This is a particular skill of cherishing someone that draws on attentiveness and compassionate care. It is a form of storytelling in the sense that it recognises the unique narrative of an individual's life and thus the virtues of reality, compassion and delight all play their part. If done well then the uniqueness of this person is offered as a gift to the people who grieve and the words of the service commending him to God take on a deeper and more real cadence. He is cherished and the people who mourn recognise it and feel cherished themselves. For clergy who do many funerals it can be a draining process to attend well to each deceased person and to momentarily know and care for him. It is a skill and a discipline. Again it is learned and developed through practice. Again it involves a proper ability to recognise feelings and

think feelingly. It is a form of intersubjectivity in which the deceased becomes, in Buber's terms, a 'you' rather than an 'it'. A failure to convey this sense of the deceased as precious will be experienced by mourners as a lack of care and will be a negative witness to both the Church and God's love for them.

The art of comforting

One of the ways that mothers cherish their children is through comforting them. The ability to comfort a baby is one of the earliest skills that a mother has to learn and we associate comforting with mothering. Comforting requires the kind of attending to the particularity of the other that I have already discussed. It involves generic ways of being and behaving, but is always focused on the concrete reality of the person and the situation. It is learned through practice. Comforting involves the art of assuring another that, despite the sense of distress they feel, they will not be overcome. It involves the ability to be compassionate, to feel with the one who is distressed and through touch, speech and visual signals to model a calmness that doesn't invalidate the distress but affirms the ability to carry on living through it. It is the process by which we help another to rediscover their equilibrium, restoring them to a place where they can manage themselves.

If we look at an example from mothering, we see the kinds of thought and action involved in comforting. When a child falls and grazes his knee, he wants comforting. His mother will probably comfort physically, holding the child; she will also speak to the child, acknowledging that grazed knees hurt, that when you hurt you often cry, that bleeding is frightening and that the garden path suddenly seems a more threatening place. She will also reassure him that the bleeding will stop, that he will soon recover and that he will run and fall and run again. She will probably do this alongside practical thought and action, cleaning the wound, assessing whether it needs further attention or just a snazzy plaster. If his injury is far worse and she is uncertain of the future, she will continue to comfort him as she does all that is practical to protect him. She may simply have to say the ambulance will be here soon, the doctors will know what to do and I will be with you. The child is helped to cope with the immediate overwhelming emotions. He may recover very quickly and run off to play some more or he may need ongoing attention and affirmation. Through

comforting, his mother has helped him to cope with what was, at the time, frightening and distressing. Comforting involves physical body language, a particular tone of voice that soothes and reassures and an ability on the mother's part to control her own fear and feelings so that she can *de-stress* the child.

It is important to be clear that comforting is different from counselling. It is about dealing with the immediacy of feelings rather than trying to help someone reflect on and unpick such feelings. The primary human need in the face of events that cause distress is for comforting; counselling is a later possibility when the initial trauma has passed and individuals may need help in making sense of the circumstances in their lives. Comforting is the process of holding people and enabling them to find a place where they can begin to look beyond the immediate horror and be told that they will come through this. Comforting involves assuring the person that what they are experiencing, though it feels overwhelming, is within the normal spectrum of reactions to the circumstances they face. Clergy in parish ministry do a lot of comforting.

The etymological root of the word comforting is 'to give strength', and Stadlen writes:

Human comfort is one of the finest strengths that we offer each other. It can be casually given, by a touch, a smile, a few words or even by silence. Yet it's very effective. It doesn't usually alter the source of our troubles, but it strengthens us so we feel better able to confront them.³³⁸

Comforting, she states is 'very effective'. This needs to be owned and affirmed by clergy because, in the myriad of pastoral encounters that make up parish ministry, they are constantly called upon to comfort people. In maternal comforting mothers attend over time to the particularities of their child and learn ways of comforting that are appropriate to him. Clergy, in many encounters, do not have the luxury of an ongoing relationship. This means they need to develop a very keen ability to 'read' people and comfort appropriately. This is a skill and a discipline which, again, will come easier to some than others and will feel more 'natural' in some circumstances than others. It

³³⁸ Stadlen, *What Mothers Do*, p. 60.

requires the ability to use feelings to both assess appropriate action and evaluate it. Experience of the practice builds wisdom and can begin to make this reading and assessing almost second nature. It requires the kind of thinking that Ruddick attributes to mothers, where ‘feeling, thinking and action are conceptually linked’.³³⁹

Comforting is an embodied skill that often involves touch. For mothers it is often about physical holding. Clearly, physical holding is inappropriate where there is not already a close relationship, but comforting still needs to be bodily, even if that is a simple touch or sitting or standing in a way that inclines towards the one in need. The art of comforting involves drawing on one’s own experiences of feeling in need of comfort and of being comforted. Aspects of this require empathy – that is, to relate from one’s own experiences to the emotional state of another.³⁴⁰ Yet it often requires more than empathy, as a priest has to deal with emotions and feelings that she has not had herself. It also requires perspective. De Marneffe writes:

A mother’s responsiveness combines both her willingness to enter into emotional states with her child – what we commonly call empathy – and her ability to reflect and offer a different perspective ... Thus, in the everyday act of comforting her child, a mother’s very ability to help her child depends, fundamentally, on her having her own different perspective.³⁴¹

It is this combination of being able to recognise and validate another’s feelings while also being able to offer perspective that makes comforting effective. In good practice, clergy – encountering people they haven’t met before but who have turned to the church for help – will be able to make people feel comfortable and to offer comfort. In all situations of need they will listen and attend in order to acknowledge feelings, but they will not themselves be overwhelmed by the feelings. They will be reflecting on any practical ways forward and holding onto their own sense of hope for these people and this

³³⁹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 70.

³⁴⁰ Noddings, Ruddick and Miller-McLemore all discuss the use of the word empathy for this feeling with others and suggest that what is required is more than empathy. All suggest that empathy implies understanding another’s feelings by identifying them as like one’s own. See Noddings, *Caring*, pp. 30–31; Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p121; Miller-McLemore, Bonnie, *In the Midst of Chaos*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007, p. 52.

³⁴¹ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, p. 79.

situation. An aspect of that hope is the reality of God, so they also hold such people before God in a form of prayer.

An example where comforting is the principal skill that clergy need to use is in the common pastoral encounter of bereavement. When people are bereaved they need comforting that has similarities to the example of the hurt child above. They need to have the pain acknowledged, to have their feelings of loss and sorrow recognised and validated. They need to know that grief hurts, it is all right to cry, it will be physically tiring and it is confusing. They need someone who is calm to speak to them about the landscape of grief, the ways in which you forget for a moment and then are brought up short with the memory of loss, and how the world can suddenly seem a more frightening place because doctors do not know how to make everyone better and God did not answer your prayers. At this point they need comforting, not counselling. They need the practical arrangements to be intermingled with the soothing reassurance that this can be endured, however impossible it feels. I remember sitting with a mother who had just lost her three-year-old son. 'I don't know how to organise a funeral for my child,' she said and I could say, I do and I will and I will be with you through it. The art of those offering pastoral care at this time is to comfort and to assure those, in a place that feels overwhelming, that they will find the strength to come through and they are not alone.

The comfort that clergy are offering is both a human concern for people in distress but it is also a compassionate witness to the love of God. Clergy are able, in themselves, to trust that although they do not know the individuals, God does. Thus in attending to the people, a priest is also attending to God, praying that in them and through them God's grace may flow. Because they are comforting as a priest and are recognised as a representative of the Church, their words, actions and presence bear witness to Christ. Therefore their comforting is also prophetic; it speaks of the values of the kingdom and proclaims the love of God for these particular human beings. The concrete situation and the particular people will dictate how the priest articulates this prophetic dimension, but even where words are few, the act of being there and offering comfort as a witness of the Church speaks of God's love. Compassion and attentive love are virtues necessary for comforting and so is the virtue of

hope. To comfort others is always to hold before them the hope of new beginnings and new possibilities.

For Christians this hope works at different levels. There is the hope that with support those in distress will move through the painful times into new possibilities in this life. There is also the eschatological hope that pain and suffering, death and despair have all been overcome through the death and resurrection of Christ. Christians believe in life beyond death, in an eschatological righting of wrongs and in the eternal verity of God's love. Even where people cannot themselves fully share in this hope, the priest's witness to it is part of her ability to offer comfort. Witnessing to this hope is an important aspect of the ongoing worship and teaching of ministry, and of the comfort provided for those who do share in the Christian hope. In word and sacrament the hope of faith, the possibility of new beginnings is regularly proclaimed so that believers can renew their trust in the companionship of Christ through all the changes and complexities of life. The *Book of Common Prayer* Communion service makes this comforting explicit: 'Hear what comfortable words our saviour Jesus Christ said unto all who truly turn to him ...'³⁴² In preaching, teaching, leading worship and pastoral care, speaking of God's love offers comfort. In recognising the reality of human emotions, with all the doubts, fears and uncertainties that life brings, clergy in public worship and pastoral care empathise and show compassion. In constantly witnessing to the hope and redemption offered in the Gospel, they can offer a perspective that is truly comforting and help individuals to understand and experience the comfort of the compassionate love of God.

