*The Faith Lives of Women and Girls:*

*Identities, Experiences, Practices, and Beliefs*

26-27 March 2019

Queen’s Foundation, Birmingham, U.K.

**PAPER ABSTRACTS AND BIOS**

*1. Professor Donna Bowman, Norbert O. Schedler Honors College, University of Central Arkansas*

**Crafting Identity: The Spiritual Formation of Women in Prayer Shawl Ministries**

Prayer Shawl Ministries (PSMs) are lay ministries providing handcrafted shawls and similar items to those in need of comfort. The movement originated in the early 2000s at the Hartford Seminary from a liberal and third-wave feminist context, and has spread across North America and around the world into Christian congregations (and non-religious organizations) of every denomination and theological orientation, from evangelical fundamentalist to mainline Protestant to traditional Catholic and Orthodox. Qualitative research conducted in 2013-2014 with dozens of groups and over eighty individuals, in a variety of sites and organizational settings in the United States, illuminates how the practice of handcrafting prayer shawls shapes participants’ understanding of spiritual or religious identity. Prayer shawl makers draw connections between their work and meditative/therapeutic practices, affinities encouraged in influential texts of the PSM movement with instructions such as creating an atmosphere of presence, repeating trinitarian mantras, praying while stitching, and journaling. Such practices are often understood as disciplines of spiritual self-formation. But the specific ministerial parameters of PSM -- aggregating individual work, participating in blessing ceremonies, coming to consensus on the logistics of ministry (including selecting recipients), and releasing shawls to persist as symbolic textiles in others’ lives -- produce a greater effect on the contours of participants’ spiritual identities. This is revealed by the confluence of spiritual values in PSM participants across diverse organizations with diverging polities, worship styles, and doctrinal commitments. This presentation will highlight the conditions that produce these outcomes, gathering and analyzing the self-descriptions of prayer shawl makers in a range of settings. Finally, the particulars of PSM and the possibility of generalization to other female-led lay ministries of caring will be discussed.

***No bio***

*2. Dr Madeleine Castro, School of Social Sciences , Leeds Beckett University*

**The Red Tent online and biological essentialism: exploring how women’s circles understand womanhood**

In recent years there has been increasingly interest in and attendance at women’s circles in the Western world (see for instance, Leidenfrost, 2012 and Longman, 2018). One such set of circles is the Red Tent Movement (see <http://redtenttemplemovement.com/> and <https://redtentdirectory.com/>). The Red Tent is a space where women gather to be with and support each other, at the same time as celebrating and honouring womanhood. Women meet, often monthly in a decorated, special, or sacred space to share their stories, cry, laugh and reflect whilst sometimes engaging in ‘spiritual’ practices and revering the divine feminine (Leidenfrost, 2012; Longman, 2018; Starkweather, 2011). Many women who have been involved in these circles report individual healing and/or transformation (see Leidenfrost, 2012), and moving moments of connection and collectivity where their bonds with other women are positively changed (Castro, forthcoming). Longman (2018) even argues that they are forging new forms of femininity. However, there have been some issues regarding the exclusivity of the Red Tent, particularly concerning definitions of womanhood and perceived biological essentialism (e.g. <http://transwaffle.blogspot.com/2016/03/the-red-tent-movement-and-non.html> and <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/lasarafirefoxallen/2016/09/you-are-welcome-in-this-circle/>). This paper reviews some of the substance of these difficulties from online blogs and discussion forums and the issues that underlie them aiming to unpick threads concerning femininity, womanhood, and women’s circles.

*Madeleine Castro completed her PhD in 2009. She currently teaches interdisciplinary/social psychology at Leeds Beckett University. Her research interests include feminism, Parapsychology, and post-secular spiritualities. Her current research explores the Red Tent Movement online. She is a committee member for the Transpersonal Section of the BPS, and co-directs Exploring the Extraordinary (EtE), a network for researchers interested in extraordinary phenomena.*

*3. E. Anna Claydon & Jo Whitehouse-Hart, University of Leicester*

**Testimonials of Faith: Confessions and Secrets in Women’s Social and Media Engagements as Believers**

This paper examines the gender specific findings from focus groups, participant observation and survey data collected from evangelical ‘audience-believers’ (our term) during 2017. This data provides a revealing window on the impact of testimony, both revealing and keeping secrets and being secretive about one’s anxieties about faith, which speaks to the concerns of women and girls within the wider socio-cultural context. In our earlier work (Claydon & Whitehouse-Hart, 2018) and recent examinations of the participants of this dataset, what was apparent was that there are two distinctive processes underway for those with faith. The first is what we call the ‘psycho-theological process’, whereby the believer’s psychology becomes completely entwined in their experience of faith but, in which, there is no ultimate ‘state of grace’, with a constant recapitulation of what we argue is a hermeneutic (and ontological) anxiety. The second is the precise nature of the congregation as an audience. Thus, we developed our term ‘audience-believers’. What we argue is that the act of audiencing (Fiske, 1992) has a particular quality for those with faith, distinct from all other conceptualisations of ‘the audience’ or ‘the spectator’, that has implications for how we think about constructions of social and faith-based identities within the practice of being the audient-believer. When we examine women, their faith acts both in prayer groups (the traditional testimonial) and digital contexts (social media, app and website usage), what can be extrapolated is that there is a particular play around identity which is more complicated than we might see with men because it is marked by the socio-economic and gender position of women in a far more politically resonant manner. As such, what this paper does, via analysing the data, is to position the utterances of women with belief within the discourse of feminism and feminist theology perspectives. 300 words

*Dr. E. Anna Claydon is Associate Professor in Media and Communication at the University of Leicester. Her work mainly focuses upon film, music and disability but she is primarily a cultural studies researcher. It was an interest in the latter (faith healing and mental health) which lead to the project represented today, alongside a return to psychoanalytic theory and subjectivity.*

*Dr. Jo Whitehouse-Hart is Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Leicester. Her work centres upon promoting psychosocial approaches to media texts and she has conducted extensive research of audiences, which partly stimulated her interest in the project today, as she observed the increased participation of believers with media tools.*

