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A Charismatic Practical Theological investigation into
the lived religion of Newfrontiers women in the UK

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Abstract

This thesis examines the faith lives of women from the Christian Charismatic church network Newfrontiers using a practical theological research methodology. Data for the research was collected via participant observations of services and research interviews. This research is situated within Charismatic theology and the methodological processes stem from this commitment. Making use of Charismatic practices of testimony to hear experiences of meeting God and accounts of oppressions this research offers a novel methodology for Charismatic Practical Theology. The review of literature concerning this church network shows that there is a gap in knowledge about Charismatic women's faith lives with most research in this field concerning gender and complementarian church governance. Research by Kristin Aune in 2001 described the construction of gender in Newfrontiers; it is, along with my own Masters research, the only academic treatment of Newfrontiers women. Kristin Aune describes the use of the Jezebel narrative in 1 and 2 Kings as part of the network's self-understanding of women who seek power in churches and marriage.

Hearing the testimony of the research participants allowed for the construction of the primary theme in the research: making a place. This theme is expanded upon by describing it in terms of epistemic justice. The women can be understood as suffering epistemic injustice that they negotiate using the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. A hermeneutic of Newfrontiers women is created from the data and a new reading of the story of Jezebel is offered. The research suggests that this is not a fitting way to describe women in Newfrontiers but rather the biblical character of Elizabeth is suitable.

“In the kitchen because there’s no other space for me.”

Testimony and epistemology in Newfrontiers women

A Charismatic Practical Theological investigation into the lived religion
of Newfrontiers women in the UK

Claire Louise Williams

Department of Theology and Religion

A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Durham

October 2024

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As always, Ben.

Introduction

This research stems from my experience over ten years as a member of a Newfrontiers congregation in the Southeast of England. The church I had joined as newly married and a recent graduate had, after several years, merged with another local church which I discovered was part of Newfrontiers. Newfrontiers is a network of churches that formed from the house church movement in the 1970s because of the UK Charismatic renewal. The union between these congregations brought energy and vibrancy to my somewhat stale, middle-class congregation. Suddenly our church, which used to go on ski trips and hold New Year's Eve parties, now had a food bank, flags during Sunday worship services and members of Alcoholics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous in the congregation. This new group of churches appeared to me to be doing the things I had written about with such gusto during my undergraduate studies, the things I understood to be the *real* mission of the church. This was social action, encountering suffering, and bringing the hope of the good news of Jesus that had been life changing to me. In addition to these changes, it appeared to be a community that genuinely cared for one another. The social action did not seem patronising. It did not helicopter its privilege into situations that it did not understand. Rather, the congregation was formed of diversity and variety that served alongside one another. Yet, my formation as a theologian and my presence as a woman did not appear to correlate with the view of women held by Newfrontiers.

Newfrontiers is one network amongst a number that formed at the same time, and which adhere to complementarian church governance. Various known as house churches, new churches, restoration churches, and New Apostolic churches these churches exist outside of the established church and instead take their governance from local church 'elders' and 'apostles'. I was regularly invited to offer teaching in leadership training courses offered by the network, which appeared to me to be sharing of doctrine which is forbidden to women in Newfrontiers. I was also not allowed to be formally a leader, even though I was teaching church leaders. I reflected upon this in my own account of being part of Newfrontiers,

I could not bring skills in theology to an employed role. This was because the only avenue for that was through church leadership and I was not permitted to do this in the complementarian church structure that exists. I was told there was no route for me by a

number of different men in the church. Nonetheless, I continued to be asked to teach for the network amongst other men who had paid positions in their churches.¹

This lack of formal role, but permission to teach men who were either elders or would later become elders, was illustrative of the confusion and uncertainty around women. This uncertainty was reflected in the reasons given for why women were limited to non-eldership positions in the churches, although they could be called ‘leaders’. My own experience was that this pertained to questions of mentoring and discipleship between women and male apostles of the church, and this was reflected at a theological forum I attended on this issue for one of the Newfrontiers’ spheres,

Stories were told around the table of times when male leaders had been hijacked by needy, sexualised women who wanted to have affairs with them and had lured them into pastoral visits that hid ulterior motives.²

There was a desire to give women as much opportunity as possible in the churches, but also a palpable fear of the way in which these things could be practically navigated, primarily to keep men safe from accusations of sexual misconduct. Being understood as a teacher who should not be paid and a source of sexual temptation for men characterised my own dissatisfaction with the network.

My membership, family and friends who formed my local church and whom I loved conflicted with this dissatisfaction. How could both affective responses to the church be understood? This prompted my investigation.

This project also stems from my own master’s dissertation which I undertook after a long period of absence from theological study due to raising children. During our research methods course our tutor suggested we write about something we knew well. As I gazed around the classroom at retired senior civil servants, activist clergy, and ordinands with careers in the city, I felt unsure what a mother of young children who had been at home for nearly a decade had to write about. Thus, I conceived a project that combined what little I felt I had in the way of contribution to make – motherhood, church, and theology. This began my master’s dissertation on motherhood

¹ Appendix 1.

² Appendix 1.

in Newfrontiers churches.³ My own experience, combined with this small study of only five women, suggested that there was more than could be described and understood about the women who belong to these churches. I suspected that there would be more that was positive to say about the choice to belong and to flourish in these very close-knit church groups as well as difficulties and accounts of the challenge of being a woman in a male-led church network.⁴

Throughout this thesis the nature of complementarian governance of churches moves in and out of the centre of attention; therefore, I offer here a definition. Complementarianism understands gender as closely related to sex, that it has an essentialist quality that requires behaviour that correlates to the gender, and that there is a theological mandate for difference in roles and responsibilities in the home and church.⁵ The theological and ecclesiological (and often domestic) outcomes are that men are seen as suitable for leadership and women as necessarily submissive.⁶ My engagement with feminist research opened up to me during my earlier post-graduate studies led me to focus on inequalities for women. However, my life within the church and my provisional forays into research also suggested rich and diverse spiritual lives that women could be described positively. There seemed to be a gap in the accounts of Newfrontiers women and also in a methodology for such research that held the tensions of these good and bad experiences together. This research is situated in this gap to account for and describe this tension and to construct a theological response to it.

Research Question

These experiences and questions are woven together to form a research question. The question incorporates what is not known about Newfrontiers women alongside a novel approach suitable to this enquiry. **What is the testimony of Newfrontiers women concerning their experiences of God and the church?** This question is broad enough in scope to allow for both positive and negative accounts making use of a qualitative methodology for experiences that I, as

³ Claire Williams, 'Mothers in Newfrontiers: Charismatic Spirituality, Motherhood and the Christian Tradition', in *Female Faith Practices: Qualitative Research Perspectives*, ed. Nicola Slee et al., Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology, vol. 37 (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2024).

⁴ See Appendix 1.

⁵ Michelle Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Evangelical Gender Debate* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016). 2.

⁶ Rosie Clare Shorter, 'Rethinking Complementarianism: Sydney Anglicans, Orthodoxy and Gendered Inequality', *Religion and Gender* 11, no. 2 (22 November 2021): 218–44, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18785417-bja10005>.

the researcher, could not anticipate and for storytelling from the women as is fitting for Charismatic testimony. In what follows I will lay out the theological frameworks for these strands and introduce the research.

Situating the Research: Charismatic Theology

This section situates both my own theological position and the ways in which I will approach the research question. The research is conceived of and followed through to analysis from the standpoint of Charismatic theology. Charismatic Christianity is a tradition delineated by historical, sociological, and theological motifs. Following Helen Collins, ‘Weaving Worship and Womb: A Feminist Practical Theology of Charismatic Worship from the Perspective of Early Motherhood’.⁷ I make use of a theological framework to address the particularities of Charismatic theology in relationship to Practical Theological methodologies in so doing I will show that the Charismatic practice of giving testimony will reveal rich spiritual lives and potentially raises questions or concerns that they have.

Charismatic theology is a particular type of Christian theology focused on storytelling and the Holy Spirit. This theology finds its origins in the Charismatic renewal that developed in the 1960s.⁸ Often defined as a wave of Pentecostalism, it is primarily identified as a belief in the present reality of the gifts of the Spirit described in 1 Corinthians 12. Allan Heaton Anderson suggests that it is nearly impossible to define the differences between Charismatics and Pentecostals beyond the sociological iterations of the churches involved.⁹ However, this thesis takes a different approach. Much literature spends time defining Charismatic theology in relationship to historical and sociological ideas; Charismatic churches are those that formed part

⁷ Helen Collins, ‘Weaving Worship and Womb: A Feminist Practical Theology of Charismatic Worship from the Perspective of Early Motherhood’ (University of Bristol with Trinity College, 2016).

⁸ The Welsh revival is noted by some commentators as an earlier iteration of Charismatic Renewal in the UK.

Hollenweger notes that it has some similar characteristics: Welsh hymn singing as a form of colloquial worship similar to the modern hymns of Charismatics, less emphasis upon sermons, practising baptism of the Holy Spirit, services incorporating contributions from congregation. Evan Roberts was a key revivalist, he differentiated between conversion and baptism in the Holy Spirit. For a time ‘the chapel replaces the public house’ in Wales, according to Hollenweger (Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*. 183) which is an early demonstration of the social impact of this type of spirituality. Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, trans. Wilson (London: SCM Press, 1972).

⁹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). 157.

of the renewal of the church within existing denominations and also those churches that formed latterly as new types of churches outside of both established churches and Pentecostal denominations.¹⁰ The theological definitions are particular but closely linked to the historical and sociological ideas that underpin them. There is, however, a particular Charismatic theology that forms this theological undertaking. Theologian Mark Cartledge defines the core values of Charismatic practice as,

The central motif of the Charismatic tradition is the ‘encounter with the Spirit’ both corporately within the worshipping life of the Church and individually through personal devotion and ongoing work and witness in the world.¹¹

Alongside this, Collins defines Charismatic theology and practice in six ways: Charismatics expect the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit in the everyday. They expect to encounter God in their own experiences. They anticipate a story that can be told about themselves and God. There is a levelness amongst believers because all experience God. The presence of the Holy Spirit implies power for believers and finally, this is enjoyed in light of a firm expectation in a future state for Charismatic eschatology.¹² This focus upon the present and lived encounter with the Holy Spirit means that theological reflection is not simply historical reflection but also enquiry into the lives of Christians today.

Charismatic theology finds its motifs in theological reflection upon Acts 2 in particular and the description of the life for the first believers in the nascent church.¹³ Charismatic theology has this in common with Pentecostal theology. The Pentecostal theologian Wolfgang Vondey understands there is an ‘indebtedness’ within Pentecostalism to Charismatic theology suggesting that Charismatic theology has a place within an overarching theology that is also Pentecostal.¹⁴ Charismatic core belief and practice is similar. Like Pentecostal theology and following Collins, Charismatic belief seeks to understand the gifts of the Holy Spirit found in 1 Corinthians and the

¹⁰ For example, Anderson. Pages 157-175, Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997).

¹¹ Mark J Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2006). 16.

¹² Helen Collins, *Charismatic Christianity Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023). 19-20.

¹³ Stephen B. Clark, *Charismatic Spirituality* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2004). 7.

¹⁴ Wolfgang Vondey, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, Routledge Handbooks in Theology (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2020). 2.

practice of such gifts in the lives of believers today.¹⁸ However, there is reasoning behind my choice of ‘Charismatic theology’ for the focus and contribution of this project. Collins finds the term ‘Charismatic’ to be more encompassing biblically, it allows for a wider lens than the typical emphasis upon Acts 2.¹⁹ It is also, she argues, less sociologically and historically restrictive.²⁰ ‘Pentecostal’ infers a relationship to ‘classic Pentecostalism’ which Newfrontiers itself does not define itself as. Thus, in the same way as Collins, I choose this category to connect to the community I write to and from.²¹ Charismatic theology makes specific claims about the access that humans have to the divine, in essence epistemological claims. These claims will be sketched below to illustrate the theological underpinnings of my particular methodology for approaching the research question, and also my own situation and the assumptions that I make throughout the research from conception to analysis.

Whence Comes Charismatic Theology?

The assumptions in Charismatic theology about the nature of knowledge and access to divine revelation require some description, in particular, the relationship between the human knower as divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit and the normative role of scripture. These two elements shape this thesis because of the possibility of knowing, via empirical investigation, the human response to the Spirit and using that to shape readings of scripture. It shares many similarities with Pentecostal theologies, as noted above, and therefore the work of Pentecostal theologians is of value in the description of Charismatic theology. Mark Cartledge puts theology that emphasises the person and work of the Holy Spirit as part of a tradition that has always existed in the church.²² He finds Pentecostal theology to particularly attend to that tradition, therefore, it is of use in Charismatic theology (or spirituality as Cartledge calls it) that has the same focus - the Spirit.²³

Charismatic theology has a storytelling and narrative thread that weaves through the three primary elements of theologising, testimony, and scripture. Both the storytelling of the individuals in faith communities and the storytelling of scripture intertwine to create a theology

¹⁸ Collins, *Charismatic Christianity Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit*.

¹⁹ Collins. 8.

²⁰ Collins. 7.

²¹ Collins. 6.

²² Mark J Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2006). 15.

²³ Cartledge. 16.

that is dialectically both rigid through scripture's unchanging nature and reactive and evolving through the storytelling of humans who speak and story their lives through the Holy Spirit's work. Wolfgang Vondey describes Pentecostal theology as having an experientially based theological framework which means that the nature of Pentecostal theology has a lived, human element.²⁴ Pentecostal theology, for Vondey, is always affective, which leads to practice:

The current of Pentecostal spirituality moves from experience to testimony to affections to practices and returns to experience in an ongoing dynamic that captures what might be termed doctrine.²⁵

Theology for Pentecostals is 'bound to the biographies and ethnographies that testify to the concrete contexts of lived experiences...'.²⁶ When approaching Newfrontiers women about this research question participants were familiar with the notion of giving testimony, indeed Anna, one of the participants joked, 'I love talking about myself!' but also that she had enjoyed the process, she told me 'Yes, it's been really lovely, it's just encouraging to tell stories, isn't it?'.²⁷ When interviewing Angela we both agreed that the process was enriching for us,

Angela: Sorry, I get preachy when I do that, because it's just...

Claire: Go on. I interviewed someone else earlier today, and they also had a time like this. I was thinking, this is not research, this is just good for me, you know?!

Angela: Yes!²⁸

I mentioned to interviewees and noted that the process of hearing these testimonies was of personal benefit and that the women had shared openly and honestly with me. This is the telling of testimonies, and it is the storytelling of individuals that is constructive in both their own lives and those of the churches.

²⁴ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*, 2018. See 4 for the description of his work that incorporates the neo charismatic churches of which Newfrontiers is one.

²⁵ Vondey. 18.

²⁶ Vondey. 20.

²⁷ Anna, Interview 7, n.d.

²⁸ Angela, Interview 11, n.d.

Testimony reflects a form of reality for the believers, and scripture is used to explain that reality in their lives. Cheryl Bridges Johns says that the ‘holy history’ that Pentecostals participate in, via their oral accounts, gives them a voice, a narrative that is confirmed by scripture in a way that they would not have if reality was only situated in the socio-political realm.²⁹ Thus, Johns claims that theologizing in Pentecostal communities is oral.³⁰ This is the Christian story brought to life in experience, understood as representing reality, and then described through testimony. This becomes their ‘holy history’ she says, as they interpret scripture via their own experiences and understanding. This has a thoroughly pneumatological understanding, ‘the voice of the people is, therefore, empowered by the Holy Spirit to become the speech of God’.³¹ Testimony serves to decode reality for the members of the church, and it also communicates an understanding of the world that is empowering for those who hear it. It gives voice to anyone who wishes to have it, Johns argues, via testimony even a child can teach.³²

Testimony is validated in community. The way such theologising is given authority involves the judgement of the community as to whether the Holy Spirit has inspired the words. The activity of God is sought by the community. Sociologist David Martin reinforces this point; he believes that Pentecostals *believe* that they have a story to tell.³³ This research seeks to hear the stories that are told from the women who were willing to share them.

This story must always be one that interacts with two key elements, with scripture and with the Holy Spirit. Steven Land understands this in terms of ‘apocalyptic vision’.³⁴ Testimony is witness to the apocalyptic *telos* at work in the believer and their daily life. It is witness to the work of God in their life and their journey in the faith. For those that hear it, it is worthy of responding to - and purposeful for - formation in the faith. Land describes this as ‘stories merged with *the*

²⁹ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010). 88.

³⁰ Johns.

³¹ Johns. 89.

³² Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010). 126.

³³ David Martin, *The Breaking of the Image: A Sociology of Christian Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

³⁴ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

story'.³⁵ This description for Pentecostals is true for the wider Charismatic theological tradition. Collins writes that for Charismatics testimony sharing is 'their primary way of expressing their experiential knowledge and wisdom of God in Christ'.³⁶ Alongside this dual relationship with theology and experience, testimony giving constructs social identities and relationships and are assumed to be possible for all believers.³⁷ Testimony becomes a source of theological knowledge that is revealing of the lives of women, that of both good and bad experiences. Testimony is a way in which the experience of believers, and in this case for women, that is offered, via their own interpretation and received as having spiritual power. This study seeks to understand the experiences that I had and relate them to other women's experiences. Testimony is in keeping with this endeavour, as it is the typical manner of theologising in the Charismatic church.

The theological voice of storytelling interacts with the theological voice of scripture that is held in Charismatic theology as the primary normative authority. The women who willingly shared their stories for this work are brought into conversation with scripture to proffer new hermeneutical possibilities for the normative reading of scripture. This is in line with other Pentecostal and Charismatic theology that believes the bible is 'the supreme epistemic authority' and it is unique in this position as revealed scripture.⁴⁴ The authority of scripture as the norming knowledge of a Christian life is in relationship to the faith experiences of individuals. The bible is used not as a rule book or guidebook, the truth of which is known through propositional theological statements, but rather as a biblical narrative in which experience today is given meaning.⁴⁵ There is a tension between these narratives and a necessary interpretative move to negotiate knowledge of God between two sources with different levels of authority and different qualities. Sheryl Arthur argues that congregations 'mediate what is normative' via their interaction with the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ The pneumatological process then becomes a construction of theology. The bible has authority as unique amongst all other written texts and for a member of

³⁵ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 1993. 112.

³⁶ Helen Collins, *Charismatic Christianity Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023). 99.

³⁷ Collins. 99.

⁴⁴ Simo Frestadius, *Pentecostal Rationality: Epistemology and Theological Hermeneutics in the Foursquare Tradition*, T&T Clark Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2021). 175.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2018). 21.

⁴⁶ Sheryl Joanne Arthur, 'Negotiating the Non-Negotiable: The Elim Pentecostal Movement and Theological Normativity', *Practical Theology* 13, no. 5 (2 September 2020): 466–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2020.1734286>. 467.

a Charismatic community the primary source of normativity. The normative value of scripture for Charismatic theology indicates a *reality* beyond the human experience and indicates, as I've noted, the relationship between the stories *in* history of believers and the story *of* history in scripture. The mutual guardianship that the bible and community has over the act of testifying requires deliberate choices to hear, receive and re-tell stories that are partial or incomplete, this research endeavours to do that for Newfrontiers women.

This research centres the voices of the women who kindly and sacrificially shared their lives with me and constructed rich and warm theology alongside me. This mirrors the practice of Charismatic theologising. Much of my thinking was nuanced and reworked in conversation with them and this research, whilst making no claims to generalisability. It highlights their particular experiences that they brought and constructs with their voices and input particular accounts of these women reflective of that particular time in their lives. In so doing their voices are joined with the voices of the wider network to deepen and change the story about women in Newfrontiers. This story, as the next chapter will develop, is one that has centred around a character in scripture called Jezebel. Women who seek power and wish to exercise gifts in the congregation were, in the early days of the network, said to have a 'Jezebellic spirit'. However, the deep and rich accounts these women shared led me to reconsider if this is the most fitting description of their lives. Thus, this thesis takes the stories of the women they offered and draws it into *the story* in a more fitting way which would not have been possible without the hermeneutical framework offered by their stories and the community that is created between myself as the researcher and their stories in the interview testimonies.

Testifying relates to epistemology via relativised claims regarding access to the real. The reality, which Charismatic testimony accesses, is confirmed by Scripture and the socially constructed authentication process in the community. Both scripture and experience require interpretation which is the work of Charismatic theology. In the same way as doctrinal claims about God are relativised as having access to the real but not privileged access according to Vondey, so also does the process of biblical interpretation. Pete Ward notes that any theologian - this would include biblical scholars or any readers of the bible - who claims to have access to the real, to be able to 'see' more clearly than the lived experience of churches and faith members, is in error.⁴⁷ This is a false dichotomy, rather both theological tasks, that of understanding texts and traditions

⁴⁷ Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology* (Leiden; Boston: BRILL, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004347359>. 25.

and that of understanding experience, require the theologian who interprets for each age. The belief that the scripture is the word of God, in keeping with the Charismatic framework for this study, is not a claim that reading scripture accesses divine reality without a human relationship to that scripture. For Charismatic faith, testimony is an important locator of knowledge and expression.

A significant question for Charismatic theology is: what role does scripture have in answering questions about human experience? How can new testimony, such as the women in this research mediate renewed interpretations of scripture? It is fundamentally eschatological in orientation but also a witness to daily life. Hence, Cartledge claims that it is a means of social construction and involves perception, memory, consciousness, and reason.⁴⁸ The interweaving of stories of humans with the stories of scripture are continually negotiated and checked. Allowing for a self-understanding to interact with the dynamic processes of testifying. The power dynamics of storytellers is relativised pneumatologically, all are privileged to speak in the Spirit and are distinguished as potential storytellers of divine revelation. Testimony is, says Cartledge, a suitable way to access the ordinary world of the Pentecostal and therefore, as this study will show, to reconsider old stories in light of the new. It is theologically and methodologically sound as an approach to ordinary beliefs and experiences because it is in keeping with the belief in God's action, via the Holy Spirit, in human lives today. Storytelling for Charismatic theology is an epistemological act, it is the way in which the divine voice is heard and understood and related to human life. In this thesis, testimony is treated as a fundamental source of theological knowledge.

This research will draw together the theological testimony of the women who offered their voices into conversation with the scriptural stories that have been previously offered to describe them. This will use a new shape for Practical Theology that incorporates this Charismatic practice of testifying and restories the lives of the women so that their association with Jezebel is not the final word about them. As Charismatics merge their own stories with *the* story this work seeks to merge the accounts of women with the story of scripture to restory their lives with a different biblical narrative that more fully reflects them.

⁴⁸ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*. 17.

The Claims of this Research and the Outline of the Thesis

The thesis begins with a review of the current literature about women in Charismatic Christianity, especially Newfrontiers. It uncovers the gaps in the accounts and particularly focuses upon where a theological reflection may sit in concert with the sociological and historical surveys of Newfrontiers. It highlights a point concerning Newfrontiers' self-understanding and the literature around Jezebel in particular the 'Jezebelic spirit' and the relationship to women who seek power.

Chapter 2 articulates a theological method of hearing the testimony of unheard voices as a suitable way in which to develop Charismatic theology alongside liberative agendas. It also complexifies this theology by holding fast to the commitment Pentecostals and Charismatics have to expressing joy and celebrating the good. It recognises this as a contradiction and holds the two in tension. I describe this in three phases. Phase 1, 'testimony in the Spirit', examines the potential to hear testimony as a research method is theorised as both legitimate for this study and as a spiritual encounter. Phase 2, 'wisdom in the Spirit', receives the research data reflexively and the analysis stage. In this stage I account for the use of non-theological resources to create the description and analysis. Finally, phase 3, hermeneutics, is where the traditional interpretations of biblical narratives are retold with a renewed hermeneutic created from the research data. Following this, the process of conducting the research is described including the research interviews in which the research participants testified, prophesied, and recounted actions of God. These participant observations allow for a deeper understanding of the context of the participants.

Chapter 3 then describes the context in which the research participants can be found, following the observations and secondary sources. It describes the congregational life of English Newfrontiers congregations, their worship, community, and church governance.

Chapter 4 is my description of the data and findings, which focuses on the theme of 'making space' and develops both the negative and the positive accounts of epistemic 'unacceptability' and 'acceptability'. From the interview data themes of negotiation and legitimisation are introduced here as the women account for their behaviours and practices that afford them forms of legitimacy, in particular epistemic legitimacy.

In the subsequent chapter 5 my analysis develops these themes and suggests ways in which the participants experience epistemic injustice and negotiate and find alternative communities in order to express their Spirit inspired views and ideas. This negotiation occurs both within and without the main church services, and as such I suggest that Newfrontiers women create, using Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's term, '*ekklesia gynaikōn*'. '*Ekklesia gynaikōn*' is the church recognised as constructed of women, containing them, and being formed by them.⁴⁹ This enables the women's God-knowledge to find expression both inside and outside the authoritative church structures.

Finally, in chapter 6, I suggest a hermeneutic that proposes an amended self-understanding of women in Newfrontiers, translating previous views of women who seek power in the churches to be like the biblical character Jezebel and finding them similar to Jezebel in unexpected ways. I also rescript the narrative to consider the character of Elizabeth, found in the early chapters of Luke's gospel. This is the final phase of my methodology that mimics the way in which testimony is used in Charismatic churches to find a place of the storyteller in the story of God and to renew understanding and interpretative lens through the experience of testimony giving.

Contribution of the Study

This thesis contributes to the field of Charismatic theology. The methodology I will describe makes use of the principles sketched above to listen to the voices of those who are subject to those who are more powerful than they are. This is a Charismatic Practical Theology that incorporates the Charismatic community's hermeneutical practices. Alongside this it holds fast to the commitment in Charismatic theology, and in Pentecostal theology, to celebrate the action of God and use testimony to account for it. This is the manner that deeply reflects the Charismatic process of hermeneutics, the linking of stories and testimonies to scriptural narratives is a fundamental element of Charismatic theology and therefore it is fitting to combine this with methods from Practical Theology to develop a manner in which this theology should be accomplished, in order to hear those whose testimonies have not been heard.

A further contribution focuses upon spiritual experience. Testimony giving in the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches is constructed as an encounter with God and a practice that enriches

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). 5-7.

the community who receive it. Thus, a research methodology that embraces this experience of God incorporates Catherine Sexton's aims of research that is itself a spiritual practice.⁵⁰

Finally, this thesis contributes to the small field of scholarship that surrounds the church network known as Newfrontiers and the women within it. It develops upon the previous scholarship of Kristin Aune enriching her description of women in Newfrontiers and updating the research findings. It also develops upon my own master's thesis about the faith lives of mothers in Newfrontiers.

My hope with this thesis is to focus on Charismatic accounts of joy and trouble from Newfrontiers women and develop a constructive account of the lives of my research participants. This account is a tribute to the creative and life-giving stories that the women told me, their hopes and their disappointments and their profound commitment to worship and discipleship in all situations. It also endeavours, as with all Practical Theology, to present a problem and suggest a solution, that of hearing the women's stories to tell a new story found in scripture. This new story is part of the novelty of the methodology – it takes the good stories, the accounts of divine encounter and celebrates them weaving them into the new story about these women's lives that is joyful.

⁵⁰ Catherine Sexton, 'Method as Contemplative Enquiry: From Holy Listening to Sacred Reading and Shared Horizons', *Practical Theology* 12, no. 1 (January 2019): 44–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2019.1575042>.

Chapter 1: Women in Newfrontiers: Background and History

This thesis concerns the accounts of spiritual practices of women in the Newfrontiers church network. This research adds to this sparse and under researched religious network. This chapter introduces some of the studies that inform our understanding of Charismatic women whilst primarily meeting the gap in knowledge about Newfrontiers women in particular. This research engages with evangelicalism, studies about Christian women in the UK, and Charismatic Christianity. These fields have been studied to variable extents and each in turn suggest areas worthy of further research. It is the convergence of these gaps that indicate what research would be most fruitful, illustrating the nascent areas of study that suggest where new insight can be gained and where the older research areas – in particular those concerning gender roles in churches that have been only narrowly examined. For the women in Newfrontiers there remains also a concern about silence, other than the significant study by Kristin Aune in the early 2000s and my own masters work, there has been no subsequent research about Newfrontiers women and their lived religious experience. The literature does not proffer an insight into the faith lives of women in this branch of the Christian faith, which the wider literature demonstrates can reveal richness and depth. This part of the literature review addresses the works that do exist about the lives of women, firstly in the broader Evangelical Christian tradition. It considers the faith lives of UK Christian women, and the research that indicates lived religion as an important way to understand women's faith and the literature, such as it is, in the Newfrontiers category.

Evangelical Christianity and Women – A Brief Introduction

Newfrontiers as a Charismatic church is also part of the Evangelical movement.⁵¹

The women who choose to remain in complementarian churches are of particular interest to this study, despite the presence of other churches that admit women into leadership. There are a number of studies that seek to explore the reasons behind this remaining. Elizabeth Brusco, in her study of Columbian women and their families, explains that the traditional roles of women in Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations in Columbia are beneficial.⁵² This is because, in

⁵¹ Kristin Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches' (Kings College, University of London, 2004). 21.

⁵² Elizabeth E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia*, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

their traditional roles, these women were agents for change in their families. Pentecostalism did not create for them renewed societal roles but improved their circumstances *in situ*. This is because the traditional male in Columbia, says Brusco, was prone to excessive drinking, smoking, and to using prostitutes or maintaining mistresses. The ascetism promoted by the Evangelical Pentecostalism condemned these actions. The Colombian women surveyed, Brusco says, were not seeking access to the male sphere. Rather, they found their new religious form, 'elevates domesticity, for both men and women, from the devalued position it occupies as the result of the process of proletarianization.'⁵³ The choice to involve their families in these churches, that moderated their husbands' negative behaviour elevated the women's circumstances. This study, although in Columbia and therefore a different culture to this current study, indicates that the choice of women to access and to participate in a complementarian religious group can be positive and active for their own good. In fact, Brusco sees it as a form of emancipation. Rather than teaching women that their suffering on earth will be rewarded in heaven, these women are altering their circumstances for their own good by promoting their interests theologically.⁵⁴

Early suggestions of emancipation of women in Christian communities are shown in the literature to disappear with changing readings of scripture. In the nascent days of Pentecostalism, notes Janet Everts Powers, women were involved in all aspects of ministry. However, the institutionalisation of Pentecostalism resulted in the expectation that women would take traditional roles, alongside the Charismatic belief that, having come from mainline denominations, there was no second or subsequent experience of the Holy Spirit. Theologically this meant that rather than focusing on the Spirit empowering for ministry, the Charismatics viewed the Holy Spirit experience as an individualised and personal experience of renewed relationship with God. For Charismatics, the gift of prophecy did not include preaching and prophecy, consequently, prophecy which had long been an area of female participation was reduced in scope. Powers observes that Wayne Grudem wrote that prophecy did not equal ministry of the word,

Once he had devalued prophetic ministry and established teaching as the true authoritative ministry of the Word in the New Testament, Grudem proceeds to identify

⁵³ Brusco. 3.

⁵⁴ Brusco. 136.

preaching with the ministry of teaching.⁵⁵

Thus identified, the biblical texts that prohibit women from preaching and teaching are employed to close the case. Everts Powers thus says that Pentecostalism was affected by the impact of Charismatic renewal's adoption of Pentecostal beliefs and their adaptation of theological understandings.

A more general analysis by Judith Stacey and Susan Gerrard concludes that American Evangelicalism is 'the vanguard of the anti-feminist backlash'.⁵⁶ However, they detect some presence of feminism in Evangelicalism in America by way of, amongst others, the Evangelical feminists. This group have their Evangelical beliefs and their feminist beliefs modified by one another. They claim that the New Testament demonstrates women's equality with men, and that their beliefs are biblically coherent. They have a wider influence than their numbers suggest, say Stacey and Gerrard, influencing male theologians to promote feminist views. The rest of their study of women at a church in Silicon Valley is predominantly about the views of evangelicals on marriage, homosexuality, abortion, and headship. It demonstrates the preoccupation that research about women in evangelicalism has with these 'hot topics'.

The relationship women have with feminism and its aims are therefore complicated. Kristin Aune claims women fall into different categories regarding Evangelical Christianity.⁵⁷ There are women who fit well within the traditional roles. These women will likely remain committed to Evangelicalism and active within it. Then, there are 'adaptive' women who work and manage homes. They 'are likely to incorporate holistic alternative beliefs and practices into their Christian spirituality and give less time to the church'.⁵⁸ Finally, there are those who are full-time employed, not heterosexual, and will be marginal or non-attendees of Evangelical congregations. Aune's point is that women's lives are changing, and the first category is reducing. She particularly studied Newfrontiers women (as is examined below) and found those marginal women were at

⁵⁵ Everts Powers, 'Your Daughters Shall Prophecy', in *Philip's Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership*, ed. Estrela Alexander and Amos Yong (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009). 146.

⁵⁶ Judith Stacey and Susan Gerrard, 'We Are Not Doormats', in *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*, ed. Faye D. Ginsburg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ Kristin Aune, 'Evangelical Christianity and Women's Changing Lives', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 3 (August 2008): 277–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506808091508>. 283.

⁵⁸ Aune. 283.

risk of leaving Newfrontiers churches or had already left. The primary discussion in the literature about women in Evangelical Christianity particularly relates to gender roles and leadership. However, there is a growing body of academic research that suggests that such topics reduce the field unduly; ignoring spaces, behaviours, and spiritual practices that construct the lives of women and are richly demonstrative of faith behaviour that is gendered and outside of the ecclesiological research boundaries thus far.

Part 1: Introducing Newfrontiers

Newfrontiers is an apostolic church network that was formed in the 1970s during the Charismatic revival.⁵⁹ Samuel Jefferey and William Kay have undertaken research of the history of the network. They divide this history of Newfrontiers into three distinct periods.⁶⁰ These are: 1970–1990 (approx.) where the group was formed and began increasing in number, partially through the addition of congregations from elsewhere. Then 1990–2001 involved incorporating some of the elements of cell church and international church planting. Finally, 2001–2016 saw the dispersal of Newfrontiers into distinct but joined groups called ‘spheres’ which are similar to Anglican dioceses in their oversight of a multitude of churches. These ‘spheres’ are coordinated by an ‘apostle’ who leads an area only roughly determined by geography. This geography is progressively diluted as church planting takes place.⁶¹ The determining factor of these spheres is not geography but relational links to the apostle in charge.

⁵⁹ Originally called House Churches that name was abandoned because as the groups grew they no longer met in people’s houses. The churches when they met in houses were community orientated, laity-centric, and informal in nature. It could be more appropriate to call the churches ‘Restorationist’ as this was the original driving force behind the movement. The churches sought to ‘restore’ the New Testament paradigm as they perceived it into modern British churches. The particular ecclesiology of leadership, via apostles and linked to the restoration New Testament church structure, has led to the designation ‘New Apostolic Churches’ which encapsulates both the renewal of the spiritual gifts and of the other aspects of the church particularly ‘apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers’. William K. Kay, ‘Apostolic Networks in Britain: An Analytic Overview’, *Transformation* 25/1 (January 2008). 241.

⁶⁰ William Kay and Samuel Jefferey, ‘The Growth of London’s New Churches: The Example of the Newfrontiers Network’, in *The Desecularisation of the City: London’s Churches, 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper, Routledge Studies in Religion (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2019).

⁶¹ For example, Relational Mission a sphere based in Norfolk and led by Mike Betts has a number of churches in East Anglia but also some in Kent. It has a multitude of churches in Europe also and church planting continues to progress there. At the time of writing some discussion had occurred about a church plant in Liverpool. Geographical element is not determinative.

The first phase of Newfrontiers International begins with Terry Virgo and his own history. Virgo was born in 1940 in a non-Christian home. He underwent a conversion via the Baptist church and then the Pentecostal church, and he would eventually describe himself as a 'Charismatic Calvinist'.⁶² Early on, the distinctive theology and worship style of Newfrontiers is embodied in the founder. After leaving bible college, Virgo became the minister for an Evangelical Free Church where he led people in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. He had experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a Pentecostal church and had understood the Charismatic revival as connected to the renewal of these gifts in believers today. This led to increasing invitations to other churches who had heard of this relatively unusual occurrence in an evangelical church.

The network's ecclesiology begins to show itself even at this time. The way in which these interested churches participated in what Virgo has to offer is by 'coming into relationship' with Virgo.⁶³ These churches came from a variety of places, some were Baptist who had been influenced by the Baptist Revival Fellowship.⁶⁴ There were no formal connections, which included no statements of faith or constitutions. This was, as Jefferey and Kay note, the rejection of frameworks and structures and is characteristic of the Restoration church with which Virgo would eventually become associated.⁶⁵ The south-east of England was the hub of Virgo's influence, where up to thirty churches cooperated with Virgo by the close of the 1970s. Often Virgo was invited into churches in order to explain the new Charismatic phenomena that was circulating and causing some confusion.

One element of ecclesiology that relates to this research is the form of leadership embraced by Newfrontiers. Benjamin McNair-Scott, in his thesis on Contemporary Charismatic Apostolates, places Virgo in a category of apostles called 'Apostle Type 1' alongside Derek Prince and Peter Wagner.⁶⁶ These apostles make use of 1 Corinthians 12.28 and Ephesians 2.20 to justify a high

⁶² Terry Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2001). 62.

⁶³ William Kay and Samuel Jefferey, 'The Growth of London's New Churches: The Example of the Newfrontiers Network', in *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches, 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper, Routledge Studies in Religion (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2019). 242.

⁶⁴ Kay and Jefferey. 243.

⁶⁵ For example, there is no voting in Newfrontiers churches, even in the early days. The authority of the church laid in the eldership that was appointed.

⁶⁶ Benjamin G. McNair Scott, 'Making Sense of Contemporary Charismatic Apostolates An Historical and Theological Appraisal' (Kings College, University of London, 2012). 9.

level of apostolic authority. Virgo's beliefs are that there are three types of apostles, those first 12, then Paul and then those who are in church history, including himself, presumably. This was comparable to the authority of 'Apostle type 2' – deemed lesser, as those congregations in their care were under the authority of their own pastors rather than the apostle – and 'Apostle type 3', who is one amongst many of the fivefold ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4. This is important analysis as spiritual authority is impactful upon the daily lives of those who are situated under it. The level and extent of spiritual authority raises questions about autonomy, which directly affects choices of spiritual practices pertinent to this study. Of these apostles, McNair Scott writes,

What unites them is that their spiritual authority takes precedent over all other ministries in the Church and they provide 'foundational' input without which the church local and universal will never become all that God desires.⁶⁷

Virgo would eventually accept the need for some formality, whilst determining it always to be organisationally lean. This formality came at the time when he named his movement 'Coastlands'. This change simply provided an umbrella under which sat any church with a relational connection to Virgo. In 1986 Coastlands was given a new name, 'New Frontiers'.⁶⁸ Walker considers this a positive move for the network removing, the 'hi-de-hi' feel and imposing a name which 'heralded the pioneering spirit of the church'.⁶⁹

By 1990 and the second phase that Jefferey and Kay identify, growth of Newfrontiers concentrates no longer on 'formulation of its principles and values' but upon growth beyond the borders of southern England. Kristin Aune's research occurred at the end of this second phase. She describes Newfrontiers as having three 'restorationist distinctives', which are: 'ecclesiology, anti-denominational kingdom theology and discipleship'.⁷⁰ She highlights the church planting emphasis. The direction in this phase was towards growth and towards reaching those that had not heard either the Christian message or the Restorationist one. The cell church model provides a certain daily spirituality, 'cell groups were to function as quasi-families, nuclei of spiritual

⁶⁷ McNair Scott. 224.

⁶⁸ <https://newfrontierstogether.org/about-us/timeline/> date accessed 18th June 2020.

⁶⁹ Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (Surrey: Eagle, 1998). 336.

⁷⁰ Kristin Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches' (Kings College, University of London, 2004). 33.

nurture...'.⁷¹ This is an example of the Newfrontiers whole life approach to faith. Rather than Sunday attendance being the only marker of the participation in the faith, practices that develop outside of religious services function as means of belonging and enacting belief.⁷²

The third phase is from 2001 until now. In 2002 New Frontiers International removed 'International' from its name.⁷³ By 2011 Virgo had handed over the mantle of leadership of this now large group of churches. At this point it was 800 churches in 70 countries.⁷⁴ The network was split into fifteen 'Apostolic spheres' that were led by men who had been identified as apostles. Women were unable to be either apostles or church leaders. These spheres still relate to one another under the banner of Newfrontiers and will meet together occasionally. The linked fellowship run by male heads of spheres and churches will be significant in this thesis as I show the impact this relational, networking ecclesiology has for the authority and impact women have in their faith communities.

The 'Newfrontiers Together' website lists 23 apostolic leaders across the world.⁷⁵ As well as in the UK these leaders are in East Ukraine, Russia, America, Kenya, Zambia, Armenia, Mexico, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Dubai, India and Nepal. It is not possible to know with certainty how many churches these apostles represent as records are not kept and degrees of relational connection can vary in different locations. The breadth of the network and the unstructured associations and connections of individual churches with others makes the precise number and nature of Newfrontiers difficult to quantify. As such, this thesis has focused on churches in England.

This thesis is written at an academic crossroads. In 2003 David Smith was able to write that very little had been written or analysed about this movement: 'the very newness of the movement and the fact that it is still dynamically growing and changing, necessitates the reliance upon primary

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Claire Williams, 'Mothers in Newfrontiers: Charismatic Spirituality, Motherhood and the Christian Tradition', in *Female Faith Practices: Qualitative Research Perspectives*, ed. Nicola Slee et al., Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology, vol. 37 (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2024). 157.

⁷³ Throughout this thesis I have made use of the most recent designation.

⁷⁴ <https://newfrontierstogether.org/about-us/timeline/>.

⁷⁵ <https://newfrontierstogether.org/team-member/arsen-tatintsyan/> accessed 2 July 2020.

oral sources'.⁷⁶ Newfrontiers particularly suffers from a paucity of scholarship from the early period of the Restoration movement. For example, Andrew Walker's first editions made only passing referenced to founder Terry Virgo and Newfrontiers. The early histories and academic accounts of the Restoration movement make only small reference to Newfrontiers which means that it emphasises Reformed theology and Charismatic practices, and the way in which this is outworked is missed out of the canon of early Restoration writings.⁷⁷ There are now an increasing number of studies that consider the missional behaviour of Newfrontiers, their church planting endeavours, the ways in which their history has shaped the broader movement.⁷⁸

These are works of sociology and history primarily and offer more in depth analysis of the development and growth of the movement. Some studies are theological but reflect different themes.⁷⁹ However, this thesis is concerned with the women whose voices have not been

⁷⁶ David Smith, 'An Account for the Sustained Rise of New Frontiers International within the United Kingdom', *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 23, no. 1 (March 2003): 137–56, <https://doi.org/10.1179/jep.2003.23.1.009>. 137.

⁷⁷ Much is said in Restoration analyses about the 'shepherding' movement and its impact. This is not a feature of Virgo's ministry and the churches associated with him but his absence from the early analysis leads to a distortion of the accounts of Restoration churches.

⁷⁸ Samuel Jefferey, "A World-Wide Family on a Mission": The History of the Newfrontiers Network in Transnational Perspective, c.1980-2011' (Kings College, University of London, 2019). William K Kay, 'Apostolic Networks and Mission', *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 26, no. 2 (October 2006): 156–67, <https://doi.org/10.1179/jep.2006.26.2.008>; Kay and Jefferey, 'The Growth of London's New Churches: The Example of the Newfrontiers Network'. Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (Surrey: Eagle, 1998). Nigel Wright, 'Restoration and the "House Church Movement"', *Themelios* 16, no. 2 (n.d.), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/restorationism-and-the-house-church-movement/>. Brian Hewitt, *Doing a New Thing?: Seven Leaders Reflect on the Past, Present and Future of the House Church Movement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995). Joyce V. Thurman, *New wineskins: a study of the House Church Movement*, Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums 30 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1982). Smith, 'An Account for the Sustained Rise of New Frontiers International within the United Kingdom'. Barry Cooper, 'Newfrontiers Church Planting in the UK: An Examination of Their Distinctives and Practices' (Bangor University, 2009).

⁷⁹ James Martin Scott, 'The Theology of the So-Called New Church Movement: An Analysis of the Eschatology A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology' (London Bible College, Brunel University, 1997), <http://www.wild-fire.co.uk>; <https://www.3generations.eu/papers/hcmesch.pdf>. Max Turner, 'Ecclesiology in the Major "Apostolic" Restorationist Churches in the United Kingdom', *Vox Evangelica* 19 (1989): 83–108. A. Ewen Robertson, 'The Distinctive Missiology of the New Churches: An Analysis and Evaluation', *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 35, no. 2 (October 2015): 144–61, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1812446115Z.00000000016>.

represented in these studies, and the way in which theology has evolved to describe them. The study is distinctive in this manner, it is a theological work rather than a sociology or history and it is one which represents women in a new way, reorientating the story told about them by others. This chapter seeks to place these women in their contexts theologically, by understanding the studies of UK women, of their lived religion and the only significant study of Newfrontiers women that currently exists, that of Kristin Aune's sociological analysis. This study contributes to that work from a distinctive Charismatic and theological position and both updates and develops the foundational study by Aune.

Part 2: The Faith Lives of UK Christian Women

The study of lived religion and of faith lives considers the intersection of faith that is both in the *ecclesia* and developed around or outside of it. For a study of Newfrontiers women, this is suitable to understand their faith behaviour in a complementarian church that does not allow that behaviour in all aspects of their ecclesial structures. Lived religion enables research to hear and see how belief interacts with behaviour outside of power structures, in different ways to normative groups and also in additional ways, alongside the normative and structured *ecclesia*. This makes it particularly fruitful for research that investigates women.

The field of women's faith lives and lived religion is considered to begin with Nicola Slee's groundbreaking work on 'Women's Faith Development'.⁸⁰ This novel doctoral work used a feminist methodology to explore the ways in which women's lives of faith changed and developed over time. It created a space in which the particularities of lived religion were examined as they intersected with gender. Slee's study proposed that there was a unique lived expression of faith for women that was heretofore under researched and unheard.⁸¹ Slee's work was innovative because it made use of qualitative research, in particular research interviews. The recognition that normative faith development was predominantly male and, therefore, lacking due recognition to the ways in which women formed and navigated their faith. Not only did it

⁸⁰ Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2004). Nicola Slee, 'Empathy and Immersion as Theological Values', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 135 Susan Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God: The Authentic Spirituality of the Annihilated Soul* (London: Routledge, 2016). 33.

⁸¹ Slee, *Women's Faith Development*, 2004. 4.

illuminate this gap but it thrust the theological examination of women's practices into the limelight, finding in these things something that was valuable to research.

Research studies concerning the faith lives of UK women have been gradually increasing in number and with that increase both methodological and theological trajectories have developed.⁸² For example, the Faith Lives of Women and Girls Symposium, established at the Queen's Foundation has generated, so far, three edited collections concerning the methods, research outputs and analysis of qualitative studies on the lived religion of women, primarily in the UK.⁸³ The most recent of these publications, 'Female Faith Practices', suggests that there is increasing interest in the study of the practices of women's faith and suggests what can be known by these types of investigations.⁸⁴ This incorporates a recognition that practice is a form of theological expression, and that there is, within female faith, a wide variety of said practices – such as wild swimming, dancing, novel rituals, and traditional rites.⁸⁵

Following Meredith McGuire,⁸⁶ the editors note that the gendered nature of lived religious practices are worthy of serious study. The centre of the home in lived religion allows for an emphasis on the previously unknown elements of religious practice, in particular, those which relate to women.⁸⁷ This intersects with the interest in bodies and bodily practices that are the focus of attention for feminist, womanist, and LBTQI+ scholars.⁸⁸ These practices are worthy of investigation in and of themselves but also illustrate the relationships or lack thereof with established churches and faith groups. Such methodologies suggest a way into understanding the lives of Newfrontiers women that takes seriously their lives inside and outside their faith communities.

⁸² Nicola Slee, ed., *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls: Qualitative Research Perspectives*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013). 1.

⁸³ Slee. Nicola Slee, Fran Porter, and Anne Phillips, eds., *RESEARCHING FEMALE FAITH: Qualitative Research Methods*. (Place of publication not identified: ROUTLEDGE, 2019).

⁸⁴ Nicola Slee et al., 'Introduction', in *Female Faith Practices*, by Nicola Slee et al., 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003228431-1>. 4.

⁸⁵ Slee et al. 4-5.

⁸⁶ Meredith B. McGuire, 'Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 3 (1990): 283–96.

⁸⁷ Nicola Slee et al., eds., *Female Faith Practices: Qualitative Research Perspectives*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology, vol. 37 (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2024). 5.

⁸⁸ Slee et al. 6.

Agency and Lived Religious Investigation

The study of female faith practice has paid particular attention to the practice of faith within the home, in the education of the young, and in the care of the sick and elderly. This is amongst other locations – spaces that have, perhaps, been less overtly controlled by men than the public space of church, temple, synagogue, or mosque and, at the same time, have often been overlooked in accounts of how faith is nurtured, formed, and developed.⁸⁹ The editors summarise the volume's focus as, 'the way in which they challenge, critique, subvert, or nuance the taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of female faith which continue to operate in both academia and "ordinary life" contexts'.⁹⁰ This means that as lived religion studies embrace these traditionally believed syncretistic practices of 'popular religion', there is potential for a fuller and richer description of the faith lives of women in particular.