Like many clergy, I learned the art of comforting through watching the way an experienced priest comforted and cared. I learned from his ability to articulate and reflect on what he was doing and why. And alongside this I drew on my own experiences of being comforted and not being comforted, utilising feelings as a way of judging action. I also drew on my sense of God as comforter through both personal experiences and the teachings of Christian faith. Reflection and practice can, in time, lead to a seemingly natural ability to read people and respond appropriately, but there is a danger that if the practice

³⁴² Order for Holy Communion, *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662. These words follow the confession and absolution.

is not named then it is not valued. Good comforting, like good caring, is confirmed in the reception of those receiving it. Many individuals recognise the generosity of such comforting and are grateful to be skilfully cared for. Like mothers, priests are expected to be good at it, so a failure to learn and an inability to read people and comfort them appropriately when they turn to the Church for help can damage people's trust in the Church and even distort their understanding of God.

Yet, because 'comfortable' and 'comforting' are words that connect to cosiness and sentimentality, there is ambivalence in owning comforting as a primary ministerial practice. Sentimentality, though, is not comforting; it is a form of 'cheery denial', which Ruddick identifies as a degenerate form of the virtue of cheerfulness or hope. Comforting is not sentimental, as it acknowledges the reality of pain and fear.³⁴³ The association of comforting with the maternal, and thus with dependency and vulnerability, has also meant that it is undervalued and not recognised as a skill. The increasing professional respectability of counselling has added to the undervaluing of the very different, non-professional skill of comforting. Counselling is a particular and valuable practice, but clergy need to acknowledge confidently that in parish ministry they fulfil a very different role from counsellors, though the kinds of problems they listen to may be very similar. Articulating the particular skills involved in comforting, in meeting the distressed in the midst of distress and helping them practically, emotionally and spiritually to move through it, is important if clergy are to value their own abilities and feel that others recognise comforting as an art and skill. In speaking about pastoral ministry there needs to be resistance to eliding comforting and counselling or of privileging the latter over the former.

Embodied ways of knowing and communicating

I noted above that comforting was an embodied practice and many aspects of cherishing are as well. They involve both the use of body language and the ability to read it in others. This kind of communicating is essential in maternal

³⁴³ De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, discusses the sentimentalised view of mothering, pp. 144–45.

practice because the early stages of the relationship are developed before the child can speak, but they continue to be central to the ongoing relationship of mother and child. And because this is how we learn to relate, they continue to matter in adult relationships. The tone of voice used to reassure, soothe or welcome can be as important as any words spoken. As can the tone of disapproval and the admonitory look. Appropriate levels of touching, a hand on the arm or, if the relationship is right, a hug can convey real sympathy or warmth. Eye contact and bodily attention all speak to people at a deep level.

In mothering a young baby this non-verbal, embodied communication is highlighted because there is, as yet, no speech. It is necessary to learn how to communicate through tone of voice, eye contact and touch, and how to read the baby's non-verbal language. Yet as children develop speech, the non-verbal ways of communicating do not cease. My children learned how to read my face, even across a crowded room. A stern look could wordlessly make them rethink a particular course of action. An encouraging smile could reassure and share in joys and delights. They understood urgency and the times when it was all right to dawdle and explore. Tones of voice convey as much as any words and the value of touch speaks of affection, condolence, comfort, reassurance or playfulness. Over time, ways of bodily communicating develop in a good relationship and children of varying ages may look for the reassuring nod or the affirming touch.

It is because these embodied ways of communicating carry such powerful messages that it is necessary to reflect on them. It is important to acknowledge that utilising and understanding such body language is shaped by the social setting in which individuals have grown up. Different cultures can have very different attitudes to eye contact, touch and voice tone. This is why understanding the context of ministry is very important. Clergy need to be self-reflective about the messages they convey through non-verbal signals, just as they need to become practised in reading the body language of others. They also need to be able to comfortably inhabit these embodied ways of communicating so that they don't appear staged. This is all part of the *attention* talked about in preceding chapters. In individual encounters compassion, interest, patience and attention are all conveyed in embodied ways that can often matter far more than the actual words. Yet they need to relate to the

words authentically. Emphasising the non-verbal ways in which humans communicate through body language and symbolic spaces and objects is not intended to detract from the importance of speech. It is through speaking and storytelling that people make meaning of their own lives and the lives of others. Such stories make sense of the symbols and rituals that shape both homes and communities. Even before children learn to talk, mothers – alongside the non-verbal communication – talk to and with their child. It is the proper integration of the verbal and the non-verbal that enables children to learn their ‘mother’ tongue.

For those coming new to Christianity and the worshipping life of the Church, the priest is often the one who shapes ‘the mother tongue’: how they speak of and practice the faith. Whatever the particular tradition of a church, the worshipping experience will involve not just the spoken words, but the unspoken language of voice tone and body language alongside deliberate embodied practices. These will be shaped by theological and doctrinal beliefs as well as matters of style, taste and habit. People will stand at some points, sit or kneel at others. They may cross themselves or raise their arms in the air. In doing so they are adopting postures and movements that have become part of their worship. For newcomers and outsiders such movements may seem strange, but for the regular worshippers they are habitual and almost unthinking. They have been learned; deliberately taught or simply copied. They become the *habitus* of that community,³⁴⁴ the mother tongue of faith. They have parallels with the manners learned at home: how to eat at table, handle the cutlery, greet visitors and behave in public. Mothers help to create the *habitus* of a home, teaching such embodied ways of being through deliberate repetition and correction as well as through modelling behaviour. Thus my own children stand up to greet a visitor who comes into the room and move to shake hands, offer accepted words of greeting. These learned bodily movements happen on most occasions without a deliberate thought because they have become habitual. They have watched over the years how adults behave, they have been

³⁴⁴ The concept of *habitus* comes from Mauss, *The Notion of Body Techniques in Sociology and Psychology*. Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, define it as ‘the embodied daily performance of beliefs and traditions that are acted rather than conceptualised’ and they link this to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in a church community, pp. 141–42.

formally told what to do, but now the movements are a ‘natural’ response to the presence of a visitor.

At home and in church such embodied practices will be shaped by cultural understandings of normal behaviour and particular preferences of this place and these people. While mothers shape children from their earliest years, clergy move in to existing congregations and may find some of the postures and movements do not correspond to their own habitual practice. Understanding how deeply embodied ways of doing things affect people is important in understanding when and how changes can be made. It is also important in the clergy role of both deliberately teaching postures and movements and modelling them when presiding at services. For many Anglican clergy working within a liturgical tradition, some of these embodied aspects of worship are dictated by the rubrics, though there are always aspects of local practice. In both a home and a church there will be a *habitus*, an accepted way of doing things that simply seems to be normal to those who belong. In the home, mothers have a pivotal role in creating this *habitus* and in a particular church the incumbent is similarly pivotal.³⁴⁵

Whatever the actual style of a particular church, the rituals should enable those present to make meaningful connections between their life experiences and the reality of God’s ongoing interest and care. The parish priest has a responsibility to understand and respect the embodied nature of such worship. It does make a difference how the priest, or other ministers leading such rituals, inhabit them. The tone of voice, the eye contact, the level of attention and presence will all speak to those participating as loudly as the actual words. The conviction that can be read in the nonverbal language of a priest will make a difference to how trustworthy and believable the words being proclaimed are. This can be particularly important for newcomers and visitors, who take their cues from the priest. The physical actions of those leading the service should provide clues to the newcomer but not distract from the flow. People unconsciously read faces and posture. They respond to the

³⁴⁵ Stringer, Martin, *On the Perception of Worship: the ethnography of worship in four Christian congregations in Manchester*, Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 1999, provides a fascinating study of the language and practice of four different congregations. It highlights how bodily practices as well as phraseology become almost unthinking to the regular members as they express their faith through the embodied and linguistic practices that are habitual to the congregation.

cadence of words, to tones of voice as much as they do to the actual content. The priest needs to be able to explain why certain movements and actions happen when they do. Thus they need to be able to reflect on their own as well as their congregation's style. Amy Hollywood writes about how this *habitus* of embodied religious practice comes to feel natural.