4. *Revd Dr Helen Collins, Trinity College Bristol*

***When worship doesn't work* - contrasting concepts of transformation for mothers in the Charismatic Movement**

This paper will present some of the findings from my PhD research which carried out qualitative research into the spirituality of new mothers within the Charismatic Movement. I argue that charismatic styles of worship can be experienced as excluding and alienating by new mothers because of the competing ways in which worship and mothering are conceptualised. In this paper, I will illustrate my argument through the theme of 'transformation', a key concept in the literature on Charismatic/Pentecostal worship (Cartledge 2006; Hollingsworth 2007; Land 2010) and in scholarship on motherhood (Miller-McLemore 1994; Hays 1996; Rose Ennis 2014). I examine song lyrics and prayers from participant observation in charismatic worship services to argue that charismatic interpretations of 'transformation' assume a therapeutic experience which is quickly realised and corporately felt within the worshipping encounter. I contrast this with examples from my interviews with mothers to demonstrate that their experiences of transformative, divine encounters are much more complex and difficult. I argue that their expectations of a charismatic style transformation has caused them to ignore and devalue the deeper forms of transformation they are experiencing. I conclude with some suggestions to reimagine a broader, more inclusive understanding of charismatic transformation.

*Helen is a lecturer in Practical Theology at Trinity College, Bristol with responsibility for Anglican formation and practical training. Prior to that she was DDO, IME2 Training Officer and Warden of Readers for Bristol Diocese. Her PhD research was into the intersection between charismatic spirituality and motherhood. She studied at Oxford University, Kings College London and Bristol University.*

5. *Rev. Claire Dawson, University of Chester & Diocese of Sheffield*

**The Gift of Leaven: A new feminist theological praxis for urban church**

This paper explores the findings from my feminist qualitative research project and considers the implications for the Church and academia. The project was based in the post-regeneration community of Bootle, North Liverpool where I was parish priest of a small Anglican Church. I extract the hidden *phronesis* of twelve white working-class women and present this as a thematic network holding the three global themes of: hope; placed and particular; and the death space. This is defined as the Gift of Leaven and is my main research finding. The concept of the leaven is taken from the parable of the leaven (Matthew 13:33) where the yeast represents the women’s gift of *phronesis* to the academy and the Church, a gift which I argue is generally ignored within the Church’s arborescent theological paradigms.

Through a spiralling process of theological reflection, the voices of the women are drawn into conversation with voices from urban geography, feminist theology and public urban theology. The resulting new feminist praxis for urban church is the new women’s knowledge, which has been generated by this research project. This new praxis is revealed in and through everyday ordinary objects, the *lo cotidiano* of the women. It is presented to us as fragments as these I suggest offer more of a lasting truth and hope than grand centrally placed metanarratives of Christian belief. This praxis challenges assumptions about where new knowledge comes from and whose voices we are listening to. This is not a new six-point plan for how the Church should engage in urban ministry. What is offered instead is a new way of seeing and understanding the urban church from the perspective of the white working-class women, voices which are notable absent from both ecclesiology and academia.

*Claire is an Anglican Priest currently working as a Vicar in the Diocese of Sheffield and in the final stages of her Doctorate with the University of Chester. Her research was born out of her work in Bootle, North Liverpool, an area of multiple deprivation and considers how church can be vulnerable within the present climate for growth and success.*

6. *Hengameh Ashraf-Emami, University of Nottingham*

**Politics of the veil**

This paper aims to explore multi-dimensional aspects of the veil and British Muslim women identities in two cities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Glasgow. The empirical research will draw on forty life history interviews of participants across generations with diversity of ethnicity and social class. This ethnographic research attempts to shed lights on complexity of Muslim women’s identities in public arena through veiling and unveiling. To achieve the aims of the research, this article applies mainly two theoretical frameworks, one based on W.E.B. Du Bois’ (1897) double consciousness linking this to intersectionality (as expounded by Crenshaw and McCall, 2013.) in order to demonstrate and explore various agency of the participants and veiling. Undoubtedly, intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion plays a significant role in constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing of participants’ identities in post secular and multi-cultural society such as Britain. It is important to comprehend how Muslim women negotiate their identities through veiling and unveiling and how they use the veil as a tool for empowering themselves through the process of decision making and self-identification. Furthermore, it is notable to explore how perceived identity may support or contradict their identities. Considering agency is not as a static subject but dynamic, it is vital to comprehend the multi-dimension of agency in public and private life.

*Hengameh Ashraf Emami is a PhD researcher at the University of Nottingham. Her PhD explores agency of British Muslim women in intergenerational context. Her book chapter: GENERATIONAL RELATION: Gender and generational relations for Muslim women in Scotland published by Edinburgh University Press.  Hengameh is working as a senior research assistant (Multi) Cultural Heritage project Funded by AHRC at Northumbria University.*

7. *Rev’d Dr Allison Fenton, Cumbria Christian Learning*

**Enchanted Chatter: Narrating Christening Stories**

As a priest in the Church of England and as a mother I became increasingly aware of a dissonance between those who attend church for a christening and the usual, often dwindling congregation who can feel used (and abused) by these ‘visitors’, often ridiculing or diminishing their motivations. Wishing to take seriously the stories of mothers who request christening for their babies rather than to dismiss them, I began to listen to mothers in the North-East in order to explore their meaning-making. To some extent specific research questions evolved as the research developed in order that I could explore what was really going on rather than beginning from a fixed point. In this paper I will describe the evolution of these questions through the purposeful chatter in which I and my participants engaged.

Firstly I will describe the methodology of my research: how each phase of the research was carried out and how it informed the next. Despite an imbalance of power in the conversations (which I describe in this paper) I will argue that the mothers who participated and I became, through our wise-ranging chatter, co-creators of meaning.