Nonetheless, it is not, says McGuire, simply an adoptive process where such elements are formally recognised as religion. Rather, it is the understanding of what these blended and adaptive practices achieve for the individual who is participating in research.⁹¹ McGuire makes a distinction between religion-as-preached and religion-as-practiced in the historical context of the reformations of the Protestant churches. In so doing, she indicates the differences between what people heard as their instruction upon how to live, the way that the church thought they should believe and behave, and how these people, individuals in their own historical contexts, actually did behave.

These adaptive practices are acts of agency which choose where authority is found for the individual. For example, the women who Giselle Vincent researched with who opt to follow both Christianity and neo-paganism. This syncretism can be redescribed as people who are 'fusers'.⁹² Such individuals particularly embody dual or multiple religious identities. This is significant because the individuals who are concerned approach 'secularisation' in a nuanced way.

⁸⁹ Slee et al. 6.

⁹⁰ Nicola Slee, *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls: Qualitative Research Perspectives* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2016). 8.

⁹¹ Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). 61.

⁹² Giselle Vincett, 'The Fusers: New Forms of Spiritualized Christianity', in *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization*, ed. Kristin Aune and Sonya Sharma (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

'They may no longer attend a church but practice behaviours that are religiously 'meaningful'.⁹³ Lived religion or studies that incorporate investigations of practices discover different manners of religious participation that is both gendered and non-traditional.

By overemphasizing official religious belief, teachings, and organizational membership, sociologists and other researchers have simply failed to notice that many people engage, outside or alongside those religious organizations, in valued spiritual practices that address their material concerns and deeply felt emotional needs.⁹⁴

Indeed, lived religion allows for the importance of the domestic and relates the quotidian to questions of agency. For this study it is suggestive that what happens in homes and workspaces where agency and authority exist might have a bearing upon Newfrontiers' women's self-understanding.

McGuire notes the practices of women in Latino US culture that is centred around their homes and includes domestic shrines and the importance of their gardens.⁹⁵ Investigating such practices under the lived religion understanding allows for such behaviour to be understood for the nuances that it represents. For example, McGuire takes the devotion of the Virgin and male domestic violence as an example. This act is both one which encourages some women to endure their violent homes and others to reject it.⁹⁶ The complexity of the symbolism and the power and the 'multivalent' elements of these lived and material engagements are found in observing or hearing about the daily lives of the faith rather than only the professed beliefs. Such devotion may require objects to facilitate it, icons or images, altars and bodily postures. These are the 'material concerns' of the study of lived religion.⁹⁷

Developing this area, Jan Berry and Janet Wootton both explored the behaviours that constituted faith in particularised contexts – paying careful attention to how the lived

⁹³ Vincett. Sharma, Sonya, and Kristin Aune. (2016) 2016. *Women and Religion in the West*. 1st ed. Routledge. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1633835>.

⁹⁴ McGuire. 66.

⁹⁵ McGuire. 52.

⁹⁶ McGuire. 54.

⁹⁷ McGuire. 55.

environment is both constructive and constructed by the women engaging in it.⁹⁸ Similarly, ethnographic research has potential to reveal such previously unknown spiritual practices that diverge from the espoused and normative behaviours of traditional churches. Anna Fedele and Kim Knibbe note that ethnography can complexify the acts of power and agency in religion that can be understood as oppressive are transformed by the practitioners into tools that ‘open up new avenues to come to terms with their everyday lives, contest previous forms of power and create something new.’⁹⁹ These complexities are highlighted in such research and offer the nuance that a theological investigation of Newfrontiers women requires for it to wrestle with the question of agency in a UK church that restricts agency to women.

Berry’s work incorporates research into the power of ritual and spiritual practices for women’s formation and faith development.¹⁰⁰ It is significant in its approach to reintegrating women to their own faith expression when practices and traditions have excluded them. In this way Berry talks about ritual as ‘constructing meaning’ rather than simply expressing that meaning.¹⁰¹ This demonstrates the complex relationships between churches, oppressions and agencies in these lived religious lives. Her study is a development of Elaine Graham’s work which opened the field of Practical and Pastoral Theology to the idea of practices as ‘purposeful activity performed by embodied persons in time and space as both the subjects of agency and the objects of history’.¹⁰² Such practices, argues Graham, do not respond to the grand narratives of systematic theologies but form them in particularised situations. The emphasis upon particular situations and contexts allows for a narrowed focus for this study upon women in particular and each individual story specifically. Thus, this theory transforms the relative place of behaviour and its significance in faith settings and also the behaviour of women.¹⁰³

Kristin Aune’s work similarly looks at the lived religion of feminists introducing the notion that the collective lived behaviour is indeed a lived religious practice that is ‘embodied and practiced

⁹⁸ Jan Berry, *Ritual Making Women: Shaping Rites for Changing Lives*, Gender, Theology, and Spirituality (London ; Oakville, Conn: Equinox Pub, 2009). Janet H. Wootton, *Introducing a Practical Feminist Theology of Worship*, Introductions in Feminist Theology 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Pr, 2000).

⁹⁹ Anna Fedele and Kim E. Knibbe, *Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality: Ethnographic Approaches* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2013). 15.

¹⁰⁰ Berry, *Ritual Making Women*.

¹⁰¹ Berry. 4.

¹⁰² Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002). 110.

¹⁰³ Slee et al., *Female Faith Practices*. 4.

in daily life'.¹⁰⁴ That feminists focus on their political and social liberation further highlights the connection between lived religious practices and the complex narratives around agency. For the experience of Newfrontiers women to be suitably recognised and heard these studies illustrate the field of investigation that is suitable to richly describe their situations.

Susan Shooter's work illustrates the utility of research interviews to understand religious lives and practices. It pivots from agency in the lived to agency in the hermeneutic that offers liberative potential. Her work on survivors of trauma uses qualitative research to interrogate biblical narratives, 'using the survivors' viewpoint as the lens through which we view scripture and academic theology'.¹⁰⁵ Shooter uses the research to garner codes and themes relating to the ways in which women understood traumatic events and the presence of God in their lives throughout. Stories and narratives are used by the nine women interviewed to tell of the presence of God and the presence of evil, both woven together and theologised upon by the women.¹⁰⁶ Finally, accounts of faith practices were given by the women and their impact upon their lives examined by the participants – for example 'Deborah's' account for the practice of scripture reading leading to a sense of calling to ordination.¹⁰⁷ She takes these accounts and 'adds scriptural resonance' by narrating them alongside the biblical story of Job.¹⁰⁸ She reads the lives of the women and of Job alongside one another finding the same themes therein. Job's story, when read in light of the women's testimonies finds the same key themes, thus Job can be understood as a 'survivor of abuse' just in the same manner as the women interviewed.¹⁰⁹ Shooter's work is a critical development in the treatment of empirical work and biblical reflection. The interaction between the lived accounts of women and the story of scripture enriches the description of the women and also the normative suggestions of the study.¹¹⁰ For a Charismatic theological investigation this work is significant as it develops the previous understandings of lived religion but suggests ways in which this is brought into *theological* conversation with the texts that shape the community.

¹⁰⁴ Kristin Aune, 'Feminist Spirituality as Lived Religion: How UK Feminists Forge Religio-Spiritual Lives', *Gender & Society* 29, no. 1 (February 2015): 122–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214545681>. 123, 139.

¹⁰⁵ Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*. 33.

¹⁰⁶ Shooter. 54–58.

¹⁰⁷ Shooter. 66.

¹⁰⁸ Shooter. 81.

¹⁰⁹ Shooter. 112.

¹¹⁰ Shooter. 169–172.

Lived religion and theological enquiry continues in Ruth Perrin's work in the first volume of research from the symposium suggests the relevance of lived religious investigation, qualitative research, and Charismatic Evangelicalism.¹¹¹ In this work she investigates the egalitarian churches and deliberately excludes from her investigation those 'reformed' traditions that embrace 'complementarianism'.¹¹² Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods Perrin looked at the value of relationships in these communities amongst women, particularly the importance of role models. Perrin's work particularly highlights that many studies have already confirmed the importance of relationality in women's faith and her work develops this in terms of faith development.¹¹³ In so doing she illustrates the gap in knowledge that this work seeks to understand in the community that she deliberately avoids, the complementarian communities.¹¹⁴ Perrin's work examined bible reading practice and the formation of role models from scriptural examples. She also illustrates the suitability of lived religious investigation to interrogate the lives of Charismatic Christians confirming the suitability of the appropriation of such methods for this study and illustrating the gap that she chose to leave is one which this study can potentially fill.

Recognising the importance of religious practice and lived religion, and the gendered nature of the same, directs studies of UK women towards ethnographic and qualitative research. The literature surrounding UK Charismatic women, and Newfrontiers women, does not typically include lived religion or practices. This, as I will show, reflects primarily on the experience of gendered leadership and questions that focus on ecclesiology, omitting this important correlated experience. The relationship between women and the church is a critical relationship, says Aune, because women constitute the greater proportion of congregants as well as the driving factor of religious practice and change.¹¹⁵ This is indicative of the importance of engaging with women's spirituality for the growth and development of Practical Theological studies. As corollary to that, Aune also notes that there is little research relating to women's faith lives in conservative Protestant Christianity outside of America.¹¹⁶ The studies about Evangelical Christian women are

¹¹¹ Ruth Perrin, 'Searching for Sisters: The Influence of Biblical Role Models on Young Women from Mainstream and Charismatic Evangelical Traditions', in *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls: Qualitative Research Perspectives*, ed. Nicola Slee, Fran Porter, and Anne Phillips (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016).

¹¹² Perrin. 112.

¹¹³ Perrin. 111.

¹¹⁴ Perrin. 112.

¹¹⁵ Kristin Aune, 'Evangelical Christianity and Women's Changing Lives', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 3 (August 2008): 277–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506808091508>.

¹¹⁶ Aune. 281.

indeed predominantly related to America although I will cite Aune (discussed below) and Collins as exceptions.¹¹⁷

UK Christian Women – The Future of Research

Studies of UK Christian women, such as Abby Day's 2017 and 2022 ethnographies on Generation A and Baby Boomers, have focused on women in the Anglican communion.¹¹⁸ Day's 2017 work explores the faithful and unpaid generation A women's commitment to the church and investigates their lived religion. She asks the question, 'what will happen to the church once these women are gone?', because she finds that they are the last remaining devoted generation to the Christian faith in the Anglican church. She argues that the subsequent generations do not believe as their mothers did.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, their mothers – generation A – had a particular form of lived religion belief that found churches to be extensions of their homes that were spaces of religious devotion and female religious agency.¹²⁰ For the Anglican women of generation A this was to do with duty and obligation.¹²¹ For subsequent generations, there was no such sense of duty to 'God, neighbour, Queen and country'.¹²² When this self-understanding falls away, then Day reflects that the church will become increasingly empty; the faith lives of this generation of UK women are sustaining the UK church in a way that cannot be replaced.

The future of research concerning faith lives of Christian women in the UK is suggested by work such as this. Not only does Day's work not venture into the faith lives of women outside of Anglicanism but she leaves posed and unanswered 'what next?' Is there a life for the UK church when generation A have gone? This question naturally is followed by another – are there other women in the UK who have a sense of a belief that determines sustaining religious behaviour for the church? Are there UK women who are outliers, like the generation A women, who make

¹¹⁷ Susan D. Rose, 'Women Warriors: The Negotiation of Gender in a Charismatic Community', *Sociological Analysis* 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 245–58. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo*. R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Stacey and Gerrard, 'We Are Not Doormats'.

¹¹⁸ Abby Day, *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen: The Last Active Anglican Generation*, First edition (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017). Abby Day, *Why Did Baby Boomers Turn from Religion?*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192866684.003.0001>.

¹¹⁹ Day, *Why Did Baby Boomers Turn from Religion?* 43.

¹²⁰ Day, *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen*. 69.

¹²¹ Day. 177.

¹²² Day. 179.

choices that require explanation and whose lived religious lives are complex and multivalent, and against the grain of prevailing belief about gender, religious practice or freedom? My own earlier study of Newfrontiers women suggests that they may be of a similar type to Day's generation A Anglicans.¹²³ In the same way that Day finds her Generation A women experience church as a form of family,¹²⁴ so also did the Newfrontiers women in my own small study.¹²⁵ The studies and research about UK Christian women have illustrated a gap in the research of Evangelical women broadly and, as I shall illustrate, Charismatic women and Newfrontiers women in particular, concerning what can be learned and understood about their lived religion.

Charismatic Christianity and Women's Faith Lives

The literature about Charismatic spirituality does not frequently address the experiences of women, nor does it include Pentecostalism as part of a wider movement in the manner of Collins.¹²⁶ Spiritual practices and faith lives are omitted from the articles that exist about women in leadership in Charismatic theology.¹²⁷ The primary emphasis in these texts are the debates concerning gender roles and leadership. These exist on a spectrum between those who are egalitarian and believe that Charismatic churches are anti-feminist and those who examine both sides of the gender roles argument, even though they still focus upon this debate above all others. Janet Wootton indeed finds that women have had, traditionally, a worshipful voice in the free churches (most of whom are Evangelical) indicating female agency in worship and the development of distinct practices.¹²⁸ In the same way as with women and leadership, the studies of Charismatic spirituality do not include particular examinations of women's contributions or unique behaviour.¹²⁹ Collins, in her recent work, notes in her chapter, 'Equality', the importance

¹²³ Williams, 'Mothers in Newfrontiers: Charismatic Spirituality, Motherhood and the Christian Tradition'. 151-171.

¹²⁴ Day, *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen*. 72.

¹²⁵ Williams, 'Mothers in Newfrontiers: Charismatic Spirituality, Motherhood and the Christian Tradition'. 165.

¹²⁶ Collins, *Charismatic Christianity Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit*.

¹²⁷ William K. Kay and Anne E. Dyer, eds., *Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies: A Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2004). Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997). David Martin and Peter Mullen, eds., *Strange Gifts? A Guide to Charismatic Renewal* (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1984). Nigel Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium: Do They Have a Future?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995). Joe Aldred, *Pentecostals and Charismatics in Britain: An Anthology* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2019).

¹²⁸ Wootton, *Introducing a Practical Feminist Theology of Worship*. 27.

¹²⁹ Thomas Allan Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993). David Middlemiss, *Interpreting Charismatic Experience* (London: SCM Press, 1996), <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/36300147.html>. Stephen B. Clark, *Charismatic Spirituality* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2004). Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*. Graham Hunter, *Discipline and Desire: Embracing*

of mutuality and celebration of diversity, focusing on the works of Black scholars in particular.¹³⁰ She cites the spiritual practice of glossolalia as an important element of this and is critical, as a spiritual practice that informs a theological ethics of equality. Her work signifies the importance of exploring the nature of this theorised equality and whether, in keeping with an interest in lived religion, this is found in practice.

Although the majority of research does exclude the particularities of women's faith lives, there is a small amount of research about the faith lives of women in Charismatic communities. Susan Rose's article, 'Women Warriors', was a sociological survey based in America about the negotiation of gender in a Charismatic community.¹³¹ Her findings were that women negotiated the demands of their religious community and their gender construction by emphasising the biblical commands that relativise headship.¹³² By admitting that they sacrifice their own position in favour of the male/husband role, by dismissing the importance of feminism, by finding a 'strong male' in their family to be an advantage, and by subversive and empowering prayer roles, she states, 'Prayer, then is one way for women to exercise power and influence within the fellowship and the family'.¹³³

Agency in Charismatic Christianity

Agency as a critical concept becomes demonstrative of lived religious behaviour as well as ecclesiological and theological convictions. Helen Collins' doctoral research studied the worship lives of mothers in Charismatic congregations.¹³⁴ She investigated the behaviour and

Charismatic Liturgical Worship (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2017). John Leach, *Renewing Charismatic Worship* (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2009). Mark Bonnington, *Patterns in Charismatic Spirituality* (Cambridge: Grove, 2007). Colin Ogilvie Buchanan, *Encountering Charismatic Worship*, Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship ; No. 51 (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1977). Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: S.P.C.K, 1996). Victoria Cooke, *Understanding Songs in Renewal* (Cambridge [England]: Grove Books Ltd., 2001). Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹³⁰ Collins, Charismatic Christianity Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit. 115.

¹³¹ Rose, 'Women Warriors: The Negotiation of Gender in a Charismatic Community'.

¹³² 'no matter how successful a man may be in his work or community, if his family is out of order – his wife unhappy or his family uncared-for – he has failed', quoted 246.

¹³³ Rose, 'Women Warriors: The Negotiation of Gender in a Charismatic Community'. 255.

¹³⁴ Helen Collins, 'Weaving Worship and Womb: A Feminist Practical Theology of Charismatic Worship from the Perspective of Early Motherhood' (University of Bristol with Trinity College, 2016). See also Helen Collins, *Mary the*

dissatisfaction of women who attempted to engage in Charismatic worship services and experienced distress at being unable to access typical Charismatic worship in the same way that they had prior to childbirth and motherhood. Her focus on sung worship and church services led to insightful and cohesive suggestions for reimagining self-understanding of these women in light of the biblical example of Mary. By choosing the worship service as the locus of her study, she emphasised what is particularly important for Charismatic worship – the gathered congregation in general, and the worship service in particular. Her work centres the ecclesial setting and hints at the prospects of investigating outside of it for Charismatic women's religious lives.

For empirical researcher and theologian Mark Cartledge, Charismatic women are able to access cultural authority via alternative routes by making use of their spirituality. Charismatic women follow in the footsteps of their Pentecostal forbears who accessed authority in this way. For example, Aimee Semple McPherson, who exercised a gift of prophecy and, at her death, left the Church of the Foursquare Gospel of 410 churches and 29,000 congregants, which she founded.¹³⁵ In this same way, women in Charismatic churches are able to have influence over the congregation via spiritual gifting. However, unlike in Pentecostalism, Cartledge finds that the gifting most likely to be employed by women in Charismatic churches was the gift of visions or being 'slain in the Spirit'. Women, therefore, have particular expressions of agency.

Agency also has a relationship for women with men and the way in which men differ or women use men to construct their agency. For Cartledge, when compared to men, he surveyed those who were more likely to use 'word gifts'. He interprets this as, in one way permissive of women's agency, whilst also containing them to that alone. He also mentions the prevalence of women who are married to church leaders and also having this cultural authority.¹³⁶ This, he says, appears to be the most successful way to exercise authority in a congregation – by having a Charismatic gifting, and a route to its demonstration via a husband in a position of power and

Worshipping Mother: Reclaiming Mary's Motherhood for Contemporary Mums (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2018). Helen Collins, 'When Worship Doesn't Work – Contrasting Concepts of Transformation for Mothers in the Charismatic Movement', *Practical Theology*, 4 July 2019, 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2019.1636174>.

¹³⁵ Mark J Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012). 159.

¹³⁶ Cartledge. 167-169.

influence.¹³⁷ He rightly comments that this is restrictive for single women, those married to non-believers, or to men who do not wish/are not able to be in church leadership. Collins and Cartledge both focus their research on the congregational behaviour of Charismatic women, leaving open an exposed gap in the description of Charismatic lived religion and behaviours that this study will examine.

One way in which Charismatic lived religion can be accessed is through testimony. Based in Australia, but formed by international studies, Tanya Riches and Larney Peerenboom argue that testimony in Pentecostalism has been used as a form of ‘church branding’ and therefore ‘narratives can be highly influenced by patriarchy, sexism and racism...we recognize informal barriers to spiritual formation created in the exclusion of narratives that keep women safe’.¹³⁸ The testimony of Wendy Virgo (explored further below), who is a leader’s wife in Newfrontiers, is an example of such. In this, she narrates that her quest for power in the church is illegitimate. From her platform, her narrative is expanded upon as part of a hermeneutic. Her story, unironically from her position of power as the wife of the founder of Newfrontiers, is the prevailing narrative that causes the interpretation of scripture. Indeed, the importance of testimony for the Charismatic church cannot be underestimated, and it wrestles with the complexity of agency again.

Marcela Chaván de Matviuk argues that for Pentecostals ‘personal narrative’ delivers the Pentecostal message.¹³⁹ She also finds it be an ‘egalitarian form of discourse’ because it is accessible to all who seek to understand it.¹⁴⁰ Narrative functions in an embodied and lived manner, incorporating all aspects of human experience, thus it does not exclude based on class, education, or, indeed, gender. In particular in Pentecostal communities ‘throughout the last three centuries, testimonies have been the most popular way of communicating to others how one becomes saved.’¹⁴¹ The power connected to testimonies is therefore significant, it expresses essential, salvific communicative force. It is the way by which matters of ultimate concern are

¹³⁷ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 2012. 168.

¹³⁸ Tanya Riches and Larney Peerenboom, ‘Complaint as Testimony?: Listening to Australian Pentecostal Christian Women’, *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* 44, no. 1 (2 January 2024): 3–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2024.2334062>. 4.

¹³⁹ Marcela Matviuk, ‘Latin American Pentecostal Growth: Culture, Orality and the Power of Testimonies’, *Asian Journal Of Pentecostal Studies*, 2002, 205–22. 215.

¹⁴⁰ Matviuk and Apts Press. 216.

¹⁴¹ Matviuk and Apts Press. 218.

transmitted. Thus, the implications of testimony that is silenced, or never sought are also connected to issues of power. For Daphne Marsden, the silencing of testimony in complementarian churches is particularly relates to gendered power relations.¹⁴² In her research she encountered women who had not been listened to by their churches regarding their domestic abuse at the hands of their husbands. Their testimony was disregarded because the prevailing belief was in gendered hierarchy reinforced by biblical interpretation.¹⁴³ Agency and the ability to speak and be heard are closely correlated.

Thus, agency is a complex notion in Charismatic Christianity. Aune notes that religion writ large has been considered in the past to be contra to the agency of individual women,

Liberal feminist views of agency as autonomy and resistance to patriarchal norms often contradict religious understandings of agency (Mahmood 2005). Feminism's secularist assumptions derive also from feminism's socialist or Marxist inheritance, wherein religion is rejected as a form of false consciousness blinding women to their oppression or teaching that freedom is for a utopian afterlife (Braidotti 2008).¹⁴⁴

Aune's argument suggests this complexity in religion and the view of religion from sociology and feminism concerning agency. She critiques the assumption that agency is *necessarily* autonomy and that therefore women *necessarily* require freedom from religion. Agency is framed as a concern of feminist history, Aune notes the preponderance of second-wave feminism to conscientize women to the possibilities of life beyond the domestic sphere – with the corollary negative effect that had on religious observance.¹⁴⁵

Agency is accessed and performed via embodied practices of a Charismatic type. Martyn Percy writes that women in Charismatic churches¹⁴⁶ experience a somatic and romantic relationship

¹⁴² Daphne Marsden, 'The Church's Contribution to Domestic Violence: Submission, Headship, and Patriarchy', in *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion*, ed. Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, and Katie B. Edwards (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 73–95, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72685-4_5.

¹⁴³ Marsden. <https://www.perlego.com/book/3494959>.

¹⁴⁴ Kristin Aune, 'Feminist Spirituality as Lived Religion: How UK Feminists Forge Religio-Spiritual Lives', *Gender & Society* 29, no. 1 (February 2015): 122–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214545681>. 124.

¹⁴⁵ Aune.

¹⁴⁶ His study is based on the Toronto blessing, a Vineyard Church, and, therefore, in the third wave of Pentecostalism like Newfrontiers.

with God.¹⁴⁷ This allows for a relative power imbalance to be partially righted by participating with authority in worship and small group leadership. This comes via their experience of Charismatic spirituality and the displays of ‘eroticism’ that lend them credibility within the church community. Percy calls this a re-empowering of women who are excluded from other aspects of community power such as being a pastor. Percy writes an insightful account, yet some of his analysis is patronising: ‘The type of woman “set free” here is an issue...namely, married women in middle age, for whom the recovery of romance as a means of reconstituting relationship may seem attractive’.¹⁴⁸ He continues by writing about the similarities offered by ‘undemanding’ romantic fiction. However, he writes as an outsider to that community and as a man writing about the experiences of women. His own hermeneutical power in his analysis is unacknowledged.

As the ability to speak and be heard is related to the issue of agency so also is an analysis of agency and speech in academic research. Percy does not allow for what Donna Haraway termed ‘situated knowledges’.¹⁴⁹ For Haraway knowledge in research is fundamentally perspective laden and the quest for objectivity particularly futile. For Practical Theological research this is expressed by Pete Ward when he writes of the ‘affective gravitational pull of the Church’¹⁵⁰ and Tone Stangeland Kaufman who interprets this as a requirement for awareness of one's position in relationship to church tradition and academic questions.¹⁵¹ For Kaufman this requires the researcher to understand their relationship to their own ‘interpretative horizon’ in relationship to spirituality and church affiliation.¹⁵² For Percy, it is possible that a history in the leadership of the Anglican tradition has not been acknowledged fully in his critique of the worship practices of women in the Charismatic tradition. Percy’s study and Aune’s commentary both suggest - in different ways - the need for nuanced and complex descriptions of agency in women's lived

¹⁴⁷ Martyn Percy, ‘Sweet Rapture: Subliminal Eroticism in Contemporary Charismatic Worship’, *Theology and Sexuality* 6 (1997): 71–106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/135583589700300605>.

¹⁴⁸ Percy. 103.

¹⁴⁹ Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

¹⁵⁰ Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017). 4.

¹⁵¹ Tone Stangeland Kaufman, ‘Practicing Reflexivity: Becoming Aware of One’s Default Mode and Developing an Epistemic Advantage’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2022), 111–20, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119756927.ch12>.

¹⁵² Kaufman. 112.

religion that holds the tensions that women experience seriously and seeks to describe them theologically.

Day notes that women who do exercise alternative behaviours of spirituality don't value them necessarily for what the practices achieve, she says,

While I was aware, in my own pursuits in religious studies, of how theorists often negated or denigrated women's labour, both material and spiritual, I was unprepared for how the women I observed appeared to do it as well. I have already mentioned that they dismissed the power of their 'chatting' as unimportant, but I also observed how they often created theodicy by blaming women for the problems they observed.¹⁵³

Day highlights the lived religion of the Baptist women that she researched, that offered an alternative way of life to the world around them. Day's, 'Wednesday Women' (so called because they met on a Wednesday), understood themselves as living alternative lifestyles and Day understood them to be enacting 'resistance' to the secularised world around them by committing to their 'conservative religion'.¹⁵⁴

Day's study highlights the complex relationship between devalued women's practices and the meaning they might have in response and relationship with the world around them. Although Day studied Baptist women who have a complex relationship to Charismatic spirituality, the study is still illuminating because their behaviour is resistant to the secularised majority, and this is particularly understood in gendered terms. The alternativity of their lived religion is viewed as less-than their male counterparts, and their disempowerment, according to Day, is designed to 'preserve their religious tradition and place within an increasingly secular world'.¹⁵⁵ Although this describes the women's relationship with the world outside the church, it does not take a theological view of the women's spiritual practices. It also does not articulate a theological interpretation that understood what might be advantageous to maintaining this stance or understood as motivated by factors that are not sociological, such as hermeneutical devices or authoritative teaching. Rather, it is a difference that should be accounted for sociologically for

¹⁵³ Abby Day, 'Wilfully Disempowered: A Gendered Response to a 'Fallen World'', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 3 (August 2008): 261–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506808091507>. 264.

¹⁵⁴ Day. 265.

¹⁵⁵ Day. 265.

Day with some reflection upon 'belief narratives', which hints at theological reflection but does not develop it.¹⁵⁶

Not all Evangelical (nor Charismatic) women are the same. Aune points out that most of the research thus far focuses on women who are married, have children, and do not participate in full time employment (the employment element is captured neatly in Day's example – all the Baptist women are part-time employed and mothers).¹⁵⁷ This misses the agency of those women in the communities who do not fit these categories. Aune notes that this does not account, for example, for single women, single mothers, or women who are employed full time. These women constitute a gap in the literature that Aune fills with her work on Evangelical women in Newfrontiers churches (see below). However, this point is also true theologically. The works thus far treat Evangelicals as a homogenous group according to belief. However, not even all New Apostolic Churches (of which Newfrontiers is a type) are theologically similar, having differences in beliefs regarding mission, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Therefore, any study of women in Evangelicalism or even in Charismatic Christianity risks ignoring the Newfrontiers women.¹⁵⁸

Research into the faith lives and lived religion of women particularly reveals the non-traditional behaviours that navigate the complexities of agency and power. It enables the syncretic, fused religious practices and the behaviour of women in society today to be examined, especially in light of the disputed secularisation of the West. Following Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead, lived religious studies allows for the 'issues of selfhood and identity' to be taken seriously.¹⁵⁹ Faith lives and lived religion grapples with questions of agency and embodied practices, recognising the complex and multivalent nature of these but also – as studies such as Day's, Collin's and Cartledge's illustrate – how they make use of the tools which might be understood to oppress them.

¹⁵⁶ Day, 268.

¹⁵⁷ Aune, 'Evangelical Christianity and Women's Changing Lives'. 282.

¹⁵⁸ There are two significant works about Apostolic Networks, Kay and Walker, but they do not directly address the experience of women.¹⁵⁸ They mention women only in the context of leadership and governance of the church. In this way they are similar in their research emphases of the wider conservative Evangelical scholarly community.

¹⁵⁹ Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead, 'Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 2 (June 2008): 259–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00406.x>. 259.

Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Work of Kristin Aune

Kristin Aune has written one of the only academic treatment of women in Newfrontiers churches. She assesses how gender is constructed from a sociological perspective. She finds that this construction is postfeminist, that it is reactive against feminist discourse, and that it is different in Newfrontiers public discourse compared to local Newfrontiers congregations.

Aune says that, at their formation, most Restoration congregations, ‘aligned themselves in opposition to the sexual counter-culture and second wave feminism, supporting strongly conservative, gender-differentiated theology and practices’.¹⁷⁹ She writes from a sociology of religion perspective. Her thesis is that gender is socially constructed and therefore ethnographic research reveals the constitution of gender in particular groups of individuals. Aune also writes from a time period when second wave feminism was the primary feminist movement. Now, fourth wave feminism can be sometimes called the primary feminist expression.¹⁸⁰ Although it is not the purpose of this thesis to place Newfrontiers women into a particular feminist phase, it is noteworthy that Newfrontiers women are being influenced by a developed and developing feminist tradition in the society around them that has changed since Aune did her research and her work could now be updated. However, this does not mean that Aune’s work is not of immense value. Aune states that her primary finding is that Newfrontiers women are influenced by a ‘postfeminist discourse’.¹⁸¹ She describes postfeminism as ‘a sometimes-contradictory adherence’ to both gender traditionalism and feminism occurring in late modernity.¹⁸²

Aune finds that Newfrontiers churches, amongst the other New Apostolic Churches, were reactive to both secular and Evangelical feminism.¹⁸³ In her chapter called ‘Gender in NFT’s Public Settings: Publications and Conferences’, Aune places Newfrontiers in the ‘backlash against “secular” feminism’ with some notes of response to the Evangelical feminist position as

¹⁷⁹ Aune, ‘Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches’, 2004. 10.

¹⁸⁰ Harriet Kimble Wrye, ‘The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Psychoanalytic Perspectives Introductory Remarks’, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 10, no. 4 (16 October 2009): 185–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240650903227999>. 2.

¹⁸¹ Kristin Aune, ‘Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches’ (Kings College, University of London, 2004).

¹⁸² Aune. 92.

¹⁸³ Aune. 119.

well.¹⁸⁴ These are described by Aune as being central to NFI's theology. Aune finds that in the public discourse regarding gender roles demonstrated in the bible conferences such as Stoneleigh¹⁸⁵ and the public discourse concerning male eldership. Aune mentions the role of Wendy Virgo in promoting this view. Wendy Virgo is Terry Virgo's wife and is the author of a number of books, some of which discuss the nature of gender roles from the Newfrontiers understanding. Aune finds Virgo's views to be in line with other male leaders of the network in promoting an understanding of biblical commands regarding church leadership.¹⁸⁶ So also, Terry Virgo, Mike Betts (currently head of the Relational Mission sphere) and Steve Blaber (current elder at Grace Church, Chichester) are accredited with articulating and promoting male leadership as the biblical norm.¹⁸⁷

Aune expands her research to illustrate Evangelicals' experience based upon Newfrontiers. She makes a critical point for her own research and for this thesis:

Because discourse is easier to uncover than practice, especially when the historical past is being investigated, I attend throughout this study a little more to what constitutes separate spheres, feminist, backlash or postfeminist discourse than practice. I recognise the danger this holds of ignoring embodied subjects...¹⁸⁸

This study can be said to constitute a continuation of Aune's work, attempting from the standpoint of Practical Theology to investigate the nature of the embodied practices that Aune recognises as an element of research that she could not complete within the bounds of her study. Nonetheless, it is critical to understand what her study did demonstrate from the discourses she witnessed and her analysis thereof.

¹⁸⁴ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 111.

¹⁸⁵ 1998 – Wendy Virgo's talk about rebuking a 'Jezebellic Spirit' see below.

¹⁸⁶ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 127.

¹⁸⁷ Aune. 127-128 For Mike Betts: <https://www.relationalmission.org/leadership> [accessed 11/04/2024] and for Steve Blaber <https://wearegrace.uk/about-us/> [accessed 11/04/2024].

¹⁸⁸ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 90-91.

The Jezebellic Spirit

It is worth expanding upon the notion of a 'Jezebellic Spirit' as Aune dwells upon it particularly. The Jezebellic Spirit is the primary scriptural story that is mapped onto the lives of Newfrontiers women. The hermeneutical process that incorporates some lived experience (of a restrictive type) and scriptural themes has described women in this way. It, as Aune shows, forms a large part of the self-understanding of the behaviour of women in churches despite a variety of responses to it. It connects to this research because it identifies a 'demonic spirit' that particularly oppresses women and causes them to 'challenge male authority'.¹⁸⁹

In relationship to the self and agential power Aune's discussion of Jezebel is particularly relevant for this study. Aune lists the Jezebellic spirit as one of three conservative discourses she identified in Newfrontiers.¹⁹⁰ I choose to focus on this discourse rather than the other two, which Aune identifies as male church authority and the role of women because it particularly relates to the lived religion and experiences of women that this thesis seeks to understand.¹⁹¹ This is because, as shall become evident, that the interaction with the idea of a Jezebellic spirit relates to marriages and spiritual behaviour, and as Aune describes 'the complex interplay of ideology and practice concerning gender'.¹⁹²

Aune takes up the narrative from the Fort Lauderdale Five who promoted this particular 'spirit' as a feminist influence upon the authority of male eldership.¹⁹³ Wendy Virgo, the wife of Terry Virgo, spoke at a bible week about this topic.¹⁹⁴ Virgo understands the 'Jezebellic Spirit' to be one that influences a woman to resist the authority of her husband.¹⁹⁵ This is done in a way that undermines a God given order and also causes harm to the marital and church relationship. Virgo's emphasis is upon the effect this has on the woman involved. It is important to note that Virgo understands that this influence is also possible in men as well as women, both of whom

¹⁸⁹ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 129.

¹⁹⁰ Aune. 125.

¹⁹¹ Aune. 127 and 133.

¹⁹² Aune. 132.

¹⁹³ Aune. Aune describes these men as 'independent Pentecostals who worked closely with British House Church leaders in the early to mid 1970s'. 27.

¹⁹⁴ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 129.

¹⁹⁵ Aune. 130-131.

suffer from a desire to control, dominate and manipulate.¹⁹⁶ This is demonstrated in women regarding complementarianism by a resistance to the authority of a husband in a marriage and a negotiating of power and influence in church leadership. The Jezebel narrative is a discourse that relates to power and agency and has significant affective power for those who hear it.

Virgo describes this 'Jezebelic' position as one in which she has found herself. She then also describes the way in which she rejected that and repented of her influence of this 'satanic attitude'.¹⁹⁷ This is articulated in many different places, but one example is in, 'Women Set Free', where she describes the interplay between submission and freedom.¹⁹⁸ This interplay results in the understanding that the will of God is sovereign over the lives of Christians. This may not be a particularly desirable direction (biblical examples being Mary, Abraham, Joseph, Job, and Ruth). However, despite the will of God being 'tough', it is a 'privilege' to submit and releases God's power to do his will, says Virgo.¹⁹⁹ Virgo's point of note here, that is pertinent to Aune's analysis, is that the notion of submission of women to men is reductionist if all people are to submit to God.²⁰⁰ Aune describes an event where prayer ministry was offered to all although only women took up the offer.²⁰¹ Despite men and women being potentially oppressed by the Jezebelic spirit, the narrative and response at the event only concerned women.

At this juncture it is relevant to introduce Miranda Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice and in particular hermeneutical injustice. First introduced by her in her original text, Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as relating to an ability of an individual to understand themselves in relationship to the social constructs of understanding governed by those in power.²⁰² Fricker provides a methodological framework that relates power and epistemology and connects it to issues of injustice. She describes two forms of injustice related to epistemology: testimonial

¹⁹⁶ Wendy Virgo, *Influential Women: From the New Testament to Today - How Women Can Build up (or Undermine) Their Local Church* (Oxford: Monarch, 2009). 186.

¹⁹⁷ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 131.

¹⁹⁸ Wendy Virgo, *Women Set Free*. (Kingsway, 1989).

¹⁹⁹ Virgo. 137-149.

²⁰⁰ Virgo. 137.

²⁰¹ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 132.

²⁰² Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Repr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). 147.

injustice which is ‘when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word’.²⁰³ This is associated with hermeneutical injustice which is the inability to describe one’s own social situation because of collective inability to describe a process fully, thus the absence of a ‘critical concept’.²⁰⁴ Fricker’s understanding is particularly helpful in relationship to this study because it focuses upon the accounts given by individuals – their testimony – and the ways in which these are received. The women in Newfrontiers both give me their accounts but also in doing so describe their previous experiences of giving account to the church. As I have argued in this chapter, personal testimony, agency, and power are closely correlated in the academic narrative and in the self-understanding of Newfrontiers women.

Power is particularly relevant in the Jezebel narrative where those in power – in particular the Virgos – have created a ‘shared hermeneutical resource’ that all in Newfrontiers are subject to.²⁰⁵ Fricker has more recently nuanced this type of behaviour as being ‘discriminatory epistemic injustice’ which differentiates from ‘epistemic injustice’ more broadly that relates to distributive knowledge production and access.²⁰⁶ Hermeneutical injustice is connected to ‘unequal hermeneutical opportunity’ which comes from lack of social power.²⁰⁷ Aune’s work reveals a narrative about women and power that is created by those who are already in power. Because this narrative works to prevent women gaining the power they would need to challenge this hermeneutic it remains unequal and discriminatory in the ability to challenge or change the discourse.

Wendy Virgo is highlighted by Aune as the primary individual that shapes discourse, relegating other women’s experiences as without epistemic power for the movement. For although Virgo speaks of this submission in principle, she preaches with authority and has a ‘special status as Terry’s wife’.²⁰⁹ Aune’s conclusion is that it is not a straightforward rejection of feminism that influences the public views of Newfrontiers, because Aune understands Virgo to have a personal authority whilst minimising the collective authority of women.

²⁰³ Fricker. 1.

²⁰⁴ Fricker. 1.

²⁰⁵ Fricker. 148.

²⁰⁶ Miranda Fricker, ‘Evolving Concepts of Epistemic Injustice’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043>. 53.

²⁰⁷ Fricker. 54-55.

²⁰⁹ Aune. 132.

Exacerbating a complex hermeneutical environment, Aune notes Terry Virgo is quoted in the magazine *Christianity and Renewal* as describing women as being ‘very involved’ and that it is not a problem for women who are part of Newfrontiers to be in a complementarian church.²¹⁰ Indeed, he claims:

We simply and honestly believe that the Bible shows us that there are roles in the church that are gender-specific and that if these principles are correctly observed we shall see women blossom and flourish into the beautiful potential God has for them.²¹¹

Virgo here employs gendered, romanticised language to illustrate how women are allowed to grow and develop under the authority of men and that the ‘caricature’ of Newfrontiers ‘NFI (No Females Included)’ is ‘completely inaccurate’.²¹² Aune’s work develops how gender is understood and constructed in these terms but does not engage in the faith lives of women in these churches. Aune refers to the ‘rhetoric’ of Newfrontiers, this is concerned with ‘gifts’ and the notion of Romans 12.4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12–14 where all members of a church have different offers to the function of the church. She concedes that the anti-clerical position taken by Newfrontiers allows for more women to be active in congregations, versus, for example, a Baptist congregation that ordains one woman while the remainder are relatively inactive and passive church members.

Feminism as a movement is used as a foil for Newfrontiers’ ideas about women and agency. Aune comments upon the frequent use of the word ‘release’ as suggestive that Newfrontiers believe that feminism traps women in an undesirable position. Her conclusion is that Newfrontiers has subconsciously adopted the language of the feminist movement in their use of ‘release’, ‘liberation’, and ‘empowerment’. Additionally, this language could be interpreted as also related to the spiritual warfare movement. For example, the belief in spirits and a personal devil who afflicts people, the idea of a war against these principalities, all garners language similar to

²¹⁰ Aune, ‘Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches’, 2004. 135.

²¹¹ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*. 303.

²¹² Virgo. 303.

the feminist language.²¹³ Newfrontiers response to perceived feminist attack is to characterise feminism itself which leads to a complicated relationship with its main themes.

The complexity of agency and voice for women is partly revealed in the local church. At Westside (the pseudonym for the church that Aune researched), women were allowed to lead ('anchor') church services, which meant vetting contributions from the congregation in order to be sure that they were suitable and use discernment to ascertain that their inspiration was indeed from God. This is a level of temporary authority which can, and did for Aune, show times of a wife exhibiting authority over her husband/church leader. Women exercised egalitarian authority for prophetic utterances in contrast to the public discourse of Newfrontiers which suggested unequal authoritative speech. Although not all women believe that they have this prophetic ability, those who do are able to use it to speak with authority. This thesis seeks to further develop the idea of authority in speech in Aune's work. Aune noted that male prophesiers were more likely to use gendered images when prophesying than female, particularly in relation to physical beauty. Despite this, there was also evidence of subversion of gender stereotypes, of which the male prophesiers made use, such as remarking about the oppression and future freedom of an individual whom Aune refers to as able 'to affirm feminist critiques of women's marginality'.²²⁵ Prophecy therefore, in Aune's study, is evidenced as a way in which women are in practice given 'privilege and recognition'.²²⁶ However, despite attempts at feminist 'subversive' metaphors in prophecy the women's influence is curtailed by male authority.²²⁷ The nature and quality of the spirituality of the women involved, particularly regarding questions of operation – prophetic and living with notions of 'Jezebellic Spirits' – is not addressed in Aune's study.

Aune's study reveals Newfrontiers, at the time of her work, lacked a thorough hermeneutical understanding of women and their places in the church. It shows that what is declared in the espoused and normative theologies is diluted at the local level, or even dismissed. It reveals inconsistencies in the application of the discourses even with those who profess them publicly.

²¹³ Opoku Onyinah, 'Spiritual Warfare', in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey, First issued in paperback, Routledge Handbooks in Theology (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022). 321.

²²⁵ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches', 2004. 165.

²²⁶ Aune.165.

²²⁷ Aune. 167.

Aune illustrates a need for a renewed hermeneutic and self-understanding for the women that reflects their own lived experiences and the actual practices in the church.

Complementarianism and Agency in Newfrontiers

Scotland writes that the R1 churches of the New Apostolic movement were known in their early days for their attitudes towards women as ‘subservient’.²⁴² In the Bradford Harvest Church, he says, women were expected to cover their heads as a sign of their submission. Bryn Jones’ church had a ‘pass the veil’ ritual for women who wished to speak in the service. They had to raise their hand to indicate that they wished to give a prophetic word or other permitted speech and then the veil was passed to them to follow 1 Corinthians 11.5. This contrasts to Pioneer and Ichthus churches of the New Apostolic Movement who did allow women in national leadership. Nonetheless, those churches who do not have this opinion (he cites Vineyard, Salt and Light and Newfrontiers) may still allow women to give prophecy with authority.²⁴³

There are a handful of studies that describe and assess Newfrontiers within the broader group of New Apostolic Churches. These books are primarily accounts of the history of the movement. They are littered with the names of men and are effectively an account of the actions of those men. The histories frequently speak of men who met other men and became friends with them, had a meeting, and introduced other men to them.²⁴⁴ They fall into the trap of narrating the experience of the church entirely from the perspective of men. Elizabeth Johnson argues,

Feminist religious scholarship also searches for ignored, suppressed, or alternative wisdom both inside and outside of that mainstream, for bits and pieces that hint at the untold stories of the contributions of women and the possibility of different construal of

²⁴² Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium*. 86 In the few studies that surround these churches Andrew Walker is famous for his sociological designations R1 and R2. These represent the two Restoration factions that developed. This split happened in 1976. Walker uses sociological types to define the two groups. ‘R1’ is the most like the ideal type of Restorationism. This is Bryn Jones’ group and also Virgo’s. ‘R2’ is the more liberal group and was populated by such as Gerald Coates. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*.

²⁴³ Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium*. 86-87.

²⁴⁴ A few examples: Terry Virgo’s book *No Well Worn Paths* is a continued account of friendships and church relationships with other men. Virgo, *No Well Worn Paths*. This is also the case with Walker’s *Restoring the Kingdom* and Hocken’s account of charismatic renewal *Streams of Renewal*. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*. Hocken, *Streams of Renewal*.

reality. The hope is to discover dormant theological themes and neglected history that will contribute to a future of full personhood for women. Although women's words have been censored or eliminated from much of Christian heritage, in the midst of the pain of dehumanization women have nevertheless always been there...²⁴⁵

There are women in the history and experience of the Newfrontiers churches but too little is known about them. Whilst Johnson writes with great skill of a greater theological and church historical problem, this thesis can contribute to correcting the Newfrontiers' gap about the stories of these women from a Charismatic theological perspective.

Where women are noted in the academic literature, it is brief and relates primarily to leadership and authority. Kay's large volume on the New Apostolic Churches covers little material specifically about women. He notes in passing that women were freed in the early form of the movement from dress codes of the 1930s and 1950s. However, this is contradicted by the evidence of head coverings in some of the churches. Other mentions of women are primarily to do with leadership roles in churches with passing references to groups held for women. Andrew Walker is similar in mentioning women only in relation to issues of leadership and submission of women to men in various situations. He also discusses the shepherding movement's interaction with women briefly, but this does not reflect particularly on Newfrontiers as they did not participate in a heavy shepherding model.²⁴⁶ It does speak, however, to the notion that the lives of women were under the scrutiny of church leadership in R1 churches and that this influence may still be felt in Newfrontiers. Finally, Virgo's, 'No Well Worn Paths', articulates the stance of Newfrontiers regarding women in leadership – that there aren't any.²⁴⁷ The academic literature about Newfrontiers rarely notices women, when it does it typically relates it to gender role within marriage but most particularly in church leadership. This is in part because of the complementarian beliefs of Newfrontiers (and a few other R1 churches) being different to both society and other Christian denominations. However, Newfrontiers has women in its congregations and these women are living lives of faith that are not described in detail. It is the purpose of this research to expand upon the academic work and look more closely at the lived religion of Newfrontiers women both in relationship to gender and authority and more widely in

²⁴⁵ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2018). 30.

²⁴⁶ Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*. 184.

²⁴⁷ Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*. 301.

their faith lives.

I wish now to situate the women who form the research participants within the context of lived religion in Newfrontiers as it is today. Complementarianism can be described as a form of teaching that describes ideal relationships between genders, often referred to as ‘gender roles’. It situates men as suitable for leadership and women as necessarily submissive.²⁴⁸ This leadership can relate to church governance and to marriage. Complementarianism is based upon an interpretation of particular biblical passages heavily influenced by particular scholarship, especially John Piper and Wayne Grudem’s, ‘Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism’.²⁴⁹ Rosie Clare Shorter finds complementarianism less a theological position and more a Christian discourse that constructs both boundaries and narratives.²⁵⁰ She describes the primary idea of complementarianism as telling ‘a story of how men and women are equal but different. As a result, men should lead and women should submit, in the home and in the church.’²⁵¹ However, there is also an abundance of variation in the application of complementarian beliefs in churches. Similar to Shorter, Marion Maddox claims that as an ideology, complementarianism is inconsistently applied in churches serving only as a ‘rhetorical marker of difference’.²⁵² This corresponds even to the conflict within Newfrontiers as presented by Aune.

Thus, it is necessary to describe the way in which complementarian ideology presents itself in recent Newfrontiers history and in the life of the church today. Merely describing the church as committed to complementarianism would be insufficient because of the ambiguity over the definition and practice of the belief. Aune describes the origins of the House Church movement as having significant correlation with a response to the gender shifts of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁵³ It became central, she argues, to theological distinctives in the first House Churches (of which

²⁴⁸ Rosie Clare Shorter, ‘Rethinking Complementarianism: Sydney Anglicans, Orthodoxy and Gendered Inequality’, *Religion and Gender* 11, no. 2 (22 November 2021): 218–44, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18785417-bja10005>.

²⁴⁹ John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Revised edition (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020).

²⁵⁰ Shorter, ‘Rethinking Complementarianism’. 218.

²⁵¹ Shorter. 219.

²⁵² Maddox M, “‘Rise Up Warrior Princess Daughters’: Is Evangelical Women’s Submission a Mere Fairy Tale?’, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 1 (2013): 9–26. 11.

²⁵³ Kristin Aune, ‘Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches’ (Kings College, University of London, 2004). 119.