Recognition of the learned nature of one's *habitus* can begin to open spaces for understanding, yet it's in the very nature of the *habitus* to cover over its own learned status. Belief successfully inculcated through bodily practice renders itself 'natural' and hence resistant to critique and change.³⁴⁶

Understanding the complex way that practices are learned, yet feel normal, can, as Hollywood says, open spaces for understanding that will help in teaching and explaining to newcomers as well as helping people adapt when change is necessary.

In thinking about comforting above, I commented that the dual aspect of the one comforting is essential to the process: that is, the ability to feel with the person but not to be so caught up in their feelings that the necessary perspective is lost. There is a similar need for a dual perspective in leading worship. The ability for a priest to be attentively present in any service or ritual is a subtly different experience from an individual themselves getting caught up in the worship. For a priest, however strongly a particular religious ritual touches their own worshipping self, must, if presiding, be consciously attending to the others. She thus learns to balance a genuine worshipping experience with a *responsive* attitude to the congregation and all that is going on. We will look at this further in the next section. At this point I am affirming the importance of the non-verbal messages that those leading services are communicating. They need to resonate with the desired meaning. This seems a very obvious and simple factor but, again, if it is not named and explored it can be dismissed as unimportant. In naming it as a skill I am also pointing out that it can be developed and improved, which means that clergy need others who

³⁴⁶ Hollywood, Amy 'Practice, Belief and Feminist Philosophy' in Anderson, P, & Clack, B, (eds.), *Feminist Philosophy of Religion – Critical Readings*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp.225-240, p. 237.

can sensibly comment on how they appear *bodily* when conducting worship and pastoral encounters.

Multi-tasking and multi-attending

The examples above have stressed the importance of clergy being able to attend properly to the particularity of the other. In fact, clergy need to develop the capacity to be attending to and reading the body language of others while carrying on with other tasks of ministry. It is often acknowledged that one skill-set that mothers develop is the ability to multi-task. This is usually understood at two levels. Firstly mothers learn to be able to do more than one thing at a time, for example, they can feed a baby, cook a meal and assist an older child with homework *simultaneously*. The other meaning of multi-tasking is that they need to be able to turn their hand to lots of different tasks in any given day, switching between different roles from play companion to domestic worker, to skilled negotiator, without even factoring in any work beyond the home. Both aspects of multi-tasking are, I would suggest, part of the practice of parish ministry. Clergy are less likely to be doing two or three tasks at the same time, but they do, like mothers, learn to be multi-attending. That is, while fully engaged on one task, they may be attending on a number of different levels. A good example of this is when a priest is conducting worship on a Sunday morning.

The primary task on such an occasion for the priest is to conduct the worship well. As we noted above, this involves appropriately performing the rites of the given tradition using words, gestures and movement in such a way that the worshipping experience of all the people is meaningful and the whole is an acceptable offering to God. At the same time she may well be scanning the congregation. In doing this she is looking out for who is there and how people are. She will make mental notes of certain absences with connected planned actions: to make enquiries, or pay a visit or make a call. She will take note of any newcomers or infrequent visitors and again begin to think of actions. Newcomers may prompt subtle adjustments to the service, a clearer indication of how the service flows or a particular word of welcome. She will notice that the body language of someone suggests that there are issues that

need following up and note that the particular readings may be hard for someone else.

She may also be attending to the roles others play in the service. There will be aspects of training that require sensitive feedback. Others need affirmation and thanks for the parts they have played in the worship, whether visible or behind the scenes. She may be assessing for herself how changes in liturgy, choreography or use of space feel and function. She is also offering her own worship, trying to attend to God's message for herself and this community, to discern the way forward and the right priorities. All of this is unobtrusive. It is a form of attending to the concrete reality of this congregation as they are this morning and certainly should not intrude on their worshipping experience. It is a form of attentive love that mentally asks if all is well with these people and how best she and they can, collectively, be the church they are called to be. This attention feeds into the priest's experience of presiding over the worship of the community and into her own prayer that she may be able to minister to them by the grace of God.

Such unobtrusive attention is part of an ongoing habit of parish ministry as the priest chairs meetings, joins in the toddler group and participates in parish events. She scans the people and reads the non-verbal signs. It often goes hand in hand with a form of praying that mentally holds the people encountered and met before God. This kind of prayer is unobtrusive and mostly unarticulated. The attention can allow the priest to recognise and respond to the needs of the other even if, at times, the other does not know how to articulate them or doesn't have the courage to share them. If practised, it results in a sensitivity that can feel changes in conversations, read signs in people's bodies and respond appropriately.

Multi-tasking and multi-attending in parish ministry involves the ability to move emotionally from very different environments and situations without bringing inappropriate attitudes into each. Martyn Percy refers to this as the 'enormous range of temperatures that a priest experiences and moves through in a given day',³⁴⁷ moving from rain to sunshine, from formal to relaxed and warm. The patchwork nature of a priest's daily diary means that she may move

³⁴⁷ In conversation, January 2011, and see M. Percy, *The Ecclesial Canopy: Faith, Hope, Charity*, Farnham: Ashgate (forthcoming).

from comforting a widow straight into singing time with the toddlers. She may then have a few visits some to people who are a delight, others who are bitter or boring individuals who sap her energy. The day may also include meetings both within the church and in organisations in the wider community where she represents the church. At some of these she may need to be assertive in stating a position, at others simply listen and show her face. Meanwhile she is waiting for the phone to ring because a faithful soul is dying and that might mean a reorganisation of the whole diary. It may also mean the loss of someone special to her and the community. In her head are the readings for Sunday's sermon, the plans for a Lent talk, how to respond to the latest diocesan initiative and whether she has time to go to the shops to stock up the fridge.

These encounters need to be contained at some level. In each place she must attend to what is happening. She must listen attentively to the widow and then move on to laugh with the children while picking up on the tentative questions of faith expressed by one of the mums. She must do her best to attend to those she likes and those she finds hard and in the meetings play her part with integrity. It all involves an ability to move from one thing to another in a way that continues to hold all that is important while switching her focus onto the real and concrete. This multi-attending is a skilful practice that good clergy develop so that it seems to come easily but, again, I would suggest that an inability to name it can mean that even those who do it do not recognise and value it.

The patchwork nature of the clergy diary also points to the way that clergy straddle two very different ways of understanding time. Here again I think there are interesting parallels with mothering. A parish priest lives in the real world with its linear patterns of time. She makes appointments and schedules meetings and has an outline of a normal working day. Yet she is also dealing with the unplanned and the unpredictable. People get ill and die unexpectedly, people feel a desire to speak of issues that can lead to explorations of faith at unpredictable moments and none of this takes account of the planned diary. Clergy therefore have to work with both the planned and the unplanned, allowing space for the unexpected and accepting that sometimes everything will come at once and seem utterly overwhelming. Most clergy accept this and are good at managing the overwhelming, but they also need to

learn to accept the unplanned periods of quiet and rejoice in them as times to recharge and relax. The linear pattern of time means that we can feel guilty resting or relaxing in what is designated as working hours but if we acknowledge that the 'work' demanded doesn't always conform to these hours then it can perhaps be easier to let go of the guilt in the times when things slacken off for a bit. Mothers of babies and young children can feel the benefits of resting when the baby sleeps, putting their feet up while the toddler is absorbed in a new toy or enjoying a relaxing coffee and chat while her child plays with another's. Clergy need to accept the slack times as gifts to allow for relaxation and refreshment even when they are not days off.

Mothers can also learn to slow down and move sometimes at the child's pace, dawdling along the road studying the plants in the wall or standing watching a digger on the building site. Children can teach her about living in the present moment, enjoying the simplicity of things and the joy of now. Practising this ability not to rush enables clergy to focus on the unexpected encounters, to allow time to look and to listen, to people, to places and, above all, to God. My training incumbent encouraged me to walk as much as possible around the parish, allowing enough time between appointments to stop and chat if necessary, or to walk down a different road and reflect on the people there. For many the sheer size of the parishes in their care makes this impossible, but finding the ways to create a slower pace in the midst of all the busyness of parish life is an important practice for allowing people and God to interrupt the careful planning.

Stadlen talks about how much of a mother's day can look like doing nothing and this can feel true for clergy too, yet they may well feel exhausted and drained by it all. Revaluing the non-productive time spent wandering, listening to people, praying for places and people, pondering and reflecting is an important aspect of understanding the practice. Stadlen writes:

If we keep referring to the slow periods of mothering as 'getting nothing done', then most mothers will continue to see what they are doing as nothing.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ Stadlen, *What Mothers Do*, p. 109.