Drawing on my wider research, I will go on to suggest that for many of the women who participated there remains an element of ‘enchantment’ in the world. I will argue that in order to take this experience seriously, the categorisations and definitions of religion used by Church and Academy need to develop ‘misty boundaries’ (as defined by William James) rather than dismissing the meaning-making of mothers as ‘folk religion’.

*Rev’d Dr Allison Fenton is currently working in Cumbria as a theological educator for Ordinands, Curates and Laity; she is Acting-Principal of Cumbria Christian Learning. She is a priest in the Church of England and has served in parishes in Newcastle, Durham and Carlisle dioceses.  Her academic interests include the theology and spirituality of mothers. She has three (only just) adult children and lives in Cumbria with her husband, Jonny, and Bedlington Terrier, Wiggins.*

8. *Dr Anna Fisk, University of Glasgow*

**‘Stitch for Stitch, You Are Remembering’: Knitting and Crochet as Memorialization**

This paper will explore how the craft of knitting is used in women’s work of materialized mourning and memorialization—including in ‘continuing bonds’ with the dead and recovering connections with female ancestors.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with knitters at Edinburgh Yarn Festival 2018, the paper will discuss five participants’ craft projects narrated by the makers as being ‘especially meaningful’ because of the connection with maternal figures who have passed away. Judith spoke of a shawl she knitted while her mother was dying in hospital; Nalle showed me a shawl she made in the aftermath of her mother-in-law’s death, and Solan was wearing a Fair Isle colourwork cardigan she knitted up from patterns she found when sorting through her deceased mother’s belongings. Alexandra told me about a shawl pattern she designed in tribute to her great great grandmother, and Lotta was knitting a shawl using wool handspun by her grandmother’s mother. The paper will also include autoethnographic and reflexive considerations of how the process of the research has been shaped by how I think of my own knitting in relation to my grandmother, who taught me to knit. She died two months after I conducted these interviews, and thinking about my participants’ accounts came also to shape my own mourning process.

The paper will argue that the role of knitting in women’s grief-work and memorializing are aspects of how contemporary knitting culture uses craft as a means of connecting with the sacred. This is reflective of wider trends in late modernity, including the sacralization of the family and preoccupation with the past. In conversation with contemporary scholarship on death and bereavement, this paper will consider how these knitted items are used to honour heritage, make space for reflection in grieving, maintain the presence of the dead, and provide tactile comfort in the face of loss.

*Dr Anna Fisk is Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Glasgow, and Editorial Assistant of the journal Literature and Theology. She is author of Sex, Sin and Our Selves (2014) and is currently writing Knitting, Modernity and the Sacred: Crafting Spiritualities, under contract with Bloomsbury.*

9. *Rachel Giles, freelance*

**Gardens in the wilderness: involuntary childlessness and emergent Christian communities**

This paper explores how Christian communities outside of churches can help involuntarily childless women to sustain their faith when church is no longer a space they feel they can safely inhabit. It examines how, for this group, the experience of contemporary evangelical church life can become unbearable in two ways: firstly, its deeply embedded cultural expectations of reproduction and nuclear family (Llewellyn 2016) can be shaming, either intentionally or unintentionally; and secondly, its underpinning theologies addressing loss, bodily dysfunction and failure tend to collapse into modernist ideas of fixing and healing (Frank 2013). Ultimately, since children are seen as a blessing, the narrative that childlessness must be a sign of God’s disfavour (Moss and Baden 2015) can persist – or worse, it can be framed as part of a yet-to-be revealed overarching ‘plan for one’s life’. These positions are, for many women, unacceptable.

The paper gives expression to the voices of members of two South-West London non-church communities: The Vine, a Christian group for involuntarily childless women that I set up, and Sacred Space Kingston, an emergent non-church Christian community of which I am a member. The paper will examine how the practices and language (of liturgy, prayer and discussion) of these communities reject prevailing evangelical culture and narratives, offering a new, empowering theology which helps to sustain faith, build community and create growth from loss. These communities have non-hierarchical leadership structures, are comfortable with models of shared knowledge, and use art, storytelling and discussion to create new forms of meaning and wisdom.

*Rachel Giles is a freelance writer, speaker and curator. She is interested in the intersections between infertility, childlessness, faith and art. In 2018 she co-curated an exhibition in Barcelona for the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology and was a speaker at the arts festival Fertility Fest, London. She is a member of the emergent Christian community Sacred Space Kingston.*

10. *Nuam Hatzaw, University of Edinburgh*

**‘Walking Through by Faith’: the theologies of migrant Zomi women in the UK**

This paper explores the theological reflections of migrant Christian Zomi women in the UK. Based on fieldwork undertaken for my MTh, I will argue that the specific theologies of migrant Zomi women reveal broader, overarching themes that must not be overlooked when examining the faith lives of migrant women.

The Zomi are a majority Christian ethnic minority from Chin State, north-west Myanmar. Poverty and deprivation in Chin State has led to high levels of migration, resulting in sizeable Zomi communities in America, Australia and Malaysia. By contrast, the Zomi community in Britain is extremely small, numbering around just 70 individuals. Most of the UK Zomi struggle financially, working in low-paid, physically demanding and unstable employment. Assimilation and socio-economic mobility is further hampered by the language barrier and the lack of an established Zomi community to provide resources and connections. Furthermore, Zomi culture and custom is still patriarchal, lending a gendered dimension to the experiences of migrant Zomi women.

This paper will explore the ways in which the migrant experience and minority status of Zomi women in Britain have shaped the ways in which they theologise. My research uncovered three central themes - the concept of God as Friend and Confidant, the understanding of God Alone being their sole helper, and the idea that struggle creates ‘real’ faith. Although specific to the Zomi case, I will argue that these reflections nonetheless speak to larger themes in the theologies and faith lives of migrant ethnic minority women. More specifically, the gendered nature of their faith expressions, the power of belonging, and the ways in which faith can be tested, strengthened and reworked, all point to different dimensions within the faith lives of migrant women that must be acknowledged, respected and centred when we conceptualise women’s faith and spirituality.