Newfrontiers was one) to illustrate gender differentiations. Conflating the sexual revolution and second-wave feminism, while rejecting both, the House Churches positioned themselves against these ideas as morally abhorrent.²⁵⁴ This resulted in the nuclear family with the male head of a household being the core normative familial structure. In churches, the consequences of this were complex.

The complexity of the Newfrontiers stance is illustrated in its relationship to other, stricter forms of complementarianism. Many of the early House Churches were formed of ex-Brethren members. In Brethren churches women were expected to keep silent.²⁵⁵ However, in the House Churches, the new Charismatic experience allowed women to speak and prophesy in the churches in keeping with the Pentecostal influence.²⁵⁶ Terry Virgo interpreted the Charismatic gifts as allowing for women to speak in churches, at odds with the inheritance of Reformed and Brethren theology that influenced the first Restorationists. Virgo writes in his autobiography of an ex-Brethren member of his church who left the congregation because of women praying publicly.²⁵⁷ However, in the same volume Virgo identifies the decision that no women will be in 'governmental leadership' in Newfrontiers, as an identity marker in a chapter entitled, 'Turning Up the Contrast'.²⁵⁸ Virgo identifies this as a way in which the church is different to the world around it, that Jesus was a 'rock of offence' and so also is the church in the way that it is unpalatable to society with decisions about women.²⁵⁹ Newfrontiers occupies a position that rejects feminism, rejects extreme complementarianism, and is uncertain about its theological view on women, power and agency.

From the available research, it is apparent that the espoused view of Newfrontiers is essentialist in their gender construction and applies this perspective to their theology of eldership.

According to the original research by Aune there appears to be pragmatic differences between espoused belief and practice of gender roles, especially in marital relationships where authority is

²⁵⁴ Aune. 120.

²⁵⁵ Aune. 120.

²⁵⁶ Aune. Aune notes that women in Pentecostal churches became 'quasi-preachers' allowing the authority of the Holy Spirit to justify their speaking out in churches. 112.

²⁵⁷ 80 Virgo, *No Well-Worn Paths*. 80.

²⁵⁸ Virgo. 301.

²⁵⁹ Virgo. 301.

negotiated more fluidly.²⁶⁰ Newfrontiers has continued to articulate a complementarian form of church governance since its initial position in the 1970s. Recently, ‘Think Theology’, the website associated with some Newfrontiers theologians, has suggested that the key issue to be understood in this area involves women teaching in churches. This is because teaching is associated with defending doctrine, which is the role given to elders in the churches according to their interpretation of scripture. The view states that the position that is only available to men in the churches is ‘eldership’. This eldership is a form of church leadership that is reflected in the created order. The difference between men and women is essentialised because of differences that are highlighted in Genesis 1 and 2, this according to Andrew Wilson, the website’s lead contributor and a well-known theologian within Newfrontiers.²⁶¹ The essential differences between men and women lead to different roles and different positions of authority in both the home and the church. Women, according to Andrew Wilson’s analysis, are biblically mandated to submit to their husbands. This submission is mutual however, husbands are also expected to submit to their wives,

But not in identical ways. Christ and the church serve each other, but we do not do so in the same fashion: Christ serves us by dying and rising to rescue us, and we serve him by responding in faith to his leadership.²⁶²

Thus the authority is described as mutual but negotiates and relativises it in practice. It is this association with the leadership of Christ and the church that informs the view that women and men are different in church leadership also. Elders of the church in this understanding are male, and are understood to be ‘guardians’ of the church – charged with protecting the flock. This includes theologically, and they are understood to be guardians of doctrine also. This theological guardianship means that women are restricted from teaching in churches anything that is considered to be ‘big T’ teaching. Big T teaching is the form of teaching reserved only for those who protect the church as elders and is to do with guarding doctrine. ‘Little t’ teaching is the

²⁶⁰ Kristin Aune, ‘Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches’ (Kings College, University of London, 2004). 184.

²⁶¹ Wilson, Andrew

https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/beautiful_difference_the_complementarity_of_male_and_female [accessed 5/1/2023].

²⁶² Wilson, Andrew

https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/beautiful_difference_the_complementarity_of_male_and_female [accessed 5/1/2023].

teaching that is available to all members of the church in keeping with Paul's biblical instruction in Colossians 3.16 to 'teach and admonish one another in all wisdom'.²⁶³ These instructions allow for all members of a congregation to potentially speak before the gathered church whether they are male or female, but only male elders to speak on issues of doctrinal significance, Wilson calls the male only teaching 'big T teaching' which defines doctrine and practice. Women are allowed to perform 'little t teaching', which is described by Wilson as, 'quoting, explaining and applying Scripture, under the guidance and oversight of the elders'.²⁶⁴ This furthers the complexity in the application of complementarianism in Newfrontiers that is noted by Aune, Newfrontiers appears to have changed its position from the early view in the 1970s and has given to some limited agency in preaching and teaching within the local church.

Therefore, agency in Newfrontiers churches can be found in a number of places. Tanya Riches and Larney Peerenboom note that, in Hillsong women, coming from an egalitarian church network with prominent female leaders continued to ascribed to notions of ideal femininity. To access this role they would rely upon status as mothers and wives, particularly of male church leaders.²⁶⁵ Aune's study of Newfrontiers similarly found reliance upon marriage and motherhood and in particular where there is no visibility for women as leaders, access to power for this network is found in marriage relationship.²⁶⁶ Thus, Wendy Virgo, has power to offer interpretative frameworks based on her testimony as the wife of Terry Virgo. Wendy Virgo's ability to narrate also relates to another element of female agency in UK Charismatic churches – that of gender roles via marriage.

Ross Wignall's study of one of the more prominent Newfrontiers churches in the UK, Church of Christ the King in Brighton (CCK), illustrates this form of adaptive agency. Wignall begins the article with a description of Lou Fellingham, a member of the Fellingham worship family. She leads worship in the congregation and is described by Wignall as having 'youthful dynamism,

²⁶³ Wilson.

²⁶⁴ <https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/teaching-with-a-little-t-and-a-big-t> [accessed 5/1/2023].

²⁶⁵ Riches and Peerenboom, 'Complaint as Testimony?' 9.

²⁶⁶ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches'. 139.

combined with acute femininity and a euphoric sense of worship'²⁶⁷ Wignall argues that agency, for Fellingham in particular,

Her story also contains the complex paradox of Charismatic feminine agency and spiritual authority, whereby a woman cuts her way into the world but is always under the supervision and control of male leadership.²⁶⁸

Citing Saba Mahmood's study of Egyptian mosque attendees²⁶⁹ Wignall argues that agency in CCK is complex interweaving of religious behaviours that 'defy categorisation'.²⁷⁰ This is the case in the broader field of research that examines the role of women in conservative faith traditions. Male elders and leaders at CCK account for women as 'very gifted' and describe those they label as such as having pastoral and caring skills. Wignall understands this as a positive interpretation of the traditional gender roles and differentiation.²⁷¹ Agency for such women Wignall finds, comes in the feminized roles available to them – such as being an elder's wife or a worship leader. These roles are tentative and at the gift of the male leaders in the community and agency comes from the performance of particular feminized behaviours, in what he labels the 'charismatic bargain'.²⁷² The bargain is that their power can be significant as long as they conform to the feminized version that is acceptable and accept their reliance for their situation on the male forms of absolute power within the community. This corresponds to Aune's wider demographic in her study about Evangelical women who

Conversely, agency in Newfrontiers churches is deemed more suitable and accessible for young men who otherwise exhibit disenfranchisement.

²⁶⁷ Ross Wignall, 'Becoming a "Gospel Woman": Agency, Youth, and Gender at a Charismatic Church in Brighton and Hove, UK', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 38, no. 1 (2 January 2023): 61–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2022.2155367>. 62.

²⁶⁸ Wignall. 63.

²⁶⁹ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400839919>.

²⁷⁰ Wignall, 'Becoming a "Gospel Woman"'. 66.

²⁷¹ Wignall. 69.

²⁷² Wignall. 74.

For young men especially, the church offers a route towards empowerment and agency which they are denied in mainstream life, a way of ascending to manhood that is self-evident and deeply fulfilling in a way that other routes to manhood are not.²⁷³

Indeed the need that CCK has to provide male leaders, against a surplus of women, led to what Wignall terms ‘Charismatic positive discrimination’.²⁷⁴ This also references the possibility for all men in a Newfrontiers church to ascend to the socially important heights of eldership or even apostleship. This is particularly the case when the manner of appointing such leaders is nondescript and largely at the whim of the other men in positions of authority.²⁷⁵ The field is open to all men who display the appropriate skills, which Wignall finds to be a combination of preaching ability, relational networks, and appropriately demonstrated hegemonic masculinity.²⁷⁶ This is also the case in Newfrontier’s missionary outreach which is particularly dependent upon church planting. This too is gendered with church planters called ‘fathers in the faith’ and involved in the foundations of these nascent communities.²⁷⁷

The research that exists about Newfrontiers and women focuses upon their interaction with gender constructions and leadership in marriages and the church. My own pilot study began to explore the possibilities of lived religious investigation for women.²⁷⁸ However, the primary focus of gender roles continues to highlight the complicated understanding within the network about women’s roles in churches and one which has changed over time. This suggests that the previous narratives of women who seek power being afflicted by a Jezebellic spirit may no longer reflect the behaviours in the churches nor the lived experiences of women. This study will examine the experiences of women in light of this exposed and developed gap.

²⁷³ Ross Wignall, “‘A Man after God’s Own Heart’: Charisma, Masculinity and Leadership at a Charismatic Church in Brighton and Hove, UK”, *Religion* 46, no. 3 (2 July 2016): 389–411, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2016.1169452>. 392.

²⁷⁴ Wignall. 397.

²⁷⁵ Wignall. 401.

²⁷⁶ Wignall. 400–401.

²⁷⁷ Wignall. 402.

²⁷⁸ Williams, *Female Faith Practices: Qualitative Research Perspectives*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (London: Routledge, 2024).

Beyond Complementarianism: The Case for this Research

This chapter has located the field of study in Charismatic Christianity, lived religion, and Newfrontiers. It develops Aune's previous work about women in Newfrontiers. Within the broader field of Evangelical Christian women, studies particularly focus upon ministerial roles and gender concepts. This is expanded more broadly in the studies of faith lives in UK Christian women. In this area there is research that looks at the particularities of faith in women, their lived religion and their adaptive and gendered practices. These studies reveal that there is more to know about women than the Evangelical research has engaged with.

The study narrows the field to particular work on Newfrontiers women the literature review considers the work of Kristin Aune who provides the only in-depth analysis of Newfrontiers and their constructions of gender. Of special interest is her reflections upon the Jezebellic spirit narrative and how it informs the self-understanding and behaviour of Newfrontiers women. Aune's excellent study, undertaken more than 20 years ago, needs updating and expanding. The literature review highlights the value of 'lived religion' as a category of investigation, that it expands understanding and reveals areas that are not considered in studies that focus on written doctrine and ecclesial practices. Lived religion explores the domestic, the adaptive, and the gendered expressions of faith. All of these categories are insightful for women in Newfrontiers who, as participators in a complementarian church network, necessarily do not engage in ecclesial leadership formally constructed. Questions about agency and epistemic power reveal the gaps which this study is concerned to fill. To reveal that which is not known about these women requires an approach that engages with the lived, the embodied and the non-ecclesial. Studies that address these things are typically found in Practical Theology. Practical Theological methodologies provide scope for exploring practices and spirituality. The next chapter will explore a suitable methodological process within the field of Practical Theology to address the gaps of knowledge the review of literature has revealed.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Method: Charismatic Testimony

The literature review has exposed a gap in the description and understanding of Newfrontiers women who are in the UK, who are non-liberal, post-feminist and whose self-understanding of their lived religion involves a characterisation of power and spiritual authority that is called Jezebellic. The literature suggests that the idea of lived religion is particularly useful in understanding non-normative, non-typical female religious systems. Newfrontiers women are shown to sit in this category because of their participation in a non-liberal, male governing church network where they are theoretically less powerful and the non-normative gender. I have argued that testimony serves as a form of theologising that situates the speaker in their narrative tradition, normed by the authority of the bible. Testimony is a way of understanding the links between lived experience and scriptural narratives where both interpret one another, with the bible being the final authority. Therefore, the question, **What is the testimony of Newfrontiers women concerning their experiences of God and the church?**, will address the gap identified in the review of literature.

This research ‘begins’ with the lived experience of women given through the testimony that they share and the questions that I, as an insider, had generated about this experience. I define ‘lived experience’ as Nancy Ammerman suggests; as relating to lived religion and the blurring of the boundaries between public and private and, therefore, revealing a host of religious practices heretofore discounted.²⁷⁹ I wished to formulate a research methodology that was in keeping with my own faith commitments and that is thoroughly theological.

In light of this and the questions that Evangelical theologians have concerning the methods of Practical Theology – in particular the prioritising of both experience and non-theological disciplines – I designed my research as seeking *Charismatic testimony*. The Charismatic church regularly engages with the spiritual practice of giving and hearing testimony.²⁸⁰ This is part of the work of the church in recognising the Holy Spirit as present and active in the lives of individual believers and the faith community. Often these testimonies are shared in church services but also

²⁷⁹ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices* (New York: New York University Press, 2021). 3.

²⁸⁰ Johns, *Pentecostal Formation*, 2010. 89.

informally amongst believers in their daily faith expressions.²⁸¹ By designing research that attempted to transform the traditional research interview into a theologically rich ‘hearing’ of testimony, I hoped to prioritise Christian experience and divine action.²⁸² I wished to design research that could be aligned with Charismatic theology and that engaged with questions that stem from human experience.

Practical Theology

My research proposes ‘hearing testimony’ as a way to Charismatically and theologically engage with the question of experience and its role in Practical Theology. In so doing, one can access the experiences of women in Newfrontiers churches via their own accounts, understanding the good and bad in their testimony. My theological assumptions as a Charismatic researcher understood theology as having epistemic potential in the combined stories of testimonies and scripture as mediated through the community of faith. These threads are separate and related, and to understand both they and the research question requires a methodological framework that guides their integration, and is in keeping with the principles outlined above. In order to answer the research question posed, and in line with the place that human experience has via testifying to the action of God, it is a Practical Theological investigation that is most fitting.

The review of literature has presented a gap in the understanding of Newfrontiers’ women’s lives and behaviours in relationship to their Christian faith. Drawing upon and developing the work of Kristin Aune. The literature review described the field of lived religion as the way in which this gap could be understood, described and then new knowledge about these women found. This chapter will explore the field of Practical Theology as the suitable subdiscipline of theology to access accounts of lived religion. It will argue that qualitative research accesses the subject most suitably and generates the knowledge that Practical Theology then allows reflection upon and normative suggestions to be made. All of this will be framed in keeping with the Charismatic theological commitments of the work which particularly understands personal accounts of human and divine activity as being transmitted through testimony giving.

Practical theology is suitable for the aims of this research because it ‘attends to non-elite knowledge, documents injustice, reveals “signs” of God in places previously seen as unlikely and

²⁸¹ Mark J Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology*, 2017. 17.

²⁸² Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

exposes the limits of dominant theological frameworks'.²⁸³ Practical theology attends to the key aims of this research. The women in Newfrontiers are non-elite because of the complementarian nature of Newfrontiers where ultimate power resides with the male leaders. The research, as Charismatic research, wishes to hear the accounts of God and, although Newfrontiers wouldn't expect hearing about God to be unlikely in the women's lives, it hasn't yet been heard fully as the review of literature demonstrates. Theological reflections upon lived religion provide the vehicle by which to understand the women and such a field requires certain methods and tools to access it,

Lived religion thus understood as practical theology's object of interest not only requires qualitative methodologies, but also depends on the phenomenological and hermeneutical theoretical underpinnings characteristic of qualitative approaches²⁸⁴

Thus, the lived religious investigation has a natural outcome, that of reviewing hermeneutical methods of self-understanding. The review of literature also highlighted the dominant theological framework of the Jezebel narrative relating to women who search for power in churches, Practical Theology investigating lived religion suggests ways in which new normative theology or hermeneutical outlooks can be suggested that is formed from new understanding found in qualitative research.

Methodological Framework: Charismatic Testimony

To describe a process of research that is coherent I present three 'phases' of research. My choice to name them phases rather than stages reflects a methodological consideration regarding starting points. Traditional models of Practical Theology often form cycles or steps that incorporate discrete moves that the theologian or student should take, for example the Pastoral Cycle by Paul Ballard and John Pritchard or the Charismatic Practical Theological process of Mark Cartledge's model for Practical Theology.²⁸⁵ Indeed Evangelical theology has long been

²⁸³ Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 'Is Qualitative Research the Best or Only Way to Study Lived Theology?', *Ecclesial Practices* 10, no. 2 (28 December 2023): 157–64, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-bja10055>. 163 material in ellipses is omitted.

²⁸⁴ Ulla Schmidt, 'Continental Practical Theology', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 301.

²⁸⁵ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 2012. Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 3. impr (London: SPCK, 2001).

suspicious of Practical Theological endeavours in part because of these stages as they appear to prioritise experience over revelation and social sciences over the word of God.²⁸⁶ However, as I began to formulate a research methodology, I could not find a model that accurately reflected the process I was undertaking. This was because I could not clearly illustrate where the research had begun. It neither sprung entirely from questions relating to scripture nor did it emerge from my lived experience but from some tangled questions that moved between the two. Thus, I prefer Pete Ward's description of starting points in theological research as 'methodologically problematic' because of the impossibility of discerning a clear and unambiguous pure beginning in one field or another.²⁸⁷

The description of the research in this thesis is nonetheless linear because it is a text that must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. However, to acknowledge that this is representative, not of distinct parts of the research, but of a continual dialectical process of movement between different sources and insights into the research area, I use the word 'phase'. This emphasises that, in particular moments, a theological voice or source is given more emphasis deliberately, but that, at all times, I am 'in the middle' of the research.²⁸⁸ The phases that I moved between and through (sometimes sequentially, but not always) can be called 1. Testimony in the Spirit 2. Wisdom in the Spirit, and 3. Hermeneutics and restorying.

Phase 1: Testimony in the Spirit

To access the lives of humans requires information that cannot be gained from the usual sources of theological research – books. Human lives require a different approach. This is usually called empirical research, and it seeks to access the human religious experience. The ways in which theologians have gone about this task have involved the social and medical sciences.²⁸⁹ I will develop the work of Swinton and Mowat, adding a Charismatic emphasis, in order to understand and analyse the experience of women in Newfrontiers churches. I will do this by seeking testimony. In this research, testimony is the accounts given by the interview participants of their

²⁸⁶ For example, Helen Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflections Starting with Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 2020), <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9780334058588>.

²⁸⁷ Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017). 4.

²⁸⁸ Ward. 11 Adapting the idea of Rowan Williams' that theology begins in the middle, centred in the church.

²⁸⁹ Mark J Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012). 12.

encounters with God in their daily lives. It is self-authenticating by the participants as their own description of their experience. The testimony functioned, in accordance with the description in the introduction, to illustrate the ways the women experience God in their life and testify to their own difficulties in life. Thus, testimony creates their stories, in their own words, that are both joyful and sorrowful.

Practical Theology Investigating Lived Theology

A Charismatic Practical Theology seeks to access these testimonies and reflect upon them. To do so the beliefs and practices of humans must be heard. Cartledge, as a Charismatic Practical Theologian, might be an obvious choice for a partner in this investigation.²⁹⁰ In his proposed methodology for a Charismatic Practical Theology, he suggests moving through a number of processes to disclose a situation more fully. He speaks of the ‘dialectics in the Spirit’ which incorporates interdisciplinary work to understand ‘lifeworld’ and ‘metanarrative’ in conversation with Charismatic spirituality and the Practical Theologian.²⁹¹ I have chosen not to use this methodology because, in a similar vein to Collins and Swinton, I do not wish the interdisciplinary process to have an independent stage in the research that is not at all times attempting to be theological.²⁹² I also, as shown, reject somewhat the notion that stages as concrete moves in a process of research exist, rather I would argue that at all times the researcher is vacillating between their own situation and many of the research interests as they arise. The notion of phases, as I’ve already indicated, is more appropriate, and implies that the researcher gives *attention* to the research in this iteration rather than moves through discrete stages of research. Cartledge’s model closely follows Johannes van der Ven in approach, incorporating insights from the interdisciplinary world to reveal human experience where theology becomes empirical in order to understand the world.²⁹³ In contrast, my research would rather change the poles, suggesting that the empirical can be theological, in keeping with lived theology’s aims, to reveal the divine in human life. I use empirical methods to access the testimony that the women offer, as a suitable way to hear their voices that is in keeping with their spiritual experience as Charismatic Christians.

²⁹⁰ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 2012.

²⁹¹ Cartledge. 28.

²⁹² Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflections Starting with Scripture*, 2020. 42. John Swinton, *Walking with Jesus in Strange Places* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd Ltd, 2022). 54-55.

²⁹³ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 2012. 15.

This situates the work within the study of lived religion and within the wider field of Practical Theology. Based on the ideas of Nancy Ammerman and Meredith B. McGuire, lived religion developed as a response to the practices of scholars of religion that study received texts and normative doctrine as the primary access point to knowing about religion. In contrast, lived religion seeks to understand the complexities and differences that are found in the practices and beliefs of individuals. For the purposes of this work, the emphasis on the lived experience in this field allows for the centring of experiences outside of the church, outside of the mainstream, and towards the margins of where normative theology is typically held, especially in a complementarian church. The emphasis is on the lived, material, and present expression, rather than on the relationship with something that is outside of time or outside of the people that practice it.²⁹⁴ For this research, the only thing that is outside of time and practices is God. The ability to describe God is held in the complicated space of testimonial accounts gleaned through research interviews.

The significance of study in lived religion is the emphasis on embodied expressions rather than on texts, documents, and normative authorities that forget and overlook the lives of those who are not central to the production of these things. In relation to my own study, this means that the practices and behaviour that women describe in their own lives, and the ways in which they live out their religion in the things they do daily, weekly, and in their own rhythms can be described. This allows for complexity, and for dissonance with normative doctrines of a church. The study of lived religion is particularly generative for the lived experiences of women as shown in my introduction.

A significant development in the scholarly descriptions of lived religion was the appropriation of the task by theologians who wished to describe and understand the lived as a theological process. As my theological commitments have indicated, it is important for the research to be theological through and through and for each phase to be potentially theological without having to be transformed as such thereafter in a ‘theological move’. The emphasis for lived religion is that the practices are social practice of a particular type – those that have a consciousness of something other whilst embedded in the ordinary.²⁹⁵ For theology the emphasis is different but critical. These are *both* social and spiritual behaviours where the focus is also upon the agency and presence of God in the lived experiences of religion.

²⁹⁴ McGuire, *Lived Religion*. 5.

²⁹⁵ Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion*. 21.

Lived theology contains within it the potential for a confessional stance for the research and the researcher, it contains within it the potential for knowledge of the activity of God. Lived in religion is complex and that complexity should not be ignored theologically says Charles Marsh.²⁹⁶ The question that lived theology wrestles with, therefore, is: what sense can be made and what value is there in attending to this complexity? The answer to this question, according to Marsh, is that the lived *is* theology in that ‘theological ideas aspire in their inner logic toward social expression’ and that their interpretation should be considered different to social scientific investigation or other research in the humanities, because theology seeks also to know and understand God and God’s presence.²⁹⁷ Marsh thus differentiates between lived theology and lived religion is this *theological through and through* emphasis, that stems from the presence of the divine, or the absence of the divine, in the research.

The emphasis on the divine differentiates between lived religion and lived theology.²⁹⁸ The type of Charismatic Theology that I attempt to produce in this study places the voices of women and their own accounts of lived religion in the centre. Indeed, in order to avoid the error of ‘speaking of God by speaking of social practices in a loud voice’ the theologian researcher must keep in mind this emphasis upon the divine presence in the research.²⁹⁹ This requires an active listening that follows the idea of holy listening that Catherine Sexton proposes so that a theological account is generated that is a Charismatic theology centred on the women.³⁰⁰ As such, when hearing the testimony of women, when understanding testimony and receiving it as a form of knowledge, it is possible to describe this knowledge as *theological* knowledge and the process of hearing it as *theological* and therefore something that, with reflection, reflexivity and critical distance has the potential to be knowledge about God.

Testimony of lived religion is suitable because it is in keeping with the theological practices of the Charismatic community and necessary for the testimonial justice as suggested by Fricker.

²⁹⁶ Charles Marsh, ‘Introduction’, in *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy*, ed. Charles Marsh, Peter Slade, and Sarah Azaransky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). 5.

²⁹⁷ Charles Marsh.7.

²⁹⁸ Sabrina Müller, *Lived Theology: Impulses for a Pastoral Theology of Empowerment* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021). 27.

²⁹⁹ Charles Marsh, ‘Introduction’. 16.

³⁰⁰ Sexton, ‘Method as Contemplative Enquiry’.

Fricker describes prejudicial practices when the identity of an individual, in this case their gender, leads to them being an unreliable informant.³⁰¹ In light of the Jezebel narrative, women in Newfrontiers have not been invited to share their understanding. They are ‘barred entry to the community of informants’.³⁰² Thus, testimony is a theologically rich way of addressing this injustice and understanding the lived religious behaviour of informants who are typically not included in their community’s self-understanding.

The nature of the insider research, I conducted also allows me to prevent as far as possible Fricker’s concerns about transference of epistemic power from an individual as subject to object.³⁰³ This means that for a Newfrontiers woman to contribute as a ‘trusted informant’ in Fricker’s terms the individual is not simply a source of useful information but a co-creator of their knowledge. This means allowing the process to be flexible, non-determinative of direction within reason and thus avoid the informant becoming ‘passive’ in the process. I account for how I did this in Part 2, ‘Interviews’.

I attempt to incorporate the individual’s account of lived religious practices and experiences whilst rejecting the emphasis in lived religion’s studies on the human alone or the human who accounts for meaningful connections with the other. Instead, I seek to allow for the agency of God to be potentially revealed in the storytelling. Sabrina Müller claims that lived theology emerges ‘through expression’.³⁰⁴ As such, in contrast to those research designs that reflect the ‘affective gravitational pull of the church’,³⁰⁵ seeking to hear testimony recentres the research towards women’s professed lives outside, adjacent, *and* within the faith community. Therefore, the focus of attention is away from the centre of the church, which might lead to analysis of worship experiences via participant observations or the way in which the women engage in services.

³⁰¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 2011. 130.

³⁰² Fricker. 130.

³⁰³ Fricker. 132.

³⁰⁴ Knut Tveitereid, ‘Lived Theology and Theology in the Lived’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 69.

³⁰⁵ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*. 20.

For this project, the primary focus of the research is towards the quotidian experiences of women. Attending to their lived religion as their lives outside the church meetings, via testimony, allows not only the focus to be upon the lived in keeping with the research question but also the specific lived lives of women outside of the male dominated sphere of Newfrontiers' church services and their complementarian framework. The empirical work must be fitting for this aim. It seeks to allow for the women to speak of their own experiences, allowing for agency of their own description, and testimonial authority. Interviewing is the most suitable way to allow for this hearing to be achieved. By so doing the research can reveal, in their own voice, more of what is unknown about their lives.

Lived Religion, Theology, and Testimony

In this thesis, I make use of the category of 'lived religion' to describe the non-official and non-normative religious practices of women in Newfrontiers. For this theorisation, I follow Nancy Ammerman and Meredith McGuire who understand lived religion to be an alternative mode of understanding faith and spiritual behaviour found not in the official doctrines, creeds, and mythos but in the practices of everyday lives both individually and communally.³⁰⁶

Nancy Ammerman understands the salient features of lived religion to incorporate practices of the individual related to their plurality of contexts. Such practices are embodied and material, contain emotions, and are moral because they both create and govern judgements and behaviours.³⁰⁷ These practices are 'embodied in time and space, and the meaning is in that embodiment rather than in explanatory belief or a bargain for salvation'.³⁰⁸ This illustrates the alternativity or addendum to officially sanctioned doctrinal statements. I also will follow Sabrina Müller and Charles Marsh who adapt and develop the concept of lived religion towards a definition that incorporates a theological turn.

My use of lived religion and lived theology allows for me to discuss the behaviours, practices, emotions, and circumstances of women in a way that is theological. Lived theology understands that these actions are spiritual and confess the presence of God. Combine this with the way lived religion investigates the practices that exist outside the normative and that is why it should be

³⁰⁶ Nancy T. Ammerman, 'Rethinking Religion: Toward a Practice Approach', *American Journal of Sociology* 126, no. 1 (1 July 2020): 6–51, <https://doi.org/10.1086/709779>. 28.

³⁰⁷ Ammerman. 8-27.

³⁰⁸ Ammerman. 20.

situated in the lived. Nancy Ammerman notes a political dimension to this type of investigation, that the embodiment of practices illustrates the regulation of individuals and their bodies and ‘cast light on the many intersections of power and inequality’.³⁰⁹ Lived religion and lived theology both allow researchers to understand previously unknown theologising and alternative practices.

For the lived religion of Newfrontiers women to be understood, on their own terms and according to their own narratives of their lives and understanding I will endeavour to hear their testimony. Nancy T. Ammerman and Roman R. Williams suggest that hearing ‘everyday stories’ is an appropriate way to communicate lived religion.³¹⁰ Testimony is suitable because of the theological and a spiritual practice that allows women to speak with authority. Testimony also allows for the women to define which practices they understand as facilitating the presence of God. This is also in keeping with Ammerman’s definition of practices as actions that collude both with the participants own beliefs and those of their faith community. The purpose and value of the action connect them to something discernible to them as ‘other’.³¹¹

Testimony is a spiritual practice that involves a believer telling an inspired personal story. This inspiration is, as with other forms of speech in the Charismatic community, believed to be the Holy Spirit who offers expressive abilities to any who participate in the salvation of Christ.

Helen Collins describes testimony as a ‘charismatic speech act’ that allows for the expression of ‘experiential knowledge’.³¹² She also describes it as a form of ‘social knowledge construction’ that creates identity and community.³¹³ In this way the giving of testimony mirrors the emphases of lived religion; it is individual and communal; it is constructive and descriptive and following a more lived theological nuance; it is inspired and responsive to the presence of God. Testimony is also a way corresponding narratives with the narrative of scripture. In this thesis, I will follow the description both of Collins and also of Steven Land who argues that the giving of any personal account is always interacting with both the Holy Spirit and also the story of scripture. The stories of individuals in testimony are woven in, validated and authorised by the stories interpreted from

³⁰⁹ Ammerman. 21.

³¹⁰ Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Roman R Williams, ‘Speaking of Methods: Eliciting Religious Narratives through Interviews, Photos, and Oral Diaries’, in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Volume 3: New Methods in the Sociology of Religion (2012)*, ed. Luigi Berzano and Ole Riis, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047429470>.

³¹¹ Ammerman, ‘Rethinking Religion’. 17.

³¹² Collins, *Charismatic Christianity Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit*. 99.

³¹³ Collins. 99.

scripture.³¹⁴ In turn the scripture itself is understood and contextualised by the stories of the individuals who read it. This back and forth action of testimony means that it is an important tool of Charismatic theologising. Testimony therefore is a form of self-expression, self-understanding, and a spiritual practice. It is deeply theology and deeply experiential.

Testimony is theologising about everyday encounters with God, lived religion and lived theology are the studies of these everyday encounters, the practices that facilitate them and the meanings associated with them. Both the ability to speak about oneself and about God furthers the aims of lived religion to hear the importance of practices, especially those practices that do not conform completely or negotiate or reject those forms of religions that are authorised, scripted, and held by those in power. Ammerman acknowledges this when she notes,

Religious practices include ways of talking and habits of storytelling, including the theologies and scriptures produced by religious virtuosi and academic experts. Those are not the primary or only window on religious ways of narrating the meaning of life, but they too are religious practices. The turn to lived religion has mean that we look beyond those official religious actors and grand cosmic myths, but without ignoring them.³¹⁵

Testimony achieves this in a particular way, it both turns from the official religious actors and preserves the storytelling emphasis that Ammerman notes. Charismatic theology *is* storytelling, testimony giving *is* lived religious storytelling.

Accounting for the Good and the Bad

Charismatic practices of giving testimony are typically positive accounts of the good works of God in the life of an individual, often through hardship and overcoming of trials.³¹⁶ Thus, testimony accommodates the Practical Theological impulse for contextual theology that describes, evaluates, and proposes changes and in the process and notices and accounts for problems and oppressions.³¹⁷ Many of the research methods, for example the pastoral cycle of Ballard and Pritchard³¹⁸ or Swinton and Mowat's 'establishing the problem',³¹⁹ begin with a

³¹⁴ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*. 112.

³¹⁵ Ammerman, 'Rethinking Religion'. 28.

³¹⁶ Collins, *Charismatic Christianity Introducing Its Theology Through the Gifts of the Spirit*. 104-105.

³¹⁷ Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2016. 52.

³¹⁸ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*.

³¹⁹ Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2016. 52.

situation of difficulty, whereas the method of ‘hearing of testimony’ proposed here takes seriously Ward’s notion that Practical Theology investigates lived and everyday theology in the lives of individuals, not simply critical incidents.³²⁰

The women, by giving testimony, are offered an opportunity to describe many facets of their lives, happy and sad events and in so doing it allows for the combination of two seemingly polarised positions in the field of Practical Theology – the relationship between marginalised experiences, on the one hand, and the action of the divine, on the other, as the Newfrontiers women see fit to describe. Ward highlights these disparate positions by comparing the work of Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Andrew Root.³²¹ By illustrating the differences in emphases between Miller-McLemore, who seeks to articulate the experiences of the marginalised, and Root, who describes the action of the divine in lived experience, he explores the divide in Practical Theology between a ‘liberal’ approach (understanding the divine through lived experience) and a ‘conservative’ approach (which begins to some extent with doctrinal commitments).³²²

The methodological process that I suggest follows Ward’s endeavour to ‘collapse’ the differences between these two camps and allow for whatever direction the women would take the testimonial process, not imposing requirements from outside the research overly. The research does this by embracing the Pentecostal/Charismatic doctrinal belief that divine encounter is both possible and occurring today. When people speak of this encounter, it carries theological meaning but also that the primary theological authority resides in scripture, interpreted by humans and their lived experience. Testimony can speak both of the good and the bad within experience, while leaving space within it to hear that which is of the divine and therefore fundamentally good.³²³

The fundamentally good and bad can be theologically attended to via testimony. Samuel Tranter suggests that there is space for attending to ‘consolation’.³²⁴ This is suggested as a spiritual practice, one which can be learned from. In the instance of this research, testimony is a conduit

³²⁰ Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*. 3.

³²¹ Ward. 48.

³²² Ward. 49.

³²³ My thanks to Dr Sam Tranter for highlighting the necessity of ‘the good’ in practical theological work.

³²⁴ Tranter, “‘Disciplined Wonder’”. 5.

for holding the good and bad experiences of the women within a broader framework of accounting for human and divine action and reflecting upon them. This allows space for ‘wonder’, says Tranter, and an examination of the reason for why something worked or of the experience of encounter.³²⁵ To fully hear the voices of women in Newfrontiers and their lived experience of their faith it is necessary to allow for the breadth of experience possible in the Charismatic church tradition. This necessary requires listening to good stories if they exist. This further enables a rich complexity to be explored which is fitting for a model that is situated in Charismatic theology, because this complexity recognises the nuance of a situation: a person can experience the divine whilst suffering – a belief well attested to in Christian history – and an oppressive situation is not always thoroughgoingly negative. Ecclesial situations can seek to be reformed and celebrated at the same time. This means that testimony can speak to that which is in need of liberation as well as speaking of the ways in which God encounters individuals today; this is in keeping with the theological framework suggested in the introduction.

Charismatic Testimonial Narratives: The Question of What Comes First

Charismatic spirituality engages with scripture by placing the individual in the very heart and midst of the story. The individual is bookended by the past salvation history and the future salvation hope. Steven Land says that the believers live in the story in the same way that they live in Christ.³²⁶ Tony Richie observes, ‘Pentecostal testimony is not only a retelling of the history of the biblical story but also its recapitulation or reenactment in actual human experience for the glory of God and the blessing of God’s people’.³²⁷

Collins argues that scripture must be prioritised in a Charismatic theological reflection. Her thesis is based upon the belief that Christians are formed best for ministry when they begin epistemologically with scripture.³²⁸ This is against the view that experiences or problems are the beginnings of any theological reflection, or indeed the theological question. This is not a reduction to positivism or a negation of experience but a recommendation that most information

³²⁵ Tranter. 5.

³²⁶ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*. 74.

³²⁷ Tony Richie, *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue*, Asbury Theological Seminary Series in World Christian Revitalization Movements in Pentecostal/Charismatic Studies, no. 6 (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2011). 139.

³²⁸ Helen Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflections Starting with Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 2020), <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9780334058588>. 177.

to be had about God is found in the written revelation of scripture. However, the question of whether theological reflection should begin with scripture, rather than prioritise it, is problematic. This research takes a different approach. Even in Collins' written examples of her method, they do not all begin with scripture itself. One is called, 'A ministry team with a problem'.³²⁹ Here a hypothetical team ministry has a difficulty with the outcomes of their work. They draw together to resolve the difficulty. While making use of the model Collins suggests, they begin their work with scripture.

However, I wish to argue that they have *not* begun their work with scripture. The scriptural input is the second step. Here, the source of theology is the groups' understanding of a problem, i.e., their *testimony* of a problem. Like in Swinton and Mowat, and Ballard and Pritchard, there is a focus on problems that are in need of solving. It is sufficient to locate a beginning in theology that is with human experience embedded in the Holy Spirit's presence and participation in the lived. This follows a process in the research which seeks to understand that beginning and to describe the lived human document. This process remains Charismatically theological and this is the methodology I propose. Charismatic Practical Theological enquiry can describe problems and experiences, and, therefore, seek to overcome them in the spirit of liberation theologies, but it can also hold a space for the good and the righteous while accounting for experiences of those too. All of these are presented as stories that relate to *the* story of scripture, which orientates individual stories and lives.

The research question asks about the nature and qualities of the lived theology and religion of Newfrontiers women. Key to asking this question is the nature of the answer and the possibilities and limitations of it. This is a question of epistemology the way this particular information is known, and, as I have already described, and also one of process: how can that knowledge be obtained? Phase 2 of the research takes the rich description of the lived experience of women generated by their testimony and incorporates my own interpretation. In this way I function as the community of interpretation of their testimony. Then phase 3 takes the testimony and reads scripture through this hermeneutical lens. This then forms the 'constructive conversation' similar to Swinton's suggestion, hoping that there is 'fresh light on our knowledge of God'.³³² This fresh light is the renewed understanding that the testimonies shed upon the interpretation of scripture for the community.

³²⁹ Collins. 185-192.

³³² John Swinton. 82.

The situated knowledge that is generated by Practical Theological research has a particular form and can make claims that are limited to new ways of seeing the action of God. The limits of the theological claims are akin to the limits of claims around qualitative research more broadly, ‘qualitative research provides us with knowledge, which is often personal, subjective, ungeneralizable and non-replicable’.³³³ The outcomes of such research, therefore, as already articulated, are conditional and particularized. The role of the researcher is to discern patterns and make suggestions constructive of the conversation in hand. Thus, Phase 1 is the process of hearing testimony, conceived of as giving insight to lived theology and divine action, nested within the wider story of scripture. The testimony gives insight also to situations of oppressions or problems and encounters with the good. Phase 2 is the concurrent work of the researcher and the process of analysis, described below. Phase 3 follows after the description of phase 2 and is the process of offering a new normative understanding based on the testimonies of women in interaction with scripture.

Phase 2: Wisdom in the Spirit

Ward mentions that theology should be reflexive, aware of its locatedness and situatedness.³³⁴ This causes ‘disclosure and dialogue’ which allows for the faithful commitment to belief, in which the personal situation of the researcher/believer, their social context and their historical tradition can be part of the work. This is found in ‘theobiography’, the autobiographical account which is the key starting point for theological reflection and is at the beginning of this thesis.³³⁵ Theological reflection is theorized as participation in a particular situation, made theological because of its rootedness in a certain tradition of the church, in which the researcher engages with theorising reflexively.

Reflexivity is well-articulated as a methodological consideration of empirical research; it is particularly foregrounded in feminist research, and strongly recommended in sociological investigative practice, originating from feminist standpoint theory and participatory research.³³⁶

³³³ John Swinton. 85.

³³⁴ Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM, 2008). 3-4.

³³⁵ Ward. 4.

³³⁶ Nicola Slee, Fran Porter, and Anne Phillips, eds., *RESEARCHING FEMALE FAITH: Qualitative Research Methods*. (Place of publication not identified: ROUTLEDGE, 2019). 5. Natasha S. Mauthner, Odette Parry, and

As both a practice and a methodological concern, reflexivity seeks to understand the conditions in which data is produced as being necessary for the complete understanding of the data. Reflexivity emphasises the abandonment of epistemological foundations of positivism,³³⁷ because it illustrates the framework within which data was collected and understood and that meanings of that data are co-constructed during the analysis. For a Charismatic theological epistemology such as this, this does not impinge upon the reality with which the respondents of research engage, but upon the analysis with which the data is understood. A reflexive approach does not demand that the research findings are entirely in the analysis but the presence of the researcher is found throughout the research, in the generation of the research question, and the formulation of interview structure. The importance of acknowledging potential self-deception means that this methodology should focus upon the impulses of reflexivity theory for the role of the researcher. Testimony is theoretically useful for the Charismatic articulation of the research participants *and* also the researcher themselves. Throughout this work, the voices of the women mingle with my own voice in the construction of a Charismatic theology. As well as considering the reflexive construction of *questions* about theology I also wish to be maintain reflexivity throughout the process of research and the analysis of the research. Because I play an active role in both my personal faith, my church and in this research, I did not believe it was possible to bracket out my own impact and interaction with the research design and the research analysis. Therefore, I sought an approach that would permit my ongoing interaction with these two elements, design and analysis.

Analysis and Description

Part of the work of the researcher in Practical Theology is to engage with sources that are outside of the discipline, be that the social sciences, political theory, psychological sciences, and many more possibilities besides. This project seeks to use theological and non-theological sources to deepen insight into the testimony given by the women. This analysis involves the discernment of the researcher as to which alternative and additional voices aid the thick descriptive and analytical phases that the research goes through, whilst remaining committed to these external disciplines having a relative place and value in the theological methodology rather than a distinct and separate part section or phase in the process. For a Charismatic theology, the

Kathryn Backett-Milburn, 'The Data Are Out There, or Are They? Implications for Archiving and Revisiting Qualitative Data', *Sociology* 32, no. 4 (November 1998): 733–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038598032004006>.

³³⁷ Slee, Porter, and Phillips, *RESEARCHING FEMALE FAITH*. 5.

context of the community is one which, as part of the Charismatic hermeneutic, is always in need of interpretation. In the same way that Charismatic theology interprets the text Scripture using their testimony, so also should the context that interprets be interpreted.³³⁸ The text of the research is interpreted so that,

In the process of dialogue with the Pentecostal (con)text, both the Pentecostal (con)text and the intertext of the reader are (re)formed and (re)imagined.³³⁹

In other words, as a text the research is an analysis of the lived, this lived experience is then accounted for in a written text.³⁴⁰ The lived itself is theological through and through, and the text that captures elements of this lived account is also theological. It takes the messy and incoherent data that is developed from observing and recording aspects of lived religion while trying to reveal it in a written form. It is then part of the hermeneutic in Charismatic theology that constructs and renews meaning.

This is theologising that acknowledges that theology is not constructed at the point of writing but is always and already existent in the lived experiences of the research participants.³⁴¹ For this research, the participants understood that their giving testimony was an act of accounting for the presence of God in their lives and drawing me into their experience. Catherine Sexton understands research to have potential for ‘theological encounter’, and that data analysis can be more than a method but can be understood as ‘holy listening’ also.³⁴² Sexton wished to ensure that her work was not reliant only upon sociological methods but also that her methods were uncovering the theological character of her data and process of analysis. Writing about ‘holy listening’ as a research process, Sexton documents her research into the lives of Roman Catholic Sisters and the data analysis she undertook. Her ambition was to make her analysis an act of

³³⁸ David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse: An Intertextual and Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2018). 7.

³³⁹ Johnson. 7.

³⁴⁰ Pete Ward, ‘Theology and Qualitative Research: An Uneasy Relationship’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, 1st ed. (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119756927.ch2>. 13.

³⁴¹ Ward. 13.

³⁴² Catherine Sexton, ‘Method as Contemplative Enquiry: From Holy Listening to Sacred Reading and Shared Horizons’, *Practical Theology* 12, no. 1 (January 2019): 44–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2019.1575042>. 44.

thoroughgoing theological work, and, in this way, her aims are the same as my own.³⁴³ To ensure that my analysis is aligned with my methodology, I wish to present the possibility of ‘holy listening’ and re-describe Sexton’s project in Charismatic terms as hearing testimony as a Charismatic experience of God.

Sociological and psychological analysis are not my primary routes in this Charismatic endeavour, because of some of the methodological assumptions that they make. A purely sociological investigation into the experiences of women in a Newfrontiers church would look primarily, as per Aune, to the expression of complementarianism and seek to understand why that power is ceded by women in these churches; this is because the concerns of sociological research direct attention to these questions. However, a Charismatic analysis does not look to the dynamic of power in the same way. Johns reminds us that the Charismatic renewal included people of diverse economic backgrounds and is no longer primarily of the materially poor.³⁴⁷ It is also not necessary because it limits the understanding of reality to one concern: only the expression of sociological and political frameworks. My intention is not to dismiss the role of sociology in the study of religion but to place it separately to the theological understanding that I wish to begin with. In fact, I note with caution Sarah Coakley’s reminder of the value of sociological and feminist thought in the process of constructing theology.³⁴⁸ Coakley theorises that theology is *in via*, a necessarily particularised and contemplative approach to thinking about, in her case, systematics. To overcome this, she suggests undercutting the secular assumptions of the sociological endeavour in order for sociological investigation to serve the cause of understanding the variety of expressions of theology beyond the academy. This is the task of understanding theology in context and can be undertaken with theologically conscripted sociological tools. Thus, I engage with non-theological theoretical tools in order to serve the wider purpose of theologising that is the aim of the Charismatic methodology.

Martin wishes to highlight that the interviewee believes their experiences to be real and that these experiences should be treated as if they are real in the process of research. Cartledge says that rescripting works as a metaphor for research, the values of it are of ‘respect’ and

³⁴³ Sexton. 46.

³⁴⁷ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010). 104.

³⁴⁸ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139048958>.

‘attentiveness’.³⁵⁰ For this research ‘rescripting’ occurred in this phase as I developed ideas and theories that offered rich descriptions of the themes that formed in the interviews. I wish to allow for these descriptions of events to stand as the interviewee believes them to have happened, as descriptions of something real rather than articulation of subconscious repressed and political expressions. That notwithstanding, it is important to allow space for the potential for oppressions. This is in keeping with the liberative element of the research without reducing the research to only seeking oppressions. The research analysis cannot assume oppressions exist or make liberative categories the only ones through which the data is interpreted. This process can be described as Charismatic (therefore theistic) rescripting.

This notwithstanding, I do not deny that the analysis of the data requires interaction between data and theory. I propose to use, following Kristine Helboe Johansen, a form of data analysis called abductive analysis.³⁵⁴ Abductive analysis acknowledges a role for pre-existing categories in the analysis of research data. This is in contrast to deductive models which entirely shape the research analysis via theory, providing, pre-eminently the categories via which the data should be understood. Suitable for testing theories, this is a deductive method of analysing this data, whilst acknowledging the researcher’s preformed position in the research which runs the risk, as Johansen warns, of silencing the data. As this is of particular concern when hearing the theologising and lived experiences of a marginalised group, I am aware of needing a strategy of analysis that listens to the data theologically. The natural alternative to rejecting preformed theory for data analysis is the inductive method of analysis. This attempts to let the data speak freely in the analytical process and brings no alternative theorising to it. However, the risk is that it is ‘somewhat naïve’ to the input and knowledge of the researcher, says Johansen.³⁵⁵

In my planning for the research analysis, I was aware that my reflexive position had formed the research questions and the areas of investigation and would naturally also inform the manner with which I interpreted the data. It seemed to be a dishonest endeavour to not acknowledge my

³⁵⁰ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*. 17.

³⁵⁴ Kristine Helboe Johansen, ‘Analytical Strategies’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveit Reid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022).

³⁵⁵ Kristine Helboe Johansen, ‘Analytical Strategies’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveit Reid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 397.

role in the analysis of the data. Thus, I positioned my data analysis as in the abductive model. This, says Johansen, is a dialectic between theory and data. This conversation is mutual and allows for the data to speak but also for theory to form and structure the analytical process. As this is a theological account and situated in the Charismatic tradition, I hoped that the abductive process would form this element of testifying on my part for the research whilst allowing the testimony of the women who participated to also be heard.

Thematic narrative analysis is an appropriate choice of analysis for a Charismatic rescription that is abductive for this research. Thematic narrative analysis seeks to understand patterns within the data.³⁵⁶ This is similar to how testimony is received by those that hear it in Charismatic communities, patterns, and correlations are established between the word of God and the community's experience. Thematic analysis, broadly described, looks to note these themes via coding processes. Themes are patterns of meaning according to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, which link to a central idea.³⁵⁷ Finding of themes and codes are part of the output of research, meaning that reflexivity is recognised throughout the initial analysis processes. Thematic analysis is distinct from other types of analytical method because it is not bound to a particular theory that determines its operation, for example, in the way that discourse analysis or grounded theoretical analysis are; rather, thematic analysis is applicable to a number of different methodological frameworks and is noteworthy because of the flexibility in its application.³⁵⁸ However, it is particularly suited to qualitative work and Braun and Clarke describe it as having a 'qualitative sensibility'.³⁵⁹ This is fitting as this research is qualitative and is using a unique methodological underpinning. Telling testimonies is complex, the research acknowledges the messy accounts of the good and the bad that were told and required an analytical strategy that embraced contradiction – as thematic analysis does – and allowed for codes and themes from Charismatic theology to be reported in the analysis.