The slow periods of ministry are times of reflection, opportunity and slowly building up relationships of trust. Clergy need to find a balance between being seen as approachable, with time to talk, and managing all the many tasks expected of them. Accepting the unpredictable periods of busyness and calm and finding ways to weave them in to the ongoing linear demands of ordinary time is a necessary adaptation to the practice of ministry, which differs in so many ways from the measurable productivity of other patterns of working life.

Homemaking and housekeeping

At the centre of parish ministry is the local church building. In the last chapter it was noted that maintenance and care of these buildings was a central part of parish ministry. This involved much of the ‘labouring’ aspects of the role, which can be understood as housekeeping. Buildings need to be regularly cleaned and tidied. They need to be repaired and sometimes reordered. Spaces outside need grass mowing, weeds dug up and litter removed. All of this can and should be undertaken collectively, but it must be done. As discussed in Chapter Five, Ruddick sees a home as central to maternal practice and she links it to the skill of administration: ‘Central tasks of fostering growth are administrative.’³⁴⁹ This is a term that is more familiar to clergy than it is to most mothers, but unpacking what it means in maternal practice can provide a more holistic way of viewing it in ministry.

The management of a home requires administrative skills. It requires the planning of meals and other necessary domestic chores. Food must be bought, budgeted for, cooked and served. Different needs of family members must be factored in, allowing for likes and dislikes. Social diaries need to be co-ordinated, events need to be organised; time for holidays, appointments and general relaxing need to be fitted around different work and school patterns. This is all carried out within a family constantly adapting to change. Children grow and need new clothes, new toys, different space and different activities. Careful thought needs to go into what is retained and what discarded so that the home doesn’t become overwhelmed with clutter. As children become more mature, they can participate in the collective chores, but that often means more

³⁴⁹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 87.

supervision and constructive feedback. Thus homemaking involves both housekeeping, in the sense of domestic chores, and also managing budgets, administration and overseeing those who help in the domestic tasks. It also involves strategising and planning for all the changes of a growing community.

This has strong parallels with the domestic, administrative and management aspects of parish ministry. The regular 'domestic' tasks of church life can be shared, but must be done, requiring some level of oversight, affirmation and constructive feedback. The administrative and management tasks can also be shared. The Church of England has developed structures for this; elected officers, PCCs and various deanery and diocesan bodies. The Parish priest has particular responsibilities in these structures yet they are designed, however inadequately at times they work, for a collaborative understanding of decision-making and strategising. Overseeing the collective 'domestic' labour of church life and the administrative aspects involves priests in management. Alongside this management are the strategic aspects of planning for the future and adapting for change, which is a consequence of growing changing people.

In both maternal homemaking and parish management what is essentially important is the motivation for the administrative tasks. These places, the home and the local church are there to provide real people with the physical, emotional and spiritual space that underpins their growing and flourishing. These places are shaped by the threefold demands of nurturing towards maturity. They must have a sense of security and familiarity that enables those who belong to feel held and safe. They also need to allow for growth and change, so they must have levels of flexibility. They also have to be socially acceptable – which means they must be recognisable for those who come in from outside – while witnessing to the values and beliefs espoused by those who belong.

In a domestic home there needs to be enough that is familiar, making it a comfortable and safe space for its inhabitants. When moving house, there is always a sense of relief when certain key pieces of furniture, pictures and objects are put in place. This new space now feels like our space. These traditional pieces speak at levels beyond their actual significance. Thus a picture's value may relate to past homes, the person who gave it, the fact that it

is inherited or a complex mix of all these. The familiar needs to be maintained alongside flexibility and change. Changes will be dictated by the different needs of the growing children; from playrooms, to teenage ‘snug’ and from endless toys to computers, drum kits and quantities of long-limbed friends. The home must accommodate different people under the same roof and, at best, be a place of hospitality to outsiders. In order to be hospitable there are cultural norms about how space is used and acceptable levels of order and disorder. Clearly, wealth, physical space, size of family and all sorts of cultural assumptions will affect homemaking. Poor housing and lack of money make the task of homemaking particularly difficult. Yet, an over-obsession with fashion or a preciousness about all the contents can make a well-appointed home unwelcoming and unhomely.

Clergy share with others in the care of buildings that are often complex and expensive to manage. Difficult decisions need to be made about how they are to be maintained, heated, cleaned and utilised. They contain many artefacts that resonate with the people who come, and these artefacts make them feel at home, but it is not always the same things that people love and value. Changes in need raise complex questions about reordering the space. People are no longer used to sitting in cold buildings or walking miles to the nearest toilet. Musical tastes alter and fewer people are able to play the organ or commit to the choir, so in many churches empty choir stalls dominate the chancel. Yet altering buildings is not straightforward. Both the regular worshippers and people beyond the church community relate to the building. Historical significance and community memories play into the way such buildings are valued and cared for. There is also the important sense that changes that seem good at the moment may simply lead to problems for the future, when tastes and attitudes will have shifted again in ways we cannot predict.

The ability to manage all of this well is part of the priest’s role, but it must be remembered that the role of manager arises out of the responsibility to care for the people and places; it should not be the primary model. It is also clear that it involves the ability to balance the competing ‘goods’ of the practice and to facilitate change in collaborative and constructive ways. Administration and management are necessary tools for homemaking and housekeeping. They are necessary tools for caring for both a church building

and the community for whom that space exists. Poor administration means that people and events can get forgotten. Poor housekeeping means that cluttered and dirty spaces make people feel unwelcome and unvalued. Unkempt spaces speak of neglect and in a church they are dishonouring, not just to the congregation, but also to God. Poor planning means that necessary bills cannot be paid, affecting repair, maintenance and good stewardship of resources.

Clergy need, with others, to oversee the care of the spaces entrusted to them. This can often be an onerous aspect of the work, taking up time and energy with little to show for all the hard work. It requires skills that can be developed and practised. At its best it is seamless, happening in ways that do not distract those who come from their primary task of worshipping God. Buildings may be unwieldy and resources may be limited, but love and care can make a place feel welcoming and reflect the love and care offered in worship and fellowship. It is not necessarily the most well-appointed homes that feel the most welcoming but the ones that radiate the warmth of the relationships within them. Both those who are regular and those who visit will be learning, albeit often unconsciously, from the language of the buildings and the attitudes of the people who inhabit them.

Weaning and managing change

As noted above, housekeeping and homemaking involves the management of change. Like mothers, clergy are engaged in the care of real people so they will consistently need to facilitate change. Some aspects of change are negotiated with ease and it is only when looking back that the extent of adaptation is fully perceived, but some change needs managing. One of the primary changes in a young child's life is moving from milk to solid food, and this process is named weaning. In mothering, the process of weaning has come to symbolise the complexity of encouraging a child to move on, accept new experiences and let go of some older securities. Thus inherent in the process of weaning is an understanding that change can often involve letting go of valued things. What is let go of can carry resonances beyond its obvious utility.

When a baby or young child is weaned from breast or bottle they not only give up a familiar form of food but also the process of being closely held. This has also often entailed time when mother and baby could watch each other,

deepening their sense of relationship. If a mother is breastfeeding, the baby has a fair amount of autonomy in how much milk he ingests and the balance between fore and hind milk. He could decide on whether this was a quick feed or a long, slow experience. In moving onto solids he gains many things, including a more varied and satisfying diet, but he loses the holding, the autonomy and the familiar comfort. The mother, too, is involved in both freedoms and losses. In weaning her child she can let others share in the task of feeding; she will be able to leave the baby for longer, perhaps return to work outside the home. Yet she is giving up the easy, free and portable source of food for a process of cooking, processing or buying suitable baby food. Mealtimes are no longer a quiet time of holding, but are now messy and sometimes fraught.

The wisdom of maternal practice has taught mothers that the process of weaning needs to be planned and managed. It has to acknowledge both the excitement of the new and the fears and challenges of letting go of old ways of doing things. Weaning involves gradually introducing new tastes without immediately withdrawing the milk. It requires a deliberate attempt to be relaxed on the mother's part, especially when lovingly prepared food is rejected. It requires creativity and perseverance. A mother must try and see the change from the child's perspective, to recognise the reality of their fears and to address them as best they can. These fears may seem bizarre and illogical to an outsider, but are connected to the meanings the child has created around his world. A mother also needs to be honest about her own feelings and reasons for choosing how and when to introduce change.