*Nuam Hatzaw is a PhD student in World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh. Her research interweaves ethnography and theology in order to critique the project of Asian feminist theology from the standpoint of Zomi women in Chin State, Myanmar. An interdisciplinary scholar by training, her research interests include feminist theologies, postcolonial theologies, anthropology and critical theory.*

11. *Shona Hayes, University of Chester*

**‘I don’t want to be a Tempting Temptress’: Modest fashion and Evangelical Christian Culture**

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with young women who attend an evangelical Christian Union whilst at University, this paper discusses the theme of clothing and modesty in relation to evangelical culture. Clothing plays an important role in the lives of women and girls from birth. Feminist writers are often “critical of the entire fashion industry as a form of social control of women through its gendering and sexualisation functions” (Bouvier, 2016, 355). Within Evangelical Christian culture, there is an added pressure to conform to the demands of the patriarchal Church, covering their bodies to avoiding tempting Christian Brothers. Conservative evangelism is popular within British Universities (Strahn, 2013), juxtaposing the traditional University ‘Lad Culture’. The participants in this study express feelings of being lynch pins in creating the sexually sanitized social space demanded by the Christian Union, meaning they are constantly aware of their sexuality and ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (Mulvey, 1975, 837). One way that modest dress has been interpreted by the women in the evangelical Christian church is through t-shirts with “clothed in strength and dignity” printed on them (Proverbs 31:25). Throughout this paper I examine the use of modest fashion as a tool to counteract their ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ and the over-sexualisation of women’s bodies.

*Shona Hayes is a PhD candidate in her first year at the University of Chester, supervised by Dr Dawn Llewellyn and Dr Caroline Tee. The project focuses on the relationship between Christian women and modest fashion.*

12. *Revd Dr Clare Herbert, Associate Tutor in Pastoral Theology, St Augustine’s College of Theology*

**“Something Borrowed, Something New”: Towards a Theology of Same Sex Marriage**

In the United Kingdom, since 2004, legislation has opened the way for civil partnership and same sex marriage. This research explores an emerging theology of civil partnership, examining in particular the voices of gay and lesbian Christians in same sex relationships at St. Martin-in-the-Fields where I worked as a priest.

The topic was investigated within a broad conceptual framework of hermeneutical practical theology, the language and theology of marriage, and queer theology. Using qualitative research, the research method adopted was semi-structured interviews, offered to the thirteen members of the congregation of St. Martin-in-the-Fields who were in civil partnerships when the research began. Eleven verbatim reports, which included seven lesbian narratives, together with two responses to structured questionnaires, were coded by a process of thematic analysis, evidencing overarching themes.

Three major themes were identified. First, the public nature of the rite and ensuing relationship effected transformations, in which the love of God was known. I interpreted that both the civil partnership rites and corresponding relationships participate in the queer sacramental nature of reality. Second, participants reflected that God had acted in both personal and political history. I interpreted their views to reveal an emerging if under-developed queer liberation theology. Third, almost all participants likened the relationships to Christian marriage. I perceived that in effect this meant that they had “queered” the theology and language of marriage, simply by inhabiting it.

However, a fourth theme is also identifiable: the impact of the research journey on my own faith and life as lesbian, priest and practical theologian. It is the journey towards understanding my own life as vantage point in the construction of a confident queer theology of marriage, which I explore in this paper.

*Rev Dr Clare Herbert is a priest in the Church of England , one of the "first wave" of women ordained in 1994. After ministry enjoyed mostly as Rector of St Anne's Soho, and as Lecturer in Inclusive Theology at St Martin in the Fields, Clare became Tutor in Practical Theology for St Augustine's College of Theology (formerly SEITE). She now works part-time, and is enjoying a quieter life whilst attempting to write a queer theology of marriage to be published next year.*

13. *Manon Ceridwen James, St Padarn’s Institute, Cardiff*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

**How I Abandoned My Body to His Keeping: reflecting theologically on the experience of domestic violence through the poetry of Kim Moore**

Reflecting theologically on poetry as a means of accessing human experience is a growing field within theological research. Within feminist theology, literature as well as creative writing, has been crucial in giving space to women’s voices (see Llewellyn 2015, Walton 2014, Slee 2018). In order to gain insight into the experience of domestic violence, I reflect theologically on a sequence by the young Cumbrian poet Kim Moore, *How I abandoned my body to his keeping* in her collection *The Art of Falling* (Seren 2015) which explores an abusive relationship from a physical, emotional and psychological point of view.  I end by drawing out some pastoral implications for the church from a close reading of Moore’s work as a white working-class young poet. This study also demonstrates the distinctive contribution a poetic approach can offer within feminist theological research, particularly in exploring trauma.

*Manon Ceridwen James is the Director of Formation for Licensed Ministry for the St Padarn’s Institute, Church in Wales. The book based on her doctoral research, Women, Identity and Religion in Wales, Theology, Poetry, Story was published by the University of Wales Press in 2018. Her poetry has appeared in literary magazines including Poetry Wales and Envoi.*

14. *Dr Michele Lamb, Department of Social Sciences, University of Roehampton & Centre for Applied Buddhism*

**Living a Buddhist life in the Soka Gakkai: solidarity, life course and identity**

This paper reflects, from a practitioner’s perspective, on the experience of being a woman practicing Buddhism in the tradition of the thirteenth century Japanese teacher Nichiren, whose teachings are based on the Lotus Sutra. The paper specifically draws on the experience of practice as a member of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) within the United Kingdom (SGI-UK). SGI is a lay Buddhist organisation established in Japan in 1930 and which currently comprises a worldwide membership of around 12 million in 192 countries and territories. SGI’s foundational philosophy is based on the teachings of Nichiren expounded through a large body of letters and treatises which set out the philosophy and practice. The contemporary application of Nichiren Buddhism is further developed in writings, lectures, and dialogues by successive presidents of Soka Gakkai and most significantly by SGI’s current president Daisaku Ikeda. The paper begins by providing a brief philosophical, historical and institutional overview of the position of women in Nichiren Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai. The paper then uses an auto-ethnographic approach to explore three themes arising from the lived experience of being a member of, and holding leadership positions within SGI-UK since 1980. In the presentation the author reflects on intergenerational solidarity and the role and relationship between women and young women in SGI-UK; how membership of SGI and Buddhist practice influences and shapes life course decision-making; and the movements’ evolving engagement with contemporary discourses of identity, gender and feminism.