³⁵⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>. 79.

³⁵⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Doing*, 1st ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2021). 229.

³⁵⁸ Braun and Clarke. 80.

³⁵⁹ Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*. 7.

Phase 3: Hermeneutics and Restorying

Swinton and Mowat say that Practical Theological research ‘is an interpretive discipline which offers new and challenging insights into Christian tradition in light of fresh questions which emerge from particular situations’.³⁶⁰ The final phase of the research is a normative move that seeks to allow the women’s voices to interpret the biblical narrative to find a suitable story that impacts their self-understanding. This is in keeping with the Charismatic hermeneutical practice.

Hermeneutics of Charismatic theology corresponds with the interests of lived religion, particularly the relationships between those on the margins and structural power. The partial inheritance from the liberation theology that preceded the development of Practical Theology encourages insight into prejudice and disadvantage. The emphasis on the location of theology for liberation theologians in situations of oppression. The development of the Practical Theological discipline both after and alongside liberation theology gives scope for the lived to inform not only thick theological descriptions but also the possibility of change. This change can be both suggestive of practice and theological discourse. Thus, not only can the research ask interrogative questions of the lived religion that add to the knowledge of a situation of these women, it can also take these insights and apply them to proffer new readings of tradition in light of the thicker description of the situation. In this case the descriptions of women in Newfrontiers that already exists is the Jezebel narrative, the testimony of the women can potentially offer to confirm this biblical depiction or contradict it. Swinton suggests that Practical Theological research allows for the now of God’s action in the present to interact with the action of God in the past, as typically understood in systematic and biblical theological research.³⁶¹ So, research into the lived theology and religion of women in Newfrontiers adds to the past knowledge of God, particularly known in the network through readings of scripture and adds to this knowledge the now of the experiences of women and results in a new reading of scripture that aids in their self-understanding.

Hermeneutical practice in Charismatic theology closely corresponds to the lived religious interpretative practice. The process of theologising in Charismatic understanding is hermeneutically related to the texts of community (their testimonies) that are not static but that

³⁶⁰ Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2016. 26.

³⁶¹ John Swinton, ‘Empirical Research, Theological Limits, and Possibilities’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 81.

change and have potential for renewal. The conversation between this text of testimonies and the text of scripture is the way in which theological meaning is discerned in the Charismatic community. In the introduction Charismatic theology was described as formed using testimony that has hermeneutical power for reading scripture. Charismatic reading practices mirror Pentecostal reading practices in their emphasis on the Spirit's role in the lives of the believer. Thus, the Pentecostal scholarship on hermeneutics, which sits under the wider banner of Charismatic Theology, is important for this understanding of the methodology. Mark Cartledge in his account of Charismatic theology makes use of Pentecostal descriptions of hermeneutical practice, he argues that the 'interpretative community' is a core part of the worship and practice of a Charismatic community that comes together to scripture is read.

the text of Scripture and the narrative of the charismatic tradition are interpreted experientially in ways that correlate the two, thus enabling participants to understand the meaning of the symbols and the praxis via the biblical narrative and *vice versa*.³⁶²

This means that the reading of scripture is orientated towards a 'reader-centred approach' that recognises a potential plurality of meaning derived from the relationship of the text to the reader. In this thesis the empirical research that seeks testimony becomes a type of interpretative community.³⁶³

The community is 'in front of the text' and enters the reading relationship within the world of the text and interacts with it. Pentecostal hermeneutics can be developed in light of intertextual theory that describes interpretation as a series of interrelating 'texts'. Robby Waddell and David Johnson are the leading proponents of this description of Pentecostal (and therefore also Charismatic) interpretative practice.³⁶⁴ They both argue that Pentecostals use their (con)text as part of an interpretative community that reads scriptures using a reader-orientated method. For Pentecostals this method of reading scripture pays less interpretative attention to authorial intent and negotiates theological meaning with the interaction between the texts.³⁶⁵ Kenneth Archer

³⁶² Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*. 131 italics original.

³⁶³ W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd edition edition (Ada: Baker Academic, 2014). 5.

³⁶⁴ Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 30 (Blandford Forum: Deo Publ, 2006). Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse*.

³⁶⁵ Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*. 44 Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse*. 4.

describes the early Pentecostals as making use of a unique hermeneutical method that incorporated their own social location and theology as interpretative tools rather than an exegetical method. This he calls 'the community story as the influential hermeneutical filter'.³⁶⁶ Pentecostal readers of scripture do so within their narrative tradition, he argues, which involves eschatological awareness and belief in the present reality of the power of God. He describes a give and take between the shaping of a community by scripture and the discernment of meaning in the text that is held by the community.³⁶⁷ Key to this is the continuing involvement of God in human history,³⁶⁸ which is significant because the same God who dictated the scriptures for the Christian community to read and learn from was actively engaged in the shaping and forming of the reading community and the reading community is dictated to by its context.

Alternative contexts for interpretation are rejected in Pentecostal hermeneutics. The early Pentecostals rejected the role of tradition in the interpretation of scripture preferring the belief in the restorationist, primitivist ideas that the church up until that point was apostate.³⁶⁹ This means, for the relationship between scripture and Pentecostal/Charismatics that it is the interpretation of the restored community that has value. This bi-directional relationship between lived religion and interpretation of scripture is shown in the Pentecostal tendency to incorporate scripture into their own accounts and testimonies, says Archer.³⁷⁰ The final phase of this research takes the lived religious experiences given in testimony and creates a reading community from that which is brought to bear upon the extant scriptural descriptions (of Jezebel) and considers if it is fitting for the women who shared their stories. This becomes a process of restorying, where the story that was told about the women is retold in light of their own story telling. There is a dialogue between two stories of theology – testimony and scripture – to create a new theology.

This interaction of stories is described by John Christopher Thomas as based on the Acts 15.1-29 model of theologising and illustrates a potential hermeneutical process. In this passage, says Thomas, the experiences of Paul and Barnabas are considered by the Jerusalem council whilst

³⁶⁶ Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2009). 129.

³⁶⁷ Archer. 135.

³⁶⁸ Archer. 147.

³⁶⁹ Archer. 152.

³⁷⁰ Archer. 161.

they make a theological change to their practice.³⁷¹ The power of the retold experience in this passage forms a new way for the community of faith to read previous scriptural instruction. The hermeneutical power of the experiences of Paul and Barnabas that are understood by all to be part of the works of the Spirit allows for a fresh understanding of the stance the church has towards the Gentile community.³⁷² Thomas notes that scripture is the final move in this hermeneutic when the experiences have been heard and understood. Using discernment, James settles upon Amos 9.11-12 as the key text to examine in light of the new experiences.³⁷³ Of all the multitude of available texts to the community James picks this one, which does not even refer to Gentiles. Thomas understands this to be part of the hermeneutical process where texts are chosen and interpreted by the community in the power of the Spirit.³⁷⁴ Scripture, for Charismatics, is always interpreted with a reading that is 'for and in' the community.³⁷⁵ The choice of the important scriptures for renewed understanding in the community is made in conjunction with the Holy Spirit,

...despite the fact that there were plenty of texts which appeared to teach that there was no place for the Gentiles as Gentiles in the people of God, the Spirit's witness heavily influenced the choice and use of Scripture.³⁷⁶

In other words, the hermeneutical process relies upon the discernment of the Spirit to find that within the canon of Scripture that is most important for that time and that place.

For this thesis, and in keeping with reflexivity, the process of selecting texts is one which I undertake alongside the hearing of testimony that informs it. Testimony serves to interpret and understand the scriptures, and one outcome of Practical Theological research is the reinterpretation or restorying of scriptural accounts. The choice of the scriptural stories in view comes from the community and from the interpreter (James in the Acts account) who work together to find the important texts. For this research the 'story' of Jezebel has been told about

³⁷¹ John Christopher Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2, no. 5 (1994): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699400200504>. 44-45.

³⁷² Thomas. 45.

³⁷³ Thomas. 46.

³⁷⁴ Thomas. 49.

³⁷⁵ Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse*. 6.

³⁷⁶ Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostals and the Bible'. 50.

women and their voices have not been added to the reading community. In adding their voices, the Jezebel story is reconsidered and its suitability questioned. To do this work, to use testimony of women as an interpretative community reading scripture, I wish to make use of Love Lazarus Sechrest's 'associative hermeneutics'.³⁷⁷ Associative hermeneutics seeks to discover the 'rhyme' between the scriptural story and contemporary issues and in so doing bridges the gap between James and the nascent church in our image of Charismatic hermeneutics. Sechrest's womanist readings allow for an encompassing methodology where the outcome is one which attempts to hear black and brown voices and lived experiences as faithfully as possible from the standpoint of a white woman. This centres their accounts in their own testimony and hears them into speech in the hermeneutical moves of the final analysis. The process involves finding analogical similarity between ancient texts and current experience whilst maintaining the separateness of the two situations. She suggests that this is in keeping with traditional black methodologies of finding experience in the text and moving between the text and the experience and back again. The process of association in this Charismatic Practical Theology is undertaken by the researcher in light of the careful listening and reflexive process primarily in Phase 2. Then, in Phase 3, the associations that have been made before, such as with Jezebel, are either confirmed or new associations sought that better connect to the testimonies of the women. The hermeneutical process begun in context is moved on through this selection.

After the selective methods are complete possible outcomes are considered. The hermeneutic must reflect the community of interpretation that the research has gathered together. Bridges Johns suggests that we renew our attention away from 'what the text meant' and 'what the text means' to 'what new world is being created by text' and 'how are women to be found within this new world'.³⁷⁸ The question this research seeks to ask and answer is, what is the new world created by the women's testimony and how is it related to the scriptural world? Does the new world confirm the old world suggested by the leaders in the community or does it demand a renewed understanding of association and the places in which the women's stories can be found in scripture? By being part of the movement of the Spirit women can develop from the feminist position of 'hermeneutics of suspicion' to an account that incorporates that grief and hope of the bible.³⁷⁹ Bridges Johns appears to approach the reading of scripture for Pentecostal women as

³⁷⁷ Love L. Sechrest, *Race & Rhyme: Rereading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022).

³⁷⁸ Bridges Johns and Stephenson, *Grieving, Brooding, and Transforming*. 10.

³⁷⁹ Bridges Johns and Stephenson. 10.

replete with liberation potential and positive engagement with a text that appears at once to harm and to heal. Instead of understanding the bible as an historical resource to be accurately interpreted and known – an object to be observed from a distance, the bible has a higher ontological status as a way in which the presence of God is ‘mediated’.³⁸⁰ Thus the bible is ‘Spirit-word’ and ‘sacred space’. For women who interact with the bible they seek both the thread of their own story within it and a sense of freedom.

Dismantling of oppressive power structures and liberation are two of the possible outcomes of this process. Bridges Johns develops the interaction of feminist standpoint theory and biblical interpretation that requires women to use their own experience to call out oppression.³⁸¹ She cites Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics of remembrance and the ‘dangerous memory’ found in scripture that call out the patriarchal reading. Fiorenza rejects the ‘either/or paradigm’ of viewing the scripture as either oppressive or liberative.³⁸² This prioritises the standpoint of the female experience in the interpretation of scripture. However, Fiorenza who argues that a conservative woman (by this she appears to mean a woman engaged in patriarchal Christian communities) has internalised her oppression – following Paolo Freire – and therefore could not, using her own standpoint, liberatively interpret the text. This makes the Practical Theological conversation that I propose troubling. If hearing the testimonies of women who have internalised their oppression cannot be bought to bear upon readings of scripture then what purpose has the project? Will they not return to their Jezebel narrative as they have been taught? The role of the interpretive theologian therefore is engaged. As one who is ‘conscious’ following Freire again, they are able to negotiate this interpretative framework that hears the testimony of women who may or may not have critical awareness of their own oppression. However, simple interpretation using feminist standpoint and critical consciousness is not adequate for a Pentecostal/Charismatic informed Practical Theological method. The Spirit, according to Bridges Johns, is involved in the conscientization of the women who read the text.³⁸³ The possibility of liberation and transformed readings are part of the hermeneutics’ final stages.

³⁸⁰ Bridges Johns and Stephenson. 12.

³⁸¹ Bridges Johns and Stephenson. 16.

³⁸² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). 75.

³⁸³ Cheryl Bridges Johns and Lisa Stephenson. 16.

Therefore, I propose that a hearing of the testimonies of women and a conversation with the normative texts of a tradition can achieve a liberative restorying of scriptural accounts following Bridges Johns' hermeneutic of 'grieving, brooding and transforming'. Grieving is the response that the women and the Spirit make when their own life or the scriptural account brings them low,

Whenever women are brought low within the biblical narrative, *Shekinah* is there, lying in the dust, and anguished human suffering.³⁸⁴

This painful and Spirit endued process is followed by 'brooding' where there is hope for 'newness',

The Spirit spreads her wings over the sinful times recorded in Scripture as well as over our own sinful times. Reading the Bible is to experience the hovering, waiting, gestating work of the Spirit.³⁸⁵

As texts are read from the position of the testimonies of women in research, they are ripe with potential and hope. This leads to the final move of Bridges Johns, her 'transformation'. This transformation still holds the brokenness, the patriarchal oppressions and pain but proposes a deeper engagement with Scripture that leads to transformation.

This contextual and transformative reading of Scripture requires a theological hermeneutical process that involves the whole person incorporating the story of God via scripture and experience.³⁸⁶ There is a spiritual kinship between the authors of the original scriptural text and the current interpreters, the personal experience is part of the hermeneutical task. This personal experience is discovered through hearing testimony and the women's generous accounts of themselves. This is what Bridges Johns calls '*yada*' which is to know in an experiential way. There is continuity with the scriptural community via the Holy Spirit.

Thus, this phase of the research mimics this practice of weaving worshipful storytelling and biblical readings into a process of analysis that is suitable for Charismatic theology. It uses the

³⁸⁴ Bridges Johns and Stephenson. 17.

³⁸⁵ Bridges Johns and Stephenson. 18.

³⁸⁶ Johns, Pentecostal Formation, 2010.

hermeneutic of experience to interpret the scriptures recognising that testimony itself, when told by Charismatics is already and always being held against scriptural revelation. The third phase of analysis recognises this back-and-forth action of interpretation. This is not to say that the words of the women will be checked for honesty or accuracy against a literalist reading of the scriptures; rather, as Cheryl Bridges Johns suggests, the mutuality and recognition between the stories of lived experience now and the stories of the bible are noted. A Charismatic/Pentecostal who gives testimony seeks to weave from their own story the stories of God as they are recounted in scripture.³⁸⁷ This means that the outcome of this research is not necessarily practical suggestions; rather, it is affective assonance, continuity in the biblical story from ancient texts to present life. Thus, rearticulating and refining the self-description of a church.

Swinton and Mowat, in their introduction to 'Practical Theology and Qualitative Research', suggest that the outcome of theological research can take the form of 'formulating revised forms of practice'.³⁸⁸ This is with the intention to take the research and critically explore ways in which change is useful and informed by a greater understanding of a situation. This is the process described in my account of phase 1. Other cycles and models of Practical Theology similarly offer 'outcomes' informed by the research such as the pastoral cycle, Osmer's 'pragmatic task', Carledge's further questions or 'proposed transformation of theological praxis', or Root's 'construction' in Practical Theology that he says moves from describing reality to 'normative commitments'.³⁸⁹ This section has sketched the manner in which I will use the data from research interviews to construct a hermeneutic for scriptural reflection making use of association in order to find the stories of women that they shared and their echoes and associations in scripture. Thus, the manner and the nature of the theological reflection is informed by the research findings and analysis.

³⁸⁷ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010). 133.

³⁸⁸ John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, Second edition (London: SCM Press, 2016). 96-97.

³⁸⁹ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008). 175
 Cartledge, *Practical Theology*. 30 Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014). 236-8.

Conclusion to Methodology

The methodology that I propose is suitable for this work, it hears testimony as speech that relates to the good and the bad experiences of the believer, it analyses it in a Charismatic theological way understanding the process as a spiritual task and then takes the outcomes from this and hears anew the testimony of scripture via a reformed hermeneutic. This occurs in three loosely held 'phases' with much movement between them and no logical precedence beyond what is required for clearly written text. These phases are 1. Testimony of the lived religion of women that holds both divine action and human accounts of the community giving space for the good and the bad in accounts. 2. Wisdom in the Spirit taking into account reflexivity and the role of the researcher in the analysis of what is happening. This can incorporate sources outside of theology that the researcher deems useful and enlightening to create a rich analysis of the situation. 3. The final stage, which is necessarily towards the end of the research, is one which takes this conversation between the community and the researcher and thinks about its resonance with scripture. Scripture then is invited to testify in the midst of the community that interprets it: both mutually converse and complexify one another in the hope of highlighting a reading that reflects the lived experience of women, allowing scope for accounts of marginalisation if necessary and their experiences of the divine.

The outcome of this process is not necessarily a renewed attention to a particular form of practices, nor a discrete exegesis of a particular text of scripture. Rather, the outcome is renewed reading and encounter with scripture hearing through the community of interpreters that may not have been heard heretofore. This renewed reading is incorporated into the readings that already exist and through conversations within the community a fresh insight into the testimony of scripture is potentially revealed.

Part 2: Methods

This second part of this chapter describes the process of conducting the research. I describe the situation of the research as conducted by an insider researcher concerned with good, ethical research, and the associated theorising. I also describe the process of recruitment and the boundaries and limitations of the sample. Next, the research process is accounted for, in particular, the way in which research interviews were analysed for the theological and methodological frameworks. I, then, proceed to account for the first of two changes that occurred within the research which led me to reflect upon the manner in which I would analyse

my data. Women described situations of oppression, which were particularly related to their gender. I needed to have a methodological framework that allowed for this and had to adjust my expectations and reconsider my methodology. During the process of analysis, I encountered and describe a second change which required further data gathering and a return to my first phase: Testimony in the Spirit. Finally, I to describe the analysis of the data that I collected, and seek at all times to account for the decisions I made and the reflexive position that I endeavoured to take.

Testify!: Research Design

To hear the testimony of the research participants, I wished to build a model that made use of interview techniques and then develop it into a theological method of data collection. To do this I analysed the value of responsive interviewing and feminist interviewing as two sociological methods that fit the research aims, to hear women's stories of their faith lives. I then translated these methods into a Charismatic model of testimony hearing.

The research was designed to allow for the testimonies of women in Newfrontiers to be received and, following Ward, to participate in as many different social worlds as I could.³⁹⁰ Initially this began as a plan to interview a number of women and seek to understand their own faith worlds and experiences, as fully as I was able. Following Kristin Aune's work I choose to interview only women as it was their faith lives that appeared to be absent from research and publicly available material.³⁹¹ As the research developed and was reflected upon this was not enough for understanding the lives of the women. Thus, I undertook a second phase of data collection to add context to the hearing of women's testimonies via participant observations. I then concluded with analysis of interview data, while describing the findings of the research.

Insider Research

The research design was affected by my status as an 'insider researcher'. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson also call this, following Alvesson (2009) 'at-home ethnography'.³⁹² As a member of a Newfrontiers church and someone who has participated in some wider Newfrontiers

³⁹⁰ Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012). 7.

³⁹¹ Aune, 'Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches'. 50.

³⁹² Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Routledge, 2019). 50.

activities I had a position within the research that made me familiar with much of the background of the community. This also meant that I was able to draw upon networks for recruitment and church observations. This was not without its own difficulties. When churches agreed to observations, they also wished to play some part in influencing the research, asking whether I would allow them to see pre-published material and agree it. I did not allow this, but it did indicate the complex nature of insider research. My relationships with the churches meant that gatekeepers had access to me as well as the access that I had to them. Hammersley and Atkinson note the conflicts of loyalties that an insider researcher can feel towards the organisation that they researched.³⁹³ I particularly felt this as the research developed and the emphasis changed, as the dissatisfaction that the participants noted with the male leadership in the church meant the introduction of feminist analysis that I had not anticipated using. My knowledge of the network, and some of the data collected, meant that I knew this change in direction may not be welcomed by the gatekeepers and leaders of the organisation. Honesty towards the outcomes of the research process and my own beliefs about the nature of the research came into conflict with my perception of the leadership's reception of my work. In this I noticed similarity to Mary Clark Moschella's words:

The goal of ethnographic research is to produce knowledge. This implies an ethical duty to tell the truth. However, this obligation may collide with other ethical duties.³⁹⁴

My need to tell the truth that the women shared with me outweighed the consideration that the leadership of the network itself might dislike the findings.

There were also advantages to my insider status. Many of the women connected to me directly because of this, and there was a sense of kinship that came from this mutuality. Moschella notes that insiders who are church leaders are well positioned to conduct research in their own churches because they are members of a community but also 'set apart' in their status as leaders.³⁹⁵ As a Newfrontiers woman, I cannot be a leader and therefore can't describe my insider status in these terms; yet, as one who has taught theology both inside and outside the network, I noted a similar status to the one that Moschella describes, a sense of separateness because of my theological training. However, unlike Moschella's description of a leaders who aren't 'members

³⁹³ Hammersley and Atkinson. 51.

³⁹⁴ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*. 117.

³⁹⁵ Moschella. 44.

of the tribe', I felt I was a member and that this was not a disadvantage, particularly in my interviews with the women.³⁹⁶

There is a further, nuanced view of my insider status and the associated power I held. In 'Feminism and Method', Nancy Naples notes that the insider/outsider binary masks power differentials within research contexts. She says that we are 'never fully outside or inside a community', and that the relationship with the community is always being 'negotiated and renegotiated'.³⁹⁷ This was something that had to be borne in mind at all times when conducting the research. The renegotiation of power was evidence in the women's willingness to prophecy and pray with me, acts of spiritual agency that I did not instruct them to do, but that they undertook themselves. There was also another authority and power dynamic in the interviews that sociological methodologies do not account for, the presence of God, invited by both the participant and the researcher, which both complexifies and levels the power dynamics significantly. As we prayed at the beginning of the interviews, Christ was invited into the midst of the work, and the presence of the Holy Spirit acknowledged and welcomed. My position of power as the researcher, whilst remaining, was qualified by this. I did not have *ultimate* power in the interviews. However, this does not nullify the power, particularly spiritual authority, that I could have wielded in the interviews. I was mindful at all times that adding this spiritual and religious element to the interviews had potential to be abusive and neglectful of the participants. To the extent that I could minimise this, I made every attempt to do so. This leads naturally to the ethical considerations of the research.

Ethics

Ethical permission for research interviews was gained from the University of Durham. Participants were presented with consent forms, information sheets, and privacy notices after they agreed to take part. Moschella notes the pastoral element of ethical research, which allows for the 'goodness, hope, and justice to which the pastoral practice of ethnography aspires'.³⁹⁸ Although I did not have personal relationships with any but one of the interview candidates, I still attempted to maintain the care that Moschella says is inherent in pastoral and insider research conducted by church leaders. This led me to be careful with the participants that they

³⁹⁶ Moschella. 44.

³⁹⁷ Nancy A. Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (New York: Routledge, 2003). 49.

³⁹⁸ Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*. 103.

consented fully to the work they undertook, and that the data I had collected was a fair representation of them. To do this I sent the transcripts back to them, although not all were available by email to do this. I made sure they knew when they could withdraw, and indeed, as I shall note later, one participant did choose that option and withdrew. Others added to their transcripts or sent additional data which allowed for their participation to continue after the interview had been conducted.

Ethical research should also notice the potential for harm to be done to participants. This speaks to the navigation of truth and harm. Newfrontiers as a network were not participants in this research so noting that the research outcomes might cause them harm because they may not agree with my findings or may dislike them is unfortunate but not the main concern regarding harm. Harm to the women was something that I was very aware of and attempted to avoid. In the research there were moments when participants spoke of truly awful events in their lives, avoiding harm did not necessarily mean that they should not speak of these things despite the distress that it did cause. As Hammersley and Atkinson observe:

Participants do not always see their anxiety or stress as a reason to suspend the research, though this does not necessarily mean that carrying on with it will do no harm.³⁹⁹

One example of this is the participant who spoke of the death of her son. When I checked with her if she was happy to continue, she told me that she had known that she might choose to speak of this. Nonetheless when the interview finished, we spoke of what she would do in the immediate time afterwards and whether there was someone in the house with her or people she could call if she needed support. In this way and although harms occurred, they were navigated. The telling of upsetting stories was part of the permission that the interviewees gave me and continued to give me throughout the interviews.

The ethical requirements for anonymity meant that the participants and the participant observed churches are not identifiable in the research. The participants have been given pseudonyms, as have the churches, and identifying features are not included.

³⁹⁹ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*. 224.

Recruitment

I approached sampling with two main focuses: intersectionality and theoretical sampling, in keeping with my approach of abductive analysis between theory and data. For intersectionality, I wished to follow my theological commitments to hearing voices that had opportunity to speak before. For theoretical sampling, I wished to make sure that the sample was suitable to answer the question I had. For example, they had to be women, and they needed to be members of Newfrontiers. Following from my priority for reflexive research, I sought to acknowledge where I may have missed voices that are different from my own. I looked to see how I have shaped the research and to acknowledge that by shaping it, I potentially omit ideas and groups.

The task for this thesis is to understand and dialogue with the experiences of women in Newfrontiers. In many ways the aims of this overlap with a feminist Practical Theology. Feminist research typically seeks to listen to the experiences of women and to re-narrate the male normative descriptions that predominate, and I aligned myself to some extent with this particular aim despite the methodological impulse being different. This work does seek to give voice to women's experiences but, with a slightly different aim, one that attempts to describe these experiences where they have not been described at all before. It seeks to find these voices as particularised, not necessarily subsumed by a male narrative, but also different to it because of difference in male and female experiences, while in keeping with research framed as lived theology.

Therefore, the method of sampling I employed was theoretical sampling.⁴⁰⁰ This is appropriate because I have a theory I wish to elaborate and generate (as shown in my introduction) that the spiritual experiences of women in Newfrontiers are particular and unique. It is also appropriate because it focuses upon the lived experience of women and the call of Miller-McLemore to heed the quotidian life of women when considering theoretical theology.⁴⁰¹ The sample needs to include women who are participants in Newfrontiers churches for a set period. I choose a set time period to favour those women who had chosen to stay in the community and also those who had a chance to experience over time the life of the church. I choose two years of attendance because this is indicative of a commitment to the church.

⁴⁰⁰ Hammersley and Atkinson. 36.

⁴⁰¹ Elaine Graham, 'Feminist Theory', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

I also wished to make sure that my sample adhered to the intersectional aims of the project which were to aim for research that represented as many different situations as possible. Whilst acknowledging that intersectionality was not sought in order to make claims for generalisation, this project seeks to hear as many voices within the theoretical framework as possible. In this case, I sought to interview women who were of different classes and ethnicities as well as different relational statuses – married and single, parents and not. I also attempted to recruit from a wide range of Newfrontiers’ spheres (see introduction). Elaine Graham illustrates the problem of universalising experience, it is the same problem that feminist theorists attempted to prevent when experience was universalised from the male perspective. Seeking diverse voices can appear similar to seeking to hear *all* voices but this is not the intention of the research. It is *possible* to theorise all women’s experience based upon a narrow sample that is not representative of the diversity of women’s life experience, although it is not ideal; Graham suggests that it is still of value because it has a ‘strategic utility’.⁴⁰² This strategic utility for her is to illustrate the failure to treat women as human subjects, but this is not the way I wish to make use of this sampling strategy. Rather, I wish not to claim that women are not recognised as ‘human’ but rather have heretofore not been investigated. Their voice has not been heard. I do not make universalising claims; rather, I wish in this thesis to generate description and theory based upon the sample that I have rather than on all women in Newfrontiers generally. Then, the strategic utility of the voices can be applied, as per the methodology, to a hermeneutic that has value for the movement.

This research makes no claims to generalisability; rather, the research and the recruitment aim to highlight the particular accounts of *these* women at this time. The outcomes of the research therefore do not anticipate describing the reality for *all* women in Newfrontiers, nor for any group greater than the participants themselves. However, Rubin and Rubin claim that a breadth of participants acknowledges that reality is complex and that it is necessary to reflect that for the sake of credibility.⁴⁰³ For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to gain a variety of opinions within the sample group. I am not seeking to compare experiences or contrast opinions but to generate depth of descriptions within the group. The 24 women who participated in my interviews attended 14 churches in Newfrontiers. I recruited for the interviews making use of contacts I had as an insider of the church network. Two participants I knew as a friend, and they

⁴⁰² Miller-McLemore. 199.

⁴⁰³ Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005). 67.

helped recruit other participants. Once I had interviewed some women, they then shared the call for participants with other women they knew who might be interested in participating, and as such the recruitment used a 'snowball sampling' method. This proved to be constructive for the research as at least one additional participant was recruited from the network of women within Newfrontiers that had become a focus in some of the data and the analysis. For this research, I interviewed 25 women initially and one withdrew after transcription. I received more requests to participate than I had capacity for in the research. I rejected participants on a first-come basis, this meant that I did not take on additional requests once I had fulfilled my quotient of participants and was happy that the intersectional aims were being met as far as possible. It was difficult to recruit for LBTQI+ participants as this was not the primary request for taking part. I reflected after I had finalised my participants that I could have done more to deliberately seek out participants who identified as LBTQI+. No participant identified as LBTQI+ which was unsurprising to me because of the church's view of heterosexual marriage as the only place for sexual relationships. It was unlikely, I thought, that anyone would identify to me that they were LBTQI+ as I was an insider researcher whom most of them did not know.

I requested that participants had attended a Newfrontiers church for at least two years to qualify for participation, this I felt was long enough to establish themselves in the church and would omit women who had not committed to Newfrontiers but were only trying it out. Of the 25, one withdrew her consent after reading the transcript of her interview. The women ranged in age from 23 to 67 years old. They identified their spheres in Newfrontiers as: New Ground, Christ Central, Relational Mission, Commission, and Catalyst. Of the women, three are retired, three work in healthcare, five are teachers, and six work for their churches in administrative or communications roles. The remaining participants include a poet, a television director, a gap year student, a professional in the charity sector, an insurance worker and an administrator at a theological college. The participants skewed towards professional careers, this is reflected in their education also, with 20 of the participants having at least undergraduate level qualification. I was unhappy with this lack of diversity regarding employment and education. Four of the women were married to elders in church leadership, two women are single, six women have grandchildren, and five have no children, the remainder are mothers. It is noteworthy that a number of the women had grown up in Christian families and that was mentioned in the interviews themselves. I endeavoured to recruit diversely both in ethnicity, marital status, and relationship to church leadership. I was aware of the risk of only interviewing other elders' wives and how that might restrict the data as such women would have different access to church

leadership than women who were not married to elders of the communities. One woman identified as Asian British, one as white South African, one as mixed race British, one as mixed-race Jamaican-Nigerian-Black-British. The remainder identified as either White British, British, or other White.

Participants were approached by email with an outline of the project and my original aims are expressed below in the email. This email would become a key part of the change in emphasis that my project underwent as I continued, although I was not aware of it at the time. The email included this phrase: ‘My intention with this work is to move the discussion about women in Newfrontiers away from complementarianism (male eldership) and address the gaps in knowledge that exist about the experience of women who are part of Newfrontiers and choose to remain so’.⁴⁰⁴ This stated my intention to not focus interviews on female leadership but on lived religious behaviour.

Below, fig 1, is the fieldwork through interviews.

Interview	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	NF Sphere	Length of Interview	Transcript returned
1	Katherine	White	?	Commission	77 mins	Yes
2	Gaby	White	38	New Ground	48 mins	Yes
3	Lisa	White	57	Commission	58 mins	No
4	Mary	White	60	New Ground	70 mins	Yes
5	WITHDREW					
6	Sarah	White British	36	Catalyst	61 mins	Yes
7	Anna	White British	36	Relational Mission	57 mins	Yes
8	Natalie	White British	39	New Ground	47 mins	Yes

⁴⁰⁴ Appendix 2.

9	Jennifer	White British	49	Catalyst	59 mins	Yes
10	Susan	White British	60	Catalyst	57 mins	No per request
11	Angela	Asian British	42	Catalyst	64 mins	Yes
12	Stephanie	South African	42	Relational Mission	54 mins	Yes
13	Jessica	White British	39	Catalyst	51 mins	Yes
14	Elizabeth	White British	42	Participant didn't know	66 mins	Yes
15	Andrea	White	36	Catalyst	62 mins	Yes
16	Jane	Black/mixed race British	54	Participant didn't know	74 mins	Yes
17	Caroline	White British	43	Catalyst	54 mins	Yes
18	Donna	Mixed Jamaican Nigerian Black British	49	Relational Mission	51 mins	Yes
19	Julie	White British	66	Catalyst	53 mins	Yes
20	Hannah	White British	23	Relational Mission	50 mins	Yes
21	Helen	White British	36	Relational Mission	57 mins	Yes
22	Sophie	Other white	38	Relational Mission	54 mins	Yes
23	Amanda	British	56	New Ground	57 mins	Yes
24	Tracey	White British	56	New Ground	45 mins	Yes
25	Anne	White British	67	Christ Central	56 mins	Yes

The research data is limited through the methodological and theological assumptions but also because it primarily focuses on white women and in particular there is an uneven distribution in favour of white women who are middle aged. The research does not heavily draw upon women who don't have a degree level qualification. This was unexpected in the data, when I asked for highest educational qualification, I did not anticipate the majority of the women to have a degree. The research therefore lacks diversity in educational attainment. The women also were largely between 30 years old and 50. This means that the experiences of younger people are not particularly well addressed and these people might have different, generational linked, opinions on both the practice of their faith and their status as women. There were only a few women who were older, this results in fewer women who would have been in the first waves of the Charismatic revival and would have experienced the beginnings of the Newfrontiers movement. Finally, the data does not reflect the opinions of men by way of a comparison. This is a relative weakness as I cannot suggest ways that men and women might differ in their lived religious experiences which might highlight the experience of women in a different way or indicate elements of behaviour and testimony that are not related to gender expression.

Conducting the Research

Interviews

This part of the research process relates to the first phase of the methodological framework. This was how I heard the testimonies of women in Newfrontiers, understanding their background and context in their churches within a Practical Theological methodology.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore questions the suitability of qualitative research to access lived religious or lived theological lives.⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, she notes the intention of such research to close gaps in understanding between doctrinal theology and that which is lived 'every-day' by individuals and communities. However, she questions how theology can be understood in practice and the disconnected aims of embodied and practical lived experience and reflective and discursive theological dialogue that is 'disembodied', as she phrases it.⁴⁰⁶ Taking account of this important concern this research determined that interviewing allows for hearing every-day stories which suitably accesses the every-day of lived theology and lived religion. Following Nancy T.

⁴⁰⁵ Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 'Is Qualitative Research the Best or Only Way to Study Lived Theology?', *Ecclesial Practices* 10, no. 2 (28 December 2023): 157–64, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-bja10055>. 157-164.

⁴⁰⁶ Miller-McLemore. 161.

Ammerman and Roman R. Williams, they argue that hearing ‘everyday stories’ is a way in which lived religion and lived theology can be communicated.⁴⁰⁷ They suggest that such stories allow for the ways in which people live out their religion is both practical (because watching everything a person does is neither possible nor pleasant for the individual) and allow for people to give their meaning and as cites where understanding of religious tradition can occur.⁴⁰⁸ For this research such narrative story telling will be accessed through research interviews.

Ammerman and Williams caution researchers to recognise the novelty of interviews, that they do not conform with typical conversations in daily life but are determined by the power of the researcher and their research goals.⁴⁰⁹ While this is important and is borne in mind (see below on feminist research interviews) in the interview, this critique reveals a particular element of the research methodology that makes interviews particularly suitable. Although interviewing is not like typical conversation, as Ammerman and Williams remind us, it is particularly similar to testimony giving. Testimonies start with a general idea, a boundary imposed from outside the story, typically by the individual but sometimes by others, and in the same ways as interviews an artificial form of narrative giving. This makes research interviews suitable for providing data that can be understood in the Charismatic framework as similar to testimony giving and sources of data about lived religion and lived theology that are suitable for answering the research questions.

Research interviews provide rich sources of data of a particular type. According to Ammerman and Williams, research interviews in the field of lived religion produce stories that are tailored to the audience – the researcher and reveal new insights to the interviewee as they speak.⁴¹⁰ This was the case for some of my research participants who expressed new ways in which they understood their stories having told them to me in the interview. As such, the data provided by interviews, says Ammerman and Williams, is ‘co-created in the socially-contingent event of an interview’.⁴¹¹ In asking the question, ‘what can empirical research help us to see?’, John Swinton addresses this concern about any data that comes from qualitative research, including research

⁴⁰⁷ Ammerman and Williams, ‘Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion’.

⁴⁰⁸ Ammerman and Williams. 118-119.

⁴⁰⁹ Ammerman and Williams. 120.

⁴¹⁰ Ammerman and Williams. 121.

⁴¹¹ Ammerman and Williams. 121.

interviews.⁴¹² He notes that all such data is contingent, probabilistic, tentative, and subject to both falsification and revision.⁴¹³ Bearing this in mind, what data *can* a research interview possibly provide that is of value? This relates back to the nature of qualitative research in Practical Theology broadly but can be specifically answered about interviews also. Data from interviews provides insight into situations that could not be received by observation alone argues Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson.⁴¹⁴ Data from interviews provides commentary from those who are in the situation, describing and explaining it from their own point of view. For this research, interviews establish the participants accounts of their lived religion and their own commentary on their meanings. This does not mean, as noted above, that such stories are raw, unbiased, or naïve data but the co-constructed accounts still provide information from the participants perspective that is worthy of analysis and investigation.

The purpose of the interview is to translate the voices of individuals into written texts.⁴¹⁵ Questions and answers are the basic format that all the types follow, where information is gained by that questioning. Questions can be either opened or closed and this affects the type of information gained, although Kathryn Roulston reflects that the type of question asked does not guarantee that the answer will follow as expected.⁴¹⁶ I wished to understand in depth accounts of experiences and to hear those experiences without predetermining the answers. Therefore, I made use of ‘open’ questioning. Open questioning allows the respondent to make use of their own words to formulate answers.⁴¹⁷ The participants own words can be reflected back to them to probe further into the subject matter, or the interviewer can translate their words into academic language; Roulston calls this ‘formulated talk’.⁴¹⁸ This formulated talk can then gain the agreement or disagreement from the participant as an added level of authenticity and verifiability.

⁴¹² Swinton, John, ‘Empirical Research, Theological Limits, and Possibilities’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 81.

⁴¹³ John Swinton. 85.

⁴¹⁴ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*. 103-104 4.

⁴¹⁵ Kathryn Roulston, *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (SAGE Publications, 2010).

⁴¹⁶ Roulston. 15.

⁴¹⁷ Roulston. 17.

⁴¹⁸ Roulston. 18.

Theorising the process of the interviews is also necessary. Interviews in a research setting are typically formally structured or semi structured.⁴¹⁹ Attending to Charismatic testimony meant adhering as closely as reasonably possible to what a person giving testimony in a congregational or social setting would be like. Therefore, interviews were conducted as ‘informal’ interviews which meant they had less of a specific agenda and ‘the researcher uses informal approaches to discover the categories of meaning in a culture’.⁴²⁰ This meant that alongside the call for research participants the primary guiding narrative given was the idea of speaking ‘like you are giving your testimony at church’ and the initial question of ‘can you describe your relationship with God?’. This is theorised by David Fetterman as a ‘survey’ question which is intended to get the scope of a person’s situation and understand the research’s boundaries better.⁴²¹ Rather than having a strict interview schedule with questions that would be semi-formally worked towards, for example as Kallio et al suggest⁴²² I deemed it necessary to have themes about which I would direct questions, if the interview pace slowed down. The interviews were discursive and questions primarily drew out of the participants narratives. In the first two interviews, I trialled asking questions about the theme of practices, such as Advent, Lent, and other observances. This did not garner much response from the first two interviewees. They had little to say on the subject so I decided not to pursue that as a course of investigation. This was an inappropriate survey question I concluded. Fetterman suggests that once a survey question has established a frame of the field then questioning can become specific. This is in order to ‘probe further into established [categories] of meaning’.⁴²³ This particularly became apparent in the interviews that expressed discontent in the complementarian environment. Specific questions clarified the experience *if* it was raised by the interviewee and allowed for the nuance in the situations to be more clearly expressed. I found that close-ended questions, which are useful to ‘quantify behaviour patterns’,⁴²⁴ were rarely useful in the research. The story-telling, narrative nature meant that questions were more naturally open-ended which allowed for the participants to speak extemporaneously around the broad themes of their experience. This meant that the interviews

⁴¹⁹ David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, Fourth edition, Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 17 (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2020). 51.

⁴²⁰ Fetterman. 51.

⁴²¹ Fetterman. 53.

⁴²² Hanna Kallio et al., ‘Systematic Methodological Review: Developing a Framework for a Qualitative Semi-structured Interview Guide’, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 72, no. 12 (December 2016): 2954–65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>. 2962.

⁴²³ Fetterman, *Ethnography*. 55.

⁴²⁴ Fetterman. 57.

were semi-structured but perhaps more accurately semi-~~un~~structured whilst recognising the researcher involvement in the overall planning and themes the participants had freedom to draw on many varieties of experience and direct the conversation.

Responsive interviews also allow the interviewer to interact with the research participant during the moment of the interview. Rubin and Rubin describe the responsive interview as one which is dynamic and iterative.⁴²⁵ They describe the model as allowing for the personality of the researcher in the styles of questioning. This incorporates my reflexive aims. The model is responsive because it is shaped by the interests not only of the interviewer guided by the research question but also the participants. It seeks to learn what is of importance to those who are being interviewed. The responsive interview has five characteristics.⁴²⁶

Firstly, it seeks to understand the participants interpretation of their lives and experiences. This is suitable as this study seeks to understand the human actions and the human response to divine actions, which is necessarily interpretative as the individual explains how they understand the acts of God that they describe.

Secondly, it allows for the interviewer's personality and style not only to be evident but acknowledged. This is suitable for the work because it does not seek to bracket out the religious experience of the interviewer, or the faith of the interviewer, and is then in keeping with my methodological aim that wishes to make the work theological rather than sociological, not bracketing out faith claims.

Thirdly, the interviewer sustains or creates personal relationships with the interviewee and has attendant ethical responsibility to protect them and their data. This fits with my research because some of my participants are known to me prior to the interviews and I wish to be able to include their contribution legitimately and treat all the participants with the same high ethical standard. It is also fitting that a piece of Christian research upholds any and all ethical claims that the research methods make upon researcher.

Fourthly, the responsive interview is broad in questioning so that the views of the interviewer are not imposed upon the interviewee. This is reflexive and therefore suitable for the methodology

⁴²⁵ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*. 15.

⁴²⁶ Rubin and Rubin. 36.

that I propose; it requires me to be aware of the impact of my beliefs and attempt to account for them with broad questioning and careful listening in order to not make assumptions about the data collected.

Finally, the responsive interview pursues different directions and avenues of inquiry based upon the insights of the interview. This is necessary because the research participants are under-researched, and little is known about their beliefs and practices. Although I theorise at the beginning of the work that there is something of interest and value to learn, the interviews themselves will reveal what that is and what should be investigated further.

Feminist Interviewing

Feminist interviewing is an important guide for interviewing women and has been transformative of the practice of interviewing more broadly outside of feminist methodologies. I have mapped this practice onto my own research interviews in this thesis. In the 1980s, Ann Oakley's work on feminist interviews set the tone and emphasis for future discussions about feminist interviewing.⁴²⁷ In her article, she wrote about the sociological paradigm of the time that was transactional. Data was mined from interviewees with little regard for the interviewees' wellbeing or benefit. Conversational tone was pretended, to imitate something the participants were familiar with fraudulently.⁴²⁸ This was manipulative said Oakley, aiming to get as much information out of the interview situation as possible. The requirement was to remain detached from the process as the interviewer, not giving of oneself at all. This was because there was a requirement to boundary friendliness, maintaining a professional relationship with the interviewee whilst prioritising making them feel relaxed enough to talk. It assumes passivity of the interviewee and that the behaviour they and the interviewer conduct is 'socialised' into their conversations. At the time that Oakley wrote her article, the methods that were suggested were non-emotional and professionalised. Since then, that has changed and ethnographic practice, for example that of Hammersley and Atkinson, has embraced and adapted the criticisms that Oakley brought to light.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ Ann Oakley, 'Interviewing Women', in *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. Helen Roberts (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁴²⁸ For example, Selltiz is quoted on 34 '...a brief remark about the weather, the family pets, flowers or children will often serve to break the ice'.

⁴²⁹ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*.

Oakley herself received some criticism about the suggestions for interviewing that she made, particularly, about the attempt to establish rapport with research participants. Rapport was sought in order to avoid the temptation to treat individuals abusively as sources only of data and not of value themselves. Rachel Thwaites comments that although the aims of rapport building are good it still involves an element of performance, of pretending, especially if the researcher is hearing ideas that are offensive to them.⁴³⁰ In that situation, they are not likely to respond in horror at the ideas that they dislike so strongly because they still want to hear the interviewee's beliefs and descriptions. If they were to react, this is likely to end the interview. Thus, there is performance in the interviews that cannot be removed from the process.⁴³¹ Rather, that and other elements of the interviewer's input should be acknowledged via the reflexive process. The researcher should always be reflective about their interpretation and the power that they hold to tell the life story of another says Thwaites.

Despite the best intentions that power difference cannot be removed, but it can be acknowledged. By acknowledging it and the other factors such as pretence in the interview process, there is an understanding that there is a need to be pragmatic in interviews. The feminist ideal of mutual sharing and honesty in the discourse of an interview is the aim but where that is not possible it should be discussed openly and honestly.⁴³² This honesty concerns the partial nature and 'messy' way in which interviews are conducted.⁴³³ It is important to acknowledge the aims of the feminist interview – equality, being *for* the interviewee rather than exploitative and an emancipatory act as being ideals that the interview aims towards. Oakley has since reflected that her interview work still aims to maintain interest and friendship with her interview participants and that this is not a fraudulent claim to a relationship that only exists during the interview phase.⁴³⁴ The interviewees hold a power that the interviewers do not, that of the ability to answer the question as they choose and the decision to forget about the interview process and the work involved if they wish. Oakley frames the interview as a 'gift' from the interviewee, one that is given without the expectation of anything in return. This allows for the researcher to construct

⁴³⁰ Rachel Thwaites, '(Re)Examining the Feminist Interview: Rapport, Gender "Matching," and Emotional Labour', *Frontiers in Sociology* 2 (10 November 2017): 18, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2017.00018>.

⁴³¹ Rachel Thwaites, '(Re)Examining the Feminist Interview: Rapport, Gender "Matching," and Emotional Labour', *Frontiers in Sociology* 2 (10 November 2017): 18, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2017.00018>.

⁴³² Thwaites. 7.

⁴³³ Thwaites. 8.

⁴³⁴ Ann Oakley, 'Interviewing Women Again: Power, Time and the Gift', *Sociology* 50, no. 1 (February 2016): 195–213, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515580253>.

our telling or their story potentially in ways that they do not like, as the co-constructor of the data. This again returns to the role of the researcher in the process of research, not as one removed but one intimately involved in the data that is collected.

Feminist research has prioritised the daily, lived experience of women as sources of deep description and knowledge. Marjorie Proctor-Smith claims that theology is found at the kitchen table, returning once again to the feminist and female orientated view of the sacredness of the ordinary.

This valorizing of the ordinary is the means by which participants in feminist liturgy recognize and honor the presence of the holy in the daily work of women that is rarely regarded as sacred, or even meaningful.⁴³⁵

In order to explore this valorisation the feminist interviewer can be mindful of their language. In the previous section about reflective interviewing, Roulston suggested ‘formulated talk’ as a research method. Feminist interviewers will deliberately use terms and categories used by women in their daily lives, ‘rather than the research topics established by the discipline’.⁴³⁶ This allows for exploration of experience and lives that have not yet been articulated. This appears contradictory to ‘formulated talk’, but the intersection with Christian experience, where there is a recognisable descriptive language for experience allows for such formulated conversation. For example, language about Charismatic experiences or feelings can be formulated together by the interviewer and interviewee into language that both understand. This formulated talk therefore will not be pure academic description but a type of description that is Charismatic and Christian and that is understood by both parties, therefore, while valorizing ordinary experience and deepening descriptions. This feminist method was particularly suitable in the framework of lived theological investigation. The ability to understand the quotidian alongside accounts of faith lives allowed this method of interviewing to approach the research question.

Responsive, Feminist, and Charismatic

The ultimate purpose of the interviews was to hear accounts of the divine in the daily, the lived in the religion and to do so in a way that fit with my theological and methodological

⁴³⁵ Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition*, 2013. v.