Mothers learn that the process of weaning a child from milk to solids is replicated in so many other areas of the child's life. A child is weaned from a cot to a bed, from favourite toys to new ones, from the safety of nursery to the infant school, and so it proceeds. If a child has had change managed well in the early years he should, hopefully, find it easier to embrace and manage changes himself. The process of weaning in all its forms involves trial and error and learning from the successes and failures of other practitioners. It involves focusing on the particular child with his individual likes and fears. In some cases reaction to a suggested change may result in a rethink about whether that particular change needs to happen at this time and at this pace: could it be re-

imagined? Creative ways of retaining aspects of the past can be incorporated in to the new, for example by periods of quiet physical holding being included in the rituals of the day when the actual physical process of breastfeeding is stopped.³⁵⁰ Again, assessing feelings and recognising the reality of the other can reduce conflict and encourage a shared ownership of changes.

Mothers have to ask themselves if the change is motivated by the readiness of the child to move on or their own agenda. Her agenda may be set by a desire for easing a certain aspect of the workload or the opinions of experts who write and speak about generic babies and timings. In weaning mothers learn that change often involves a process; it can take time and may need to pass through stages. They may well make use of rituals, stories and plenty of body language to help facilitate this process. They also learn that such a process may not always proceed linearly and supposed failures may, in fact, be useful ways of learning and developing for all involved.

Managing change in parish life is often complex and contested. Thus reflecting on weaning can offer insights. Clergy need to appreciate that people's attachment to certain objects or ways of doing things may be for many different reasons, thus the fears of change work at levels that are not immediately obvious. Altering the familiar words of a service can cause upset not because of changed meaning but due to a change of rhythm or the loss of certain phrases that reassure and console. Objects in the church that seem of little use can hold particular memories for some that connect them to people or events in the past. Changing the familiar things may connect to fears about ageing, lack of worth, loneliness and even issues about death. Things may well look very different from the pews than from the pulpit. Christopher Burkett notes how a Lectern Bible in a specific church can speak of the word of God, of the family who gave it, of the events that surrounded the gift and so on. He sees this as the semiotic elements of the ways congregations understand themselves and notes that an object can convey a multiple level of meanings and resonate in different ways to different people.

³⁵⁰ Psalm 131 offers the image of 'a weaned child on its mother's breast' as a picture of the soul resting on God. The image suggests how the holding is maintained as a restful, secure place even when the child has moved beyond the physical necessity of breastfeeding.

Symbolic construction is all about the meaning people give to things and how we ‘think’ ourselves into belonging. Appreciating this process is crucial to sympathetic leadership. Through a growth in such local knowledge and careful reflection on it, leaders come to understand the significance of things and behaviours that casual visitors do not even notice.³⁵¹

He goes on to note that within a given congregation the meanings given to things will be ‘multivocal’. The symbolic meaning of things allows for a variety of understandings to co-exist within shared patterns of behaviour, thus within a congregation the objects used in worship can convey a multiplicity of meanings connecting to anything from their intrinsic part in worship to the connections they provide to past people or occasions.

This means that when things are changed, even when the reasons for change seem straightforward and good, some people may find letting go difficult because of the particular way they resonate with an object or practice. Familiarity is an important aspect of feeling at home in the space and this ‘at homeness’ is often a necessary aspect of people’s ability to relax and worship God. Because many of these attachments people have to objects, the use of space and ways of worshipping function at a semiotic level, they are not easy to articulate. This means that people may react in ways that seem illogical to others, including the vicar. Contested power and the possibility of conflict will be an inevitable aspect of any community. What is important is to ensure that they do not become destructive. For a community to continue to flourish and grow, changes will inevitably need to happen. Decisions have to be negotiated that lead to appropriate action or inaction and choices between priorities must be made. Trying to understand things from different perspectives can allow the priest to recognise the deeply held concerns of the other, even if these are quite alien to them. It can also allow for others to delight in things the priest finds kitsch or unattractive. Finding ways to address the real fears behind change, to present new things creatively and to negotiate a process can reduce conflict.

Clergy, like mothers, also have to look honestly at their reasons for changing things or resisting change. Is this about making her own life easier, a matter of her personal taste or the assumption that experts, offering generic

³⁵¹ Burkett, Christopher, ‘Organizational culture in congregations’ in Nelson, John, *Leading Managing Ministering: challenging questions for church and society*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999, pp. 203 – 225, p. 210.

patterns and timetables for change, know what is best? Unlike mothers, clergy also have to acknowledge that they are passing through, for however long. Thus they have a special obligation not to impose their own particular likes and dislikes. They also have a responsibility for the whole community and therefore must try and see things from a number of different angles. At times this means a priest letting go of her own pet projects and ideas. Success is not about getting her own way, but about helping the community to grow up in ways that continue to preserve people's faith and that are acceptable to the wider Church and, above all, to God. To let go of an issue gracefully may enable growth in others of a far richer quality than anything she might have planned; it requires the virtue of humility.

Negotiating change in a community inevitably means that some will at times feel hurt, misunderstood and overlooked and such people need continuing compassion and care. Centrally important is the realisation that the process matters. In managing change in communities the ends never justify the means. As Arendt argued, that is only true in 'work', where the making of a tangible product is the goal. The process may not necessarily arrive at the ends in the way expected, but if there is integrity in the process, the end will be one that many can own. It may even be, surprisingly, more rewarding than the one originally envisioned. Patience, gentleness and self-control are all necessary virtues in managing change. Reflecting on the maternal practice of weaning can enable clergy to value the attention and compassion necessary to understand and address people's fears of change. It can also encourage a proper valuing of trial and error that is not afraid of failure. Managing change in this way calls for creativity and contextual knowledge; the focus is on a process that maintains the intersubjectivity of relationships and the flourishing of the community.

Conclusion: Being and doing

The examples in this chapter do not offer a definitive description of parish ministry, but they do point to aspects of the practice that have been under-articulated and therefore undervalued. Stadlen suggests that where mothers do not have a language to express all that they have been doing, they can easily dismiss it as *nothing*. De Marneffe writes:

The belief that it [mothering] requires no skills says more about how we conceptualise skills than it does about motherhood. What many mothers find satisfying in mothering is precisely such an exercise of skills, and the contribution that exercising those skills makes to the complexity and richness of oneself and one's child. Ironically, the skill-set mothers draw on in nurturing their children is rarely identified as such.³⁵²

This chapter has attempted to describe and name some of the skills mothering involves as a way of articulating similar skill-sets used by clergy. I am not arguing that maternal language is the only way of describing these skills, simply that it can help to articulate, reflect and value ways of thinking and acting that shape good practice. This is particularly important in the current climate, both in and beyond the Church, where the setting and measuring of targets appears to value certain skill-sets above others. Quoting De Marneffe again:

The way that accomplishments are measured and rewarded, and their relationship to how our society structures work, means that many mothers experience themselves at the intersection of two competing and somewhat mutually exclusive reward systems.³⁵³

I would suggest that this is also true for clergy. Fears about Church decline feed into the sense that clergy need to show that they are being productive while often knowing that the role has little to do with recognisable models of productivity. The dissonance between the rewarding aspects of building up communities and sustaining the ongoing round of services and parish life and the demand to define what they are doing in measurable targets can make it hard for clergy to recognise and affirm their own good practice.

Through trying to articulate some of the soft skills of ministry it may be possible to find ways of both affirming and developing them. The difficulty is that clergy, like mothers, find that many of these skills are assumed to be about personality or instinctual knowledge. Thus the ability to cherish people may be dismissed with the suggestion that someone is just a good 'people person'. Clearly, each unique human being has gifts and personality traits that mean they find some aspects of learning easier than others. We also know that

³⁵² De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, p. 114.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

upbringing and life experience play a large part in shaping such gifts and aptitudes. It therefore follows that some people will, through personality and upbringing, find it easier to cherish people, but that is not to say it has not been learned and practised. Those for whom it does not come easily can also learn, if they are prepared to practise and reflect on the practice. Cherishing is an art, a skill and a discipline. It is a practical skill, so it cannot be learned in abstract or measured through quantifiable outcomes. However, it can be experienced by those being cherished and witnessed to by their resulting flourishing. The same is true for comforting and many of the other skills I have sought to articulate above.

When clergy are not taught to value and understand these skills, they can often unintentionally damage the communities that they are entrusted to care for. They can also, through their lack of care for people, for buildings, and the processes of change, unwittingly negate the message of God's loving care that they are seeking to proclaim. For clergy, like mothers are caught up in an immensely complex mixture of being and doing. The role is both a relationship and an activity. The relationship shapes the activity and the ongoing action shapes and develops the relationship. As a mother I do things for my children, and the kind of things I do are shaped by the contingent reality of the children and the concrete situations of daily life. Through relying on my good enough response to their needs they are strengthened in both their sense of what a mother is and what they can expect a mother to do. The love that we share is both the motivation for the activity and a product of that ongoing reliable responsiveness. It is also, from my perspective, shaped by the sheer wonder of seeing my labour and action sustaining the unique lives that are growing into maturity.