*Michele Lamb has been a member of Soka Gakkai International-UK (SGI-UK) since 1980 and has held a number of leadership responsibilities including editorship of SGI-UK’s study publication. In 2009 she completed her PhD in sociology and has held a variety of academic roles. Her current research focuses on the concept of ‘Soka’ (value-creation) and its application to global issues as developed by the Buddhist philosopher and educator Daisaku Ikeda.*

15. *Dr Alastair Lockhart, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge & Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements, Bedford*

**Women, Religious Innovation, and Eschatology: A 20th Century Case Study**

In the aftermath of the Great War, a group of women formed a spiritual network focussed on the writings of the early-19th century prophet Joanna Southcott. In time, they established a headquarters and a community in Bedford in southern England, and they began to form a tight-knit religious community with an institutional structure intended to parallel and, in time, to rival the Church of England. At the heart of their theological understanding was the core principle that male-dominated Christian Churches, and especially the Church of England, were metaphysically unable to mediate ultimate religious transformation. In their interwar heyday, while a few men were permitted to join core administration, all positions of religious and administrative authority were held by female members – including in almost every overseas branch. The group took on the name “Panacea Society”, reflecting a spiritual healing system they offered to the world which they believed would heal all suffering. The healing system – which ultimately attracted more than 100,000 subscribers worldwide – found many more adherents amongst women than amongst men before it was closed when the Society was disbanded in the early 21st century. Based on recent historical ethnographic research using the resources available in the Society’s extant archives, this paper discusses the history and doctrine of the Panacea Society, the rare insight the archive provides into the everyday religious lives of the women who wrote to them, and the personal response of a male researcher working in a sphere of theology intrinsically defined by a female perspective.

*Dr Lockhart is an Affiliated Lecturer in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge and Academic Co-Director at the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements in Bedford. His first monograph, Personal Religion and Spiritual Healing: The Panacea Society in the Twentieth Century, will be published by SUNY Press in February 2019.*

16. *Julie Lunn, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester*

**Women articulating faith**

This paper comprises the second part of a four-part study. In the first part I explore and present spiritual themes evident in letters written by women to Charles Wesley in the ‘Rapture and Reason’ collection of digitised conversion narratives held at the John Rylands library in Manchester. These comprise 56 letters from 46 different women.

In this second part I will present the results of a current qualitative research project into the spiritual writing of Wesleyan women (Methodist and Nazarene) today in the UK. For this project I analyse a similar number of documents, drawing on specifically written accounts, or extracts from journals or blogs which communicate experience of God. Key theological and spiritual emphases will be identified and presented. This is of interest in its own right, demonstrating the language, theology and spiritual concepts Wesleyan women use today to communicate their experience of God.

As the research continues beyond this paper, the third section will compare the emphases discovered in sections one and two, particularly noting how the themes evident in the 21st century accounts differ or coalesce with those of women 300 years ago. Furthermore differences or commonalities in the spiritual writing of women from Methodist and Nazarene traditions will be analysed. The final part of the project will address conclusions to be drawn when comparing the testimonies of women emerging from the 18th century Evangelical Revival and those of Wesleyan women today.

In the paper for this conference, conclusions drawn from part two of the project will be offered. What do the testimonies of Wesleyan women today indicate about the spiritual position of the 21st century Methodist and Nazarene churches in Britain? What do they suggest about the vitality of faith, and the language used to express relationship with and understanding of God today?

*Julie Lunn is Lecturer in Practical and Social Theology at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, UK. She teaches in the areas of Practical Theology, Pastoral Theology, and Christian Spirituality, with a particular interest in Wesley Studies. She is also an ordained Methodist minister.*

17. *Jessie Fubara-Manuel, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh*

**Women for Women: An Examination of Disability Engagement in Nigeria**

Women with disabilities, in many contemporary societies, are often excluded and isolated from social and religious spaces. This is evidenced where patriarchal-informed practices impede women’s voices and dis-empowered support systems abound in many established settings. Consequently, women theologians and women’s rights advocates have been champions of women in speaking out and advocating for change in religious, cultural and societal spheres to ensure women live dignified fulfilled lives. They work, among other factors, on the premise of the mutuality of benefit when women support women. This is more so for women with disabilities who face peculiar challenges due to their disabilities. This paper draws on a research on a support group for women with disabilities in Port Harcourt, South-South, Nigeria and how its members are enabled to cope with the realities of life’s struggles. It explores how these women articulate and respond to the challenges of living with disabilities and the difficulties with asserting or negotiating their identities in the face of stigma. It also examines how they cope with the denial of their sexuality as well as the exclusion from faith/social spaces both of their gifts and their presence. The paper highlights the ways in which they are dealing with these challenges and giving encouragement to others to learn from their experiences. It demonstrates that the empowered support system of women for women provides a safe space in which they build confidence to assert their places and voices for the good of themselves, the church and the society.