⁴³⁶ Roulston, *Reflective Interviewing*. 27.

commitments to hear testimony. Thus, I theorising the interviews as feminist, responsive, and charismatic. Interviewing as testimony is hearing the journey that one Christian has made as a co-creator with the hearer, or interviewer, of stories about God. Oakley's requirement that interviewees be able to ask questions back to the interviewer is a good example of the relational element of interviewing that feminist research methods can teach a Charismatic model of interviewing. Charismatic Christians believe that all Christians are gifted with the Holy Spirit's presence and the specific gifts available to them – such as speaking in tongues or healing. This levels inequalities and power dynamics, theoretically, as all are potentially able to facilitate the continuing presence of God in the midst of the believers. In order to move from the theoretic equality of the participants and the interviewer to as close to a reality as possible, I choose to make use of the feminist research techniques advocated by Oakley.

My interviews are participant interviews about the actions of God in the lives of believers. The interviewees and I both participate in the same Christian world of Newfrontiers churches and are experiencing subjectively of that world and co-creating meaning from it. The interviews are the testimony of those encounters including my retelling of those testimonies, which mirror the practices of the testimony giving and sharing in Charismatic churches.

A key idea of Charismatic interview methods is to 'make room for divine action itself'.⁴³⁷ This attends to the reality of the experiences that individuals testify to, and permits a deep and thorough description of those experiences – one that does not advocate theorising reductively to human action alone.

What then do I mean by an interview that is theological? Following the methodological argument I made for testimony as an important way in which human voices can heard for Practical Theology. The interview must not be only an attempt to access data but to access the testimony of the individual. This testimony is thoroughgoingly spiritual and theological, a religious experience in itself. Thus, an interview that seeks to hear this testimony should be also an opportunity to enter into the work and ministry of God in Christ via the Holy Spirit. For Root this is possible in Practical Theological enquiry. He found during the course of interview research that he experienced the 'ministry' of the interviewees.⁴³⁸ The experience of interviewing became not only an opportunity to hear information but was transformed into a site of divine

⁴³⁷ Root, *Christopraxis*. 51.

⁴³⁸ Root. 40.

encounter. This has led him to reformulate his own approach to Practical Theology as ministerial, one where the hermeneutical endeavour is to interpret the story telling as the ministry of God. It is participatory, says Root, a work that shares in the humanity of the participants and then also participates in the being of God.⁴³⁹

Analysis

This part of the research process relates to the second phase of the methodological framework, the reflexive process of analysis. Here I describe the way in which I interpreted the data I collected self-consciously understanding my own place within this process and the presentation of the data that I made and which constructs the main body of the thesis after the conclusion of this chapter.

The Unexpected Turn in the Research: Change 1

I particularly noted in the recruitment email the issue of complementarianism in the church. For me this was key to describing the project. The only other research project that had existed until this point about women in Newfrontiers was Kristin Aune's, and had specifically addressed gender roles. At this stage, aware as an insider researcher that the church network is sensitive to criticism about complementarianism and not seeking to write a thesis solely about this, I highlighted the broader scope of the research. Nonetheless, within the methodological commitments, there is the possibility that I can uncover areas of dissatisfaction, whilst seeking that which is good in the Newfrontiers network. As the interviews progressed, I was aware that women were telling me about their negative experiences with complementarianism. This is fitting in truly investigative research, as Tranter notes,

Critical theological reflection...cannot and should not foreclose the possibility that we set out to learn from what seems good but also or instead discover that all is not as it seems, that is not well.⁴⁴⁰

As it became apparent that complementarian theology would be an issue that the women would mention, at this point I added the possibility of feminist analytic methods to my methodological

⁴³⁹ Root, 114.

⁴⁴⁰ Tranter, "Disciplined Wonder". 7.

framework. As the women identified moments and examples of oppressions in their experience, I was able to return to the analytical framework in order to address the issues adequately. I grappled with the complexities of the developing research and the reflective process that resulted in a back and forth between previously held beliefs about the research boundaries – that it would ‘move the discussion about women in Newfrontiers away from complementarianism (male eldership) and address the gaps in knowledge that exist about the experience of women who are part of Newfrontiers and choose to remain so’.⁴⁴¹ By highlighting that women ‘choose to remain’ as part of the network, I believe that I opened the possibility of this conversation returning, amongst many other elements of discussion, to the experience of church membership within complementarian churches – and the open stance of not having presuppositions about what the women might say to me or restricting their words. Charlotte Aull Davies comments that describing to participants the purpose of research can be challenging as their contributions can change the nature of it. She states, ‘researchers do not know at the outset what are all the pertinent aspects; in fact, the theoretical focus may shift and different sorts of data become relevant as the research proceeds’.⁴⁴² This was certainly the case with this work as the emphasis changed to incorporate notions of leadership and authority in churches and spiritual lives from the interviews given by the women.

Transcription and Respondent Validation

Upon completion of my interviews, I began to work through the automatically generated transcript that the Zoom software had provided. It became quickly apparent that the transcript was full of errors. As an autistic researcher (see appendix 1), I began to realise that my difficulties with auditory processing were preventing me from working through the audio files and editing the transcripts. Indeed, my first attempt at transcribing an interview and returning it to the participant for their reflections upon, it resulted in them withdrawing from the project (see fig 1). The participant was not happy with my standard of transcription, but also felt their interview did not reflect their true feelings about the process as they had difficult personal circumstances at the time. This was part of the process of continued consent. I withdrew their data from the project and considered different ways that I might overcome this aspect of my own disability. I therefore returned to request further ethical permissions from the university to allow my audio to be

⁴⁴¹ Email to participants.

⁴⁴² Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, 2nd ed, ASA Research Methods (London; New York: Routledge, 2008). 55.

transcribed by an external company. Participants were emailed to inform them of this process and to respond if they wished for their interviews to not be transcribed by this service. Consent was assumed if they did not reply to my contact. I could not contact one participant, so I did not send their transcript to the external company but worked on the transcription myself.

Once the transcripts were completed, they were returned to the participants for review. One participant could not be reached at this stage so their transcript was not reviewed. This is respondent validation, where participants are given the opportunity to check their contribution and confirm their interview data is representative of their views, or add knowledge or insight to it.⁴⁴³ In addition to the withdrawal by one participant another had, at interview, asked that I did not send her transcript to her because she discussed the death of her son in her interview and did not wish to read her words again for fear of causing further upset and grief. All other participants were sent their interviews and either replied affirming their consent or did not respond to my communication. One participant sent me an image that we had discussed during her interview, a painting that a woman had created for her, a woman whom she had worked with in a church ministry. This had inspired some of her answers and at my request she was able to send a photograph of it to me. Although this image did not add to the outcome of the research process, it served as a visual reminder during the familiarisation process.

Throughout the respondent validation process, I maintained a critical distance from the respondent validation. Hammersley and Atkinson note the limitations of respondent validation on research data.⁴⁴⁴ Respondents are not necessarily 'privileged commentators on their own actions'.⁴⁴⁵ By sending interviews to the participants for review, I was not seeking to confirm the truth of their accounts or to achieve infallibility. Rather, I wished to further involve the participants in the research process, give them opportunity to withdraw or change their contribution (as one candidate did indeed do) and to take another opportunity to gain insight. As many did not respond to the email that I sent with their interview transcript, they demonstrated their indifference to these ends. Without further information, it is not possible to understand this as either positive or negative feelings about their participation in the research.

⁴⁴³ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*. 193.

⁴⁴⁴ Hammersley and Atkinson. 194.

⁴⁴⁵ Hammersley and Atkinson. 194.

Returning to Phase 1 – Participant Observations

Additional Research Design: Change 2

The interview data lacked a context in which to place the women who were my participants. This resulted in a second round of data collection using participant observation to address this gap. An example of this lack of context is found Susan Shooter in her work looking at sexual abuse survivor's accounts notes the reaction to Mary McClintock Fulkerson's 'Changing the Subject': 'Ronan's critique was influenced by her attendance at a seminar on Fulkerson's work where there was no discussion of the interview material. This highlights the importance of carefully choosing one's method if the participants' voices are to be clearly heard in the analysis.'⁴⁴⁶ This was pertinent to her research design and is so also for mine, as it highlights the possibility of becoming entangled as a researcher into the research and not giving voice to the participants clearly.

It also became increasingly clear – using Nicola Slee's process of 'stepping out of the field' in order to take advice and to be reflexive – that the voices of the women were disappearing in the methodological and analytical theorising.⁴⁴⁷ This stepping out of the field allows for the critical distance required to recognise flaws in research articulation and to correct it. This happened in many occasions throughout the research but most particularly at the stage of participant observations, and again during the writing up of the research. Following Dustin Benac, I had approached my research iteratively, considering at each stage what questions arose.⁴⁴⁸ Therefore, during a 'stepping out' moment after the interviews were conducted it was apparent there was a need for context of the women and their relationships to churches. The question that arose was: what is it like to worship as a woman in Newfrontiers churches? This also allowed for me to acknowledge Miller-McLemore's concerns about disembodiment in theological qualitative research which is explained below.⁴⁴⁹

To see some of the participants in their worshipping context alongside seeing them in their homes via the computer screen and hearing their descriptions of their embodiment went towards

⁴⁴⁶ Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*. 34.

⁴⁴⁷ Slee, 'Empathy and Immersion as Theological Values'. 134.

⁴⁴⁸ Dustin D. Benac, 'The Craft of Theology and Qualitative Research', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 30.

⁴⁴⁹ Miller-McLemore, 'Is Qualitative Research the Best or Only Way to Study Lived Theology?' 161.

rectifying this disembodiment. A Charismatic methodology making use of qualitative research to conduct a Practical Theological investigation requires not only hearing testimony but situating the testimony within its' faith community. This is because testimony is given and received within a particular religio-social situation where the community hold it and discern its value. In order to discern and describe the situation into which the women would typically practice testimony giving, I conducted participant observations in a sample of the women's churches.

I sought ethical permission to return to data collection via participant observations from Durham University. For observing online services, I noted that I would not need the ethical permissions from the university but made use only of publicly available recorded content. It was therefore unnecessary to approach the churches themselves for their consent. Thus, I undertook participant observations and observations of online live streams of church services. Initially, I undertook participant observation without seeking the correct ethical permissions from the university. When I realised the mistake that I had made I sought these permissions for a fresh round of observations and discarded the erroneously collected data.

Participant Observation

Observing some of the churches from which the women came is a suitable method by which to acquire knowledge of the faith context of the women's faith lives. This does not assume that their daily lives are informed solely by their Sunday attendance but recognises a correlation between them. This follows Ward's view that participation is 'a willingness to participate in social worlds in a range of different ways'.⁴⁵⁰ It is suitable in order to 'develop a picture of the lived experience of a church community'.⁴⁵¹ This method, therefore, suited the nature of this phase of the research, one which sought to sketch a picture of the lives of the women based on their church communities, their common ground and communal faith lives from which their interviews both diverged and reflected upon, and answer the question 'how does this work?'⁴⁵² Helen Collins suggests that participant observations allow for the worship of women to be 'visible and tangible'. As the research interviews focused on women's experience of God, this aspect of their lives was a key component of their lived religiosity.

⁴⁵⁰ Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*. 7.

⁴⁵¹ Ward. 8.

⁴⁵² Mary Clark Moschella, ed., *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice an Introduction*, Second edition (London: SCM Press, 2023). 80.

Participant observations are to some extent an oxymoron – to be both participating and observing is challenging for the researcher. Even though I felt myself to be an insider in these communities, they were not my own church, and I was not a regular attender. Therefore I was in a middle space, that Christian Scharen describes as separating ‘the observed from the observer, the participant from the researcher’.⁴⁵³ Indeed, Aull Davies (citing Gold 1958) says that there are four different roles of participant research: complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant.⁴⁵⁴ She notes that these roles can fluctuate through the research, and I found this to be true in my experiences observing the churches. At times, I felt like a complete observer, especially in the beginnings of the services as I watched friends and families greeting each other. As services began and worship songs started, or I was spoken to by a member of a church, I began to feel more integrated and understood the community and their worship better. At these points I felt more like I crossed boundaries into the murky space of observing/participant. Being in this conflicting space helped me ‘make the familiar strange and the strange familiar’ in line with Moschella’s advice for insider research in churches.⁴⁵⁵ This was in order to ‘pay attention to mundane sights and smells and sounds and gestures’, Moschella says, in order to create an ‘impressionist painting’ that represents an aspect of the church community in view.⁴⁵⁶

The participant observations progressed as follows, I observed two congregations in person, visiting them both twice (Churches A and B). To do this, I spoke to the leaders of these congregations and gained permission to visit. I did this because of my insider belief that attending unannounced in these churches would be noticed, as I believed that the communities would be watchful for visitors and would wish to look after them. It would be deceitful, I thought, to lead the churches into believing that I was an enquiring guest who wished to attend their congregation. I then also watched two online services in two different churches (Churches C and D). These were accessible because churches at the time were still streaming services following the Covid 19 pandemic, and it was straightforward to view these and attend the

⁴⁵³ Christian Scharen, ‘Ecclesiology “from the Body”’: Ethnographic Notes towards a Carnal Theology’, in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward, Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012). 66.

⁴⁵⁴ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*. 82.

⁴⁵⁵ Mary Clark Moschella, ed., *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice an Introduction*, Second edition (London: SCM Press, 2023). 43.

⁴⁵⁶ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008). 25 and 29.

services in this way. All the churches were selected because they were churches attended by the interview participants. I choose four churches total in order to get a breadth of experience, whilst acknowledging that worship practices and church environments amongst Newfrontiers churches do not dramatically vary and therefore four was a suitable number to consider. Figure two shows the relationship of the interview participants with the participant observations.

For the online services, my observation had a different quality. For these I had the role of ‘complete observer’ and, as James H. S. Steven notes, as an ‘eavesdropper’.⁴⁵⁷ The notion of being an eavesdropper carries significant negative connotations and caused me to question the ethical implications of this practice, especially as the churches are not necessarily placing their services online in order to be subjects of research. However, the public sphere into which these services are offered online implies access to any who wish to find it, especially as the services are advertised as available to all online and offered as windows to the churches and their communities. Indeed, Liz Przybylski argues that the what and who of research is changed in the online and hybrid research method. Those who edit and make available church services take on additional roles as editors of content for public consumption.⁴⁵⁸ This role, as I understood it, is the public image of a church, that which is available not only to their community but to anyone who is interested in watching their service. As a glimpse into the worshipping community, it is a valuable resource to extend participation observation into geographical areas that would otherwise be out of reach for the research because of distance.

Figure 2: Participant observations

Interview	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	NF Sphere	Length of Interview	Transcript returned	Participant observation and date
1	Katherine	White	?	Commission		Yes	
2	Gaby	White	38	New Ground		Yes	Church A. in person July/October 2023
3	Lisa	White	57	Commission		No	
4	Mary	White	60	New Ground		Yes	
5	WITHDREW						

⁴⁵⁷ James H. S. Steven, *Worship in the Spirit: Charismatic Worship in the Church of England*, 1. publ, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002). 42.

⁴⁵⁸ Liz Przybylski, *Hybrid Ethnography: Online, Offline, and in Between* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2021). 6.

6	Sarah	White British	36	Catalyst		Yes	Church D online October 2023
7	Anna	White British	36	Relational Mission		Yes	
8	Natalie	White British	39	New Ground		Yes	Church A in person July/October 2023
9	Jennifer	White British	49	Catalyst		Yes	
10	Susan	White British	60	Catalyst		No per request	
11	Angela	Asian British	42	Catalyst		Yes	Church C online October 2023
12	Stephanie	South African	42	Relational Mission		Yes	
13	Jessica	White British	39	Catalyst		Yes	
14	Elizabeth	White British	42	Participant didn't know		Yes	
15	Andrea	White	36	Catalyst		Yes	
16	Jane	Black/mixed race British	54	Participant didn't know		Yes	
17	Caroline	White British	43	Catalyst		Yes	
18	Donna	Mixed Jamaican Nigerian Black British	49	Relational Mission		Yes	Church B – September 2023
19	Julie	White British	66	Catalyst		Yes	
20	Hannah	White British	23	Relational Mission		Yes	
21	Helen	White British	36	Relational Mission		Yes	
22	Sophie	Other white	38	Relational Mission		Yes	
23	Amanda	British	56	New Ground		Yes	
24	Tracey	White British	56	New Ground		Yes	

25	Anne	White British	67	Christ Central		Yes	
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Kallio et al argue that it is ‘ethically dubious’ to collect extraneous data beyond the research question.⁴⁵⁹ The participant observations can only provide additional data that contextualises the research interviews but cannot provide data beyond that which is pertinent to the question at hand. Thus, there is an ethical limit upon what can be known contextually about the women that they have not given themselves and that is not necessary to understand their lived religion.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke say that the process of analysis is full of implicit and explicit assumptions. They call this ‘the big theory’ under which all the analysis is formed.⁴⁶⁰ My analysis’ big theory is a Practical Theological one, which follows John Swinton’s view of what can be known through quantitative investigation.⁴⁶¹ Swinton says that empirical work has the possibility of ‘throwing fresh light on our knowledge of God’.⁴⁶² This means that the research can have validity within the field of Practical Theology and that the broader field of theological enquiry gives it ‘analytic power’.⁴⁶³ Theological ideas thus are the ways in which ‘meaningful knowledge’ in the course of the analysis is able to be determined.⁴⁶⁴

For this research codes and themes needed to reflect the theological framework that determines it – Charismatic theology. However, it could simply be contained to prior categories of Charismatic theology because that would limit the possibility for new ideas and non-conforming responses that push against the normative theology of the tradition. Thus, although the themes and codes were in conversation with Charismatic theology, some were in criticism and others were from the broader Christian tradition. This is also in keeping with reflexive commitments that recognise that similar interview data could be coded by another researcher and come to different conclusions.⁴⁶⁵ Thus, rather than siloed theological knowledge, Swinton suggests

⁴⁵⁹ Kallio et al., ‘Systematic Methodological Review’. 2955.

⁴⁶⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Doing*, 1st ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2021). 156.

⁴⁶¹ John Swinton, ‘Empirical Research, Theological Limits, and Possibilities’.

⁴⁶² John Swinton. 81.

⁴⁶³ Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*. 157.

⁴⁶⁴ Braun and Clarke. 157.

⁴⁶⁵ John Swinton, ‘Empirical Research, Theological Limits, and Possibilities’. 85.

‘hospitable dialogue’ that facilitates knowledge from alternative places – in this research’s case – outside Charismatic theology.⁴⁶⁶

The analysis process went through four stages.

1. Familiarisation
2. First round of coding
3. Thematic coding network
4. Theological and critical analysis using theory

Analysis Stage 1

1. The first stage was the transcription of the interviews and the familiarisation of them. This was in order to sit closely with the text, following Catherine Sexton’s idea of this stage as a practice similar to *lectio divina*. I rephrased this stage as a form of hearing testimony carefully and with the Spirit according to Charismatic practices. This stage takes the form of Charismatic discernment where the research is attended to carefully, not to verify its truthfulness – in common with the feminist and Charismatic views of believing the participants – but in order to understand as fully as possible what the participants had said.

Analysis Stage 2

The second stage was the first round of coding. This coding was initially quite descriptive and fell afoul of Braun and Clarke’s critique of only finding codes and themes that are topic summaries.⁴⁶⁷ Despite this inadequacy the first attempt at coding did continue the familiarisation process and was of benefit because of that. Coding, following Susan Shooter’s description of her own work, took codes from two places theological literature and so-called ‘emergent’ concepts.⁴⁶⁸

The codes all connect to telling stories of lived experiences as women in Newfrontiers churches. Stories from childhood to the present were interwoven with micro accounts of events and experiences that formed patchwork accounts of intersecting spiritual and community-based lives. Alongside narratives of quotidian experiences of mothering, homemaking or working lives were spiritual accounts of supernatural events such as encounters with angels and ‘the enemy’ and

⁴⁶⁶ John Swinton. 85.

⁴⁶⁷ Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*. 263.

⁴⁶⁸ Shooter, *How Survivors of Abuse Relate to God*. 47.

descriptions of enacting the 'gifts of the Spirit'. These were all identified as codes. As part of the process of aiding in validation, I should also account for how I came to these codes and those codes which I rejected in the process. This is called operationalization by Johansen and seeks to be honest and transparent about the formation of data analysis.⁴⁶⁹ As such these initial themes became part of a process that was largely descriptive. I would eventually reject narration in favour of 'story telling' and subsume 'community' into friendship. During coding I noticed that it was common amongst participants to answer the question 'Please can you describe your relationship with God?' with an account of their childhood. This led me to note, following Graham Gibbs, that this was a common phenomenon. Gibbs cautions that such phenomena cannot be called statistically relevant but does indicate the need for description and explanation as a key part of the study.⁴⁷⁰ As this was a noticeable trait in the interviews, it led me to consider what analytic ideas could be associated with it. I then decided to describe their practice of retelling their childhood as 'storytelling'.

Analysis Stage 3

The third stage of analysis was developing a 'thematic coding network', which begins the development of describing themes in the data. Themes describe 'patterning of meaning' in the data.⁴⁷¹ A theme is different from a topic summary in Reflexive Thematic Analysis because it does not relate to the entirety of what has been said about a given topic but identifies a 'central organising concept'.⁴⁷² As a Charismatic Theological project, the organising concepts were considered through this lens, themes that expanded upon meaning in relationship to theological ideas (as per phase 2 of the methodological process) and generating the titles as either semantic or latent descriptors.

These themes became significant parts of the analysis. In this stage it is important in reflexive thematic analysis to recognise that themes 'do not speak for themselves' and that it is the role of

⁴⁶⁹ Kristine Helboe Johansen, 'Analytical Strategies', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. Pete Ward and Knut Tveit Reid, Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022). 397.

⁴⁷⁰ Graham Gibbs and Uwe Flick, *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, Second edition, The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit (Los Angeles; London: SAGE, 2018). 66.

⁴⁷¹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Doing*, 1st ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2021). 76.

⁴⁷² Braun and Clarke. 77.

the researcher 'to speak for' the themes.⁴⁷³ Acknowledging the caution Braun and Clarke give about belief in 'emerging themes', it is useful to differentiate between codes that appear from literature and inform the interviewing process in order to confirm what is already understood.⁴⁷⁴ However, codes are introduced from the literature when this is fitting and then also codes come from the researcher's engagement with the material in order to offer. The time spent in the first stage of familiarisation prevented this to some extent and prevented 'moving away too quickly from the basic principle of allowing the respondents' words to determine the coding had led to premature conceptualizing'.⁴⁷⁵ In my initial analysis of the interviews, I identified four themes: narration, agency and intersections of marginality, community and practices, I developed these through coding the data.

After the participant observations a further round of analysis was required. This is because further access to the embodied behaviour of some of the participants was enabled in the observations that gave insight into the useful codes and themes that represented the findings. The second stage did end in conceptualisation where codes and themes were named with terms that appear in the final process.

Analysis Stage 4

The fourth stage of analysis was a conversation between the thematic structure and the analytical literature from theology and elsewhere. Another process of 'stepping out' (see participant observations section) allowed for the overall themes to be developed. At this point the notion of 'making space' became the primary theme with subthemes concerning epistemology. For stage four of the analysis the interviews are considered in light of the theoretical interests of the research. This is the part of the research where the themes were revised, the anticipated 'revision of candidate themes' that Braun and Clarke anticipate.⁴⁷⁶ For semi-structured interviews the interviewer must have some familiarity with the field. Hanna Kallio et al argue that this allows for the improvisation of questions based on the responses given within the interview.⁴⁷⁷ This also allows for the final stage of thematic analysis, the continued knowledge of the researcher of the field allows for theme creation that reflexively moves between the data and the field to generate

⁴⁷³ Braun and Clarke. 91.

⁴⁷⁴ Shooter. 47.

⁴⁷⁵ Shooter. 48.

⁴⁷⁶ Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*. 99.

⁴⁷⁷ Kallio et al., 'Systematic Methodological Review'. 2955.

themes. I note this most particularly in the development of the theme ‘practices for epistemology’. This idea reflects the data. It captures the ‘essence and scope’ of the theme as Braun and Clarke require and the ‘broad pattern of meaning’.⁴⁷⁸ However, it also uses a term that is part of the analysis rather than gleaned from the data itself. This is, therefore, a ‘latent’ theme that is an ‘implicit meaning’ from the data that is researcher led.⁴⁷⁹ Latent codes and themes can be suitable in reflexive thematic analysis if they address the aims of the project. It is inaccurate to assume that the opposite of latent coding/themes is ‘semantic’ which uses the words of the data and is somehow more representative of the data.⁴⁸⁰ A latent code or theme, such as the ‘mysticism’ code can capture a meaning that I as a theological researcher can describe in keeping with my methodological stance, particularly of phase 2 in the research. In phase 2, I suggest that Spirit inspired wisdom from multitudes of sources allows for Charismatic rescripting making use of external sources for analysis and an abductive process.

The process of deciding upon themes in a piece of thematic analysis requires a reflexive stance. As noted above, reflexivity takes into account the stance of the researcher in the production of research data. Therefore, the codes I choose were influenced by my own experiences as a theologian and as an insider researcher. Upon examining these codes, it becomes apparent that bodies, in particular, theologising practices through the body, are common, with gender and practices associated with body theology. Another theme that can be constructed from the data was storytelling. The women placed themselves into the sacred stories of God and the bible, which functions as a way to explain and narrate life both individually and in community. The third set of codes, friendship and community, falls within both themes as the women told stories of how they made their friends with divine help and how so doing created subversive, gendered communities that allowed their faith lives to flourish. These collections of codes became my sub themes. From this I was able to identify an overarching theme, this was ‘making space’.

An overarching theme in reflexive thematic analysis is not a topic summary or a collection of everything that is said by each participant, rather it is a capture of ‘shared meaning, united by a central organising concept’.⁴⁸¹ The interview data suggested that there were two significant ways

⁴⁷⁸ Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*. 112-113.

⁴⁷⁹ Braun and Clarke. 57.

⁴⁸⁰ Braun and Clarke. 58.

⁴⁸¹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Doing*, 1st ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2021). 77.

that women describe their faith lives as related to the research question, one via their bodies as gendered and sites of spiritual encounter and, second, through the telling of stories. These two elements represent the embodied and the cognitive for these women. Both are captured in the overarching theme of ‘making space’ because it was these embodied acts that helped them enact agency and the telling of stories that related this agency to their lived religion. The telling of stories is the cognitive and thoughtful response, weaving in scripture, sacred reading, and understandings of theology to build a mental framework that establishes faith. The embodied element is a troubled narrative where there are both positive encounters with God, as well as rejected gendered bodies in the churches. The theme of body assumes a different way of knowing God, one that corresponds to the experiential and embodied. The narrative element makes up a third stream of knowing God, the testimony that the women give serves to tell their own story as sacred, through gendered practices, that link them to the sacred stories of the bible and to others in the community. These are, therefore, embodied narratives of community and family both immediate and in biblical stories. Thus, the organising concept for these women’s accounts is making space. Other sub-themes were knowing God, through embodied, gendered practices and narratives.

Stage 4 analysis final themes, sub-themes and codes.⁴⁸²

Theme 1: Epistemic complexity: ‘Newfrontiers is very much about male leadership of churches’.⁴⁸³

Code 1: ‘Overlooked and misunderstood’

1.1 Women restricted from leadership – 12/24 interviews mentioned complementarianism

Code 2: Gender as a dangerous influence

2.1 Dance

Code 3: Subversive groups

3.1 ‘pushing some doors’ as groups of women

Code 4: Intersection of race

4.1 All women who identified as minority ethnic said that race was a factor in their unacceptability

Theme 2: Towards epistemic credibility: making spaces

Code 1: Making a space in the church: Towards epistemic credibility

⁴⁸² A full and detailed code map is found in Appendix 3.

⁴⁸³ Sarah, Interview 6, n.d. Page 11.

- 1.1 Women describing themselves as 'leaders' or 'in leadership'
- 1.2 Some churches do allow women to preach sermons
- 1.3 Interpretation of tongues, giving of prophecy, leading services – positions of responsibility in the church related to conveying the words of God or knowledge about God.
- 1.4 God does not support the unacceptability
- 1.5 Change in Newfrontiers is anticipated 'waiting for Terry Virgo to die' for it to happen
- 1.6 Complementarity is something to be ignored or for other things to be viewed as more important. Women who see complementarian church leadership as a problem remain in Newfrontiers for other reasons

Code 2: Mechanisms of epistemology: legitimacy and epistemology in the daily

- 2.1 Empowered by the Holy Spirit
- 2.2 God as intimate friend
- 2.3 God known outside of church
- 2.4 God making spaces and giving vocations
- 2.5 'Sacrifice' to know God better
- 2.6 God known through identity as women
- 2.7 Self-control and management of self for knowing God.

Code 3: Making a place in the community of God

- 3.1 Storied epistemological credibility (The power of giving personal testimony, Expecting good endings to stories, God is in the story of suffering, Mapping lives onto the biblical story)
- 3.2 Friendship and community as epistemic potential (Friendships as 'deep' community, Friendships with people similar to friendships with God, Subversive groups, Friendships with other women)
- 3.3 Epistemic difference: what I know and what the world knows (Illustrating difference with the world – being in Christ v. culture, Defending the place against the spirits of the world – spiritual warfare, 'We have non-Christian friends too' – being in and out of the world, 'Not a feminist takeover' – rejecting feminism, being supportive of women in Newfrontiers is not the same as feminism outside of Newfrontiers.)

The above list of codes and themes includes the renewed names of themes following Braun and Clarke's naming process.⁴⁸⁴ They suggest that theme names should represent the analytic process, saying what the analysis will say about the coded data, rather than simply identifying the topics of

⁴⁸⁴ Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*. 111-113.

the codes.⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, these themes – include language, such as ‘epistemic’ and ‘mysticism’ that is part of the Practical Theological analysis that comes in phase 2 of the investigation. Themes point both backwards to the data and forwards to the analysis in an iterative and dynamic process.

Themes and the Following Chapters

The phases of the research and the themes and codes from the data that I have developed now coalesce in chapters 4, 5 and 6 to help structure the analysis. Chapter 4 presents the data in keeping with phase 1 of the research process to hear testimony. This chapter is formed around the two main themes and the sub themes. The first theme addresses the difficulties that the women accounted for in the reception of their God knowledge. In chapter 4, the first part describes these difficulties. The second theme of the testimonial interviews concerned the ways in which women negotiated their epistemic acceptability and the way they made space for themselves. The first level of codes is reflected in the subheadings throughout the chapter. Chapter 5 is phase 2 of the research. The first part addresses the first theme: Epistemic injustice and contains the phase 2 analysis of the data. The second part of chapter 5 addresses the analysis of theme 2. Finally, chapter 6 is phase 3 of the research, the hermeneutical reading based on the testimonies. Part 1 is a reading of Jezebel that interacts with the first theme in the data, that of epistemic complexities. It is a hermeneutic based upon the first theme. The second part of the chapter reflects the second theme, negotiated epistemic acceptability and is a hermeneutic based upon that theme. Chapter headings and subheadings mirror the themes and subthemes as shown below:

All three of these chapters are divided into two parts reflecting the two main themes of the interview data. The first part of each chapter addresses the problems the women accounted for and the second part of each chapter, their adaptations and solutions. The chapters are divided into the two themes and each theme contains the codes I created from the data:

Theme 1: Epistemic complexity: ‘Newfrontiers is very much about male leadership of churches’.⁴⁸⁶

Code 1: 'Overlooked and misunderstood'

Code 2: Gender as a dangerous influence

Code 3: Subversive groups

Code 4: Intersection of race

⁴⁸⁵ Braun and Clarke. 112.

⁴⁸⁶ Sarah, Interview 6. Page 11.

Theme 2: Towards epistemic credibility: making spaces

Code 1: Making a space in the church

Code 2: Mechanisms of epistemology

Code 3: Making a place in the community of God

Conclusion

This chapter has described three elements of the research enquiry: the theological framework, the methodological framework, and the methods employed in the research. I have situated the research within the field of Charismatic theology and the discipline of Practical Theology. I have accounted for the methodological decisions that allow for knowledge of lived theology. By framing the process within a broad understanding of the Charismatic practice of testimony giving, I have described a threefold process of testifying by which the research participants, the researcher and the two combined speak, analyse, and then reflect upon scripture. Thus, the outcomes of the research have a descriptive, analytic, and scriptural element which both highlights the good and the bad in the human experience, allows for a Charismatic theological viewpoint with regards to divine action and of the potential for liberative normative moves. The second part of the chapter then develops the undertaking of the research, making note of two changes in my planned work, one that reflected the concerns of the women interviewed and another the concerns of my supervisors. By making note of these changes, I embrace the reflexivity and openness of the methodology and account for my decision making. Finally, I described the coding process as it fits in with the analysis I make and account for the decisions I took when embarking on the analysis. Having done these things I am able to present, in the next chapter the findings of the research and move forwards towards the analysis thereafter, and then, in the final chapter, the scriptural readings which completes the three phases.

Chapter 3: Towards Wisdom in the Spirit: Newfrontiers Worship Spaces

The social worlds of Newfrontiers women are formed of many different spaces and all of them intersect to form and be formed by their lived religion. One significant space, that unites them all, is the space that they worship in with their congregations. The literature review and research interviews suggested that agency within Charismatic communities is a significant factor for the research. Lived religious investigations seek to understand practices that are adaptive and gendered. Therefore, understanding how worship space is experienced and how women are seen is critical for placing the women's voices into their context. The women told me in their interviews about difficulties with engaging with their worship spaces (see next chapter) and therefore experiencing this alongside them adds depth to the description of their religious lives. This section of the thesis reflects phase 1 of the research methodology. Phase 1 is the process of hearing testimony and observing churches, conceived of as giving insight to lived theology and divine action part of which incorporates participating in the women's worshipping communities. The categories indicate the ways in which the lived religious practices of embodied spirituality interact with the structures of the churches.

I visited some of the churches of my participants. Gaby and Mary attend Church A. Gaby is married to a church leader and a mother of three children. She was present each time I visited. She never sat in the congregation but was visible coming in and out of the church and organising the children's work. I did not see Mary either of the times I visited. Church B was the community of Donna and Helen. I did not see Helen when I visited and that is in keeping with what she told me in her interview about her difficulties attending church. I did see Donna and spoke to her. She, like Gaby, is the wife of a church leader and was in and out of the auditorium during the service. Both Gaby and Donna seemed busy in the services, with their participation in worship limited by tasks that served the community.

Church C and D were online observations of my participants. Church C was Sarah's church, and she was visible in the services online. Although also a wife of a church leader, she took a more active role in the church services rather than a task orientated facilitating role like Gaby and Donna. Sarah's previous sermon is listed on the website and her spiritual and leadership presence in the community was more apparent. Church D is the church of Angela. Angela led aspects of the service including leading the community in the closing devotions at the end of the

service. Angela described to me her role as a ‘church leader’, and this was evident in the observations. She was helping the congregation in their worship. These women whose churches I observed were both visible and invisible during the worship services. They took back-seat facilitation roles and visible, worship directive roles. This appeared contradictory to me that the women had roles and did not have roles, were visible and invisible.

1. Church Services: The Worshipping Space

Worship environments in the churches of Newfrontiers are informal and modern. Buildings are sometimes hired, repurposed, or were built for purpose in the last 20 years. The internal environments are functional, most of the services have plastic chairs laid out in a U shape facing a worship band and a space where people preach, prophesy, give words of encouragement, and lead the services. This space is a space of encounter between the congregation and God, and a space where knowledge of God is delivered to those who listen. Church A is a congregation in the suburb of a major city. The church has a purpose-built building with a car park at the front. It has a large banner with ‘Welcome’ written on it and international flags displayed. Church B is an inner-city church that uses a school hall; it had temporary freestanding banners with church branding on it. Church C is in the suburbs of a deprived city area, and church D is found in a town in the midlands.

The structures of the services were similar in all 4 locations. There was worship led by a worship band comprised of guitars, keyboards, and singers. Church B and D had women leading the worship on occasions that I visited.⁴⁸⁷ Women have other roles within the church services in Newfrontiers. In church D, a woman led the service and directed proceedings.⁴⁸⁸ Women were visible in the direction, leading and public speaking in all of 4 churches that I observed. All the churches had an informal atmosphere compared to my experience of liturgical churches. Despite programme and structure, they were all able to be interrupted by members of the congregation, and regularly were. These interruptions are part of the worship of the community, who bring insights, testimonies, and contributions regularly throughout the services. Church A began its services whilst everyone was still milling around and talking. Indeed, several minutes into the service people were still arriving and talking to one another. This suggested to me that the

⁴⁸⁷ Church B visit 1 17/09/2023 and 24/09/2023, church D observation 2 8/10/2023.

⁴⁸⁸ Church D observation 1 1/10/2023.

community and the conversations were in many ways as important and as much an expression of their faith beliefs, as the other elements of the services.

The structure of the church services facilitates opportunities for participation. The churches that I observed actively encouraged gifts of the Holy Spirit and identified themselves as Charismatic congregations. During the services there were demonstrations of the gifts of the Spirit like those described in 1 Corinthians 12.8-10. Newfrontiers considers itself distinctive in that combination of the high authority of scripture and Charismatic pneumatology. It is through a close reading and engagement with scripture, and an expectation and practising of gifts of the Holy Spirit, that members participate in the supernatural life of the church. In church A, there was a sermon about Ephesians 6.18-24,⁴⁸⁹ containing descriptions of spiritual warfare that were not metaphorical; the expectation being that this was a reality that the members experienced. In the same service, I noted that the congregation were biblically literate: the leader asked a question about where something was found in the bible. I couldn't answer it when I thought about it, but a congregant answered by calling out that it was found in 1 Thessalonians. This was a good example of the Newfrontiers dual emphasis on Word and Spirit. Church A also had episodes of glossolalia.⁴⁹⁰ Church B had a prophetic word given and church C had an example of a person exercising the gift of prophecy via images (a 'picture').⁴⁹¹ The worship space flexes and moves with the participation of the members. There was a focus (and a camera for the online services) towards the front of the church, but this did not capture the other spaces in the rooms that were used. Indeed, in online viewing, I could not always see what was happening because the focus of the room was behind the camera, or there was dancing that moved out of sight. This illustrated to me that the space was even and participatory. That the service was led from the front but directed by the congregation too. Thus, both the Spirit and the congregation were assured into mutual community via the services.

2. Embodiment and Belonging in Community

Worship for the people in the services was a whole body experience. I witnessed strong emotions and noted in my research journal 'all kinds of emotions very visible, fear/anxiety, joy tears' of Church C, and in my first visit to Church B I witnessed public weeping during the

⁴⁸⁹ Church A visit 1 16/07/2023.

⁴⁹⁰ Church A visit 1 and visit 2.

⁴⁹¹ Church B visit 1 and Church C observation 1.

worship. Worship involved people moving and dancing and waving flags. In church B, people left their seats and moved into the space at the front of the church where they danced, adults and children alike. It had a party atmosphere to it, incongruent with the school setting. The getting out of seats had a symbolic nature to it, people were not told to do so, and, therefore, it required initiative and some bravery to move from the observer role of a congregant to participate in this dancing. Also, those who would offer a prophetic word or a testimony would get out of their seat and travel to the front to provide it, again, a symbolic movement from observer to public storyteller.

Testimony giving was a regular feature of the services. In church A, a woman gave two testimony stories that concerned her quotidian experiences interlaced with divine power.⁴⁹² One testimony in church A was from a woman about her child and their mental health difficulty; this was given with an assumption that the church knew and cared about this child. In church C, a woman gave an account of a miraculous healing; this was in order to give thanks to God for the miracle, but also to encourage the congregation that these events happen and are possible for them to access also. Story-telling forms the background to a supernatural life that moves beyond the services and into the week. For church C, these types of testimonies were translated because the speaker did not speak English.⁴⁹³ I also observed expected and regular testimony giving in church D.⁴⁹⁴ This story-telling and lived experience was also woven into sermons. Sermons in the observed churches were thematically similar, touching on issues of gifts of the Holy Spirit and managing suffering. They were also similar in methodology, most contained personal accounts – church C at both visits had sermons that included personal testimony from the preacher.

3. Communities and Boundaries

Newfrontiers ecclesiology is primarily orientated towards communities of belonging. It is fundamentally based upon relationships and knowing people, to the extent that these relationships are offered as a store front for people to buy into if they wish. It is also not focussed as much on the atmosphere, the building, or the visual element of church worship – to the extent that as long as the people are gathered together Newfrontiers truly can be anywhere. As I arrived for my first visit at church A, I saw families and teenagers arrive; they were dressed

⁴⁹² Church A visit 1.

⁴⁹³ Church C observation 1 of 8/10/2023.

⁴⁹⁴ Church D observation 1.

informally and were chatting and hugging one another in greeting. The main auditorium was up a flight of stairs and is a large, open space with a worship band set up at the front. There were many signs about saying 'welcome' or displaying international flags. At the back of the auditorium there were sofas and push chairs parked by new parents. Boys were kicking a football about before the service began, and there were boxes of lego. My impression was of a home-like environment where people were treated as if they were visiting someone's house. Church B was quite different in some ways. They were in a central city location and using a school hall as their meeting space. Thus, they were unable to affect the fabric of the building in the same way. The school had steep banks of chairs similar to a theatre that the congregation sit in. However, I noted that there was a similar family-home atmosphere generated by the community. I watched children running laps of the space available, and there was a 'welcome team' who were wearing badges so they could be identified. The service began after a period of tea and coffee, and there was a sense that people were sharing their stories of the week and catching up. I was invited to join in with these conversations and made to feel welcome. There was an expectation in both of the services that I visited that each person is known and part of a community.

Social activities are encouraged in church plants as a way of building community and relationships. This correlates to Virgo's emphasis upon friendship and is a distinctive feature of Newfrontiers.⁴⁹⁵ As a form of spiritual practice, this incorporates the individual into the body and family of Christ in an embodied way. The relational nature of Newfrontiers church planting is a key point of interest to this study, and Cooper summarises it well:

That is an emphasis upon relationships, the acceptance of the spiritual journey of those they are trying to reach, and the expectation that God will in some way be active through the work of the Spirit.⁴⁹⁶

This is reflected in church B, where they met in the school, and the environment was largely unchanged from its focus in the week. However, the community functioned as the church, something more than the physical environment. Indeed, this was illustrated on my first visit when I arrived early in view of the advertised start time. I walked around the school a couple of times trying to find the entrance for the service. There was no obvious way in, and I noted in my

⁴⁹⁵ See more on this in chapter 2 and Jefferey's work on friendship.

⁴⁹⁶ Cooper, *Newfrontiers Church Planting in the UK: An Examination of Their Distinctives and Practices*. PhD Thesis, Bangor 2009. 114.

research journal, 'I'm not even sure I'm in the right place' and 'how do people come here for the first time?'⁴⁹⁷ I concluded that the only way you could find the way in and visit was to know someone, in fact, as I waited I saw someone I recognised from wider network events and followed them in. I was struck by the difference to the established church where it is much easier to attend services as a newcomer. As I attended both services at church B, I began to notice that the church was interested in new people, but that the expectation was they were invited via connections to the congregation. They were not expecting people to attend 'off the street' particularly.

Church B had a specific view of the world that was cast as something quite separate, as a threat to the survival of Christianity and a risk to their way of life.⁴⁹⁸ The sermon series that I observed reminded me of the 'Christ against Culture' view of the relationship with the world;⁴⁹⁹ I noted that in my research journal, 'real sense that "the world" is very other to the Christian life and that UK Christians are persecuted, are in a war'.⁵⁰⁰ There was a narrative of persecution in this church's worldview. Yet the community itself welcomed me as I arrived and on my second visit, when there were three self-identified new people, the order of service, and what to expect was explained to the church as a whole.⁵⁰¹ This, then, was a confusing dynamic The world is against us but someone who appears as if perhaps from 'the world' is welcomed. I understood this to be the conflict between seeing non-Christian society as polluting and persecutory but understanding individuals as welcome and potential members of the community. This was, I thought, an emphasis upon localised belonging and evangelism. This was reflected in the other churches that I observed also.

There was no consistency with the communities and their social makeup. Church B was diverse, full of families, individuals, and people of a variety of ethnicities. This perhaps reflected the location in a major city. However, church A was less diverse ethnically, although there was representation. It had many families also, and a range of ages were represented. During church A's Ephesians sermon, the translation for a passage was put in Ukrainian on the screen for the whole congregation. I believed this was because the church had refugees from the Ukrainian-

⁴⁹⁷ Church B visit 1 17/09/2023.

⁴⁹⁸ Church B visit 1 and 2.

⁴⁹⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1st ed (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

⁵⁰⁰ Church B visit 2.

⁵⁰¹ Church B visit 2.

Russian war in the service, and they were making them feel able to worship and feel welcome. Church C put their song words up on the main screen in Spanish, and it became apparent that this was because of a Spanish speakers in the congregation.⁵⁰² Later on, there was mention of people praying for visas and in the subsequent service the focus was a national celebration with regional dances, songs, and dress.⁵⁰³ There was mention of colonialism, creation and the environment, and immigration in this service and it appeared to me to be a church interested in society and social action. This international focus and welcome were reflected in church D also. When I watched a service, I noted that prayers were offered for Gaza at the beginning of the war there.⁵⁰⁴ The international welcome and hospitality is applied by these churches in their own local context. Those people who might not understand English were known to the church and their language needs were accommodated. Church D offers a local drop-in centre offered as a warm space and a place for company. This is orientated towards those who don't attend church.⁵⁰⁵

Despite a fear of the pollution of the world in church B, there was an awareness and welcome to people who journey from the world into the church. Once a person regularly attends the church, they are welcomed as a part of the community. For church A, this was via a membership process, which I watched in my second visit. This was presented as a semi-official way of the people saying they wanted to commit to this community. It was not any form baptismal rite, nor did it have any other theological overtones to it beyond the community aspect. However, it was accompanied by testimonies of how the individuals came to find church A, and their joy at belonging there.⁵⁰⁶ At the beginning of the first visit, this church gave notices about events they had on in the week that were centred around food and socialising and faith.⁵⁰⁷ These incidents implied to me a community that lived its life with one another, sharing intimate details without reserve and eating home cooking and having fun with one another.

⁵⁰² Church C observation 1.

⁵⁰³ Church C observation 2 of 1/10/2023.

⁵⁰⁴ Church D observation 2.

⁵⁰⁵ Church D observation 2.

⁵⁰⁶ Church A visit 2 1/10/2023.

⁵⁰⁷ Church A visit 1.

4. Visibility and Invisibility in Worship Spaces

In church B and church C, I noted in my research journal that I could not tell from the service who was in charge. So many different people stood and spoke publicly that there was no discernible leader. Their dress did not identify them. For church C, I could only tell when they said, 'I'm one of the leaders here'.⁵⁰⁸ This lack of emphasis on the identity of leaders illustrates the communitarian nature of the churches. This is in contrast to the requirements of leaders in the church to be male. I found myself reflecting on the purpose of these rules when the leaders do not have a visible role in the services.

In the churches, I saw a number of occasions where women were leading worship or sharing words in front of the gathered congregation. In all four churches that I attended (online and in-person for my participant observations), there were theoretically women preachers. They either listed them on their websites or referred to them in their services. However, at no point in the services that I attended were women preaching. This indicated that, although it is permissible in Newfrontiers churches that a woman might preach and, indeed, my participant Sarah had done so in recent times, it was certainly not frequent enough that I encountered it.

Not all Newfrontiers churches do allow women to preach or speak publicly in front of men. It was more common to see women participating in leading the congregation by leading the service or leading the sung worship. As part of this role, it was common to see that this included managing contributions brought by the congregation.⁵⁰⁹ The purpose of this management is not only to facilitate issues of timing and handing over of audio equipment to the potential speaker but also to consider the appropriateness of the contribution and whether it is beneficial to the church and theologically in-keeping with the beliefs of the congregation. In this way, I questioned whether the gatekeeping of doctrine that Andrew Wilson refers to as part of the eldership role that is at least diluted to those who lead services, which can include women.⁵¹⁰ This moment of observation signified the wider uncertainty that I saw demonstrated in the observations about the role of women as gatekeepers and presenters of theological truth. They were both able to deliver sermons, although they did so less frequently than men; they could gatekeep truth in the gathered congregation and thereby act as guardians in the service, contra to

⁵⁰⁸ Church C observation 2.

⁵⁰⁹ Church D observation 1.

⁵¹⁰ See chapter 1.

the teaching of one authority in Newfrontiers, but this authority of theological knowledge was unofficial and recognised imperfectly. In the two online services, women summarised the learning from the sermon and made links to the rest of the service.⁵¹¹ These women were also publicly identified as ‘leaders’ of the churches.

There is not a universal Newfrontiers position on what the application of complementarianism theory looks like in their lived religion. The only common theme which I have seen is that there is never a woman in the office of elder in a Newfrontiers church. It is the case that women perhaps perform aspects of this office, but they will not be recognised or labelled as doing so. Governance in Newfrontiers churches is one of their particular distinctives. Claiming to follow complementarian doctrine, even if the application of this doctrine varies, is a core identifying feature, which serves originally with Virgo to boundary the church and continues to do so now. The women that I knew as participants illustrated this uncertainty. Two of my participants had visible roles in their congregations, and their presence, albeit online, was apparent to me. Sarah spoke in the services and seemed to deliver sermons according to the church’s social media feed. Angela led significant parts of the service and directed the worship and responses of the congregation. This led me to think of them as visible and directive in their presence. However, the other women who were participants from my interviews were less visible. I knew that Gaby and Donna were both in the building when I visited, but their roles took them elsewhere into the typically gendered spaces of childcare and other responsibilities. For them, their presence in the worship space was invisible, and their caring duties took precedent over their worship.