In parish ministry the priest is in a relationship to the parish and that relationship shapes the actions and the actions shape the relationship. The kinds of skills described in this chapter sustain and encourage the flourishing of life. Cherishing, comforting, multi-attending and storytelling all develop and deepen the relationship as the priest seeks to know and care for these people in the concrete and contingent circumstances of their lives. Through good housekeeping skills she maintains the space they need to develop and mature in faith. Some will need a lot of practical help; others are at a stage when, so long

as the resources are made available, they can cater for themselves, and possibly for others, including the priest. My teenage boys can fend for themselves so long as the fridge is well stocked – and they even offer to make me a cup of tea.

Through attending well to the concrete and the particular clergy can learn to understand the complex feelings that connect to buildings, objects, styles of worship and faith practices. They can then realise that in change the *process* is vitally important. They can learn the art of weaning: helping people to manage change in ways that enable them to feel secure. They can translate feelings into words or rituals, recognising that many aspects of people's beliefs are held through embodied practices and non-verbal ways of knowing. And because it is about a relationship, they can reflect on how their own habits and practices shape their responses and actions.

Through such practice a clergy character is developed. This cannot simply be understood as an internal process of being. It is lived out in an endless round of doing. From the smallest tasks to the large and momentous decisions, we shape the relationships we have with others. How we act is shaped by the way we think and what we value. Ruddick writes:

Maternal thinking is a discipline in attentive love. Clear-sighted attachment, loving clear-sightedness, is the aim, guiding principle, and corrective of maternal thinking. However, neither attentive love nor any other cognitive capacity or virtue sufficiently epitomises maternal work ... The love of a child, in all its fullness, could not consist solely of being able to ask, say, or hear. To love a child is to *do* whatever is required to keep her safe and help her grow. Maternal attention is prompted by the ability to act and, when most successful, gives way to the action it informs.³⁵⁴

There are many different tasks that make up the work of a parish priest and this means that clergy have a lot to do. They therefore need to be good managers, good administrators and, at times, a good general dogsbody. What matters is the motivational starting point. It is through attending lovingly to the people entrusted to a priest's care that these tasks are acted on. To lose sight of the reality of the intersubjective relationship means that organising, managing and leading can all too easily degenerate into a relationship of subject/object in which the people are seen simply as the led. One of the temptations of ministry

³⁵⁴ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 123.

is to gravitate towards tasks that seem to provide measurable and tangible outcomes, thus projects, be they buildings or other kinds of initiatives, can feel satisfying, as they hold the prospect of an assessable end. Yet the primary task is to build up the people of God, and this is ongoing. It can be assessed to some extent by looking at the flourishing of the people. Are they healthy? Yet how this question is asked and assessed is also important because it must not lose sight of the particularity of these people in this place and the centrality of the relationship between clergy and people.

For parish clergy, understanding the temptation to look for more easily definable goals is important. So, too, is resisting the alternative temptation of assuming somehow that any planning or strategies are unnecessary for God will somehow do it all. Finding ways to look for the signs of God's kingdom in the people and places where they minister involves accepting glimpses and surprises rather than finished products. As Ruddick says of maternal practice, to name virtues and ways of thinking is not to necessarily possess them, it is about highlighting the struggles and naming the temptations. Both children and congregations are resilient. While serious neglect, bullying or abuse can all cause lasting damage and should be named as wrong, the more straightforward failures of mothering and ministry are survivable. In fact, the ability to learn from our inadequacies and mistakes are one of the values that we need to pass on to those in our care. As Arendt reminds us, the ability to forgive and to be forgiven is an essential aspect of human action and interaction. As is the willingness to make promises and start anew.

In writing about parish ministry I may well be accused of neglecting important aspects of the role, such as teaching and preaching, leading worship and administering the Sacraments. I do not want to suggest that these are not important. The formal ways in which the faith is taught and reflected on are necessary aspects of building up the Church and individual Christians. Parish clergy need to find authentic ways to handle scripture and tradition, to engage with the ongoing story of God's involvement with his people and to help people themselves grow in the virtues of Christian discipleship. However, I would maintain that clergy can be tempted to overestimate the value of their didactic teaching and to undervalue the ways people learn through the wider aspects of parish life and ministry. A failure to acknowledge this means that

clergy can feel frustrated if they concentrate on the formal, didactic ways of imparting the faith while neglecting all the unconscious or unarticulated learning that is happening around them. Theologically literate and powerfully delivered sermons about the generous welcome of God will be diminished by an inhospitable vicarage and a permanently locked church.

Plenty of parish priests, like plenty of mothers, are ‘good enough’. They may not be consciously thinking about their practice in the kinds of ways that have been articulated. However, a genuine love of the people they care for has enabled them to develop a practical wisdom that means that often enough they respond appropriately to meet the contingent needs of the other with an attitude that enables them to flourish. They will draw on human skills of comforting and caring, finding out over time what works well and how to be comfortable with different people in difficult circumstances. They will reflect on the feelings of others and on their own feelings and use them to make judgements about appropriate behaviour. They will ponder and they will learn through practice. Yet if they are not encouraged to value such thinking and reflecting and learning they may fail to see that these are some of the best aspects of their ministry. Stadlen says this about mothering:

There are many books prescribing what a mother should achieve ... But there isn't much that explores what mothers do achieve. If there were, we should have more words or phrases to describe motherly achievements. The result is that many mothers do not recognise their own successes.³⁵⁵

My concern is that we fail to articulate the achievements of good parish ministry, which involves all the seemingly unproductive aspects of being seen around the parish, being interruptible, knowing how to offer a comforting word or attend properly to friend and stranger. The process of keeping the show going, noticing if the church is clean and the aspect welcoming, putting on the services with love and attention, being authentic, trustworthy, humble, cheerful and faithful. If we undervalue all these things and appear to privilege formulaic action plans and blueprints for growth then I would suggest we undermine the proper practice of parish ministry and its vital importance for building up the

³⁵⁵ Stadlen, *What Mothers Do*, p. 13.

church in a particular place. We also make it hard for clergy to recognise their own successes and take pleasure and joy in all that they do.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored using a maternal model for parish ministry. The intention has been to allow the reflections on mothering to offer insights into parish ministry to provide language that is better able to promote good practice. Therefore the thesis has looked at how mothering can be understood and how priesthood can be better articulated. This thesis maintains that the language that we use to describe these roles affects how they are understood, how they are valued and how they are practised. It has been interesting to note some recurring ideas, firstly, issues around essentialist and functionalist accounts of both gender and ministry and the difficulty in speaking meaningfully about difference. This then connects to ideas about intersubjectivity and how we understand and sustain relationships of mutuality and reciprocity, especially when there is asymmetry built into the relationship. I have argued for the centrality of *attention* and the importance of appropriate response in building such relationships and noted that they will always be contingent, lived out in the reality of particular people in concrete situations. Therefore both mothering and ministry require virtues rather than rules, and concrete ways of thinking that can respond appropriately to the real demands and needs of the particular other or others. Both, I have argued, involve the commitment to take on the responsibility of caring for this child or these people in this place.

The problem of essentialism and complementarity

In reviewing the inherited models of ordained ministry, which the Church of England draws on, it is clear that there is a strand of essentialism. This locates the priesthood in a separate mode of being to the rest of the laity. Reference to Apostolic Succession, ontological change at ordination and even the metaphor of the priest as shepherd all connect to a theology of difference in which, through ordination, the priest becomes at some level *other* to the laity. As I argued, this has interesting parallels with essentialist discussions of gender in which men and women are ontologically different. An ontological understanding of the roles of priest and of mother can unwittingly imply that the work of each should flow naturally out of their being. For mothers this is

described as a maternal instinct and for priests the grace or character of ordination. I would suggest that in both cases this language fails to acknowledge the actual process of learning how to practise the role, leading to underarticulation of the skills. It can also lead to high levels of guilt when what should flow naturally can often be difficult to learn; mothers and priests can perceive themselves to be failing where love and service is a struggle.

We saw that in both gender discussions and theologies of ordination a reaction to the determinism of essentialism was to minimise any language of difference and focus on equality. Yet this leads to a silencing of the reality of difference, which is problematic. In gender theories, I argue, it silences the specific experience of mothering with its connection to women's bodies and the reality that childcare has been seen as women's work. This has also led to a lack of recognition of the skills developed and the rewards present in caring for children. In theologies of ministry, to silence the difference of ordination, by rightfully affirming the ministry of all, leads to a genuine confusion about the role of the priest and an uncertainty about the kind of language and models appropriate for the role. This may lead to avoiding specifically priestly language and speaking more generally about leadership, and possibly borrowing models from secular organisations. This silences the issues around the sacramental nature of priesthood and, particularly, the responsibility to be a public witness to God's grace through living and acting as a priest. It can often go hand in hand with a shunning of distinctive clerical dress. The motivation to affirm the ministry of all, though, has not necessarily produced a better way of speaking about the laity or of collaborative patterns of ministry.