*Jessie Fubara-Manuel is a PhD student in World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh. Her research explores “The Role of the Christian Faith for Women with Disabilities and HIV in South-south Nigeria” and she has published in this area. She is a resource person and facilitator for the World Council of Churches programmes on HIV and Disability.*

18. *Emma Mist, University of Chester*

**Women’s Ritual Making, Sacred Space and Transformation: An Ethnography of a 21st Century Women’s Circle in Contemporary Wellbeing Culture**

In 21st century wellbeing culture, women’s circles are globally growing in popularity. Recent scholarship situates women’s circles in post-secular society, arguing that women’s spiritual and mundane experiences are intertwined in secular and sacred spaces. Through participant observation of a women’s circle in the North West of England, I observed women fluidly moving between the sacred and mundane through the production and action of ritual. As a result of ritual making, women created sacred space from their everyday actions, creating new spaces of sacred representation for themselves to challenge and subvert patriarchal power and authority. The transformation of the mundane space into sacred space created the opportunity for the women to transform themselves and the social through storytelling, conscious raising and healing. In this paper I examine how participant observation created the opportunity for myself to observe the intertwined relationship between the sacred and mundane in women’s circles, as well as how positioning myself as an ‘in-betweener’ facilitated in my own participation of the women’s circle and later analysis of the participant observations. I will then discuss the gendered sacred spatial theory I applied to two ethnographies written about the participant observations, focusing on the importance of applying a gendered spatial theory to the women’s circle as well as drawing on the importance of women’s ritual making in creating a sacred space that reflects the women’s own experience. As a result, women challenge male constructed mundane and sacred spaces, creating new spaces for their personal and social transformation.

*Emma Mist has a BA in Theology and an MA in Religious Studies from the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, at the University of Chester. Her MA dissertation examined through ritual and religious spatial theory the transformation of women in a women’s circle. Her research interests include feminist spirituality, feminist methodology, Indian mythology and animal ethics.*

19. *Ellie Mackin Roberts, Department of Classics, RHUL*

## Girls’ Bodies as Religious Objects in Classical Athens

Girlhood is the one time in the life of an ancient Athenian women’s life in which she had permission to shine on the public stage. A point when girls acted as conduits between the city and the gods and were therefore pre-eminently important for that relationship. In this paper, I will discuss the use of girls’ bodies as objects of civic Athenian religious practice. I will do this using two case studies: first, the *arrhephoroi*, who are girls between the ages of seven and eleven who serve Athena Polias; and then, the *arktoi -* ‘Bears’ played by five-to-ten-year-old girls to honour Artemis at the Brauronia. In each of these positions, it is not only the girls’ actions that determine ritual success, but also their bodies as religious objects. These case studies demonstrate how religious objectification is multi-layered. First, though the performance of objects, costumes and the experiences of the girls themselves, and then the way the girls are viewed as religious implements. I will also consider why and how prepubescent girls are made sacred by objectification. I will be applying the methodology of Religious Materialism to the girls’ actions and bodies to deduce whether we can say anything meaningful about their everyday lives through ritualised objectification.

*Ellie Mackin Roberts is an ancient historian who works on ancient Greek religious practices, and especially the way that people interacted with and reacted to the gods and their own beliefs. She is a Teaching Fellow in Ancient Greek History at Royal Holloway, University of London, a Research Associate at the Institute of Classical Studies (London).*

20. *Zubia Willmann Robleda, VID Specialised University, Stavanger, Norway*

**“If I did not pray and believe I would go crazy”: Religion in the Everyday Lives of Women Living in Asylum Centres in Norway**

Religion and its practice is a controversial issue, especially in relation to the increase of religious minorities in so-called ‘secular normative’ countries. However, if we view religion from a pragmatic approach, we can understand it as a means of *orientation* in everyday life, particularly when experiencing challenges. It may also provide a means of *transformation* or change of emotions and states (Henriksen 2017). Particularly in exile, religion can provide a source of continuity and stability especially when the future is extremely uncertain, as it is the case of asylum seekers. However, the role that religion plays for an individual can also be affected by forced migration and the change of surroundings. Therefore, this article explores the particular role that religion plays on the everyday life of nine women (with different nationalities and religious ascriptions) living in asylum centres in Norway through in-depth interviews and participant observation. It draws on Riis and Woodhead’s (2010) theorisation on the power of ‘religious emotion’ and employs Jeldtoft’s (2013:98) idea of the use of emotions as “place-making *tactics*” to evoke certain religious emotions and experiences. For all nine women, religion played a significant role in their day-to-day both back in their country of origin as well as in the asylum centre, although their practice had suffered certain changes due to the new environment. In particular, all used their religion *tactically* to orient themselves in the new context and to try making sense of the uncertainty of their situation. They also employed “place-making *tactics”* and aimed to transform their emotional state through prayer and reading/reciting religious scriptures to calm down, maintain sanity and feel in control. All in all, all women drew from their religion tactically to orient themselves in an unknown setting and transform the feelings of frustration, fear and desperation.

*Zubia Willmann Robleda is currently a PhD candidate at VID Specialised University in*

*Stavanger, Norway. She has an interdisciplinary background with a focus on migration studies, socio-anthropology, gender studies and religious studies. Her current research focuses on the experiences and aspirations of women seeking asylum in Norway as well as the role of religion in their everyday lives.*

21. *Karen Ross, Marquette University*

**Catholic Girls & Sex: Reimagining Sexual Pedagogies for Catholic Young Women through Ethnography**

This paper will present the findings of the qualitative research done for my doctoral dissertation, which examines the effects of Catholic sexual education on the sexual development and flourishing of Catholic young women and girls in the United States. For this project, I interviewed Catholic young women ages 18-25 about the narratives and messages that they received from their sexual education. I wanted to know, “What are we teaching young girls, specifically in their adolescent years, in Catholic educational environments in the U.S., about their sexual identities? What messages about sex and sexuality in particular do they find most affirming and most marginalizing and/or destructive?”

As this paper will present, the major themes that arose from the qualitative interviews demonstrated that the sexual pedagogies provided by the Catholic Church in the U.S. do not attend to the needs and desires of many Catholic young women today. The Church’s current sexual pedagogy for young women—anchored in gender essentialist norms and unattainable ideals of purity—has created a climate of guilt and shame that leaves many young women feeling silenced or excluded from the body of Christ. Thus, it is crucial to confront the unaddressed disconnection between the reality of young women’s experiences and the idealized standards by which women and girls within the Catholic faith tradition are held, particularly in the area of sexual ethics.