Conclusion

These participant observations have allowed me to sketch an image of the worship spaces from which my interview participants came. There will similarities in style of services, particularly worship practices and the accessibility of any and all people to contribute to the spoken worship in the service. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were universally desired and sought after both in worship and in sermons. Sermons themselves regularly encouraged people to seek after these Charismatic gifts of the Spirit, and did so via interweaving of scripture and personal stories in a manner similar to theological reflections on experience.

⁵¹¹ Church C observation 1 and Church D observation 1.

The role and place of women in the churches was visible. They spoke and led worship. They were able to preach and teach – although less frequently than men. The space for women is contested, however, with their official capacity limited by the complementarian doctrine that the church espouses. Official clarity on the application of this doctrine is uncertain, and it is apparent from the participant observations that women are allowed many roles of authority in the church that amount to informal leadership, but not official, recognised, or authorised governmental roles. These remain in the remit of male eldership teams and male apostles of spheres within the network. The participants who attend the churches were also invisible at times. They were present but in other rooms or not visible on the screen. The visibility of leaders was also less clear. They *were* present but it was not always clear to me who they were until they identified themselves. They did, however, direct progress and impact the congregation.

Chapter 4: Towards Wisdom in the Spirit: Hearing Testimony

The previous chapter reported the observation findings of the participants' worship spaces. The observations helped construct a view of women in their churches showing that they are both invisible and visible. These women perform leadership roles with ease but also disappear from view in their caring duties. The churches themselves were community orientated, Charismatic in practice, and rigorous in their theological methods. This chapter seeks to take this description of the worshipping space and understand what the women say about their relationship to it, how it forms their faith lives, and how their faith lives develop in other spaces also. This chapter represents phase 1 of the research alongside the previous chapter. It is structured in two parts corresponding to the two main themes alongside subheadings for the codes within the themes. The themes and codes are found at the end of chapter 2. This chapter reports the testimonial data constructed from the interviews. These are the 'everyday stories' described in my methodology. The interviews discussed many of the key features of lived religious theory in order to describe a rich picture of the participants' lives.

During the coding process, I identified that the theme 'making space' is central to my description of the Newfrontiers' women's experience.⁵¹² Women make space in their faith and in their practices both in their churches and in their daily lives. 'Making space' describes how the women articulate their experience in their interviews, and it also emerged from my observations of the churches. It is a way in which the women navigate the church and their lives in order to both meet with God and to affect change in their lives and in the lives of others. This theme describes individual practices and beliefs that women expressed in their interviews, both of discontent with the status quo of women in the churches and that they have no spaces for acceptable authority. It encapsulates their embodied and social actions that transform their experience in church and their theological beliefs about God's presence and purpose in their lives. 'Making space' also describes the wider change that is happening in Newfrontiers relating to the authorised roles of women. Although women are still not permitted to take the ultimate position of authority in a church, that of 'elder', their ability to direct and govern through spiritual practices such as giving prophecy and discerning the spirits indicates acceptability, particularly in their ability to know things, that is not demonstrated in earlier literature about the movement.

⁵¹² My thanks to Pete Ward for helping phrase this theme.

The process of ‘making space’ does not only occur in the church but also in the daily lives of women who describe knowing God in quotidian experience. They are seeking and finding God in spaces outside of churches, such as in their daily routines, in their experiences of embodiment, in their communities, and in the special insight that they find in the wider world revealed to them as a space imbued with spiritual realities. Space for divine encounter is primarily relational both with God and with those around them that through relationships facilitate and co-experience the divine. The centre of faith experience for women in Newfrontiers is not the church necessarily but the relationships that form within it that spill out into all aspects of life. The space created by women is related to the church and indeed dependent upon it but also separate and greater than it. Women in Newfrontiers’ spaces are created by their relationship with God. This allows them authority via the Spirit who imbues them with power in all aspects of their experiences.

Theme 1: Epistemic Complexities: ‘Newfrontiers is very much about male leadership of churches’

Code 1: ‘Overlooked and Misunderstood’: Women Restricted from Leadership

The theme of this research, ‘making space’ is illustrated by women who found that there is not significant space made for them, both in their ability to lead, govern, and influence. In recognition of their talents, they understand to be divinely gifted to them. Leadership is related to epistemology through managing those who are allowed to direct services and congregations and who can speak (including preach) and communicate the word of God to the church. When they speak in the spaces of church leadership, they are at risk of being ignored, forgotten or deliberately excluded. During my conversation with Jennifer, she told me of her belief that complementarianism was a ‘hill to die on’ for Newfrontiers.⁵¹³ Jennifer lives in a major UK city and works for her church. She is in her late 40s. She was keen to be involved in this research, and we were in contact beyond the scheduled interview. She believes that complementarianism has become an identifying feature of Newfrontiers, one which they are known for holding as a belief. This, for Jennifer, meant that it felt like a significant issue for her as she is dissatisfied with this belief. She has come to a more nuanced position, she believes, one that incorporates more of an ‘egalitarian’ point of view. For Jennifer, and for other women, there is dissatisfaction with the space allowed for their gifts to flourish. They are prevented from reaching their potential

⁵¹³ Jennifer, Interview 9, n.d.

which can only be fully realised when opportunities for leadership are opened to them. Lisa believed that the church prevents women from reaching their potential because of their rules about eldership.

So I think if you are young male, probably married, probably University trained, probably like wearing check shirts, and in Newfrontiers they may consider that you would be appropriate for eldership. But I think if you are outside of that criteria there is very little opportunity or expectation that you would ever have a call to leadership.⁵¹⁴

These words of Lisa indicated a belief in epistemic exclusion - her identity meant that she was not eligible for positions of power in the community, and the power corresponds to epistemic potential. Lisa, when I interviewed her, worked for her church also alongside her training as a nurse and her devotion to her children and grandchildren. She was engaging and keen to discuss her experiences. I later discovered that she had left the church as she indicated that she might during our interview. She is in her late 50s and expressed dissatisfaction with the leadership of her local church, particularly their lack of pastoral skills.⁵¹⁵ Gender is a significant factor in this leadership dynamic (alongside other elements such as university training which implies class and education) indicating that women are unacceptable to the church, despite believing that they are acceptable to God.

Sarah similarly indicated to me that she felt unacceptable because of her gender, in relationship to leadership of churches. Sarah is the wife of a church leader and her impact on the church was noticeable at the online observations. She describes herself as 'part of the church leadership here'.⁵¹⁶ She preached in weeks previously and this was referenced in the service. This indicated to me that she has some authority in her community and her words are acceptable to the church. She is a mother to primary age children. She also, like Lisa, believed that she was a leader in the church, but that this was done in a 'hidden' way in order to fulfil her vocation that she discerns from God, but in a way that is acceptable to Newfrontiers. This means that she does so 'quietly without making too much of a fuss about it'.⁵¹⁷ Thus, her epistemological power was both visible and invisible. That Sarah is 'hidden' within the church and indicates that she has no space within

⁵¹⁴ Lisa, Interview 3, n.d.

⁵¹⁵ Lisa, Interview 3, n.d.

⁵¹⁶ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁵¹⁷ Sarah, Interview 6, n.d.

which to feel fulfilled and satisfied. In the course of her conversation with me, she described this in terms of a sacrifice, a service to God to go about his work despite this oppression and silencing.

Women used metaphors of space similar to Sarah's 'hiddenness' to indicate that they felt unacceptable. I met Angela for my interview with her online. She is an energetic Asian British woman, who is single and describes herself as a 'church leader' for her employment. Angela described women being 'left out' of meetings and of not giving her opinion. This was a key example of her account of epistemic injustice. Despite women having 'platforms', a metaphor of space with influence, Angela described the opinion of men as 'women shouldn't be here'. These metaphors of space indicate that Angela understands influence as position within the church and believes that she and other women are on the outside. She described to me a situation where she felt her voice was not heard because of her gender.⁵¹⁸

The need for space that isn't permitted within the normative ecclesial structures of the church is shown in the way that women formulate alternative groups. These groups operate in two significant ways. Firstly, there are 'women's ministry' groups which are authorised and acceptable within the church community. Such groups offer teaching and social expression to women within a particular local church. Secondly, they are also used as opportunities for evangelism. The ability of women to translate their God-knowledge to men or to other women is restricted. There is epistemic inaccessibility and injustice. Elizabeth told me in her interview that as a child she believed that theology was only for men and that she was not to entertain ideas of church teaching.

'What about talking about theology, or whatever?' I really feel like as a woman it's a bit of a – I keep telling myself I shouldn't feel weird saying things that wouldn't be stereotypically a woman's thing to bring up – but I do feel a lack of not being able to discuss things or debate, or even just listen to people debating. I always really enjoy that kind of thing.⁵²⁰

Elizabeth represents the earlier views of Newfrontiers that have been changing, despite no change to official church doctrinal position. Theology, the knowledge and study of God, is

⁵¹⁸ Angela, Interview 11, n.d. Angela asked for the details of this episode to be anonymised.

⁵²⁰ Elizabeth, Interview 14, n.d.

something which might be inaccessible to her. Her knowledge is inhibited despite a desire to engage in it. Her father was a pastor, and she now works as a teacher, although she told me that she was pursuing a creative career alongside that. She is a mother and was embarking upon a relocation which was causing her to reflect a great deal on her life in the town. She has lived her entire life. The past of Newfrontiers represented in Elizabeth's childhood view and the example of the women's group, which demonstrates both the uncertainty (both about women's acceptability in the church and in theology) that is delivered by the church members and the male ownership over theology and pedagogy. Such restriction upon sharing or gaining specialist knowledge is a form of epistemic injustice: women feel unable to share their knowing about God and are not recognised or are ignored if they do.⁵²¹

Code 2: Gender as a Dangerous Influence

The risks associated with women inhabiting male spaces were demonstrated by some of the participants in their accounts. The possible pollution of men by women was particularly demonstrated in my interview with Hannah. Hannah, the youngest participant, told me in the interview that she chooses dance as a method of worship. Hannah is in the middle of a gap year and spent some time after my interview emailing me, asking questions about church membership and her relationship with her boyfriend. Throughout the interview, Hannah's thinking about embodied worship both vacillated and developed. She expressed hesitation and uncertainty as well as articulated theological views on the body and God's intentions for worship. Hannah revealed fear of sin, fear of leading others into sin, the power of the body for sinful actions, as well as theological understandings of embodied worship that contradict these fears. She exists in this uncertain state, which perhaps corresponds to both her young age and to the uncertainty about the agency of women in the church that she is a member.

The disconnect between the access to God that certain activities provide and the way they are perceived by primarily male commentators or observers was demonstrated by Hannah. Hannah particularly favours dance because it is non-verbal, an embodied practice that mirrors other liturgical and ritualised forms which are similarly embodied and non-verbal. However, Hannah believes there are two views of dancing in worship.

⁵²¹ This also happened for Jessica when she was invited to speak at a Newfrontiers festival: 'So I did a couple of seminars at Newday, but no one from my church went, no elders had anything to say, no one was that interested, no one prayed for me from church beforehand'. This compared to the men who went and were prayed for and recognised by their church. Jessica, Interview 13, n.d.

I think there's two kind of opposing views in the Church. Some people hear I'm a dancer, and are like, 'Wow, you must dance when you worship', and then other people are like, almost against using your body in that way because they feel like it's a lot of blurred lines.⁵²²

She is encouraged to dance by those who are impressed and excited by dancing as a form of worship, but there are also those who are 'almost against your body in that way because they feel like it's a lot of blurred lines'.⁵²³ This anti-body polemic that Hannah indicates presents the body as something unsuitable and unacceptable in worship. Hannah understands this to be because of a mind-body distinction which she credits to 'Western culture' where the body can be separated from the intentions in worship.

When the body is centred in the worshipping space it becomes potentially unsuitable. Suitable worship is that which engages the mind, the body is a site of unacceptable worship. Hannah mentions that there is the temptation where dance becomes about the dancer, that it is performative in a negative way.

I still find it a bit odd. I feel like you don't want to be distracting the worship of people around you, but I think it's helped me to overcome that idea, so now when I'm at home on my own, I can dance and it feels like worship, and not like I'm just dancing. I think I would still be hesitant to do it in public unless it felt very much like God had said, 'Okay, you need to do this'.⁵²⁴

Rather than a performance that draws the congregation into worship, the dance becomes a mode of idolatry, "I'd feel like everyone was watching me" and it would become about me instead of God...' was her rationale.⁵²⁵ The source of this belief resides within Hannah and society.

Hannah does not accredit the church with this negative view of the body. Indeed, when she took a gap year with a Christian dance company, this was transformative for her view of embodied

⁵²² Hannah, Interview 20, n.d.

⁵²³ Hannah.

⁵²⁴ Hannah.

⁵²⁵ Hannah.

worship. She initially found the idea of dancing in a church by invitation ‘odd’. However, by engaging deliberately in dance her opinion changed. This is significant: the embodied action came before the belief, the non-cognitive before the cognitive. Her own self disapproval was transformed by the act of participating in a new form of worship. Her body became less about herself and her understandings of indecency and became a place of possibility. She believed that she could worship and ‘bring glory to God’ through performative dance. However, this is not a concrete conversion. She remains uncertain – dance may still be distracting to a congregation. Dancing alone, unseen, is an easier and more suitable form of embodied worship.

Hannah wrestles with a mind-body disruption. Her body is a potentially dangerous thing, leading to idolatry, while drawing the observer away from God. Her vacillation continued throughout the interview, positive views followed by negative, followed again by positive and then negative. She finally lands on a positive view – that embodied worship is acceptable. Her choice of language indicates questioning – she attended a conference where there was a ‘debate about whether it is acceptable or not’. She is hesitant; however, there may be mitigation in favour of embodied practices, dance may take worship ‘to the next level’.⁵²⁶ This next level is one that is not limited by words, she says. Hannah cites the conference that she attended which compares songs in worship to dance and finds that songs limit the worshipper, ‘like singing can get you really far, definitely, but sometimes he [conference speaker] thinks God asks to take it to the next level you need a dancer’.⁵²⁷ When dance is divinely authorised, when God requests it, it becomes almost sacramental. It draws the worshipper towards God in a way that could be described as mystical. The absence of words and the ‘next level’ progression towards God is reminiscent of mystical practices. Hannah finds that dance translates from indecency and idolatry to sacramental and mystical through divine authorisation of embodied worship.

Embodied worship facilitates a special knowledge and encounter with God that words can limit. Hannah wants to further understand the impact of embodied worship. A theme throughout our conversation is her dislike of verbal worship which she feels traps people. She identifies the damage done by prophetic words and develops throughout the interview a provisional theology of embodiment. She begins, as I have shown, with the problem of dance as worship, that it might not be suitable because of idolatry. She develops her thoughts as she moves through her hesitation. She wishes to overcome this hesitation and uncertainty because of her theological

⁵²⁶ Hannah.

⁵²⁷ Hannah.

beliefs about the body. Contra to the mind-body dualism of 'Western thought', she believes that the soul is intimately connected to the body. This is because the spiritual nature of humanity is not separate to the body; rather, the bible describes the soul using words that Hannah believes are translated as physical, such as throat. The body is immanent to the reception of the divine. This is also illustrated in the bible when the psalmist writes 'my soul thirsts for you' (Psalm 63.1) which Hannah believes is a 'very physical image'.⁵²⁸

In her theological thought she analyses the mind-body dualism as connected to the sexual revolution. As society became sexually liberated, Hannah believes that the church developed fear about bodies, that they were linked to moral degradation and forbidden acts, 'that made people a bit scared about how they can use their bodies...I don't want to do the wrong thing with my body'.⁵²⁹ The body is a dangerous source of moral uncertainty. Used unwittingly, as Hannah worries happens in worshipful dancing, it can be intended for good and operate for harm, even sin. Dance in worship has the potential to be sexualised, Hannah said, in response to my direct question about this. This is not how it should be, but is a result of fallen humanity via the agents of culture and media which distort the good. Dancing then becomes complicit in the negative reception of the body, causing those who see it to 'stumble' into sin and meaning that Hannah's dancing is harmful.⁵³⁰ I put it to Hannah that this opinion means that she views the body as potentially dangerous. She agreed and said that part of her role was to prevent harm for 'our brothers and sisters'. This is a limited and moderated responsibility; she can only manage so much. Hannah articulates a culpability in the sinfulness of others. She is responsible if she uses her body in a way that causes others to sin. Yet, this is qualified by her belief that they also have a responsibility. Her body may have the potential to be dangerous, but her agency is limited because others also have agency. Their agency is formulated by Hannah as having self-control. If they have suitable self-control and she acts in a way that she believes to be morally acceptable, then the body is defused of its dangerous potential.

Code 3: Subversive Groups

From the interview data, I understood that women reclaim epistemic authority by their use of alternative groups. This furthered the complexity that surrounds their epistemic authority. They

⁵²⁸ Hannah.

⁵²⁹ Hannah.

⁵³⁰ Hannah.

are both acceptable in some instances – for some this is preaching – but require other avenues to express their vocation. The second type of group that I wish to mention is the unauthorised group. Compared to the authorised ‘women’s ministry’. I was told about one group that met via the internet and WhatsApp and acted as a subversive community. I was told about this community by Jennifer who called it a ‘network’.

you’re encouraged, you’re reinforced, lots of women thinking and pushing the same doors, trying to make change. It’s in no way a feminist takeover, but it’s a lot of women with some influence in some way, whether that’s in the church or in the culture, encouraging one another. I think that to not have those support networks, you can feel a little bit like the one woman trying. Then you think no, hold on, this is important, we are right to keep saying these things. It’s that whole, I will not apologise for this. It’s always the impulse is there to apologise, I’m just like, no. We need to just keep encouraging one another.⁵³¹

It is formed in order to ‘open doors for other women’, and is comprised of ‘lots of women thinking and pushing the same doors, trying to make change’.⁵³² Susan also told me about this group and was a member.⁵³³ Susan is in her 60s, a grandmother, who works for the church and also describes herself as a church leader. Although this was the only formal group that I was told about, other women recounted ways in which they believed that they had paved the way for other women or made it possible for other women to progress within the church. These acts of ‘making space’ for other women are not officially sanctioned or authorised. This indicated to me the necessity for resistance and accommodations outside of the authorised structure that would prohibit them. To this end, women work for the benefit of other women, attempting to make it possible for others to progress within church structures, but this work is achieved through meeting in the margins, or on the outside of authorised groups in order to affect change within.⁵³⁴ The need for such groups illustrates that the spaces within the formal church are not conducive to the aims of these women. The women are neither acceptable within the church nor does the church facilitate the changes that they wish to see.

⁵³¹ Jennifer, Interview 9, n.d.

⁵³² Jennifer.

⁵³³ Susan, Interview 10, n.d.

⁵³⁴ Jane, Interview 16, n.d. Anne, Interview 25. Katherine, Interview 1.

Women in Newfrontiers understand their gender as separating them from the normative and acceptable people of the church. They describe their gender as restricting them from full epistemic privileges that men have the potential to access. Epistemic power is achieved through access to leadership. The interviews and observations suggest that men are the normative Christian for the Newfrontiers network and women deviate from this normativity and struggle to become acceptable. This unacceptability is particularly experienced in light of leadership because of the application of complementarian doctrine in church leadership which denies roles to women. However, it is not just leadership that indicates unacceptability. This is also found for women in their gender expressions in worship and in the intersection of the gender with other factors such as race.

Code 4: Intersections of Race

One further case of unacceptability occurred when women experienced racial discrimination alongside their gender. This intersection of unacceptability meant that women who identified as minority ethnic experienced being non-normative in both their gender and their race, leading to discontent. Jane, as she now steps back from her role in a charity, says that she wishes to spend her time working with marginal people helping them to become leaders.⁵³⁵ She offered a metaphor for this new direction, 'gathering, gathering from the edges'. Alongside this she associates herself as also on the edges, 'I think I'm probably quite a rarity in Newfrontiers, a black, female leader of a [job role] in Newfrontiers'.⁵³⁶ As such, she sees part of this new direction for her life to involve mentoring of women leaders. For Jane, her status as a black woman in Newfrontiers is at the intersection of two minorities, something that she has not seen elsewhere. Jane does not believe that her identity is represented in Newfrontiers, because of this she develops a vocation that seeks to address that representation.

In the same way, Angela experienced intersections of disadvantage between race and gender and relationship status. Angela identified as Asian British. She expressed dissatisfaction with the church's role in racial discrimination, both in allowing it in the world and experiencing it within

⁵³⁵ Jane.

⁵³⁶ Jane. Jane specifically requested a high degree of anonymity because of her professional role; therefore, I keep descriptions of her to a minimum.

the church.⁵³⁷ She described ‘the whole Black Lives Matters was, it was horrendous for me’ because of the issues from her own experience of racism that provoked memories.⁵³⁸ She describes her anger with God and the words of her prayer, ‘God, this is a joke. Your church is complicit in some of this, and I’m finding it really painful.’⁵³⁹ This form of lament represents the times when she brought her pain to God. This allowed her to speak to the church of their failings. It gave her ability to speak which she couldn’t have had before, ‘as opposed to coming out of my anger and pain, it came out of a better place that was still pained, but it was rooted in God, almost in the security and comfort of God...’⁵⁴⁰ Although Angela’s anger with God presupposes some degree of responsibility for the racism of the church she also stated, ‘God’s heart breaks’ over the issue of racism. This contradiction is not explained by Angela; rather, God is both sovereign over his church and has compassion for those whom the church oppresses.

Angela’s experience of this oppression was in passing conversations and instances of silencing. She was dissatisfied with the views represented about a Christmas television advert that displayed a black family. In some parts of the media, it was criticised. When she mentioned it to her pastor, he called it a ‘controversial Christmas ad’. She found this upsetting, ‘I remember saying, “Actually, it’s not controversial. The ad is a family, just like mine, having a Christmas dinner. People have made it controversial.”’⁵⁴¹ The pastor’s difficulty in understanding that the advert was not controversial, that viewing it as such is understood by Angela as racist and othering of her lived and childhood experiences, which illustrates her dissatisfaction.

The church is not recognising race and the lived experience of being a minority ethnic person in a UK church. This experience means that it took her 27 years before she saw someone Black in church ‘stand on a platform’; she feels that she is not represented. A friend of Angela’s, a Nigerian woman, believed that Newfrontiers was unsuitable for membership because of lack of representation, ‘not even playing the drums, not even backing singing’.⁵⁴² The friend’s experience was of not seeing their own representation in public meetings. This is an intersection of

⁵³⁷ Angela, Interview 11. Angela accounted for both lack of representation in the church and also active racism. She told me of racist jokes and mocking of her accent.

⁵³⁸ Angela.

⁵³⁹ Angela.

⁵⁴⁰ Angela.

⁵⁴¹ Angela.

⁵⁴² Angela.

oppression and dissatisfaction because she doesn't believe that she has ever seen a woman of ethnic minority on a platform in Newfrontiers.⁵⁴³ This is associated with the church losing its moral character, in a way that is comparable to the church in America losing its character when many Evangelicals voted for Donald Trump for President.⁵⁴⁴ The church has stopped its liberating, prophetic stance. It acts in ways that are 'not honouring or loving'. She finds it painful that the church was silent about racism in the wake of Black Lives Matter.

God is the source of Angela's comfort in dealing with racism as well as someone whom she is angry with for the failings of the church. However, it is the comfort of God that allows her to be an agent for change in the church, and that allows her to have courage to speak about these issues. She has agency in the midst of the suffering of racism, and she has had opportunities to voice this suffering to 'a group of white male church leaders'.⁵⁴⁵ She shows that she is different in that she is not white, not male, and not a church leader. Her agency is diminished, however, as she has power to voice these concerns but they are heard by people who have not had the same experiences as her and potentially won't listen or understand. She draws the comparison by explaining that for her church pastor. It was only a 'controversial advert' that she was troubled by, but for her 'it was deeply painful'. She said that she has never lived anywhere else but in the UK; yet, the message that she received from racism broadly is that 'this is not your home'.⁵⁴⁶ God is not only the one who is responsible for the church and their behaviour but also the one who reveals racism. 'God opened my eyes' to racism in the UK, she says, and this means that God is calling her to pray for the UK in relation to racism.⁵⁴⁷ This was particularly her experience in the church service directly after the Manchester Arena bombings.⁵⁴⁸ She experienced the fear of the congregation and of particular friends, who located the bombing at the feet of 'foreigners' who had been 'let into the country'. Angela found this to be a devastating attack on her race which left her without words for her upcoming preaching and leading of the service.

I can't remember the wordings, but the gist was, 'Why do they let foreigners into our

⁵⁴³ Angela.

⁵⁴⁴ Angela.

⁵⁴⁵ Angela.

⁵⁴⁶ Angela.

⁵⁴⁷ Angela.

⁵⁴⁸ On 22nd May 2017 a bombing by an Islamic suicide bomber of Manchester Arena in which 23 people (including the bomber) died and 1,017 were injured.

country? 'This is what they do.' Three people who absolutely love me no doubt. I remember that morning, I remember thinking, oh, I am about to anchor and preach this morning. I feel like I've just been shot in the heart.⁵⁴⁹

This experience of racism stripped her of her agency to facilitate the church in its act of worship that Sunday. However, Angela is taking steps to reclaim her agency and her voice about racism. She identifies a divine calling to stop being afraid of what others might think when she speaks about these issues.⁵⁵⁰ This not a straightforward process, although she does not wish to be fearful that does not fully give her agency. Angela's account illustrates an intersection of race and gender in her life experience, while silencing caused by both oppressions. Angela's experience of silencing because of her gender are demonstrative of the ambiguity of Newfrontiers regarding the issues of oppression for women. There is not a theological position that the network provides, which means that different leaders may express different beliefs, and women such as Angela suffer as a result. Angela, therefore, continues to battle for agency. She feels 'vulnerable', indicating powerlessness, whilst maintaining a certainty of the divine call to speak about racism in the church. Ambiguity is again a characteristic of the experience of a woman in Newfrontiers. She is at once powerless and powerful (through divine mandate). Her voice means that people are beginning to understand. This is clarified for her by divine word of reassurance and authority telling her that her work makes a difference, that it opens people's eyes.⁵⁵¹

Conclusion to Theme 1

The women told stories of the ways in which they experienced feeling unacceptable particularly linked to their gender but also to race. The narrative of women indicates an environment that does not leave space for women's knowledge of God and that expression either as speech, leadership, or embodied action. This relates to the participant observations where some women were visible in positions that appeared to be leadership roles and other participants were invisible, moving in and out of spaces that could not meet their needs. Women's voices are potentially polluting, handled with caution – allowed space in controlled ways such as permission to give sermons but not to have authority in speech as elders. This environment has led women to gather in informal ways on the marginal spaces of church life to advocate and mitigate for

⁵⁴⁹ Angela, Interview 11.

⁵⁵⁰ Angela.

⁵⁵¹ Angela.

these disadvantages. These are acts of resistance with the optimistic stance that change might occur if women act to the advantage of other women.

Theme 2: Towards Epistemic Credibility: Making spaces

Code 1: Making a Space in the Church

Newfrontiers is in a period of change. Women spoke to me about anticipating and experiencing a transition away from women being unallowed to speak in the gathered church community, unable to consider themselves as leaders and rejected as a consequence. They could identify ways in which this has changed, and they could also predict that it would further adapt. Women now do describe themselves as leaders, although their leadership is qualified because it cannot be as 'elders'. They are allowed to preach, in many churches, but not all. They have spiritual, directive authority in the receiving and demonstration of spiritual gifts inside the church. They personally experience vocation given by God that gives them belief that the church's position is ambiguous, perhaps wrong theologically. They also maintain that, despite their dissatisfaction with the status quo, much else about Newfrontiers makes them feel accepted and welcome, and therefore it is worthwhile remaining in the church and seeking change in place rather than leaving. This indicates a transition towards acceptability and negotiation of some space in which to be present within the church, to move more centrally, away from marginal positions of influence and expression. The acceptability was described as of a particular type, that of receiving gifts and revelation from the Holy Spirit and gaining authority from this source of legitimisation, rather than from ecclesial structures alone.

Acceptability and legitimacy for the authoritative speech and leadership by women in Newfrontiers churches is negotiated through receiving of gifts from the Holy Spirit and demonstrating the authority and significance of these gifts. This gives the women a negotiated epistemic authority. The recognition of these gifts mirrors the pattern of recognition that occurs in male leadership. Male leaders go through a process of acknowledgement of spiritual insight and discernment, of recognition of 'gifting' and vocation. However, women noted that for men this was more likely to be recognised earlier and supported quickly by the church. For women to follow this route of recognition towards authority and presence within the church it required greater divine intervention, greater signals of that intervention, and more patience for the women.⁵⁵² Sarah told me the story of an experience that she had where she was aware of the

⁵⁵² Lisa, Interview 3.

presence of an angel. She told me,

I guess I felt quite humbled by it because he sent an angel to a women. That was quite unusual because obviously, Newfrontiers is very much about male leadership of churches.⁵⁵³

Epistemic legitimacy was acquired through recognised divine intervention. Miranda Fricker describes this as ‘correcting for prejudice’ where the hearer must adapt their response by correcting for identity prejudice.⁵⁵⁴ However, this is only achieved for women in Newfrontiers when their identity is conjoined with the divine. In this way the prejudice is ‘neutralized’ for the hearer.⁵⁵⁵

These experiences of spiritual legitimacy leads to specialist knowledge that is given by God. This forms a space where the women can speak. This is a way in which the women navigate the epistemic injustice that the ecclesial structures dictate to them. Sarah spoke of God wishing to reveal to her ‘the systems of Heaven, how he delivered things from Heaven to earth’.⁵⁵⁶ This came in the context of a conversation about a big church decision that was being made. The knowledge revealed to Sarah helped to shape the trajectory of the church. In the same way, knowledge, which is received as gift from the divine, shapes the potential for authority in the church.⁵⁵⁷ Women lead services and worship. In my participant observations, I noted that women worship leaders frequently drew the congregation into the presence of God by their actions, they pronounced spiritual insight and directed the course of the service.⁵⁵⁸ Women also accounted for roles of spiritual authority within church services. Susan often ‘hosts’ a church service. This involves, ‘martialling, fielding, weighing from the congregation...I’m very much an, in-the-moment, prophetic voice. I can often sense what is going on’.⁵⁵⁹

Other women described situations where they were given special sight, words that displayed

⁵⁵³ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁵⁵⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 2011. 89.

⁵⁵⁵ Fricker. 93.

⁵⁵⁶ Sarah.

⁵⁵⁷ Jennifer, Interview 9.

⁵⁵⁸ This was observed in participant observations and noted by interview participants, e.g. Donna, Interview 18, n.d. Donna describes interpreting tongues in the church service also.

⁵⁵⁹ Susan, Interview 10.

above people's heads or Andrea who speaks in tongues in an 'unusual' way by delivering it as a rap.

Yes. The tongues, I do something quite unusual which I've never heard really anywhere else, so I quite like to sing a song in tongues or rap it.⁵⁶⁰

When she does this, she says that she impacts different people by her actions than would be normally affected in a church service. Andrea is in her 30s and had a very young child. She works in a senior role in media. She described a childhood Roman Catholicism and her transition to Newfrontiers later in her life. By having access to spiritual authority in the service, Andrea is able to bring her own unique offering to the church that changes and has an impact. She understands this as the church acting upon a need for greater diversity in the congregation; when it allows this diversity, more people are able to praise God. Access to the divine is improved by the diversity and spiritual authority that Newfrontiers churches make acceptable when women and ethnic minorities bring their God knowledge to the church. For a Newfrontiers conference in May 2023 held in conjunction with Union Theological College, there were only white, male speakers listed on the programme but a female worship leader.⁵⁶¹ Worship is a route of influence within the network and has a degree of recognition and legitimacy – a woman may facilitate encounter with God. The limit of worship, but not teaching as indicated at this conference, shows that acceptability is negotiated and not fully realised.

The particularly tentative space is once again related to God-knowing, the epistemological element of the church's structures, delivering formal teaching is theoretically permitted by many of the churches but not reflected in national, trans-local church events. However, this too may change. Jennifer shared how her church had a group that were 'meeting to discuss it' and that permitting some form of female leadership was 'up for grabs' because 'A family with only fathers is a bit dysfunctional'. However, when attempting to speak to the wider sphere, they are part of in Newfrontiers. They met with little response to their investigations.⁵⁶² The tentative authority links in a complex way to the ideas about publicly recognised leadership.

⁵⁶⁰ Andrea, Interview 15, n.d.

⁵⁶¹ <https://gathered.org.uk/> [accessed 4/11/2022] I note that Union Theological College is also a complementarian organisation with the only woman on staff teaching on a programme designed only for women.

⁵⁶² Jennifer, Interview 9.

Lisa spoke about this uncertainty in the context of describing herself as a leader. She held a complex view of herself and of others as being in leadership but outside of the authorised or most senior roles. She said that women are in all areas of leadership, just not eldership.⁵⁶³ For her, God ‘has for you’ a plan for serving him that often involves leading others and she felt that this was achieved despite the church not making a clear path for this. She identified herself as a leader and one who thinks strategically about the congregation and their spiritual development.⁵⁶⁴ A number of the women described themselves as leaders within the church.⁵⁶⁵ This leadership is authorised and legitimised by God.

Just understanding more about God, and also gaining confidence that I could lead things, and that he has actually made me a leader.⁵⁶⁶

Women claimed a call from God to leadership, ‘I’ve always felt a call to lead churches in Newfrontiers’.⁵⁶⁷ Jessica noted that after she suffered from lack of recognition in comparison to her male peers from her church that God gave her reassurance, ‘...in your life you’re going to see my voice do things that take my breath away’ and ‘don’t let anyone despise you’.⁵⁶⁸ Jessica works in the NHS, in her late thirties and a mother and a Christian since childhood. Her words are divine legitimacy in the face of uncertain reception and acceptability in the church.

Leadership is sometimes recognised but given different names. Anne told me the story of being recognised as a ‘prophet’. Anne is in her late sixties and a grandmother. She had an experience as a younger woman outside of Newfrontiers when she was accused of being a witch. This followed her into Newfrontiers. As her conviction that she was called and instructed by God, this was met with misunderstanding and resistance by her church. She believed that the church gave her a part time job ‘in order to keep an eye on me and keep a control on what I was up to’.⁵⁶⁹ This developed and changed over time, ‘it’s completely different now’ and she no longer

⁵⁶³ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁵⁶⁴ Lisa.

⁵⁶⁵ Katherine, Interview 1, n.d. Also Lisa 5, Sarah 1, Jennifer is on the staff team and is the operations and communications manager at her church, Susan 3, Angela 5, Jane 20 (mentors ‘other women leaders’). Julie describes herself as co-leading a church with her husband pages 8 and 11, Sophie 1, Tracey 24, Anne – throughout.

⁵⁶⁶ Sophie, Interview 22, n.d.

⁵⁶⁷ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁵⁶⁸ Jessica, Interview 13.

⁵⁶⁹ Anne, Interview 25, n.d.

feels controlled or untrustworthy. She says,

I've been in a position of leadership for a long time and acknowledged in leadership, but when you're acknowledged in leadership as a woman, that's different to being acknowledged as, say a pastor or a prophet or maybe an evangelist or some other thing.⁵⁷⁰

Anne describes this improvement with nuance, 'it still doesn't feel like a level playing field'. She even, with qualification, likens this to 'white privilege', 'I think the men have men's privilege'.⁵⁷¹ She understands men to have an advantage because of their gender that cannot be overcome, this advantage allows them to be recognised in a role that she cannot attain. She told me that people recognise her abilities and tell her that it is a shame that she was not a man. If she was a man, she would be an elder by now. This works as key idea for the stories the women told me about their engagement with leadership and recognition, that their ability and vocation is noted and even publicly acknowledged but that their gender is a restriction, a disadvantage that has no clear solution.

The story of leadership for women in Newfrontiers is in transition. Whilst women note that they are understood as leaders by both themselves and by some others in the church, they also note a further expectation of change and a continuing dissatisfaction with the current status quo. Lisa believes that there will be women elders within the next 10 years.⁵⁷² Jennifer believes that the church network will change its position on women eldership once the founder – Terry Virgo – dies.⁵⁷³ This anticipated change indicates the process of recovery and resistance that women have attempted has worked, but only to an extent and not enough to satisfy those who are distressed by their restricted roles. The change has occurred when the authority of the divine is placed behind the knowledge of women and their presence in spaces of power and leadership within the church. That this is not officially recognised demonstrates that this space is unstable and insecure, to use a frequent metaphor of the women, that the doors must be regularly held open for the women following on behind otherwise it will slam shut.

⁵⁷⁰ Anne.

⁵⁷¹ Anne.

⁵⁷² Lisa, Interview 3.

⁵⁷³ Jennifer, Interview 9.

Code 2: Mechanisms of Epistemology

The theme of ‘making space’ continues in the marginal spaces outside of the church. Women seek and encounter God outside of the church service and any formal meetings in their quotidian existence. This occurs through acts of deliberate spiritual practice which allow the women to foster their intimate and personal relationships with the divine. The agency for this belongs to the women. Spiritual practice for women in Newfrontiers is orientated towards relationality. The primary relationship sought is one with God, but as I shall show in subsequent sections, relationality in all areas of life weaves throughout the data indicating that it is a core feature of the spiritual expression of women in Newfrontiers. As the literature of the church shows, this is similar to one of the main priorities of Newfrontiers: self-identifying using ‘family’ metaphors. However, the women’s relationship with God is found not in the church primarily but in the home, in friendships, and in relationship with the wider world. I shall address these areas in turn, beginning with the space for relationship with God that women carve out in their daily lives focused in and around the home and the workplace.

Encounters with the divine presence are found in spaces outside of the gathered church congregation. God is known by the women in tangible and embodied ways that create spaces for them to narrate their own faith experiences and legitimising spiritual encounters with God. God is known in the middle of a quotidian existence in part because of the obstacles to encountering God that women experience. Gaby told me, ‘I don’t find church a particularly easy experience’ – this was because her husband was in church leadership, and therefore Gaby was necessarily responsible for all elements of childcare.⁵⁷⁴ Gaby has found that she has had to adapt her practices to allow for her to access God outside of the church. Gaby is in her early forties and a mother of teenagers and younger children; she is the wife of a church elder and stays busy with lots of supporting roles alongside her external employment in the public sector. Similarly, Jessica notes the same, that models of prayer were ‘taught by men who don’t feed the babies or get the kids breakfast’.⁵⁷⁵ In this way, practices of spiritual encounter are adapted to mitigate for circumstances that the women identify as happening to them because of their gender constituted roles. The childcare is theirs and therefore God is met amidst that childcare. For Gaby then, this looks like worship in the kitchen, ‘It is genuinely’, she says, ‘in the kitchen because there’s no other space for me’.⁵⁷⁶ For Gaby, she tries to recreate church services in her home to allow for

⁵⁷⁴ Gaby, Interview 2, Depth Interview, October 2021.

⁵⁷⁵ Jessica, Interview 13.

⁵⁷⁶ Gaby, Interview 2.

her to reach God in a way that mimics what she lacks in the church service because of her role. God, according to the women, responds to this positively. He does meet them according to their accounts of their adapted practices. For her, this means dancing in the kitchen with worship music on. It ‘releases me into something’.⁵⁷⁷ This is where the atmosphere changes and she can discern a spiritual dimension to her behaviour. God, she tells me, is present in her kitchen and her worship there facilitates this. In the same way, other women account for moments when the presence of God is discernible in their adaptative practices. Tracey, a grandmother and NHS worker, understands this as the presence of God being wherever she is. This means that, in her home, God is with her because it is her home. However, it is more than this. In the same way that Gaby accounts for a spiritual reality that is revealed or allowed into her kitchen by her worship, so also does Tracey speak of atmosphere that pervades the fabric of her house. God is present not only because of her presence but because her home acts as a thin place for spiritual reality.

I actually find there’s real hotspots in my home where I regularly worship and rest and meet God. I think its angels gather, possibly.⁵⁷⁸

The regular practice of worshipping has created a sacred space in her home. God has met with women in these spaces that are not the church in a way that lends legitimacy and authenticity to adaptive and daily practices of worship. These daily practices are also outside of the home and church. Many women accounted for walking as a practice that allowed them to meet with God. I interviewed the women during the Covid 19 Pandemic lockdown. During this time walking was one of the few ways that people were allowed to leave the home. This may account for the particular focus on walking as a way of meeting God. However, the women did not mention it as a novel practice that arose out of a novel situation; rather, all those who mentioned walking did so noting that it as a regular way in which they were able to shut out distractions and focus on God.⁵⁷⁹ Stephanie told me that she will ‘put my trainers on, and get my coat on and go outside’ in order to talk to God away from distractions.⁵⁸⁰ Stephanie is from South Africa and works in administration outside of the church. She spoke to me about the difficulties of transitioning from

⁵⁷⁷ Gaby. 5

⁵⁷⁸ Tracey, Interview 24, n.d.

⁵⁷⁹ Jessica, even when she ‘rebelled’ from God as a teenager talked to him whilst walking, so also Elizabeth, Jane, Caroline, Sophie, Hannah.

⁵⁸⁰ Stephanie, Interview 12.

South African Christianity to British practices but eagerly persisted in her membership of the church because of her intimate relationship with God.

When the women walked, they would experience God in particular ways. For example, the space made by walking allowed Anna to hear a revelation from God that was directive,

I was walking home the other day from school drop off and I was looking at my phone and I just felt God say, 'Put your phone down. There's someone next to you that needs to, you need to talk to,' and I'd seen them. Actually, if I'm honest, I didn't want to, but in that moment, I was like, okay, and I did and it actually led to a really great conversation with her where I ended up praying for her.⁵⁸¹

Anna is in her mid-thirties and a church administrator. She spoke of a childhood with God, intimate and fatherly that has remained so in her adult life. Walking becomes a place for supernatural encounter and direction. Natalie walks to school where she is a teacher and listens to the bible and prays as she goes. Throughout our interview, the presence of her children in the background reminded me of her status as a mother, especially when they fell out about a computer game. She talked me through her response to that. For her, walking is part of the daily practice of maintaining her relationship with God, and this translates to bringing that relationship into school where she will pray, 'Nike prayers, Lord, Just Do It', if she feels like she needs divine intervention, for example, with a child at school.⁵⁸² The act of walking carries God with the women into their life's events. They walk with God, and God walks with them. They can discern God's presence as a result. Natalie is busy, as a mother and a teacher, walking is a space which is hers alone to spend time with God.

A significant mechanism for legitimacy is the ability women shared to utilise their own suffering for their growth towards God. Space is made for women in their own emotional lives; rather than rejecting suffering, it is embraced as constructive. There is a choice in the process of suffering that also allows for women to draw nearer to Jesus by imitation, and it is a quality of their lived religious experience. It is the imitation of Jesus that allows for women to better know him. This suffering is an act of obedience that is often a hidden and silent act. For Sarah, this is linked to her gender also,

⁵⁸¹ Anna, Interview 7, n.d.

⁵⁸² Natalie, Interview 8, n.d.

Where you're called to pray for and bless in response to hatred and dysfunction and pain. In some ways, that's suffering. I think a feeling of being overlooked and misunderstood is also a form of suffering in that you live knowing that you've got more within yet trying to live by scripture and submit to those that sometimes are untrustworthy and sometimes are imperfect and sometimes do not actually deserve my respect, yet God calls me to respect them anyway. Any of that, all forms of denial, that's suffering.⁵⁸³

It is the experience of suffering in isolation, an isolation caused by multitude of reasons – illness, being a woman in a complementarian church, choice to remain silent for the good of others – that is interpreted as an intimate drawing near to God.

I feel really positive at the moment. I feel really quite close to God. I feel like I can see how God has been working through a whole long period of things being a bit, 'Why is this happening, God?' Long answer but, yes.⁵⁸⁴

For Elizabeth, a long-time of suffering with Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) has been part of an ongoing story that God has control over, that God orders even when it is difficult for her to understand it. A notion that suffering is part of a story that is unfinished occurs for some of the women. For example, the belief that children should be confessing Christians. If they are not, the mothers perceive this as a form of suffering,

I'm the one who's being transformed as I pray and, even though the process is painful because it's not happening as quick as I want, and in those waiting years, and I'm still waiting for my middle son, I'm on the faith side of the answer to my prayer. Now, with my first son, I'm now on the thankfulness side. I thanked all the way through, but I am really looking back and saying, 'Oh wow, God.' I'm on the wow God side. My middle son, I'm still on the faith side and I'm still trusting in what's God's giving me and what he's doing. Yes, in prayer, I'm the one who's being transformed through it all. I'm saying, 'God, you fix them,' but I'm the one being transformed.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸³ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁵⁸⁴ Elizabeth, Interview 14.

⁵⁸⁵ Tracey, Interview 24.

Suffering is part of a relationship with God that is found in the midst of the story of a life. If the suffering continues for the women, they simply wait. The story is not finished yet. The ending is expected to be good. Susan illustrated this when she spoke frankly about the recent death of her son. She spoke of being angry with God, 'I really struggled. Struggled to pray. Struggled to worship.'⁵⁸⁶ However, that was not the end of her story,

Yes. Yes, he is. Yes, I'm just trying to think, I think it was before I lost - my son's name's [name] – I think it was before I lost [name], when I went through a phase of, in the prophetic, actually, I go into a bit of a performance habit of, 'Oh, it's Sunday morning. I'm a church leader. I need to perform. I need to have a prophetic word.' I went for about, I don't know how many months. It must be at least three or four where I'd stand there every Sunday morning, and go, 'Right God. Give me a word,' and he'd go, 'I love you.' I'd go, 'Yes, not that word!' Yes, I know that! Give me something that I can get on stage and bring and for about three or four months, all he said was, 'No, I love you. I love you.' That was it. I got to the point, again, of just going, 'Okay, if you never say anything to me other than you love me from now on and I never bring another prophetic word, actually, that's okay.' Looking back now, I'm just joining the dots now at that time, actually, that's what He has been doing for the last two years, is constantly going, 'Yes, you don't understand, and it does hurt, but I love you'.⁵⁸⁷

Whilst the women wait for the outcome, they pray for they expect other good outcomes in their own spiritual development. This is related to their close and personal interaction with God. This relates to the theme of making space in a particular way, women understand that difficulty and suffering are expected parts of their life. If they suffer because of the church they seek God for resolution but they also endure and wait, expecting to meet God as part of the experience of suffering.

The intimacy that is indicated in accounts of suffering is also reflected in the daily accounts of women's faith; God is referred to in terms of intimate friendship. Here also there is a space for faith expression and practice. Mary, a retired grandmother who worked in the NHS, spoke in depth of her experiences with God over a lifetime, relating in particular to her motherhood and her health. Mary sought God when she was a child and was lost and continued to have a close

⁵⁸⁶ Susan, Interview 10, n.d.

⁵⁸⁷ Susan.

and friendly relationship with God. She describes it as having ‘a constant friend’ – one whom she talks to about frivolous topics such as how nice the weather is on any given day.⁵⁸⁸ Indeed, Anna speaks of a ‘daily relationship, it’s an hourly relationship, it’s just every minute of my every day’.⁵⁸⁹ She also speaks to God and expects an answer about the minutiae of life,

Just those little things, it can be something as simple as, ‘Okay God, do I need to take an umbrella today? Is it going to rain? That kind of thing’.⁵⁹⁰

These conversations are chatty, personal, and the women account for reported speech of their own and of God’s. Amanda, a single woman in her sixties, told me of similar intimacy in the minutiae of life,

Just everyday things as well. I think he’s a God of the practical; he cares about every detail. I think sometimes we just think, oh, we pray in church, or we do this, or we do that. Actually, he can even say, ‘Look, it’s not going to rain today; put out your washing,’ and you can think, oh, well, that’s another voice. I’ve had that before and ignored it! Stuff like that. I just think, yes, it’s important that people know that it is actually a relationship. It’s two-way.⁵⁹¹

Sophie works for the church. She is a married mother and was in the process of adopting another child. Her husband works as a church elder and since our interview they have moved abroad from England but continue to be active in the Newfrontiers community. Sophie describes walking home from nursery drop off and using ‘that time to chat to God’.⁵⁹² Jessica recounts ‘from as young as I can remember I would just chat to him like I would another friend really’.⁵⁹³ Susan, in an extended description of the Trinity, described her relationship with God the Father as ‘very intimate relationship where He’s big enough that I can sit on his lap or just chat with Him’.⁵⁹⁴ This recorded speech and style of conversation has a quality of childlikeness. The women relate to God in a way that is reminiscent of a child to a parent. This is a position of

⁵⁸⁸ Mary, Interview 4, n.d.

⁵⁸⁹ Anna, Interview 7.

⁵⁹⁰ Anna.

⁵⁹¹ Amanda, Interview 23, n.d.

⁵⁹² Sophie, Interview 22.

⁵⁹³ Jessica, Interview 13.

⁵⁹⁴ Susan, Interview 10.

trust and dependence as well as of friendliness. The space that is carved out for daily relationality with God is one that requires submission, but unlike their accounts of submission to male authority, when it relates to God it is a submission that is pleasing and sought after.