It therefore follows that we need to find ways of talking about difference without resorting to complementarity, which tends to privilege one over the other, or to a form of denying its reality. Looking at the mother-child relationship can, I suggest, provide a way of understanding difference through an intersubjective relationship. From the earliest point in the relationship there are two subjects who look for mutual recognition and begin to develop a way of adapting and negotiating with each other. This relationship is clearly asymmetrical. The child is dependent on the mother but that does not negate the intersubjectivity. The child plays her part in shaping the relationship through her responses to the mother's care. A second child may provide a

similar relationship, but any mother would tell you that very quickly you know that this new baby is a subtly different person and you therefore learn to adapt and negotiate. Thus we can note that the relationship is particular; the mother and child are real people, not generic models. The relationship also requires constant adaptation as the child grows and develops. A mother may mourn the passing of various stages but she understands and fosters her child's growth and development. Thus the practice of mothering requires attention to the reality of this child, at this time, in this place and an appropriate response. It is a relationship of care that involves contingent response-ability. It is an intersubjective relationship where, at best, each recognises and loves the unique other.

Mothering is an asymmetrical relationship in which the child is able to rely on the *generous inequality* that means reciprocity lies not in taking it in turns to care but in the child's flourishing through receiving the care of the mother. Dependence is real, but it is always transitional, and the relationship moves into complex patterns of dependence and interdependence as the child grows and develops. I have argued that the role of the parish priest is to care for a particular community entrusted to her. Within this role there will be relationships of mutuality, but there will also be asymmetrical relationships in which the priest provides the luxury of allowing transitional dependence, where she is there for the other and finds reciprocity through seeing the other accept and benefit from her care. An aspect of the commitment of a priest to be a priest for these people is the willingness to be focused on the needs of others, to be ready to care and ready to respond. The multiplicity of relationships means that a priest has to develop the capacity to read people and situations quickly so that she can respond appropriately, comforting, cherishing, challenging and sustaining the people she encounters. This requires the ability to attend properly to people, to compassionately feel with them while not losing herself in the feelings, but offering a perspective and a caring presence. This reading of people and feeling with and for them requires a kind of reasoning that takes feelings seriously. Feelings become a necessary part of reasoning, enabling responsive action and assessing of that action. Thinking and feeling are not in opposition, but partnership.

In caring for others, both mothers and priests provide the places necessary for people to find the security to refresh themselves and establish who they are. Within homes and churches people are fed and taught. They find the familiar spaces and objects, the family stories and rituals that help them to make sense of themselves in the world. A parish priest needs to take seriously the homemaking aspect of maintaining a church and its services, ensuring that, as far as possible, the faithful are sustained and encouraged to grow, while visitors and newcomers are made welcome. I have suggested that attention needs to be paid to the non-verbal language of the buildings, services and people in the church. It is important to understand how much people learn through these non-verbal messages and to ensure, as far as possible, that they do not undermine the formal teaching and mission of the church.

In fulfilling the role of a parish priest as one who cares for a particular community like a mother, I have argued that Ruddick's terminology of practice and virtues provides a way of understanding ministerial as well as maternal thinking. Rather than offering a functional account of maternal tasks or implying that it is the expression of an essential instinct, Ruddick discusses the kind of reasoning that mothering utilises, and the temptations and virtues the practice is prey to. Her three demands of preservation, fostering growth and acceptability show that mothers are constantly making choices that prioritise different goods, depending on the contingent realities she and her child are facing at that moment. Because mothering involves making such contingent choices and is about an intersubjective relationship in which both mother and child are understood as having subjectivity, it cannot be rule-bound but must instead be virtuous. Identifying the kinds of virtues involved in mothering means pointing out the temptations that mothers are prey to. Such temptations can often arise out of *good* motivations and can therefore be understood as degenerate forms of the necessary virtues. As virtues are understood, following Aristotle's definition of a 'mean', we find that the temptations lay either side of the virtue. Thus, in mothering, humility seeks to find the mean between the temptation to dominate or to abnegate responsibility, to be overly intrusive or neglectful. Cheerfulness guards against the temptation to deny the complexity of reality or to despair because of it. And all the virtues are held in the attentive love that asks what is best for this child at this time.

To see parish ministry as a practice allows an understanding of the demands of ministry and the kinds of virtues and temptations that clergy face. It is to offer a way of reflecting on ministerial thinking and the reality that the demands can mean that 'goods' conflict. I have argued that Ruddick's maternal demands and virtues provide a reasonable analogy for the demands of parish ministry. Parish priests have the responsibility for preserving the life and faith of those entrusted to their care, fostering growth in individuals and the community and educating in the Christian faith. The latter correlates to Ruddick's concept of acceptability, in this case to the wider Church and, primarily, aiming for all to be acceptable to God. In response to these demands clergy need to develop ways of thinking and virtues that enable them to act well contingently, responding appropriately to the real people and places in their care. Both mothering and ministry are teleological, they are aiming for maturity both in their own practice and in the people they are caring for. Mothers want to be 'good enough' and they want their children to grow up into reasonable people. Clergy are called to be part of the building up of the Church, the body of Christ. Both they and those they care for are, by the grace of God, to become more like Christ, as Paul says, 'putting on Christ'. Priests have a particular responsibility to help people and communities grow up in Christ.

The virtues to be practised and the temptations they guard against are in many ways similar to mothering. Clergy need to practice humility to guard against the temptations of domination or abnegation of responsibility; the temptation to over-intrusive ministry or of neglect. Both of these may be motivated by good intentions but they are failures in intersubjectivity. The priest may seek to impose her will on others for their own good, or to be constantly trying to involve herself in lives at an intrusive level in order to meet her own sense of being needed. She may also fail to make decisions or act in ways consonant with her responsibilities because she is wary of responsibility or because she allows others to dominate. Parish priests need to be hopeful, compassionate, and trustworthy, as they guard against the temptations to an unrealistic cheeriness, inauthenticity or despair and passivity. They must learn to delight in the achievements of others and learn to cherish even those they find it hard to like. In doing this they draw on their theological understanding of the worth of each person in God's sight and the sense of people as gifts,

however strange. Above all, they need to develop the virtue of *phronesis*, the intellectual virtue of acting well in contingent circumstances. This virtue is developed through the practice and the ability to reflect on experience and grow in wisdom. Reflection benefits from the input of others; through conversations, storytelling and pondering wisdom is built up. This includes the willingness to share failures as an aspect of learning and, as Arendt points out, requires the capacity to forgive and be forgiven.

Arendt's definitions of labouring, work and action offer insights into the working life of a parish priest. There is plenty of labouring; work that is necessary for sustaining life. It is cyclical and can feel mundane and menial, the job is never done. This labouring can and should be shared, but it must be valued. Noting who is doing it, thanking them and affirming its value is fundamental. This is the realm of servants, and a priest needs to understand how much of ministry involves this ongoing service and what their part is in it. Alongside and interwoven with this labouring is what Arendt describes as action, the building up of community, the speaking and acting between people. This involves collaboration: working with others and respecting their otherness, using power to generate new life and resisting the familiar temptation to dominate or allow others to dominate. The virtues of faith hope and love play their part in good collaboration, as respect for the reality of the other is maintained even where it leads to disagreement and conflict. Compassion is necessary for understanding why people feel strongly about certain issues and the skills of weaning may be necessary for managing change in ways that all can own. Action is always open-ended and allows for the surprise of new beginnings and new possibilities – Arendt's *natality*.

Arendt's definition of work is the aspect of human activity that should have least priority in parish ministry. There will be projects that can be understood in this way, that have beginnings and ends and are tangible. However, the purpose of such projects is to serve the ongoing ministry of the church; the sustenance of people's faith and its action in the world. Work or fabrication is the area of activity in which blueprints, delegation and measurable outcomes are all right and proper. Here the end does justify the means, but when 'fabrication' language is applied generally to the practice of

parish ministry it damages the priority of relationship. A blueprint model cannot lead to collaboration; instead it works with delegation.