***No bio***

22. *Jessica Scott, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge*

**Knowing and Reading: Understanding the practices of women readers of scripture through a retrieval of the theology of St Macrina**

I intend to begin by expounding the practices of scripture reading I am involved in, as a member of a female Anglican lay community in East London. I seek to outline the ways that reading scripture in this community may be characterized by a set of particular communal, improvisatory, and imaginative dynamics. I then propose that the task of describing this practice of reading might well be assisted by recourse to establishing a ‘theology of reading’. Yet where prominent potential sites for this theology seem to fail to capture what I take to be at stake in the practices under discussion, I posit the significance of a voice which has not received significant attention over the years: the fourth century theologian Macrina, abbess and founder of a nunnery in Anessi, and sister of the betterknown Gregory of Nyssa. I suggest that Macrina is presented as one who teaches,

first, the primacy of knowledge through communal interaction; and, second, the value of recognition as response (gazing, touching, reaching) over straightforward naming (propositional speech).

These epistemological insights, I shall note, overlap strikingly – if surprisingly – with the recommendations of some streams of contemporary feminist epistemology, which have been concerned to show the primacy of knowing relationally over notionally. They make sense too, I contend, of the kind of practices of reading in which the female lay community I am concerned with

participate. Generally, then, I gesture towards the value of retrieving streams of theology by women – previously muted – in order to understand the practices of women; specifically, in this case, pointing to the light that the undervalued theology of Macrina may shed on the scriptural reading practices of a community of women in East London.

*With a first degree and MPhil in Theology and Religious Studies at Cambridge University, I am now in the second year of a PhD working within the field of theological anthropology. I am interested in a theological understanding of the life course and how it inverts assumptions of progress and bettering, with recourse to the works of Gregory of Nyssa (335-c.395) and especially The Life of Macrina.*

23. *Dr Catherine Sexton, Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge*

**Called to be apostolic till the very end: active ministry among ‘retired’ R.C. sisters in the UK and its reorientation towards the home**

My research explores the experience of ministry among Roman Catholic sisters as they age and are no longer involved in ministries external to their home community. I ask how these sisters understand and experience Sweeney’s (2012) ‘apostolic impulse’ at a stage in their lives when they may have to re-orient their ministry towards their own sisters and those who care for them. How do they understand their vocation to apostolic religious life at this stage of their lives and how does that relate to or shape their identity? In-depth interviews conducted with a group of Catholic sisters aged 75 – 95 from five apostolic/active congregations has identified that these sisters find themselves in a new context of reduced social influence and sometimes struggling to identify a purpose. In this context ‘ministry’ is home-based and primarily focussed on each other and their carers. Nonetheless, in their continuing journey of conversion towards total self-gift, they find new ways of responding to the ‘apostolic impulse’. In these ways, reduced social influence and physical limitations do not, I argue, constitute a diminished living of their vocation and finding a purpose becomes less important than finding or making meaning. This paper explores how the sisters come to embody their ‘apostolic impulse’ through ministry as intentional presence to each other. Schneiders’ understanding of ministry as gift (2012) and kenotic-like self-emptying (Moltmann, 1992 and Coakley, 2002; 2012) frame these women’s presence as sacramental and incarnational until the very end of their lives.

*Dr. Catherine Sexton is Senior Research Fellow at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge and was recently awarded her PhD for researching theologies of ministry among older Roman Catholic sisters in the UK.  She is currently the Director of a three year research project exploring how R.C. sisters in East and Central Africa understand the essence of their religious life.*

24. *Sonya Sharma, Department of Sociology, Kingston University London*

**“She Told Me Everything”: A Lateral Reading of Faith in Muslim Sister Relationships**

Within studies on gender, family and religion, parent-child religious transmission continues to be prioritised. As a result, other family relationships such as siblings, and in particular sisters, remain invisible to this social process. Through an examination of ten qualitative in-depth interviews with a diverse group of Muslim women based in London, who identified as sisters, overlapping themes of intra-generational religious socialization and the intersection of religion, gender and power are addressed. By looking horizontally, this paper foregrounds the mutual shaping of sister relations and religiosity, developing a new direction in the sociological study of gender and faith within families.

*Sonya Sharma is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Kingston University. Her most recent research focuses on the social relations of prayer in healthcare settings in Vancouver and London. With Kristin Aune and Giselle Vincett, she co-edited Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization (Ashgate 2008) and with Dawn Llewellyn she co-edited Religion, Equalities and Inequalities (Routledge 2016).*

25. *Dr Caroline Starkey, School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science, University of Leeds.*

**Women Building British Buddhism: Narrative, Space and Locality**

Buddhism is growing in popularity in contemporary Britain, and centres, temples and meditation spaces are an increasingly familiar sight in towns and cities from Bath to Glasgow. However, an appreciation of the multi-faceted roles that women have played in developing and establishing these spaces for practice and community have not always been given priority in mainstream scholarly work. British Buddhist women have worked to found new movements and establish lineages; they have built local networks to set up successful meditation groups; raised funds for the purchase and adaptation of buildings; and have even laid bricks and flooring, developing skills in construction and planning. Although the stories of ‘rank and file’ women might not be well-known, they are moulded, wordlessly, into the fabric of Buddhist buildings and remain a key part of the success of Buddhism in this context. In this paper, I explore these lesser-known narratives of community building and development, drawing on ethnographic data collected over a period of four-years with Buddhist women connected to seven different groups and traditions in the British Isles. What interests me most in these narratives are the micro-practices of building and belonging, and the intimate relationships that arise between individual women and local communities, places and spaces. Despite contemporary scholarly curiosity about the transnational and trans-historical connections made by Buddhist groups and practitioners, I argue that an appreciation of where women live and spend most of their time, the physical landscape and environment they engage with each day, and the relationships they build within local, immediate communities gives most structure and meaning to their spiritual lives. Recovering women’s narratives and putting them at the forefront of our analysis, enables a more holistic understanding of new Buddhist community growth, development and change.