There is a reciprocal nature to the intimate relationship with God. God is shown to know the women absolutely, which is indicated by the giving of appropriate gifts. Anne was abused as a child. She told me that she was selectively non-speaking until she was 13. She recounted how God gave her the gift of prophecy but that as a child this looked different because of her speech,

In the early days it was very, very specific, so it would be like I'd get this ticker tape going across my eyes with words on and I had to just read the words. I think that was because of the state I was in at the time.⁵⁹⁵

Anne could not have spoken as a child prophetically without this divine assistance in the form of a script. Her mutism, the result of terrible abuse, was navigated in such a way that meant God was present for her in the midst of that pain, in a way that gave her a voice. It would eventually lead to her becoming a woman whose voice is particularly heard in Newfrontiers because of her job. This is typical of both storytelling of suffering in Newfrontiers. Anne does not question that God might have prevented the abuse, for instance. This growth allows women authority and purpose within and without the walls of the church. Hannah describes being resistant to the more 'crazy' experiences of God that occur in her church and rather experiencing God in a 'gentler' way that is more appropriate. She understood 'crazy' to refer to the Charismatic gifts on display. She says,

I don't think those experiences are less important at all than the crazy ones, and I think they just show the breadth of God and how he shows himself in the way that people need him.⁵⁹⁶

This is the appropriate presence of God in Hannah's life. Throughout the interview she was unsure of herself and sought reassurance from me that she was answering the questions correctly. That she describes God as gentle and calm with her indicates her belief that he operates in a way that develops her knowledge of him without frightening her in the process.

⁵⁹⁵ Anne, Interview 25.

⁵⁹⁶ Hannah, Interview 20.

The gifts that God provides for the women are not only markers of a deep knowing but also of authority and legitimacy. The Holy Spirit imbues the women with power. These gifts are evidenced by the women in order to legitimise their potential for spiritual authority and to indicate their value in the divine gaze. Julie recounts bringing messages of tongues in church and of prophecy. As a grandmother in her sixties, this has been a challenge for her. She says this has required her to become more confident, trusting that God has given her a clear and accurate insight into a given situation.⁵⁹⁷ One example of this is the receipt of special knowledge. This knowledge allows for authority and normative influence to be exercised. Reports of seeing angels and demons allow women to direct decision making inside the church and outside the church. Jane's time with vulnerable women led her to encounters with criminal and violent men. In one recounted instance, she wrote a letter to such a man of the words that she believed God had given her to write,

I wrote this letter to this guy, and I just said, 'God sees you. he sees you. He knows what's going on, he knows what you're doing, and I believe I need to pass this message on to you...' ⁵⁹⁸

Jane has a gift of a prophetic message that gives her authority in a dangerous situation. The special knowledge that she accounts for gives her agency in a criminal environment. She goes on to describe visiting a place where such a man was and describing a 'divine appointment' with other members of this criminal organisation. Despite the man meeting with her she felt safe and was not attacked. Jane describes all of this in detail and told me that it was God and the insight and protection that he gave her that enabled her to enter this place and begin a work to rescue women from situations of extreme and agonising abuse.⁵⁹⁹ Not only does God protect Jane but the space that she and he create for her outside of the church walls is liberating not only for her but for other women also.

Daily spaces also involve embodiment. Space made outside the walls of the church not only occurred for women inside their homes or at their places of work but in their very bodies. It is their embodiment that others them from the church itself but also these female bodies that

⁵⁹⁷ Julie, Interview 19, n.d.

⁵⁹⁸ Jane, Interview 16.

⁵⁹⁹ Jane.

become a source and site of religious encounter. The intimate knowing and being known by God requires practices that sustain and foster it. The women actively and intentionally create spaces outside of church, within which the sustaining practices that women develop are described by them as ‘sacrifices’. These are personal ascetic disciplines that facilitate the relationship with God. In these practices, the women make space within their own lives for the divine presence, making this a priority over personal comforts as demonstrable acts of dedication and love. The notion of commitment to God, which has an embodied and costly response, was a particular theme for the women. This was revealed in time, food, and practices of self-discipline.

Gaby described a faithful life as one which embodied self-control. She describes self-control as a fruit of the Spirit referencing Galatians 5.22-23. This might be, for example, not losing her temper with her children, but she also particularly related it to not being overweight, ‘it’s not in God’s perfect plan for us to carry extra pounds I don’t think’.⁶⁰⁰ She said this in the context of a wider discussion about behaviour; ‘we are called to be above reproach’ in a Christian’s behaviour, and this is because ‘the path to destruction is wide’. The link with ultimate ends (destruction) and food and self-control indicates that the life of a faith filled person is one that is disciplined. It is not simply about seeking pleasure in the immediate. Similarly, Sarah made decisions as part of spiritual behaviours that allow her to be more than a ‘mediocre’ Christian but rather be a ‘white hot, radical, quietly radical Christian’.⁶⁰¹ Sarah’s quiet radicalism, as I’ve shown in section 1, is because of her role as a woman in a complementarian church. This quiet radicalism is demonstrated for Sarah in her disciplined commitment that carves out her space that is a quiet; indeed, she calls it a ‘secret place’. Part of Sarah’s disciplines were to fast from food. She did this for a variety of different time periods, sometimes as long as 40 days. In this time, she did not refrain from all food but from ‘solid food’ and from ‘luxury’. This was a period of fasting that she said God called her to. The process immediately maps onto the wider themes of the research:

So I think I’ve been learning and studying about fasting quite a bit and felt like it was about making space to mourn, making space to lament, and really articulate all the things that I realised were broken in the world, and not right in the Kingdom...it felt a bit like, how can I eat and celebrate when all of this is wrong?⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ Gaby, Interview 2.

⁶⁰¹ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁶⁰² Sarah.

Fasting from food allowed many of the women to both demonstrate their dedication to God and to refine their access to God. Sarah's fasting was a process of making space. It allowed her to bring to articulation in an embodied form the very real suffering that she experienced in and out of the church. Jane made space by fasting in order to discern the will of God. For her, fasting at critical moments during her charity's formation and ongoing work was a way of confirming that it was sanctioned by God, or of confirming decisions and directions of change.⁶⁰³ She did this to mimic Jesus' time in the desert at the beginning of his ministry. She understood that this was the way in which Jesus 'came out full of the Spirit' and that this was the purpose of fasting for her. This fasting, including a forty day fast,⁶⁰⁴ resulted in a 'breakthrough' – a change in the work of Jane's charity, one that had supernatural prompting facilitated by her fasting.

Fasting has a number of outcomes for the women. Epistemologically, where their God-knowing is held uncertainly by the church itself, fasting is a route to confirming particular insights and directive instructions that the women account for as coming from God. However, it is also a sign of commitment and holiness, of making choices that reject comfort in favour of seeking God. This leads the women to say such things as 'I want Jesus more than I want food, or I want Jesus more than I want sleep'.⁶⁰⁵ This dichotomy, the choice between food and Jesus is developed later when I show that this is considered to be the choice before women as they reject 'the world'. These embodied displays of devotion are in contrast to the 'world', which seeks comfort. These embodied practices sanctify the women's bodies – in such a contentious space as the church network – as holy, as sites of spiritual encounter that can be refined and perfected with the agency of the women for greater depth of relationship with God.

Making space for God also occurred characteristically in the women's embodiment via their reported spiritual encounters. In the same way that fasting gave an embodied response of obedience and commitment to God, so did encounters that the women claimed had divine origins. Women had experiences of the Holy Spirit in their bodies that they described as physical sensations. For example, Anne described her experiences of knowing God's presence and the work of the Holy Spirit as a physical reaction. She says that she feels she has a 'gland' in her body

⁶⁰³ Jane, Interview 16.

⁶⁰⁴ Fruit and vegetables only in the day and 'normal' food in the evenings in order to avoid disruption for the family.

⁶⁰⁵ Sarah, Interview 6.

that recognises the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰⁶ This gives her access to knowledge. It is a signpost to her when she senses in her body that God is speaking that she should act on behalf of God. She then seeks confirmation from God that what she is sensing is accurate, employing the spiritual practice that Charismatics and Pentecostals call ‘discernment’. By checking back, she self-regulates her God-knowing is a way that is familiar to Newfrontiers. The services in churches are led in a similar way, and as I’ve noted, sometimes by women, so that acts of knowing and revelation of God are regulated and checked before distribution to the gathered congregation. Checking back in this way for Anne is a personalised practice found in the wider church network.

Angela described similar examples of embodied encounters with God. Indeed, during the course of the interview she demonstrated this to me.

I do sense the Holy Spirit very easily, and often, I know I’m sensing him in a very physical way, and that just how I think I am. Yes, my body will occasionally have jerks, or my heart will go. I can just sense a very – there’s a physical thing that happens with me, which I can very much control. So it’s not like my body’s jerking away. Even now, I know the Holy Spirit’s here, and I can sense him and feel him...⁶⁰⁷

Angela explained both her agency of her experience (she has control of her body throughout it) but also an overwhelming physicality of her body in the presence of the Holy Spirit. She went on to deliver a prophetic message to me in the interview that she had discerned in this moment. Embodiment for women is a way of epistemological verification: the physical response to God is confirmation of their right knowing. It is also an indication that the space of their body is holy – God reveals Himself in their bodies therefore indicating that they are positive sources of revelation. Women also described experiences of shaking, crying, of having feelings in their stomach, heart racing, and the experience of heat and of smells – these indicated that God was present to them.⁶⁰⁸

Alongside these physical responses to God, the Newfrontiers women also made space for divine action in embodied ways that stemmed not from their own disciplines, nor from the divine but from their own bodies, because of ill health and pregnancies. Mary told me of when she had

⁶⁰⁶ Anne, Interview 25.

⁶⁰⁷ Angela, Interview 11.

⁶⁰⁸ Jane, Interview 16.

cancer and had recently been diagnosed. Mary was a nurse and explained to me that this experience held meaning in part because of her nursing training.

So I got this peace and it really was a peace, the path of understanding. That night I woke up and I felt like I had surgery in my left armpit, it was a most odd experience and almost the smell of a diathermy. You know when they close off the blood vessels and there's a very distinctive smell, actually if you're in theatres and I could smell this smell and it wasn't painful or anything; it was just like a weird sensation. With it, I knew that the surgery meant it was contained...without a shadow of a doubt and also I knew that I could ask for total healing and I could ask for it to be taken away and it was like God saying 'Now I can take it away, you needn't go through what's to come or you can experience this with me and have an incredible journey'.⁶⁰⁹

Divine action and the opportunity for miraculous healing are experienced physically. Mary's body, which is understood medically as contaminated by cancer, is redeemed as holy by the work of God. In her senses – her smell of theatre and the sensation of her cancer being contained – God sanctifies her ill, female body.

Mary continues by telling me of the process of treatment, in particular, the affect it had on her femininity when she lost her hair. Her daughter was playing with her hair one evening when they were watching television. As her daughter was playing, Mary's hair began to fall out. As she told me this story, I was aware of two people in the narrative who were vulnerable, not only Mary as she lost her hair ('I didn't think actually my hair was that important to me') and her daughter who was only six at the time. Mary indicated to me the potential that this situation had to be damaging for both of them as they were confronted with the reality of her cancer and the treatment in such a tangible way. Not only that but the loss of her hair, as part of her identity, troubled Mary. She worried about what her husband would think and went to bed that night before he came home wearing a hat. However, Mary accounts for God working for her good in this situation. Her daughter took some scissors and they cut off their hair, and they had 'a fun evening', effectively playing hairdressers. She accredited this to God. He had made it 'good for her', helping her little daughter to navigate the situation.⁶¹⁰ However, she said that she still hadn't

⁶⁰⁹ Mary, Interview 4.

⁶¹⁰ Mary.

looked in the mirror at her hair loss. She told me about pretending to be asleep before her husband got home, about wearing a hat in bed, but then she read the bible before sleep,

...it was funny because I was so tired and I'm so concerned about this. It was just all encompassing really and I thought, oh, no I'll just pray – no I'll read my bible. Anyway, the reading that night was from Song of Songs, chapter 2 and it's all about 'don't hide your lovely face from me, my dove, come out from the cleft of the rock, I want to see your beautiful face.' It was just like, oh my word, it was just so – God spoke to me personally, just what I needed...⁶¹¹

Mary was concerned that her acceptability to her husband was compromised by her hair loss. She no longer felt beautiful, and for her this corresponded to her gender roles as a wife and mother. However, God was the source of comfort in this embodied dilemma, Mary experienced his approval and the belief that she was beautiful in his sight.

In a similar way, Anne told me of when she had been seriously ill in hospital. She had a back operation that involved major spinal surgery. During her time in hospital, she was put on morphine. This caused her to hallucinate. She saw the 'Devil's demons that were crawling all over me and trying to get me but it was hallucinatory'.⁶¹² She asked the doctors, against their advice, to stop the morphine. This allowed the hallucinations to stop, although the pain was very high. For Anne, this was a point of spiritual autonomy and epistemological action because it meant 'I had my right mind'. She was able to think clearly again and for her thinking clearly equated to finding God again after the hallucinations.⁶¹³ During the times of elevated pain after she rejected morphine as treatment, she experienced vivid visions of Christ on the cross, full of detail,

During one of those, that's when God came to me, and it was like seeing Christ on the cross, trying to get his breath, trying to pull himself up and down on this rough bit of wood, and he'd been whipped before he went on the cross. It was like I could see blood dripping out of his – like his flesh was torn to ribbons, and he's rubbing it against this bit of wood.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ Mary.

⁶¹² Anne, Interview 25.

⁶¹³ Anne.

⁶¹⁴ Anne.

Anne's bodily suffering becomes a sight of revelatory experience and correspondence with the suffering of Christ on the cross. Anne and Mary's story is indicative of ways in which women experience the presence of God in their bodies during times of ill health and trouble.⁶¹⁵

This section of the analysis has considered the ways in which women testified to making space for their spiritual practices outside of the formal church services. Women described worshipping God in the kitchen because church is inaccessible as a mother of young children. The spaces that are constructed in the domestic sphere are described as holy, worshipful places where women say they meet God. Not only homes but also areas outside the homes and the women's bodies themselves are holy spaces. Physical space is not the only way that spiritual possibilities are made, suffering and friendship have significant impact on the way women adaptively meet God. Spaces are opened up to experiences of God wherever the women are regularly. This means that when women gather together these spaces are expanded and take on an extra dimension, that of community.

Code 3: Making a Place in the Community of God

Newfrontiers churches consider themselves to be 'families'.⁶¹⁶ One sphere, 'Relational Mission' says it is 'a family of churches'.⁶¹⁷ The literature of the house church movement suggests that the communities understood themselves as 'alternative societies', somewhat separate from society at large, attempting to mimic the house churches of the nascent church revealed in the book of Acts. The final section of this chapter will develop this imagination in light of the research for women in particular. It will show that they also understand the church as being a form of society but that for the women this is particularly demonstrated in their female friendships. These female friendships act as societies within the society. The women also respond to the alternative society ecclesiology by their reckoning with the world around them. Their place in the world is defined in opposition to it but with a view to impacting and changing it. They are not quietist, but perceive themselves as acting both for liberative and evangelistic purposes within the world.

⁶¹⁵ Andrea, Interview 15. Noted a similar experience during a miscarriage. Donna, Interview 18. Spoke of being 'saved by childbirth' as a metaphor for the role of mothering.

⁶¹⁶ Samuel Jefferey, "'A World-Wide Family on a Mission': The History of the Newfrontiers Network in Transnational Perspective, c.1980-2011' (Kings College, University of London, 2019).

⁶¹⁷ <https://www.relationalmission.org/> [accessed 20/11/2022].

They are, however, always set apart and different to the wider society. This is demonstrated by their special insight into spiritual realities – an epistemological element of their difference – as well as their different choices and beliefs that separate them from culture, particularly ‘western culture’.

I walked in through the doors of the church for my second visit. I was smiled at and welcomed by two women who stood near to the doors, whose job appeared to be to greet people. Coming into the main room there was a large screen that displayed the name of the church below, and which read the words ‘Loving God, loving others’. The room itself was full of people who were moving around, speaking to one another, hugging and finding seats. It was quite loud with the conversations that were taking place. The service began to start, and the conversations died down, but not away. People continued to make eye contact and smile at one another, turn and speak to people arriving late, attend to children, and to continue their conversations. The congregation had been told that we were worshipping God, and the music had begun. What became apparent was that the socialising and community interaction did not stop when the singing started. They were intimately connected with one another. There was no apparent expectation that conversations were over now that musical instruments were playing, nor that friends and family should wait until later to have conversations. The congregation linked worship of God – as per their strap line – with demonstrable acts of community. The two are linked in the lives of Newfrontiers churches. The relationships with one another as church members are part of the worship of God. Indeed, in the middle of the sermon that I heard that day, the preacher invited those who were not Christians, if they wished to become Christians, to ‘become part of the family’. This stood out as a non-traditional Evangelical message. It was not an offer that related to the individual’s stance before God and their sin, but about how they could become part of a society that communally met God.

These Newfrontiers women enter into relationships with one another that are formative for their spirituality. They experience God and their relationship with the divine through other people. This is apparent through their valorising of friendships. Friendships with other women in the church offer two significant effects: they form holiness, and they are potentially subversive. Such friendships are deliberately formed for these purposes. For the interviewed women, what constitutes God-knowledge is a co-knowledge with one another. To know God is of the first order, but to know one another comes rapidly thereafter and therefore constitutive of knowing the Holy Spirit.

Holiness is formed through friendships for interviewed women by fostering experiences of the Holy Spirit – particularly the gifts of the Spirit described in 1 Corinthians 12.7-10.⁶¹⁸ Being known by another, through frank honesty and time spent with one another, leads to holiness. This occurs when women are open to being corrected by each other. These friendships are holy. They find their source in God but are to be discovered by the women themselves. These God ordained friendships are different to friendships that they have with non-Christian people. They are considered less good because they are not as honest or as ‘deep’. Depth of friendship is a repeating motif in the data. To be a true friend requires deliberate honesty and openness. Katherine, a leader in a para-church organisation and a mother, told me of when her friend moved away as a missionary. Describing her friend moving sounded like the loss of a romantic relationship,

So we used to get together to pray regularly, and pray for our kids, yes, like that. The guys used to as well. We became really good family friends. I mean, when my daughter got married, you couldn't tell who's the mother, who's the father, it's all a little bit incestuous, I think people are a little bit like who's who?

They're all really different, the kids, but they just love each other like siblings. Their eldest daughter was my daughter's maid of honour, both her daughters were bridesmaids and stuff. So we're like this one big family really. For me, friendship is really significant in that genuine sense of people that – I know a lot of people and I'm pretty friendly, so I get on with a lot of people, but there's something about really close people that can just know all your worst parts and you know they still love you, but also are going to poke you and say, that's not you. Not just say what you want to hear, but be like, really? I have it in a few friendships, but [name] is really definitely my best friend, in that there's just - yes, I know I can trust her to say yes, you're being stupid, or that's just like unfair. I don't have to hide. I can be in her presence, having a bad day, and vice-versa. I think also, because we've had this kind of cross-cultural thing, so we've been there for the good times and the really traumatic times and stuff. So it's quite strange.

⁶¹⁸ 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.'

It was really hard when we went off in our separate directions. I remember the last time that we would get together, other than we took them to the airport. I just remember weeping. I was like, in a marriage this would be wrong, for us to separate. I'm like, how can you make us so close and go so far away? Of course, it was only for a couple of years. It was so painful. It was so painful to take our kids apart from each other and stuff, but obviously it didn't affect things in the long-term, they're really close still.

This is a task to be undertaken in friendship that mirrors the divine will to relationship that is found in their expression of faith and in the Charismatic faith more broadly. They wish to have an intimate relationship with friends and correspond this intimacy with the relationship they experience with God. Consequently, deliberate friendships are sought by the women who were interviewed. They sometimes gave these friendships names, such as 'prayer partner' or 'running partner' (after the words in Hebrews 'let us run the race set out before us', Hebrews 12.1). These friendships are formed on criteria that focuses on spiritual discipline. Friendships among Newfrontiers women are not formed around common interests beyond the Charismatic Christianity found in the church. This is because friendships are tools of faithful discipleship rather than only companionship or to pursue common interests or hobbies.

The Newfrontiers interviewees believed both that their friendships are ordained by God, and that it was in their power to seek and form friendships themselves. This indicates the co-labouring that these women have with their own spiritual development. They are responsible for their spiritual wellbeing but when they co-operate with the divine plan. They encounter God in a richer and more satisfying way. Their behaviour around friendships is an avenue to this rich spiritual experience that they value and desire. The intensity of these friendships occurs because the women believe that their friendships are connected to God's plans for their lives. To some extent that they cannot always describe clearly, these friendships are ordained by God. For example, Sarah described her friends as people to whom she 'gravitated' towards because they also identified a similar spiritual vocation.

In the interviews where women described friendships negatively, in particular, two interviewees indicated that they were dissatisfied with their current friends. They expressed similar reasons to the positive associations that other interviewees had with friendships.⁶¹⁹ One set of friendships

⁶¹⁹ Helen, Interview 21, Depth Interview, October 2021. Elizabeth, Interview 14.

had dissolved when the woman's husband had committed a public 'sin' and stepped down from a role in the church. This was for Helen in her mid-thirties who struggled with the impact of losing her community because of this judgement upon her husband. Her husband, she told me, no longer attended any church at all. She described 'ten years of disappointment' because of the way the church handled the 'sin' and the breakdown of the relationships. She said that she felt she had 'only got your husband' because of the isolation the church had placed her into.⁶²⁰

Elizabeth felt that she did not have enough friends in her current church and was moving house in part to be able to attend the church that friends of hers were leading.⁶²¹ Both women accounted for a grief that was caused by the absence of satisfactory friendships. Friendships, when absent in the lives of these women, affected their faith lives, not just their satisfaction in their social lives.

Through the friendships that these women foster, they regulate one another in pursuit of holiness. This draws them into a closer relationship with God. However, God is not only known through the individual's pursuit of spiritual discipline, but also in their encounters with their communities – God is met in the other. The women in Newfrontiers expressed their need for community and friendship faith practices that constructed their relationship with God in such a way that holiness or piety was not possible without such relationships. This is a nuance in the typical description of Evangelical faith development, which emphasises individual salvation and individual and personal growth.

Holiness through friendship is described using spiritually transformative terminology. Lisa says that her community 'is the grace of God to me'.⁶²² This, she says, goes deeper than simply a 'gift' but has elements that forms the person in the relationship with God. God is present to the women through their companions and friends in the church.⁶²³ This embodied practice of presence through other people has a material and tangible reality for the women. God is experienced through these encounters. When Natalie needed comfort, she found it in families that opened their doors to her, but it was credited that God was the source of the comfort.⁶²⁴ She describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit occurring outside the hospital where her child lay

⁶²⁰ Helen, Interview 21, n.d.

⁶²¹ Elizabeth, Interview 14, n.d.

⁶²² Lisa, Interview 3.

⁶²³ E.g. Stephanie, Interview 12.

⁶²⁴ Natalie, Interview 8.

poorly via the woman from the church who sat on the bench with her.⁶²⁵ The language of encounter, which was used by the women and the identification of these relationships with the relationship with God using mirroring language and phrases, indicates that the relationship with others also forms the relationship with God being mutually constructive.

Not all of the significant friendships for the women occurred in the central, ecclesial spaces. Subversive communities form in the women's accounts a connection to spiritual encounter with God. These communities were subversive because they operated, according to the interviewees, outside of the ordinance of the church community, in particular, the male church elders. Their goal was to engage with novel spiritual practices, external theological authority and female leadership. Jennifer told me about her group,

So I've got this network, [name] in [place] has this group, and there's women in there from all over, from [place] and from America and the UK and all the rest of it. Despite the fact we've only met in a room together once, we have a WhatsApp group which is very active and we do the odd Zoom things together, and what have you. That, I think, has been hugely beneficial for me in the last two or three years, because as you say, you're encouraged, you're reinforced, lots of women thinking and pushing the same doors, trying to make change. It's in no way a feminist takeover, but it's a lot of women with some influence in some way, whether that's in the church or in the culture, encouraging one another. I think that to not have those support networks, you can feel a little bit like the one woman trying. Then you think no, hold on, this is important, we are right to keep saying these things. It's that whole, I will not apologise for this. It's always the impulse is there to apologise, I'm just like, no. We need to just keep encouraging one another.⁶²⁶

These marginal communities also hold a subversive stance to wider secular culture: the friendships that are developed are directly compared to the friendships held outside of the church community. They are not a 'feminist takeover'. They are identified in the middle space between church and the world. These friendships within the community are different in origin and telos and are therefore valued as part of an expression of faith.

⁶²⁵ Natalie.

⁶²⁶ Jennifer, Interview 9.

Lisa meets regularly with a friend to pray. In this prayer time she and her friend practice keeping silence. She considers this unusual in Newfrontiers.⁶²⁷ She doesn't believe that other Newfrontiers people would engage in practices of spirituality that Lisa believes are not in keeping with the Charismatic church's tradition. Therefore, she and her friend, whom she says is 'exploring' this type of spirituality, go about this practice outside of the community, forming their own community. Lisa believes that she needs this practice of silence because she is angry with God. The absence of words, for Lisa, allows for this spiritual process of anger with God to develop.

However, Charismatic spirituality is often focused on words and on describing emotional experiences of divine encounter. This is not sufficient for Lisa in the situation that she is in, and therefore she requires an alternative that allows for her difficulties with God to be navigated. Practices within the church aren't meeting that need. Indeed, she also goes to conferences outside of the church run by Bill Johnson's Bethel church network based out of Reading, California. This church is another source of theological and spiritual authority that Lisa relies upon. It is very different to the theological tradition that would advocate keeping silence. In fact, Johnson's theology is popular amongst Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.⁶²⁸ Johnson's theology is also disputed within normative sources of theology in Newfrontiers, particularly, its doctrinal accuracy.⁶²⁹ Lisa is one of a number of interview participants who have attended courses and conferences run by the Bethel church network or affiliates, in particular, the 'School of the Supernatural' training course.⁶³⁰ These alternative sources of theological authority and spiritual practice indicate a pick and mix approach to spiritual behaviour and a subversive approach to engaging with them. The women participate in these different forms outside of the church's authority and describe them as ways in which they learn more about God and encounter him positively. These spaces are alternative and additional to the structured church services which allows them epistemic freedom and opportunities for leadership.

⁶²⁷ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁶²⁸ Abigail D. Shuttleworth, "'On Earth as It Is in Heaven': A Critical Discussion of the Theology of Bill Johnson", *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 35, no. 2 (October 2015): 101–14, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1812446115Z.00000000012>.

⁶²⁹ Andrew Wilson, 'On Babies and Bethelwater', *Think Theology* (blog), 8 June 2016, https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/on_throwing_the_baby_out_with_the_bethelwater.

⁶³⁰ See <https://bssm.net/> [accessed 5/10/2022].

Friendships not only facilitate God within Newfrontiers but also to the non-Christian world beyond the church. Such friendships are valued in a different way. Friendships with non-Christian people are experienced differently. For Sarah, she makes friends with non-Christians functionally to evangelise to them. For Gaby, her friendships at work set her apart as different; she is the one who behaves differently. For example, she does not swear and is known by colleagues for this. Anna describes how when she was a teenager that she was lonely.⁶³¹ This was because she was different on account of her Christian faith.

This potential for loneliness because of faith was a common theme. Women experienced their difference to the secular world as particularly significant in their social relationships. In order to account for this difference, it was framed as a sacrifice that was made because of pursuing God. The consequence of this sacrifice was that God was invoked to find friendships for the women. The women recounted praying for friends.⁶³² Friendship is something that God is interested in, that is ordained and ordered by him and is pertinent to the construction and expression of faith. Friendships, which are negative influences upon faith, are not rejected outright. Women maintain secular friendships, but they are described as qualitatively different to Christian friendships.⁶³³ The Christian friendships are frequently described as 'honest', 'deeper', 'vulnerable'. The same language is also used of relationships with God, and the parallel is significant. Christian friendships mirror the purpose of the church socially. They are formative of the relationship with God. God is described as a 'friend' to the women, who is similarly able to bear their vulnerabilities and honesty. These similarities between the Christian friendships and the relationship with God show that the communities the women construct for themselves are more than areas where discipleship and formation occur. These things do occur, but they are also a part of the way in which God's person is known. Knowledge of God and knowledge of friends interact to create a social epistemology for faith.

Friendships are sources of encountering power for the women in Newfrontiers. They facilitate access to God and are sites of encounter with the Holy Spirit. Using language that tells of a real and facilitated divine presence that is aided by these communities of friends indicates that the women rely upon the presence of their friends for their spiritual practices.

⁶³¹ Anna, Interview 7.

⁶³² Anna.

⁶³³ Jane, Interview 16.

By taking God with them, outside of their homes and the church, and into workplaces, places of social action and local communities, these women make spaces for the divine to operate in the world. In keeping with the evangelistic emphasis of their church tradition, the women were orientated towards telling other people about God. The thread that runs throughout the stories of these women is that, when they are making spaces for themselves, this is extended into making spaces for God to be revealed. I described earlier how women walk frequently as an adaptive practice to meet with God and make space for that meeting. The consequence of this adaptive practice was not only that they met with God, but also that they believed they walked with God into situations where God was not revealed before. Jane was a charity worker. She took God into places that were both dangerous for her and sites of oppression for women.⁶³⁴

I just kept on thinking, what about the women in [location]? What about them? Who's going to them? Do they know that they're precious?⁶³⁵

Jane makes space for herself and for God in a place that she perceived was closed and unavailable. This space was particularly a female space. It was one where victims were female but also a female space because Jane would only allow other women to come with her.

We wanted to move in that power, in that authority and in that identity as women, because we only ever took women into the [location], that we knew who we were, we knew whose we were.⁶³⁶

The power that Jane refers to is the power of God in the lives of her co-workers who are women. By recognising their belonging to God as believers in Christ, they were given confidence. However, this confidence was specifically and necessarily female. To bring God into this secret place that Jane believed needed liberation required the making of a female space. The offer of the church to the world was also expressed by Caroline. Caroline worked in the NHS in a senior role that involved delivery of services and procurement. She is in her early forties and a married mother. It was her belief that the church can offer to meet a social need that is not currently met by government and non-governmental organisations. When she hears of crises in communities,

⁶³⁴ Jane asked me to keep the precise nature of her work obscure to protect the women involved. Because of this some of her interview is redacted.

⁶³⁵ Jane, Interview 16.

⁶³⁶ Jane.

she says, 'I immediately go, a church has got so much to offer'.⁶³⁷ She believes that churches have a unique offer to communities to provide spaces that are welcoming. Churches are places of deep community that are different from other community spaces. This level of welcome and belonging stands out for Caroline as something that people on the edges of society – those in poverty, or with mental health needs – are desperate for. The church is the only solution because it is a community of faith. This is also because God has called people, including Caroline, to work in this way. The work that Caroline believes, which she is called to, is underpinned by the theology of deep community that the women expressed. She says that God calls us to be part of a community. Her description is of an alternative community that is in line with the alternative communities of friends that the women experience, and this alternative community works as 'a whole village' who help with children, with isolation, and 'just that sense of belonging'.⁶³⁸ The fundamental difference that being part of this community makes to people features as part of a wider description from the women of the difference that their alternative community and lifestyle has, compared to wider society. This difference is both part of the appealing nature of the community of faith and part of what separates the women from the wider world. This difference is a creation of a space that is particular, that is for the women and the wider church, but is an open space that welcomes other people in.

The differences in the alternative communities and the church that the participants indicated were ones that showed the world what being a Christian meant and offered to those who weren't members a choice to join. The women construed their difference as having an evangelistic element. They indicate the lifestyle of someone who has God living in them and the power of the Holy Spirit. Andrea works in the media. She told me of a time when she was in a swimming pool with a famous television personality, and she had a conversation about God and faith. She also demonstrated speaking in tongues to her company executives whilst travelling in a car because they had never seen it before.⁶³⁹ Jane describes her conversion to Charismatic Christianity from 'nominal' Christianity as being because she met students at university 'who were very different from the rest of the students I knew because they were Christians'.⁶⁴⁰ The difference that being a Christian made was that they were full of joy, she said, and 'deep down I

⁶³⁷ Caroline, Interview 17.

⁶³⁸ Caroline.

⁶³⁹ Andrea, Interview 15.

⁶⁴⁰ Jane, Interview 16.

envied that'.⁶⁴¹

The difference was also a moral difference. The space that the women existed in was one which refused to participate in certain actions that they considered morally wrong. This pushed them to the margins of the wider society and caused the women to act as images of this difference, making them strange to non-Christians. Newfrontiers women were involving in acts of resistance against what they understood to be the dominant culture, 'western culture', as it was frequently called. Jessica spoke at length to me about a period in her life when she made decisions that were counter to the social life around her. She spoke of being single until she was thirty years old and actively resisting the pressure from her 'non-Christian friends' to have sex and drink alcohol to excess. She was so well known amongst her friends that they adapted the phrase 'what would Jesus do?' to 'what would Jessica do?'⁶⁴² To her friends she was making decisions on moral matters as if she was like Jesus. She was pointing towards him in her choices and standing out as different from society as a consequence.

A theme in this research is of knowing, of epistemology. Alongside the women's description of epistemological injustices, and of resistance to this by making space outside of the church for special knowing of God, is a belief that they have insight into the world and different beliefs about it. This is another epistemological marker for the women of Newfrontiers. This occurs in two ways: one a rejection of feminist thinking and two a belief that there are spiritual realities that are revealed to them that are not apprehended by others.

Some interviewees disassociated themselves from the feminist movement. In accounts of women subverting the patriarchal leadership structure or questioning the role of complementarianism in the church, they felt a need to qualify this by distancing themselves from 'feminism'. When Jennifer told me about the group of women who met together to talk about leadership in the churches, she was at pains to say that it was 'in no way a feminist takeover' but rather women who have 'influence' working as a 'support network'.⁶⁴³ As she described this group, she said that she would not 'apologise' for its existence. This distance from feminism and the need to be unapologetic imply that feminism itself is a counter influence for what is good in a community of women in Newfrontiers. Her subversive community of women who are in

⁶⁴¹ Jane.

⁶⁴² Jessica, Interview 13.

⁶⁴³ Jennifer, Interview 9.

leadership within a complementarian community is acceptable in her mind if they are not self-identified as feminist. Feminism for her is a ‘takeover’ that would be damaging, not only for her group but for Newfrontiers. Jennifer is expressing many of the values that characterise a broad understanding of feminism (outside of the particularities of feminist waves and periods). She expresses dissatisfaction with the status quo. She wishes to see equality with men in women in all aspects of the church’s life. She is seeking to understand and highlight the ability of women to act by examining the biblical sources and engaging in conversation with other people in her church and her sphere (who have refused engagement). She raises awareness. These behaviours correspond with feminist practices, but her self identification does not.

In the same way Angela, who describes instances of racism and of unrecognised leadership, distances herself from theoretical stances that she finds problematic. In the midst of her telling me about lack of representation in Newfrontiers for ethnic minorities, she qualifies her story with,

I’m not into women’s rights or ethnic minority rights, but I am into justice and the heart of God, and God’s kingdom coming...⁶⁴⁴

Angela here draws a polemic between the ‘rights’ movements and the liberative kingdom of God. Justice and the will of God do not correspond to the movements for women’s rights or ethnic minority rights. They are in a similar theme, enough that she feels that she must differentiate. She is not identifying as a member of those movements; rather, she is identifying with the universalising will of God to seek justice, which is, for Angela, to do with representation and equality of ethnic minorities and women in churches. In the same way, she refers to the ‘Black Lives Matter’ campaign and her understanding of the Newfrontiers’ silence about it. Angela wishes specifically that the church would mention not the movement but racism. These three movements for Angela, ethnic minority rights, women’s rights, and Black Lives Matter are important but critically different to the justice that the church should be seeking in line with God’s justice.

Helen is more explicit about the differences between the ‘liberal’ school that she works for which has a ‘strong LGBT community and very heavily feminist’ and which she describes as being anti-

⁶⁴⁴ Angela, Interview 11.

Christian. She says that they ‘hate Christians!’.⁶⁴⁵ For Helen, liberal views necessitate a negative view of Christianity. When I asked her what this means for her views of feminism, she told me that the children at her school take ‘empowerment’ to a ‘dangerous’ level where they believe that ‘men have not got any worth’.⁶⁴⁶ Helen has a negative view of feminism as being out of balance, favouring women who are competent and qualified against men that are unable to meet the standard. Rights and justice for these women are theorised as Christian and not associated with any other movements or ideas.

Both Angela and Jennifer positively identify aspects of modern movements for equality, aspects that they favour, but distance themselves from the labels that might correspond with these opinions. Helen believes that *in extremis* feminism is negative, and that this is her experience of it. In Donna’s interview with me, she tells of her lifetime’s experience of racism and her interaction with the shooting of George Floyd.⁶⁴⁷ Donna identified herself as mixed race, married to a church elder, and mother and spoke at length of the devastating consequence racism in society, and the church had on her mental health. Donna then describes her understanding of childbearing in her own life in relation to 1 Timothy 2.15 (‘women, however, will be saved through childbearing’). She believes that this is an unacceptable position to hold if a woman is a ‘feminist Christian’ or a ‘feminist’. Constructing her role as a mother as salvific, she believes this to be contra to the agenda of feminism. However, she later describes her delight in hearing stories about women and God. In particular, women who are ‘fighting and standing their ground’.

This ambivalent stance towards the aims of feminism is possibly partially in response to my research proposal, and the distance that it created from previous discourses, both academic and ecclesiastical, about Newfrontiers and feminism. However, that does not fully account for the women’s descriptions of feminist values and the rejection of labels and associations with modern rights movements. It is difficult to fully account for the rejection of feminism amongst those women who mentioned it in the interview data. In light of the broader research findings of difference to the world and different priorities to the world, it is possible that feminism is rejected because it is deemed unnecessary in light of the liberating power of God. It is also possible that, in keeping with the desire of Stephanie mentioned above (to not be seen as

⁶⁴⁵ Helen, Interview 21. 14.

⁶⁴⁶ Helen. 15.

⁶⁴⁷ A black man shot by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota on 25th May 2020.

‘difficult’), feminism’s unfavourable association with women who cause problems is seen unfavourably. Anne said that, in the relation to battles to be recognised as a woman in the church, she had ‘not been rebellious’.⁶⁴⁸ This is similar to Sarah’s comment about keeping her resistance quiet and trusting God to restore her to the place that he has called her to. The resistance of feminism, which is public and active, is not necessary if the works of liberation are wrought not by human hands but by divine mandate.

Women also understand their way of knowing as different to the world because the Holy Spirit reveals to them the spiritual world that cannot be known without special revelation. The ability to discern the presence and actions of God, angels and of the devil and demons is characteristic of the testimony of women in Newfrontiers. Anna told me that when her son was having febrile convulsions and required hospital treatment, she was able to tell him, ‘It’s okay, God is with us right now. It’s okay, he’s here.’⁶⁴⁹ The ability to sense the divine presence and tell people about it is a form of special knowledge that gives her agency in a troubling situation. It also gives agency when women told me that they could discern the presence of evil. Tracey spoke of both an ability to identify angels and of sensing the presence of demons. This ability allowed her to understand situations with more clarity and make decisions based upon it.⁶⁵⁰ I noted earlier in the chapter that Anne had a revelatory experience when she was in hospital. She told me of her doctor questioning her about her ability withstand the pain, and she relates this both to her faith and to a difference with men,

Then he said, ‘I want to know how you did it’. I didn’t know what he meant, and then he said that he has grown men on the men’s ward thrashing about in their beds, even when they’ve had morphine. He said, ‘You just laid there, and you never made a sound.’ And he said ‘I want to know how you did it.’ I didn’t know what to say to him. I just said, ‘Well I’m a Christian. Maybe it’s my faith that’s helped me get through’.⁶⁵¹

The doctor sought Anne’s special access to knowledge; she had information that he didn’t have. Anne’s revelatory experiences when in pain, and her female body, gave her special access to knowing God and to the difference that knowledge made to her being-in-the-world. Her

⁶⁴⁸ Anne, Interview 25.

⁶⁴⁹ Anna, Interview 7.

⁶⁵⁰ Tracey, Interview 24.

⁶⁵¹ Anne, Interview 25.

different behaviour in the hospital based on this knowledge indicates her epistemological uniqueness. Her difference with the non-Christian world, embodied in the men who thrashed in their beds – presumably supposed to be stronger and more able to sustain pain – and Anne’s ability to withstand it because of her female body and its special knowing of God.

The space that is created within the community of friends allows women to access God and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. These friendships have a sacramental aspect because they facilitate the very presence of God and are valued as a spiritual commodity. They also are marginal, operating outside of the church community’s main meetings. In these marginal spaces women experience different elements of spirituality and leadership that are not available to them in the central spaces of the church and they also experience the authority and legitimisation of these marginal spaces that are acceptable and approved of by God. From these female friendship communities, women strike out into the world understanding themselves as fundamentally different from the values (such as feminism), morals and goals of the rest of society. However, this does not mean that they withdraw from these differences but rather instrumentalise them for the sake of telling other people about the God who puts people into communities that are like families. These communities are alternative societies to the normative society of ‘western culture’ that the women experience in the UK today. It is the alternative society that is the greatest good of the church, where the existence of friendships and relationships ultimately lead to friendship, relationship and community with God.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the way in which women make spaces for themselves within the Newfrontiers network of churches. These spaces are found within the church as the women negotiate their places within the uncertain and ambivalent church leadership structures but also outside of it in their homes, workplaces, and their bodies. The requirement of space creation is a key finding in this research as women express dissatisfaction with the status quo and a tendency towards acts of resistance that reject it and attempt to bring about change. The possibility of change in particular regarding women in leadership was raised by some of the women. The church networks were formed in the 1970s and change from the more extreme positions illustrated in the previous chapter and in the literature review can already be demonstrated. It is unclear whether this is an ongoing trajectory or whether this is as far as the change is likely to go. It is the case that some of the women hoped for further changes and even expected them.

For all the women, even those who did not experience Newfrontiers as treating women negatively, there was still a move from experiencing and seeking God in the structures of the church to doing so in marginal and other spaces. In this way the women accounted for experiences of good. These spaces were empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit who legitimised and gave authority to the women. Wherever the women were, so also was the Holy Spirit with demonstrable acts. This lent the women credence as they negotiated their epistemology. Their God-knowing which is held with uncertainty in the church itself is flourishing in these marginal spaces. The desire of these spaces to be open and welcoming to all who seek it was a key feature. The spaces the women make from themselves were self-consciously alternative. The women were different, both from the church and from the world around them. However, they were not boundaries that were closed but porous, always looking to welcome new members. These deliberate differences functioned as icons to both the church and 'the world', if only anyone was prepared to enquire as to their purpose. Women navigate their power and their God-knowing by creating spaces that are suitable and resistant. In so doing, they encounter God and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do good works in the church and the world. Their view is ultimately optimistic. Change and encounter are possible, and in this way they are fully in keeping with the Newfrontiers eschatology – that there is hope and things will resolve well.

Chapter 5: Wisdom in the Spirit: The God-Knowledge of Newfrontiers Women

From the interview data, I constructed themes that described the faith lives of the participants. These themes coalesced in my construction into one primary theme, making space. In their faith lives the participants made space for their own experience and expression of God within their context. This expression fully embraced their theological and contextual reality – Charismatic, complementarian UK church members – whilst negotiating and critiquing their ability to speak and be heard within it. This chapter is the completion of the second phase in my research methodology where the rich descriptions of the women’s testimonies are brought into conversation with theological and non-theological sources in order to understand and hear that which has not been expressed before. This chapter takes these rich descriptions and begins the interpretative process of drawing testimony, lived religion and hermeneutics together. This process begins here in phase 2 and completes in phase 3 with the renewed reading of scripture. This chapter is the middle part of the hermeneutical process of reading scripture in light of testimonial accounts of lived religion.

Theme 1: Epistemic Complexities: ‘Newfrontiers is very much about male leadership of churches’

Code 1. ‘Overlooked and Misunderstood’⁶⁵²: Epistemic Injustices

My research interviews began with a question about the participants’ relationship with God. The answers were descriptive of the type and circumstances of this relationship. The interviews usually then progressed to the women’s role in this ongoing divine/human encounter. They described their part in their ability to know God. When they mentioned the roles of women in Newfrontiers, I understood these comments within this larger conversation about God-knowing. To know God was inhibited to some extent by their position as women in the complementarian church structure. In the previous chapter, I identified ‘unacceptability’ in the church as a frequent code in the interviews with Newfrontiers women. The women told me that they felt that their gender was a factor in this unacceptability. Angela said her voice was not heard in a

⁶⁵² Sarah, Interview 6.

church setting. Angela navigated and created an opportunity for her own voice and for the voice of another woman that wouldn't otherwise exist. The authority of her ideas is not inherent in the structures and expectations of the church, rather must be negotiated and claimed by the women. Sarah told me that she was 'overlooked and misunderstood' but that despite it she has resolved to stay in Newfrontiers. Women described hiddenness and vocations to church leadership being unrecognised and unacceptable.

Ian James Kidd identifies religious epistemology as related to 'the practices of testifying and interpreting experiences' in distinctive ways in religious life.⁶⁵³ For Newfrontiers members testimony of spiritual experiences and of knowledge that relates to God is critical to their religious practice. Epistemic injustice in a religious community occurs, says Kidd, when a religious community expresses doubt about the credibility of a given witness.

...it is also clear that religious communities and traditions have been sources of epistemic injustice – for instance, by conjoining epistemic and spiritual credibility in ways disadvantageous to 'deviant' groups'.⁶⁵⁴

I have illustrated through my analysis of interviews and participant observations that Newfrontiers women, in participation with the practices of the faith community, demonstrate their relationship with God through the giving of testimony. These testimonies account for their experiences of the Holy Spirit in their lives and narrate their relationship with God. I construct this storytelling as a form of epistemology. This epistemology is the way in which they show that they know God. This God-knowledge is then shared with the community. However, Newfrontiers women are treated with uncertainty about the authority in their testimony and can be described as a 'deviant' group according to Kidd's description. When they speak in the spaces of church leadership, they are at risk of being ignored, forgotten, or deliberately excluded. Epistemic injustice is a description of power and knowledge and is a suitable category with which to explore this testimonial uncertainty.

Kristin Aune wrote in her doctoral thesis on gender construction and Newfrontiers that women navigate an uncertain environment caused by their gender. They do this navigation relying upon

⁶⁵³ Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043>. 386.

⁶⁵⁴ Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus. 386.

prophecy and other spiritual gifts that allow them to have some authority. This authority is related to knowledge. She describes the women as being excluded from ‘official religious authority’.⁶⁵⁵ This knowledge from prophecy or ‘ecstatic’ spiritual experiences is restrained by ‘the centrality of (male) rationality and biblicism’.⁶⁵⁶ Miranda Fricker describes epistemic injustice as twofold, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.⁶⁵⁷ The primary way in which Newfrontier’s women’s knowing can be described is by using her notion of testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice relates to the agential power. It is the power of the hearer of information who processes and assigns it credibility. It requires social alignment. Testimonial power is a social power, ‘to effect social control’.⁶⁵⁸ It is also a form of identity power, to do with ‘shared imaginative conceptions of social identity’.⁶⁵⁹

The power women have is qualified by the gender construction specific to their community. Newfrontiers women are subject to this power dynamic in their ability to give testimony to their ideas, beliefs, and experiences about God within the church. For example, when Sarah is considered arrogant for believing she has a vocation for leadership in the churches, she is subject to the denial of her testimony, the denial of her belief about herself and about God. Susannah Cornwall, Alex Clare-Young, and Sara Gillingham report that when an individual’s beliefs about themselves and their identities are denied this questions their first-person knowledge of themselves.⁶⁶⁰ They cite Talia Mae Bettcher who argues that denying first person testimony contradicts our social understandings of the value of such knowledge. This, they conclude, is epistemic injustice. So Fricker argues,

An exercise of gender identity power is active when, for instance, a man makes (possibly unintended) use of his identity as a man to influence a women’s actions – for example to make her defer to his word.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁵ Aune, ‘Postfeminist Evangelicals: The Construction of Gender in the New Frontiers International Churches’. 162.

⁶⁵⁶ Aune. 162.

⁶⁵⁷ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Repr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁵⁸ Fricker. 13.

⁶⁵⁹ Fricker. 14.

⁶⁶⁰ Susannah Cornwall, Alex Clare-Young, and Sara Gillingham, ‘Epistemic Injustice Exacerbating Trauma in Christian Theological Treatments of Trans People and People with Intersex Characteristics’, in *Bearing Witness: Intersectional Perspectives on Trauma Theology*, ed. Karen O’Donnell and Katie Cross (London: SCM Press, 2022). 114.

⁶⁶¹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*. 14.

This very event occurs when Angela questions the silencing of women's voices by the male leader who she believes did it by accident. Fricker relates this to her more systemic mode of injustice – hermeneutical injustice – where the social situation is embedded significantly and hermeneutical resources are restricted to those in power.⁶⁶² The injustice that the women reported to me is epistemic because it relates specifically to their to 'their capacity as knower'.⁶⁶³ Fricker understands this as a credibility deficit; straightforwardly, they are questioned and not believed in their accounts or not given opportunity to give their accounts to others. The power resides with the hearer who is at all times judging the likelihood that the speaker is giving a true account. Fricker, then, argues that this is an identity prejudice corresponding to an attribute of the speaker that is 'inversely related to competence or sincerity'.⁶⁶⁴ The research participants who expressed dissatisfaction with their position did so as women. Lisa describes an ideal type of elder as one who is a particular type of idealised male.⁶⁶⁵ For these women, they fall outside of the ideal type and their credibility is questioned. They are subject to identity prejudices, which are 'a negative valence held against people *qua* social type'.⁶⁶⁶

Fricker claims that such identity prejudices that effect epistemic credibility can be held in cohort with beliefs that are not, or perhaps no longer, prejudicial. She describes a woman who self-identifies as a feminist but still gives less credence to female political candidates.⁶⁶⁷ This is 'residual prejudice', she says, and relates to how social imaginaries retain prejudicial identity judgements relating to credibility. This nuance that Fricker highlights is particularly evident in the research findings. The women who expressed dissatisfaction, and those that did not, still also expressed times when, even within the church. They were given credibility and other times when they were not. Anne tells of how, 'it is completely different now', as she is known as a prophet and allowed a voice in Newfrontiers. In the same way, other women describe times when they lead services which in Newfrontiers is an epistemic role, judging whether contributions to the

⁶⁶² Fricker. 148.