Delegation is, of course, appropriate in many areas of work, but it is a form of imposing the will of one onto others, it involves a continuing expectation that things will be done as directed and can, at worst, argue for blind obedience instead of mutual trust. Where clergy delegate, they are often tempted to micromanage or to feel betrayed when others do not deliver the end product they envisioned. Measurable outcomes and action plans can close down options even when motivated by the best of intentions, perhaps to challenge complacency or despair. This does not mean that strategies, visions and plans are not part of ministry, but it does mean that they have to be collaboratively developed, adaptive and open-ended. They arise out of the ongoing life of the parish and its concern to be the Church in that place. There will be projects that are begun and ended, but the ongoing work of parish life has no end and its success is to be seen in the flourishing of lives, an inexact science that requires a priest to develop an ability to attend well to people and feelings.

This thesis maintains that the language used to talk about parish ministry matters. The model offered and the way the practice is articulated has implications for the way clergy perceive their role and how they value what they spend their time doing. I suggest that much of the language currently used either offers clergy models that are underpinned by theology that is at odds with ideas about collaborative ministry, or models that are too distant from modern experience or too vague to provide a helpful way of thinking about the role. A parish priest in the Church of England today will need to work collaboratively with the congregation or congregations they serve. It is, therefore, vitally important to have a theology of ministry that is ecclesial; that locates ministry in the collective work of the Church. It is also important to understand such ministry holistically as something that, although shared, cannot be neatly divided and parcelled out. As I have argued, this means understanding the difference between delegation and collaboration and that means taking seriously the intersubjective nature of the relationship that clergy are committed to.

In a culture that values the ‘fabrication’ model of work in which measurable targets and action plans have become part of many organisations, from manufacturing to healthcare and education, it can be difficult for clergy to live with the very different pattern of work required from ministerial practice. The boundaries are blurred and the reality of people can make it hard to evaluate success and even to define what is ‘work’ and what is not. This means re-evaluating the worth of time spent chatting, pondering and wandering round the parish, which can look like doing nothing to others and even, at times, to the priest herself. There are also the aspects of praying for people, which the priest knows is valuable but is, again, hard to measure in terms of efficacy or, at times, to explain to those beyond the Church. A priest needs to make time to attend to God, just as she needs to make time to attend to people. Both are in some sense intangible, sometimes the rewards of either attention are recognisable and affirmative, but a priest also needs to accept that there is much of what she does that will bear fruit slowly and she may never see or know the outcomes this side of Heaven. The rewards of ministry can be surprising and may be missed if the priest is not attending to what is around her. Above all she asks herself the question: Is it well with the people entrusted to my care? There is always more that could be done, but am I doing a good enough job to keep them safe, help them grow and fit them for the kingdom of Heaven?

As with mothering, there are no blueprints for how to be a good priest or build a healthy church. There are examples of good practice, the wisdom of the tradition, the insights of other practitioners, the things learned through trial and error. There are books that can help and courses that can offer new ways of looking at things and challenge one’s own misconceptions. There are plenty of good ideas, helpful suggestions for managing the labouring aspects of the work, for thinking about how to enable better collaboration, better teaching, better use of the space or the liturgy of the Church. Yet all of this has to be lived out in concrete reality. A priest and those she collaborates with in caring for *this* church and *this* people in *this* context, needs to discern what the appropriate action is here and now. She needs to know the people and place and listen hard to those who may know them and understand them better, she needs to understand what she is called on to teach in terms of the apostolic faith and

how best to convey those truths to these people. She needs to understand that her life is a public witness to the reality of God's grace and the possibility of becoming more Christ-like, so she must try to be authentic, trustworthy and have integrity, yet knowing that she will not always get it right and that it is enough to be 'good enough'. Her mistakes and failings can become part of a wisdom learned through trial and error as she grows through the forgiveness of God and those she serves. Above all, she needs to find a way of loving and cherishing these people and this community because God loves them and God has called her to care for them. This does not mean turning a blind eye to faults and failings; it is not an unrealistic fantasy, but a realistic acceptance of who they are and what they need in terms of preservation, fostering growth and training in the Christian faith.

It is my intention in this thesis to affirm many aspects of good practice in parish ministry and to acknowledge that many priests attend well to the reality of their parishes and respond appropriately often enough to be trusted. They may not name the virtues or temptations, but their care and concern for the people and communities entrusted to them means that they are developing virtues like humility and compassion while recognising the need to resist imposing their will or failing to take responsibility appropriately. These priests may not use the terminology of comforting and cherishing people, but they simply see it as part of the job. For some the practice of ministry has meant they have become virtuous and to act well contingently feels natural. Such priests can be male or female and will have learned to care from a variety of different backgrounds. I have been privileged to know and work with such caring priests and see the flourishing that such care engenders. However, the very ease with which some priests are able to care and comfort, to provide a homely church and encourage maturity in those they encounter can mean that it is assumed to be down to personality. It is my contention that practices can be learnt and developed. Past personal experience and natural disposition can make aspects of ministry easier for some than others, but virtues can be practised by all. Attending properly to others, respecting them and caring for them involves human capacities and skills that can be honed and improved.

In highlighting these aspects of ministry that have been under-articulated and thus overlooked, I am suggesting that they have a centrality to

both sustaining the faithful and reaching out in mission. Acknowledging that human beings learn as much, if not more, from the non-didactic and non-verbal, I am encouraging clergy to attend more closely to the *habitus* they help create and to the signals they send out through their own lives and bodies. I do not want to undermine the value of good preaching and teaching. The didactic teaching needs to be of the best quality possible for people to be able to engage with the ongoing story of God's loving involvement with the world and to make connections between their own lives and the calling to be virtuously Christian. Ensuring that the regular worship is of a high standard is also vital for all of the community to experience their dependence on God and to receive the spiritual feeding necessary for growth. Where the regular worship is good many will take up little of the priest's time, being able to experience God and draw the nourishment they need from word and sacrament. But all of this involves recognising and valuing the wealth of unspoken messages that the building, people and priest send out both to the faithful and to the visitors.

The purpose of this thesis has been to offer a maternal model for the role of a parish priest. I am not suggesting that this is the only model, but I am suggesting that it can offer insights into the role, particularly seeing the role as a relationship and activity that is about contingent, responsive care. If a priest cares for his or her parish as a mother tenderly, what does this mean? I have suggested that it means she practises attentive care, seeking to know when to respond and how to respond appropriately within the contingencies present in real communities and encounters with real people. She does this believing that the grace of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, flows through genuine acts of compassion and that she has been called to witness to the reality of this grace. She leads where appropriate because she cares. She teaches and nurtures because she cares. She manages the organisational aspects necessary to ensure that the church provides a place where people can rest on God, be spiritually fed and emotionally cherished. She practises hospitality and comforts those in need. She delights in all the different achievements of the others in the community, even when they may be far from the things that would normally be of interest to her. She forgives and is forgiven for failures in attention that lead to inappropriate response or neglect. And she conveys hope in word and deed. Hope in the reality of God's love, hope in the possibilities of redeemed

humanity, hope in the reality of forgiveness and new birth, and hope in the eschatological promises that, in the end, we will know and experience what it is to be fully grown up in Christ.

Such virtuous practice cannot be learned in abstract. Preparation and good teaching can help, but most important is the experience of practice and the ability to reflect on and learn from such experience. It therefore follows that the training period for clergy post-ordination is particularly important. The role of a training incumbent in helping such reflection and modelling good practice should provide a supportive learning environment. As should the whole congregation in a training parish, giving constructive feedback, affirming what is good and gently naming and forgiving what is lacking or inappropriate. Unfortunately, beyond the curacy clergy are still often isolated in their role, and provision for self-assessment and continued learning are limited and formalised. Finding ways of enabling opportunities for clergy to meet together and chat un-defensively is important. They need spaces and places to share the stories of success and failure and to learn from the reaction of others to their stories and from the stories of others. Finding language that affirms the aspects of ministry I have been stressing, that is about caring for people rather than creating projects is necessary if clergy are going to value for themselves the kinds of things that make their ministry flourish.

It follows that clergy need to *feel* cherished by the diocesan hierarchy and systems rather than pressured into producing formulaic responses. They need to be recognised as individuals working in individual places. If they feel undervalued and unrecognised they are more likely to be tempted to find a sense of worth through asserting their status over the laity or feeding their need to be needed by intrusive ministry, creating cultures of dependency. Where the parish priest has a sense of her subjectivity and a recognition of the subjectivity of those she cares for, she will find a rich mix of relationships. These will include relationships that demand care, provide care for her, delight and surprise, frustrate and hurt, forgive and start again, as she and they learn to resist the temptations and grow in virtue, allowing the grace of God to flow in them and between them, blessing and sanctifying. And both she, in her public witness as a priest, and others, in their witness as Christians, will make manifest the glory of God at work in the world.

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