*Dr Caroline Starkey is Associate Professor of Religion and Society at the University of Leeds. Her research draws on the sociology of religion, and she has a particular interest in Buddhism in the West, including issues of gender, place and space. Her recent monograph, ‘Women in British Buddhism’ will be published in the Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism series (2019).*

26. *Dr Anna Szwed, Institue of Sociology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland*

**Women and the (Roman Catholic) Church in Poland. Challenges in researching women’s religiosity in a homogenous society**

Poland – a country where Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion and where the Roman Catholic Church has for a long time played an important role in the public sphere, is an interesting case for studying religion. Despite rapid social changes related to political transformation, the religiosity of Polish society has remained relatively stable over the last 25 years with more than 90% of Poles declaring themselves believing and over 90% as Roman Catholics. Compared with other European countries the rate of religious practices in Poland remains relatively high as well (40%).

The results of quantitative research (ISKK 2015) show the gender gap in religiosity between Catholic men and women. Women declare themselves “deeply religious” almost twice more often than men. They are more orthodox regarding religious knowledge and belief. The church-orientation of female religiosity is also manifested in high rates of religious practices. However, the longitudinal research on women’s religiosity shows that although women outnumber men at Sunday masses, they practice more and more irregularly (especially educated women living in big cities). The conviction that women are more religious than men is also reflected in public awareness in Poland. The research carried out by Leszczyńska (2016) among lay Catholics and by Szwed (2015) among Roman Catholic priests show that female religiosity is perceived as natural (it does not require any effort from women; they just follow the vocation), oriented towards ritual and emotional.

The context described raises several challenges for researching women’s religiosity in Poland. In my presentation I will mention the following ones. Firstly, the tendency to research religiosity in Poland predominantly with quantitative methods based on religious parameters (e.g. dimensions of religious commitment proposed by Stark and Glock [1975]) and to focus on the Roman Catholic Church and its official model of religiosity (individual religiosity measured as “the deviation from the norm” [i.e. doctrine]). Secondly, the tendency to treat religion as an exclusive and self-referential field and to ignore relationships between religion/religiosity and other aspects of everyday life (such as family, work, social activity etc.). Thirdly, the understanding of women’s religious agency, usually equated with resistance against religious rules (subordination and piety acknowledged as non-agentic). In my presentation I will refer to the recently started project on religious agency of Roman Catholic women in Poland.

*Anna Szwed holds a PhD in sociology from Jagiellonian University, Krakow where she works in the Institute of Sociology. Her research interests focus on gender and religion, sociology of culture and gender studies, and has written articles on gender and the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and the book Ta druga. Obraz kobiety w nauczaniu Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego i w świadomości księży (The Second. The Image of Women in the Teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and in the Perceptions of Priests) (2015).*

27. *Reverend Grace Thomas, Assistant Curate, Manchester Diocese*

**Exploring female clergy wellbeing through a holistic, asset-based approach**

It has been 25 years since women were first ordained priests in the Church of England (CofE). Despite this, data which looks holistically at female clergy wellbeing within the CofE, or, indeed, within any denomination, is scarce.

In 2018, for my MA Theology dissertation, I investigated the use of an asset-based tool in the promotion of clergy wellbeing. Asset-based approaches promote resilience by enabling individuals to identify and utilise their own sustainable sources of strength to increase wellbeing. The CRISP tool (Clergy Resilience Individual Scoring Plan) required participants to score themselves in a range of ‘Categories of Life’ and provide further details in free text, reviewing their progress eight weeks later. Whilst open to all stipendiary clergy, the final cohort consisted only of women, providing a unique opportunity to investigate the wellbeing of female clergy.

Despite the vocational nature of priesthood, the primary focus of studies has been the impact of the job role upon wellbeing, often to the exclusion of other roles that individuals may inhabit. Employing an asset-based, holistic approach, enabled clergy to look at all areas of their life, demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between personal life and work which is often overlooked. The study revealed that the demands of aspects such as home maintenance, maintaining relationships and managing childcare, impacted upon overall wellbeing and the ability of women to carry out their multiple roles effectively. Using the tool, women began to source assets that could enable positive change. The results after eight weeks indicated that this had been effective, with increases in overall scores for every category. It is important to note that the ability of this approach was limited by external factors over which participants had little control. Thus, engagement not only of self-care approaches, but community and institutional support are essential in order to enable female clergy to flourish effectively in all the roles they may inhabit.

*Grace Thomas is curate in Manchester Diocese, with an interest in women’s vocations and wellbeing. She has a nursing background and researched women’s sexual and reproductive health at Manchester University. Grace holds a BSc (hons) in Nursing Studies, an MA in Healthcare Ethics and Law, and an MA Theology from Chester University, where she studied asset-based approaches in clergy wellbeing.*

28. *Marta Trzebiatowska, University of Aberdeen*

**“Atheism is not the problem. The problem is being a woman”: Atheism and feminism in everyday life**

In most western societies the number of female non-believers is growing and atheism has become one manifestation of nonreligion among many. However, little is known about female atheists. This article fills the gap by providing the voices of a small percentage of women who consider themselves ‘practising’ but not ‘active’ atheists. The central argument draws on qualitative interview data from the UK, Australia, the US and Poland and emphasizes the role of atheism as a background identity marker through which female subjectivity is enacted in everyday life. The findings are twofold: first, atheism and feminism are both devalued identities when embraced by women; and second, identifying as an atheist affords the participants an impetus to invent a new vocabulary to account for their identity. In conclusion, I argue that atheism provides a catalyst for the post-feminist discourse of independence, empowerment and freedom of choice as the participants construct narratives of ‘reasonable feminism’.

*Marta Trzebiatowska is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Aberdeen. Her research interests include religion and nonreligion, gender and sexuality, migration and social theory. Her book, Why Are Women More Religious Than Men? (Oxford, 2012, with Steve Bruce), critiques competing theories of women’s greater religiosity. Her current project investigates nonreligion and atheism in different cultural contexts.*

23.i.19 DL, AP & NS.