⁶⁶³ Fricker. 20.

⁶⁶⁴ Fricker. 32.

⁶⁶⁵ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁶⁶⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*. 35.

⁶⁶⁷ Fricker. 38.

service are valid and helpful or not.⁶⁶⁸ Women such as Sarah who saw an angel and directed the church's future plans because of this vision.⁶⁶⁹

The women in Newfrontiers can be described as epistemically *insecure*. They navigate uncertain positions of authority. They obtain authority in their God-knowing through their daily practices of embodied mystical spirituality. These practices are their manner of direct relationships to God, which as I will examine and intertwined with intimate friendships that facilitate it. These two factors create communities of knowledge that operate alongside the larger ecclesial practices of Newfrontiers so that the women are at once inside and outside the church.

Code 2: Gender as a Dangerous Influence

In my previous chapter, I described a theme of 'making space' that I had allocated to the research findings, and this analysis illustrates that this theme is a response to the women's insecure epistemic credibility. There are instances when the women's knowing is questioned and disregarded and instances when their knowing is given authority and credibility. This lack of credibility is connected to embodiment that is questioned. These instances are closely related to their embodiment. Their knowing is affective knowing inspired by the embodied practices. This can be, as already shown, both credible and of value within the church and disregarded and subject to questioning. This embodiment and the location of the embodiment is related to the women's process of creating space and developing their God-knowing and for finding such spaces to be places where their voices are given legitimacy.

The affective knowing of women is questioned in Newfrontiers twofold, because of their embodied gender and via intersections of ethnicity. Women's bodies have the potential to be dangerous. The most striking example within the research was from Hannah who feared that, with dancing, she ran the risk of doing 'the wrong thing with my body'.⁶⁷⁰ Hannah's attempts at worship by use of her body are questioned within the community and by herself because her body could tempt others to sin. Hannah's beliefs are an example of purity culture. Katie Cross describes purity culture as this,

⁶⁶⁸ See chapter 3.4.

⁶⁶⁹ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁶⁷⁰ Hannah, Interview 20.

Generally speaking, purity culture manifests most clearly in conservative Christian communities...The central tenants of purity culture include (but are not limited to) the restriction of all sexual activity to heterosexual marriage, an emphasis on modesty and sexual purity, and abstinence-only education.⁶⁷¹

Cross also describes purity culture as fundamentally concerning bodies. She calls this ‘body theodicy’ which is ‘a piece of theology that becomes trapped within the body’.⁶⁷² This theology, to do with the danger of Hannah’s body, concerns epistemology again because the questioning that Hannah undertakes is to do with her body dancing in worship. Hannah described her embodied worship as a ‘thirsting’ for God (following Psalm 63.1), seeking to know and experience the divine more. This quest for knowledge of God is potentially harmful to others. She believes that her body is damaging because it is tempting. Kelsey Sherrod Michael understands this attitude as part of Evangelical Christianity’s broader modesty culture. Primarily existing in the United States,⁶⁷³ it is a culture that seeks to surveil women in order to moderate their appearance in line with modesty norms.⁶⁷⁴ For Sherrod Michael, the example that encapsulates this idea was when a Christian blogger, Ashely P. Dickens who remarked on the online debate about whether Christian women should wear yoga pants.⁶⁷⁵ In the same way that Hannah describes women’s bodies, when they are in view, are subject to surveillance and their piety is held in question. The use of the female body by the woman has an impact on the piety and purity of men and becomes a ‘window into the state of her soul’.⁶⁷⁶ Sherrod Michael says that this makes the piety of the woman ‘legible’ to others.⁶⁷⁷ Thus, Hannah’s affective knowing of God is challenged by the legislative gaze of observers to her body. Her first-person knowledge, as illustrated above, is questioned, and her epistemic credibility is diminished. Her reading of her

⁶⁷¹ Cross, Katie, “‘I Have the Power in My Body to Make People Sin’: The Trauma of Purity Culture and the Concept of “Body Theodicy”, in *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. Karen O’Donnell and Katie Cross (London, England: SCM Press, 2020). 21-22.

⁶⁷² Katie Cross. 27.

⁶⁷³ Katie Cross finds that although the purity culture is more apparent in the US ‘to a lesser but still significant extent, purity culture has also made its way to the UK’ Cross, 37.

⁶⁷⁴Kelsey Sherrod Michael, ‘Wearing Your Heart on Your Sleeve: The Surveillance of Women’s Souls in Evangelical Christian Modesty Culture’, *Feminist Media Studies* 19, no. 8 (17 November 2019): 1129–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1490915>.

⁶⁷⁵ Michael. 1129.

⁶⁷⁶ Michael. 1131.

⁶⁷⁷ Michael. 1132.

body is unstable, and she feels that her knowledge might be untrue. She may in fact be illustrating the opposite of what she intends. For what she intends for worship with her body might in fact be sinful.

Women's bodies for the research participants are sites of troubling experiences of epistemic negation where their affective and embodied knowing is subject to questioning and lack of credibility. Their bodies, either as female or as female and ethnically diverse, are troubled sites of non-normativity. However, the notion of insecure epistemology extends into this embodied sphere as the women do have embodied knowledge that is valuable in the church and more frequently outside the church.

Mary's story of her journey with cancer is one such example of embodiment. As her hair fell out because of her cancer treatment, she engaged her daughter in what would have been a very worrying time with a game of hairdressers.⁶⁷⁸ Mary experiences an encounter with God that is embodied. This happens in the everyday site of her home and the unique situation of hair loss from cancer treatment. This situation is closely linked to her identity as a woman for her fear of losing her hair. Her husband's response to this was present throughout the storytelling. God reassured her that she was beautiful ('don't hide your lovely face from me, my dove, come out from the cleft of the rock, I want to see your beautiful face'. It was just like, oh my word, it was just so – God spoke to me personally, just what I needed...⁶⁷⁹ Nicola Slee finds that women's faith experiences are typically related to embodiment she found women practice,

...concrete, visual, narrative and embodied forms of thinking over propositional, abstract or analytical thought in the women's faith accounts.⁶⁸⁰

For Mary and the other women, their faith experiences are closely connected to their bodies and in particular to their gender. Of particular interest is Slee's discovery of a strong indicator towards 'apophatic faithing', which she described as on the edge of rational thought. This faithing is, according to Slee, more to do with what is not known by the woman rather than what

⁶⁷⁸ Mary, Interview 4.

⁶⁷⁹ Mary.

⁶⁸⁰ Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2004). 165.

is known. It is not anti-intellectual but is ‘agnostic, paradoxical and elusive kind of knowing’.⁶⁸¹ Here Mary shows that in the midst of an ‘absurd’ event that is child-like play in the middle of traumatic illness. She discovers something about her female body, and the love God has for it. Marjorie Procter-Smith describes the feminist liturgical tradition as having an emphasis upon women’s bodies that finds them holy.⁶⁸² This contrasts with traditional Christianity, she says, which finds women’s bodies to be ‘polluted and polluting’; rather, the body is celebrated including in rituals of menarche and menopause. Mary’s hair becomes a source of holy encounter compared to Hannah’s body that is polluting and Angela’s body that does not represent ‘normal’. The women have moved the locus of their faithing away from the centre of the church into spaces that are at home. Procter-Smith at the kitchen table returning once again to the feminist and female orientated view of the sacredness of the ordinary.

This valorizing of the ordinary is the means by which participants in feminist liturgy recognize and honor the presence of the holy in the daily work of women that is rarely regarded as sacred, or even meaningful.⁶⁸³

When women are located in their homes as these spaces of divine encounter, or on walks in their location they experience God in daily, mundane encounters. Gaby finds ‘no other space for me’ than her kitchen, so her kitchen becomes holy as a site of divine encounter. When Anna asks, ‘Okay God, do I need to take an umbrella today?’ She makes the mundane and trivial into an encounter with divinity that makes holy ordinary tasks.⁶⁸⁴ These daily tasks become rituals that orientate their existence towards God, so that Anna can say, ‘it’s an hourly relationship; it’s just every minute of my every day I’m very aware of God and aware of his presence’.⁶⁸⁵

These experiences are Charismatic in character as well as characteristic of female faith experiences. Helen Collins’ doctoral research concerned the nature of Charismatic worship in the early years of motherhood. She found that women from Charismatic churches experienced

⁶⁸¹ Slee. 165.

⁶⁸² Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition*, 2013.

⁶⁸³ Procter-Smith. V.

⁶⁸⁴ Anna, Interview 7.

⁶⁸⁵ Anna, Interview 7.

feelings of disconnection from their worship because of competing demands upon them.⁶⁸⁶ These demands related to motherhood and to the requirements placed upon the individual as a worshipper. This work of feminist Practical Theology found that the mothers in question were unable to participate in worship during church services because of the requirement that this worship be transformative and the competing demands of modern intensive mothering. She found that Charismatics place emphasis upon the Sunday services to the cost of the rest of the week. Collins argues that the Charismatic church needs to rediscover spirituality of the domestic and ordinary kinds. The locus of spirituality is found in the church service which has unique challenges to mothers in this instance but also to people with disabilities or work commitments. The challenge that Collins raises is one to take into the rest of this thesis. For Charismatic spirituality, there is an emphasis upon the felt encounter. It should be therapeutic and transformative. When this fails to happen there is a sense of failure and disconnect with the worshipper.

I discovered that the women I interviewed often feel unable to engage in this form of worship because they lack the energy and personal resources to make the necessary effort, due to the overwhelming and constant demands of child-care. Should they find they have the necessary energy, the demands of their baby may restrict their availability to engage or their ability to be physically present in the gathering. Therefore, a therapeutic transformation of emotions eludes them and they can feel disconnected from their worshipping community, and consequently disconnected from God.⁶⁸⁷

The Newfrontiers research participants had moved their locus of spirituality in similar ways to Collins' participants. They had reinterpreted the centre of their faith as not only in the church service but also in the home and their community.

⁶⁸⁶ Collins, 'Weaving Worship and Womb: A Feminist Practical Theology of Charismatic Worship from the Perspective of Early Motherhood'.

⁶⁸⁷ Collins. 257.

Code 4: Intersections of Race⁶⁸⁸

The black and brown bodies of the research participants were also subject to prejudice. These were intersections with gender for the participants who negotiate not only their disadvantage as female subjects but also as black and brown subjects. Jane understood herself as novel within Newfrontiers as a black leader.⁶⁸⁹ She was in a position to describe herself as a leader, illustrating a similar form of insecurity rather than outright silencing. Her leadership was *as* a black woman and was rare as a consequence, there were not enough examples within Newfrontiers. For Angela, there was a more obvious sense of epistemic injustice associated with her ethnicity. Her knowledge of her own social situation was unrecognised by the church. This was in relation to a Christmas advert featuring a family with her ethnicity. Her reflection on the negative responses in the media to this advert that she understood as racist; however, her knowledge of this situation was held as unreliable. Angela has to fight for her own social situation to be understood and expressed dissatisfaction that conversations like the one above were common in her experience of church. Angela understood that the message, ‘this is not your home’; the church was complicit in.⁶⁹⁰

Angela’s experience can be described in terms of a cultural ‘third space’ following Homi K. Bhabha.⁶⁹¹ Bhabha’s theory can be understood as referring to the intersection between two places of cultural meaning.⁶⁹² These two places are subject to acts of interpretation that are never straightforwardly communication; therefore, they enter into a ‘third’ space that is where the two meet. For Angela this third space is a place where her brown body and her female body and the experiences of both enter into a space where she is able to draw the two together and interrogate them.⁶⁹³ Nick Pilcher suggests that a third space is a place where multiple meanings can be safely negotiated.⁶⁹⁴ For Angela and the other women, he accounted for racism in the church. There is

⁶⁸⁸ I discuss theme 1 code 3 with the corresponding adjustments that women make in their communities in the following section: theme 2 code 1.

⁶⁸⁹ Jane, Interview 16.

⁶⁹⁰ Angela, Interview 11.

⁶⁹¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁶⁹² The meaning of ‘third space’ is subject to plurality and vagueness of interpretation, so any such meaning attributed to it is one of many interpretations of Bhabha available see ‘Vivien Xiaowei Zhou and Nick Pilcher, ‘Revisiting the “Third Space” in Language and Intercultural Studies’, *Language and Intercultural Communication* 19, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2018.1553363>. 1.

⁶⁹³ Xiaowei Zhou and Pilcher. 3.

⁶⁹⁴ Xiaowei Zhou and Pilcher. 4.

a necessity for transgressing their multiple identities and finding a safe ‘third space’. It is apparent that the church does not always provide this safe space but possible that the way in which I go on to describe the particular spaces that women reported to me contribute to these negotiations for women who also have black and brown bodies.

Theme 2. Towards Epistemic Credibility: Making Spaces

Code 1: Making a Space in the Church⁶⁹⁵

The female participants of the research described their female friendships as important to their faith. They used emphatic terms, such as friendships being ‘the grace of God to me’.⁶⁹⁶

Friendships develop faith and draw women closer to God, helping them form their spirituality and sense the presence of the divine. When these friendships fail or cease the lack of them is mourned. Accounting for their absence for these participants indicated that friendship and community is profoundly important to the women.

Newfrontiers has a firm belief in being a distinctive people. This follows in the tradition of Restoration churches. Walker mentions that the New Apostolic Churches function as an example of God’s ‘alternative society’.⁶⁹⁷ Each individual church is an iteration of this society. This is an important point regarding spirituality. If each church functions as a self-contained society, albeit one that welcomes the stranger, then a natural corporate spirituality can possibly be described that is comparable to other religious groups, such as monastic communities or lay communities. Arthur Wallis wished to describe the church as examples of life in heaven, communities that represent the community in heaven.⁶⁹⁸ Wallis believed that it was important to live a life set apart and lauded the Anabaptists for their success at this. Members of a New Apostolic Church are expected to give up much of their free time to serve the church. Also, their money in forms of tithes, their special skills (be it a building management or charities law or any other ability that supports the church). Walker states that the New Apostolic Churches expected their members to commit to a common society of life.⁶⁹⁹ Turner believes this to be overstating

⁶⁹⁵ In this section the analysis also includes reflection on Theme 1 code 3: subversive groups.

⁶⁹⁶ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁶⁹⁷ Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*. 169.

⁶⁹⁸ Max Turner, ‘Ecclesiology in the Major “Apostolic” Restorationist Churches in the United Kingdom’, *Vox Evangelica* 19 (1989): 83–108.

⁶⁹⁹ Quoted in Turner. 88.

the case, he says as an acknowledged outsider and sociological observer that the commitment level is lower more similar to a 'missionary fellowship or a religious community'.⁷⁰⁰ To describe this level of commitment as a reduction of Walker's assessment is strange. The commitment to a religious community is total. All possessions and all of life is given over to the common good. Tuner quotes Anne Mather on this point:

...a shared life...with mutual practical assistance whenever necessary. A member's monetary commitment will not only be to the church (tithing being a common practice) but also to any individuals within that church who may need finances – for a house, car, or holiday for example. It is apparent that the house churches have developed not only an *alternative church*, but also an *alternative society*.⁷⁰¹

This is an example of the Newfrontiers whole life approach to faith. Rather than Sunday attendance being the only marker of the participation in the faith, practices that develop outside of religious services function as means of belonging and enacting belief.⁷⁰² This has continued today. One church that I visited online to participate in a service advertises itself as a 'community that is a family' on its website. Samuel Jeffrey's doctoral thesis suggests that the notion of family in Newfrontiers 'is not incidental to the history and development of the network but is in fact central to it'.⁷⁰³ Jeffrey's calls these 'highly affective interpersonal ties' and finds them to be distinctive characteristics of the movement. His study focusing upon how the male leaders of the movement created and sustained international church growth via these foundational relationships.⁷⁰⁴

Code 2: Mechanisms of Making Space

The women make use of alternative spaces alongside and outside of their church attendance. The women's description of their relationships with one another is, as can be seen, entirely in keeping with the wider emphases upon community found in the movement. However, it is also possible to describe their particular method of female only friendships theorising with feminist

⁷⁰⁰ Turner. 88.

⁷⁰¹ Turner. Ibid.

⁷⁰² Williams, 'Mothers in Newfrontiers: Charismatic Spirituality, Motherhood and the Christian Tradition'.

⁷⁰³ Jefferey, "'A World-Wide Family on a Mission': The History of the Newfrontiers Network in Transnational Perspective, c.1980-2011'. 54.

⁷⁰⁴ Jefferey. 54.

theological descriptors. The majority of the participants described the importance of female friendships in their lives. Two participants particularly described a group that they formed outside of the church's purview. Such groups, alongside the common practice of 'women's ministry' found in Newfrontiers, fall into Nicola Slee's category, 'imagining new liturgical spaces'.⁷⁰⁵ She describes such spaces in relationship to the domestic sphere which is the primary space which women operate their faith and spirituality. The domestic sphere where,

Women have, from time immemorial, prayed, reflected on scriptures and made their own rituals in the home.⁷⁰⁶

For the women participants much of their reported faith actions centred around the home or in the sphere of domestic life. In keeping with their Charismatic beliefs and in line with my theorising of mystical behaviour the domestic space becomes a place of supernatural encounter,

I actually find there's real hotspots in my home where I regularly worship and rest and meet God. I think its angels gather, possibly.⁷⁰⁷

The liturgical space that Slee describes in the domestic sphere is nuanced in the form of Charismatic spirituality that these women practice and the church that they belong to. However, Slee notes that domestic places are not sufficient for women's alternative spaces. Houses are too small. It may be ill equipped or geographically bound. This is apparent in the women only group that the two participants mention. This group was particularly founded to counter the male-dominant spaces in the church with a view of encouraging and equipping women to enact leadership in the spaces available to them. This group functioned online via WhatsApp and Zoom meetings. In this way the women are pragmatically creating spaces in new ways,

A more recent development in feminist liturgical innovation is the use of the internet and social media platforms as alternative *virtual* spaces...⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁵ Nicola Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table*. (La Vergne: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2020), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6362102>. 67.

⁷⁰⁶ Slee. 66.

⁷⁰⁷ Tracey, Interview 24.

⁷⁰⁸ Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table*. 69 italics original.

These alternative groups function secondarily as an outlet for discontent with the male dominated church sphere.

Women's spaces navigate the tension between discontent and contentment with the church. Rebecca Chopp describes such behaviour as mitigating for the standard advice women receive to either love the church or to leave it.⁷⁰⁹ Groups like the one the women described and the women's ministry groups that exist in Newfrontiers offer potential for transformation in line with Chopp's description. This can be described using Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's term, *ekklesia gynaikeōn*. *Ekklesia gynaikeōn* is the church recognised as constructed of women, containing them and being formed by them.⁷¹⁰ Various interpretations as groups of women who 'exodus' the church, such as Mary Daly's 'leap into freedom' or Rosemary Radford Ruether's feminist base communities, it can also contain women who choose to remain in the church that removes or reduces their agency.⁷¹¹ For Schüssler Fiorenza this maintains the tension between 'church-as-home' and the notion of exodus from the church. The women in Newfrontiers have chosen to remain despite their discontent (for those whom expressed this) or remain and exist as Women-church without discontent but with spaces that they exist in that are primarily female.

These spaces are their homes, their friendships and the domestic spheres of their lives. Women-church, Fiorenza's phrase translated by Diann Nell, is a term that,

...has been broadly used to mean that women's reality – experiences, relationships, practices – and has been and will be church⁷¹²

This form of church, that exists in the dialectic of 'church-as-home' and exodus also operates in an epistemological space. For Chopp women-church questions those who have authority with clerical knowledge.⁷¹³ Although there is not an ordained clergy in Newfrontiers, there is an epistemic advantage for the male elders as those who hold and manage knowledge. Chopp's argues that alongside presenting the church as the places where this knowledge is held while

⁷⁰⁹ Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). 46.

⁷¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*. 5-7.

⁷¹¹ Cited in Schüssler Fiorenza. 126.

⁷¹² Chopp, *Saving Work*. 51.

⁷¹³ Chopp. 51.

making it accessible for women to enter it such as permitting them entry to ordination or church leadership. It is also important to note that church exists outside of these borders and that church *is* in these places. Newfrontiers seeks to be a lay movement, harking back to an understanding of church that occurred in the bible. For Slee, the nascent church was in the domestic sphere, ‘women often functioned as heads of these house churches, alongside men, or in their own right’.⁷¹⁴ Naming the reality that the practices of Newfrontiers women in women only groups and spaces *are* church and understanding this as fully in keeping with the normative theologising of the church.

The Newfrontiers participants similarly indicated their relation to space in their rejection of the world. This world-denying strengthens the sense of identity as ‘other’ compared to those around them, forcing the community to be – as with Newfrontiers more broadly – ‘alternative societies’. Rejecting the secular world, identifying at ‘the world’ or as ‘western society’, places the women in a different reality, one which they are together in their rejection. This corresponds to the mystical impulse of world denying also. Continuing with Nicola Slee’s notion of space as a feminist issue relating to worship, these women can be understood to occupy a particular space in relationship to the world around them. Julian of Norwich, in a perhaps more extreme example, similarly enclosed herself away from the world in her anchorage. Taking vows akin to funeral rites and ritually enclosing herself Julian retreated from the world into a ‘domestic interior’. This interior functioned as a ‘transitional space between heaven and earth’.⁷¹⁵ Whereas for Julian, she rejected children and marriage and the demands of the world for her time and place.⁷¹⁶ She still engaged with people around her, praying for parishioners, serving as a role model and speaking to those who needed advice. In this way, the world at large was not invisible to her and it breached the walls of the anchorage with her permission. In the same way, the Newfrontiers women make choices to remove themselves from the world but also to allow it to interact with them. Rejection of swearing, practices of retreat, psychological separation from the values of ‘the world’ around them, all serve to place them women in a space, an anchorage that manages their

⁷¹⁴ Nicola Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table*. (La Vergne: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2020), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6362102>. 66.

⁷¹⁵ Laura Saetveit Miles, ‘Space and Enclosure in Julian of Norwich’s A Revelation of Divine Love’, in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Rochester, NY: D.S.Brewer, n.d.). 155.

⁷¹⁶ There is some suggestion that Julian may have once been married and had a child but that they died. However, by the time she was in the anchorage this stage of her life, if it occurred, was over. See Sr Benedicta in Kenneth Leech and Benedicta Ward, *Julian: Reconsidered*, 2nd ed (Oxford: SLG, 1995).

ability to maintain their focus upon God. It is for the women participants the same as for Julian, a 'seeming paradox of physical isolation at the centre of society'.⁷¹⁷ The sacred spaces in their homes, where the presence of God is discernible, where even the choice to take an umbrella outdoors is influenced by the divine will, becomes a retreat from the world that separates their space into domestic holiness. Worship in the kitchen, as Gaby recounts, directly compares to the worship Julian undertook in the daily worship in her 'room of her own'.⁷¹⁸

The Newfrontiers women do not choose to disengage with the majority of the church's practices and ecclesiology. Indeed, they are oftentimes central and visible in their congregations. However, they also make use of the spaces and groups outside of the church to further their God-knowing and to construct it. Within the female only spaces of Newfrontiers this community co-creation of knowledge aids in their navigation of their own lives' narrativity as well as forming a particular space for their epistemology. In keeping with this analysis, this has a mystical/Charismatic flavour that is associated with prophetic inspiration and narrative orality.

These embodied experiences locate the women's God-knowing oftentimes outside of the church in the spaces where they encounter God through their bodies. Their bodies are sources of both divine inspiration and troubling rejection and this dialectical place is unresolved. The women move between church worship services as a spiritual centre and their own home environments and back again. This embodied affective spirituality is motivated and characterised by the Holy Spirit.

The participants reported experiences that were physical manifestations of the presence of God. They described the experiences as affecting their bodies, their sense and their mental states. These women also made use of their bodies to facilitate these encounters and as a method of self-discipline. They engaged in aesthetic practices including fasting and restrictive behaviour. For example, Sarah used her fasting practices to embody her distress at the treatment she received from the church as well as a pietistic practice, 'I want Jesus more than I want food, or I want Jesus more than I want sleep',⁷¹⁹ which summarises the orientation of these behaviours

⁷¹⁷ Laura Saetveit Miles, 'Space and Enclosure in Julian of Norwich's A Revelation of Divine Love', in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Rochester, NY: D.S.Brewer, n.d.). 156.

⁷¹⁸ Laura Saetveit Miles. 162.

⁷¹⁹ Sarah, Interview 6.

towards knowledge and relationship with Christ. The participants also reported speaking in tongues or glossolalia,

Chapter 4 highlighted the accounts of women's lived religion and described their practices as adaptive in order to make space. These practices make space in a particular way, which they allow for a form of knowledge of God that is embodied and relationship based. Margaret M. Poloma describes similar experiences as modern-day mysticism.⁷²⁰ In the context of research on the Toronto Blessing, she reported similar events of trances, glossolalia, and visions.⁷²¹ The Toronto Airport Fellowship is also a neo-Pentecostal, Charismatic church that is part of the so called 'third wave' of Pentecostalism.⁷²² Poloma defines this mysticism as,

Experiences that range from simple intuition to visions and voices and from a calm, passive 'knowing' to ecstatic trances.⁷²³

Poloma also acknowledges the debate about definitions of mysticism and the core nature of mystical experience are legion. Her stance is that mysticism is partially formed by its context and religious traditions.⁷²⁴ Therefore, her description of the Toronto Blessing as mystical is a 'contextual one that describes not only the experience but also the social milieu in which it was elicited'.⁷²⁵ This is an important methodological point that I wish to follow. The Newfrontiers research participants are modern Charismatic women who exist in the UK context. However, heuristically, it is significant to find commonalities with other mystics who operate not in this time or space but in the past in different cultures and social environments but where overlap of the core areas of analysis – making space and epistemology – creates a rich description of the behaviour and accounts of these women.

⁷²⁰ Margaret M. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2003).

⁷²¹ The Toronto Blessing, stemming from the Toronto Airport Fellowship shares a similar theological and spiritual basis as Newfrontiers. As a church in the Vineyard network its leader, John Wimber, had a significant influence on Terry Virgo and the early Newfrontiers churches.

⁷²² See Introduction.

⁷²³ Margaret M. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003). 24.

⁷²⁴ Poloma. 26.

⁷²⁵ Poloma. 26.

This contextually realised mysticism exists in five ways according to Poloma based on Jess Byron Hollenback's work.⁷²⁶ These is a change in mode of awareness, similar to Susan's experience of sitting in the throne room of God. Hollenback says that this is a form of 'waking consciousness' where knowledge is gained experientially but not through the five senses.⁷²⁷ Secondly, the access to the 'ultimately real'. This is a form of privileged knowledge relating to a given culture's belief about things of ultimate importance.⁷²⁸ When Jane speaks of an experience of weeping on a beach at the thought of women in distress that she would ultimately work with she reported experiencing a sense of the question 'I just kept on thinking what about the women [place]?...Do they know that they are precious?'⁷²⁹ For Newfrontiers this relational salvific concern is core to their interpretation of the Christian message and for Jane to have an experience that reveals that concern to her in a different way constitutes this 'access to the 'ultimately real''. This also illustrates Hollenback's third criteria that it is contextual to a given religious tradition. Newfrontiers women do not operate outside of their confessional practices. Indeed, they are careful to moderate their insights and spiritual behaviour – checking it at all times for authenticity against the movement's beliefs. For example, Anne relates, 'we can have random thoughts because we ate too much cheese last night', and discerns the difference between such thoughts and a different quality of experience which is of God, 'It's more than that. It's like something else is activated within ourselves, as well as that thought, alongside that thought'.⁷³⁰

The fourth category is 'mystical experiences are laden with affect'. The experience of emotions is a core feature of mystical experiences, as already shown Jane wept at the plight of the women she saw suffering. Finally, the fifth category is 'illumination'. Like Paloma's subjects, the Newfrontiers do not experience literal illumination. She, however, claims that they do have 'widespread' metaphorical illumination.⁷³¹ This is also the case for the research participants. They would gain knowledge and understanding through their experiences which would direct their own behaviour and that of others. Anne's role as a 'prophet' is a good example of this, so also is Sarah's experience of seeing an angel and directing church behaviour consequently. These experiences 'illuminate' the path before the church.

⁷²⁶ Poloma. 27-32.

⁷²⁷ Poloma. 27-28.

⁷²⁸ Poloma. 29.

⁷²⁹ Jane, Interview 16.

⁷³⁰ Anne, Interview 25.

⁷³¹ Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*. 31.

Daniel Castelo has also given attention to modern forms of mysticism, in this case in Pentecostalism more broadly. He highlights that many Pentecostals would reject the language of mysticism as it could be understood as ‘too esoteric, self-absorbed, archaic, or – worst of all – pagan’.⁷³² For him, and for this study, it is fundamentally to do with what constitutes ‘God knowledge’. ‘For Pentecostals, God-knowledge is not so much cultivated through actions of the intellect as it is through holistic engagement’.⁷³³ In ‘Fire from Heaven’, Harvey Cox makes similar claims about Pentecostalism. He says that they engage in ‘primal speech’ – likened to ecstatic utterances and ‘primal piety’, which incorporates trances, visions, and dance.⁷³⁴ He understands that this as part of ‘the larger and longer history of human religiousness’.⁷³⁵ He goes on to liken it to a ‘sublime form of mysticism’.⁷³⁶ The qualities and features of religious experience that these authors find in Pentecostal and other neo-Charismatic groups that lead them to affix the label ‘mystic’ are also found, as I have shown above, in the women participants for this research. These women see visions. They speak in tongues. They fulfil Hollenbeck’s criteria of mysticism. However, it is not my purpose to simply argue that these women can be potentially described as mystics within their own context. Rather, I wish to argue that this mysticism forms a role in their ‘making space’ through their epistemology that particularly relates to historic mysticism.

Louise Nelstrop argues that mystical texts valued human corporality as a way to know God. Susan describes herself as sitting on the lap of the divine male, the Father. The language that she uses is both paternalistic and romantic describing her relationship with God as ‘intimate’. Mystical theology in the West began to understand love of/to God as similar to marriage. For example, Margery Kempe (c.1373–c.1439) described herself as married to God.

⁷³² Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2017). 37.

⁷³³ Castelo. 37.

⁷³⁴ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996). 82.

⁷³⁵ Cox. 83.

⁷³⁶ Cox. 92.

The Father also said to this creature [Margery], 'Daughter, I will have you wedded to my Godhead, because I shall show you my secrets and my counsels, for you shall live with me without end'.⁷³⁷

This is, according to Nelstrop, a drawing together of the sacred and the erotic. She cites this as a natural development of the reading that Origen gave to Song of Songs and Bernard of Clairvaux developed. They were seeing within theology and within scripture a proper direction of human love and lust that was aimed at the divine rather than at other humans in sinful modes. So, says Nelstrop, human response to the divine according to Bernard could be conceived of in nuptial metaphors.⁷³⁸ Women wrote of these mystical experiences that linked divine love with metaphors that were erotic and relational: Mechtild of Hackeborn describes Christ lying in bed with her and holding her in his arms.⁷³⁹ What purpose could this be said to serve? Grace M. Jantzen describes the use of erotic and relational imagery in the mystics as women being able to 'claim their own voices and their own authority on the basis of this spirituality'.⁷⁴⁰ She finds that there is a theologising that occurs through this method of mystical encounter. For example, Hadewijch of Antwerp describes erotic encounters with God that she did not, as male mystics would, interpret as allegory, but rather 'as actual, though visionary, experience'.⁷⁴¹ From this visionary experience, Jantzen claims that Hadewijch experiences the love of God.⁷⁴² So also can Susan be described as experiencing the love of God. This forms her knowledge of God through visionary or imaginative encounters that are not interpreted or theorised but taken as given, as knowledge of an essential characteristic of God.

In a similar way Anne's vision of the suffering of Christ that she had whilst ill in hospital illustrates the mystical epistemology employed by the women to further their God-knowing. Anne describes her experience of a vision of Christ during her time in hospital.⁷⁴³ She sees Christ 'dripping with blood' on the cross. This vision is reminiscent of Julian of Norwich's visions

⁷³⁷ Louise Nelstrop, 'Erotic and Nuptial Imagery', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, ed. Edward Howells and Mark Allen McIntosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). 329.

⁷³⁸ Louise Nelstrop. 333.

⁷³⁹ Louise Nelstrop. 340.

⁷⁴⁰ Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion 8 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). 87.

⁷⁴¹ Jantzen. 135.

⁷⁴² Jantzen. 138.

⁷⁴³ Anne, Interview 25.

whilst also extremely ill. Both describe experiences of extreme, debilitating illness with periods of unconsciousness. The experiences also are both prone in a bed, unable to significantly move.⁷⁴⁴ During Julian's experience she also meditates upon the Passion,

And at this, I suddenly saw the red blood trickling down from under the crown of thorns
– hot and fresh, plentiful and lifelike...⁷⁴⁵

Compare this to Anne's account:

He'd been whipped before he went on the cross. It was like I could see blood dripping
out of his - like his flesh was torn to ribbons, and he's rubbing it against this bit of
wood.⁷⁴⁶

Both Julian and Anne experience a visceral and empathetic encounter with the Passion of Christ through revelatory experience. Julian is noted as important in theological history in part because she writes in the vernacular about such gendered embodied experiences. To see a comparable reflection here is meaningful because it conveys similar authority of the visionary and purpose. Anne is known as a prophet because of her capacity to see visions and share them with others, much like the rest of Julian's life was spent exploring these visions and recording them for others to read. Her epistemic credibility within the church comes from this visionary capacity.

Nevertheless, the epistemic uncertainty that I have described at the beginning of this chapter is similar to the experiences documented of Margery Kempe. Nicole Klan believes that it is an error to describe Kempe as a proto-Pentecostal as this is anachronistic.⁷⁴⁷ However, comparisons can be made between her experiences and modern iterations of Pentecostal and Charismatic practice. Kempe was required to navigate her own epistemic authority related to her visions and her refusal to properly participate in the discernment of spirits, the expected behaviour at the time for visionaries. In part, this was because, according to Rosalynn Voaden, visionaries were required to 'disembody' the vision from the visionary. Kempe would have been required to conform to the authority of the church, to 'vanish' from view.⁷⁴⁸ Rather, Kempe does

⁷⁴⁴ Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Oxford World's Classics (Owe) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). 5.

⁷⁴⁵ Julian. 6.

⁷⁴⁶ Anne, Interview 25.

⁷⁴⁷ Nicole Klan, 'Affective Piety and Pentecostal Evangelism: Experiential Theology and "the Book of Margery Kempe"', *Religion and Literature* 42, no. 1/2 (n.d.): 163–84. 165.

⁷⁴⁸ Klan. 164.

not vanish, she is 'inappropriate' and unacceptable. She is confident, and she challenges the authority of those in power in the church. However, her behaviour is similar to the research participants and to Charismatic practices, it

is characterized by affective mystical phenomena, an extreme impulse to evangelize, a literalist metonymic understanding of one's relationship to God, and a particularly dogmatic temperament of piety and independence.⁷⁴⁹

Both Kempe and Julian illustrate the mystical propensity for embodied experiences that convey knowledge. This knowledge is received variously as with and without credibility. To negotiate this credibility requires agency from the women and making use of those resources available to them, particularly those found in their own gendered bodies and the domestic sphere.

The use of aesthetic discipline characterised some of the research participants. Participants reported managing their diet and fasting, controlling materialistic consumption (e.g. how many clothes they own) and regulating their speech. Aestheticism in the Christian tradition 'encompasses a broad range of practices intended to eliminate vice and inculcate virtue'⁷⁵⁰ typically these practices were undertaken in order to better skills in contemplation of the divine. Aesthetic practice was both undertaken to remove sin and to achieve union with God.

The goal of Christian asceticism thus came to be understood not simply as moral perfection, but rather theosis, 'divinization' as it was described in the East, and beatific vision and *unio mystica*, mystical union, in the West.⁷⁵¹

On first blush this is dissimilar to the endeavours of women in a church that identifies itself as reformed theologically and within the Evangelical tradition. This type of Christian has typically rejected these ancient forms of Christianity in favour of *sola scriptura*, sola grace

⁷⁴⁹ Klan. 165.

⁷⁵⁰ Luke Dysinger, 'The Ascetic Life', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, ed. Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (Oxford University Press, 2020). 164.

⁷⁵¹ Dysinger, in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*. 165.

The classical vocabulary of virtue and asceticism is rare in the New Testament, possibly by design. It is difficult to emphasize the value of human striving while at the same time preaching a doctrine of utter dependence on the unmerited grace of God.⁷⁵²

Newfrontiers, as part of the Restoration movement of churches, would identify with this statement by Dysinger and identify it as a criticism of such practices as unrepresented in scripture. Nonetheless, the practices of the women in Newfrontiers are properly described as aesthetic even if they would not identify them using such language. In the language of theology, they are partakers of this Christian tradition formed within their own unique theological setting.

The authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke attribute to Jesus particular emphasis on the ascetical practices of unselfconscious fasting, almsgiving, prayer, and dispossession.⁷⁵³

That such behaviours can be traced from scripture into the Christian tradition lends credibility that women who rely primarily on scripture to orientate their daily life might also find themselves within a tradition that similarly begins in scripture. My suggestion in making these links is not to claim direct influence upon these women by mystics of history but to correlate them as in the same Christian tradition and by so doing inferring that these women can be both members of Newfrontiers a renewal, Charismatic church *and* women in the mystical tradition broadly defined.

In the same way knowledge of God is gained for women in their relationship with food. Food for medieval women achieved different aims – rejection of forced marriage, requires for sexual abstinence, valorising the complete refusal of food – but was similarly treated and acknowledged as having religious pietistic value.⁷⁵⁴ Thus, Fabio Parasecoli can claim,

The fat body, tangible proof of having given in to greed and gluttony, also becomes a locus for repentance, God's salvation and a closer spiritual relationship to him.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵² Dysinger, in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*. 167.

⁷⁵³ Dysinger, in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*. 167.

⁷⁵⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 1. paperback print., 8. print, The New Historicism (Berkeley.: Univ. of California Press, 2000).

⁷⁵⁵ Fabio Parasecoli, 'God's Diets: The Fat Body and the Bible as an Eating Guide in Evangelical Christianity', *Fat Studies* 4, no. 2 (3 July 2015): 141–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2015.1016780>. 145.

Management and control of food has historically been a way in which women express piety and control their social situation. Indeed, Caroline Walker Bynum argues that food was a 'central theme in the religiosity of medieval women'.⁷⁵⁶ Her argument corresponds to the women participants of this research – that food was an important aspect of piety because it was important socially and was in easy reach for women who were defined largely by the domestic sphere. Women historically control access to food and through this control are able to control their own spiritual expression. In medieval times, as for the Newfrontiers women, denying the influence of the world was a critical aspect of religiosity.⁷⁵⁷

It was far more difficult to flee one's family, to deny a father's plans for one's betrothal, or to refuse sexual relations to a husband than it was to stop eating.⁷⁵⁸

Access to spiritual disciplines determines the choices of Newfrontiers women also. Their spiritual practices are located in their homes and in the domestic sphere and there also is their demonstrated spirituality. This also is transportable into the secular workplace, where avoiding swearing or fasting for a change in work situation transgresses home and work boundaries but is ultimately located with the women themselves and is in their control. The regular practise of fasting that was accounted for by some participants is within the Christian tradition and beyond, claims Bynum.

It is worth noting that in many cultures, fasting as a religious activity is done primarily by women...Among Eskimos [sic], for example, it is customary for the husband to go out fishing while the wife remains at home fasting for a good catch. In Old Testament Judaism, fasting is almost the only religious act for which women (e.g., Judith, Esther, Sarah, the mothers of Samuel and Samson) are prominent models of piety.⁷⁵⁹

Bynum argues what is most accessible for world denying is what is associated with each gender. For Newfrontiers women this also extends to clothing and possessions, which is another sphere that is within the control of women. Acts of service relating to these areas allowing for generosity is also correlated. Bynum argues that medieval women were also more likely to give

⁷⁵⁶ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. 189.

⁷⁵⁷ Bynum. 191.

⁷⁵⁸ Bynum. 191.

⁷⁵⁹ Bynum. 192.

away food as pietistic action.⁷⁶⁰ This occurs with the women who even in their charitable faith works, such as visiting vulnerable women at risk of violence. They act according to what they as women have access to. Their gender and their social situation dominate their spiritual actions and choices. The location of these actions – within the homes, workplaces, and bodies of Newfrontiers women – diverts from the locus of the church building and worship services. Bynum understands this as ‘bypassing’ the clergy for medieval women.⁷⁶¹ The clerical import is not as significant for Newfrontiers women, however operating under male elderships with a degree of social influence the women are able to determine their own spiritual experience *qua* women via such embodied behaviour.

Code 3: Making a Place in the Community of God

Storytelling and authoritative speech are received positively within the community. Several participants told stories of suffering that testified to the presence of God and illustrated their practice of narrativity. These suffering stories corresponded to Arthur W. Frank’s model of the ‘quest stories’ found in medical illness recovery accounts.⁷⁶² In the same way that illness provides an opportunity for ‘journey that becomes a quest’ in Frank’s analysis, so too did the women believe in instances of suffering. There was something gained through that experience, a drawing closer or union with God.⁷⁶³ In Frank’s account there are three stages of telling quest stories; departure, invitation, and return. These stages are in keeping with the theme of space as women travel into different spaces in their stories where their faith expression changes and develops. The women’s accounts reflected these stages with some who told stories of unresolved suffering as being in the midst – anticipating the return. According to Frank, the quest stories also have three other features that were demonstrated by the women; memoir, manifesto, and auto mythology. The feature of auto mythology was also indicated in tales of suffering with attendant theologising.

The hero of a quest story, says Frank, accepts contingency and allows power to be surrendered to a higher power. For the women who told their stories of suffering, this higher power was God and the surrender of the power was part of a process of drawing closer to God. There was little

⁷⁶⁰ Bynum. 193.

⁷⁶¹ Bynum. 227.

⁷⁶² Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, Second edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁷⁶³ Frank. 115.

to no questioning of suffering or resorting to theodicies. Rather, suffering was universally considered a route to a more intimate relationship with God. The only exception to this was Lisa who described herself as angry with God and unable to engage in her usual practices because of her account of suffering. She describes holding God to account for the bad things that have happened in her life.⁷⁶⁴

However, even in the course of this pursuit of God for answers to suffering Lisa concedes that she can still see ‘the hand of God being there, shepherding them, supporting them, providing for them [family members]’.⁷⁶⁵ In this way, Lisa does correspond to the other accounts in a belief that the suffering is still ultimately positive when cast in the light of the divine and the ultimate good of knowing God. All other difficulties and problems are subsumed by the good of knowing God.⁷⁶⁶

Quest stories are accounted for in both childhood and adult difficulties. Lisa explains a micro story concerning being lost as a child and praying, ‘Jesus, help me, help me find mummy’ before concluding that he did and that ‘for me, my experience of Jesus and relationship with God was, he’s always there, always there and always faithful’.⁷⁶⁷ Throughout Lisa’s storytelling God is the resolver of problems, for those problems that are persistent Lisa and other participants place themselves in the invitation stage of Frank’s quests. There is the nature of a reflexive quality, where the individual accepts a journey that in respects you have no direct choice in.

It is not only the conclusion of a suffering story that is valuable to the participants. It is also of value to tell the story of the time of suffering. An alternative solution is considered not in a cure but in a drawing nearer to God. It is through the problems suffered that God is experienced more closely.⁷⁶⁸ This corresponds with Frank’s auto mythology element of quest narratives. This is where the individual is reinvented after the experience of the quest. This is appropriate for the women who describe transformative relational encounters with God that occur in the midst of suffering. It is the process of being in the midst of hardship, not the outcome that is of value in

⁷⁶⁴ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁷⁶⁵ Lisa.

⁷⁶⁶ Mary, Interview 4. Mary also mentioned this regarding her cancer diagnosis and treatment. The year was ‘amazing’ because it was ‘precious time with God’.

⁷⁶⁷ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁷⁶⁸ Jessica, Interview 13.

the relationship with God. Susan recounts the tragic events of the death of her son, 'I have been in a very, very dark place, darker than I ever imagined I would ever be. In that dark place, God is still there'.⁷⁶⁹

Storytelling and testimony exist in alternative spaces where it is received as significant theologically. Theologising that both God and other women (and sometimes men) are 'friends' and the constructive significance for women's faith that this has illustrates how the communities operate with hermeneutical practices. Their knowledge of God is formed through these friendships and offers a source of epistemological security. As I have already indicated, this coalesces with the epistemological authority that women are able to access as prophets and storytellers in the church.

The mechanism by which storytelling and prophecy is authenticated is through the authority of the divine male. Prophecy works as a hermeneutical tool by giving women the authority to speak. McAvoy describes this as 'ventriloquism' when it is seen in female mystics in history.⁷⁷⁰ This ventriloquism is the voice of the male God heard in the female prophet. For McAvoy, this has history outside of the Christian tradition in the 'God-inspired female voice of the ancient Sybil'.⁷⁷¹ The authoritative speech that the research participants report allow this authoritative speech. It is the authoritative speech of God, who is known as male, called Father by the women and gives them His words to allow their voice to be heard. This compares to Margery Kempe who had to 'find a way of authorising her problematic voice by means of that same voice'.⁷⁷² Kempe refers to herself as a 'creature' who is prone to being 'turned back in times of temptation' and was a 'miserable wretch'.⁷⁷³ This qualifying of her uncertain voice, that she is not worthy but God chooses her anyway, which places the authority of her words not in her female self but in the God who chooses her as a vessel. So also did Newfrontiers women make this same epistemic claim,

⁷⁶⁹ Susan, Interview 10.

⁷⁷⁰ Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 192.

⁷⁷¹ McAvoy. 188.

⁷⁷² McAvoy. 186.

⁷⁷³ Margery Kempe and Anthony Paul Bale, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Oxford World's Classics (Owc) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). 3.

I guess I felt quite humbled by it because he sent an angel to a women. That was quite unusual because obviously, Newfrontiers is very much about male leadership of churches.⁷⁷⁴

This is seen also in Mother Julian who at the beginning of her short text makes this humble note,

But God forbid that you should say, or take it, that I am a teacher, for I do not mean that, nor did I ever mean that, for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail. But I know very well that what I am saying I have received through revelation from him who is the supreme teacher.⁷⁷⁵

This authorised speech making use of the authority of God as prophetic vessels continues the tradition found throughout history of the wise, prophetic, female voice.⁷⁷⁶ This voice must claim authority from elsewhere because on its own it is unacceptable. It is interesting to note that Julian removes her caveat in the Long Text, suggesting that perhaps she gains confidence in her authority as one who received a vision from God. This mirrors the growth in confidence that women in Newfrontiers have indicated also, expressly told by Anne who experiences less rejection in her prophetic work now and therefore is more confident in her role.

It is a source of great delight to many commentators that the two foremost medieval women, who wrote in the vernacular language of their time, possibly met one another.⁷⁷⁷ Julian and Margery's meeting, however, is more than simply an endearing historical event. It is a significant part of the female mystical-prophetic hermeneutic. As I have illustrated the telling of stories and female friendships are of great important for the women who I interviewed. The women telling me their stories in interview was a practice that they were familiar with from their own lives. Testifying to one another helped them gain approval and epistemic credibility within their woman-church. This was true also for Margery, who was placed under house arrest for her unacceptable speech after her trial in York.

⁷⁷⁴ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁷⁷⁵ Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*. 10.

⁷⁷⁶ McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. 191.

⁷⁷⁷ For an example of this see the recently published novel: Victoria Mackenzie, *For Thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain* (S.l.: BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING, 2023).

Then she stood looking out from a window, telling many good tales to those who would listen to her, so much so that women wept bitterly and said with much heaviness I their hearts, ‘Alas, woman, why should you be burned?’⁷⁷⁸

McAvoy interprets this vinaigrette as Margery ‘preaching’ from the pulpit of the house that she was confined to. This preacherly role is moved out of the ecclesial sphere and into the domestic. This is the site of the female spiritual activity, where Newfrontiers women encounter and tell stories about God. From this space,

An active and overt contravention of the boundaries of this female sphere by quite literally shouting from the window to other women in the public street, Margery thus throws down a challenge to accepted notions of female behaviour and draws upon a tangential tradition of Magdalenian preaching and Sibylline utterance for the purpose of validation.⁷⁷⁹

This ‘female solidarity’ that McAvoy describes in Margery’s quest for authority in her God-knowing is a form of epistemological verification. Without the authentication of men, in this instance, Margery undertakes to find her authority with woman-church, outside the ecclesial boundaries.

The groups of Newfrontiers women who exist in storytelling, testimonial communities of women-church, can be described as having gendered social relations that impact their knowing.⁷⁸⁰ The knowledge the women describe is social as well as individual. It is social amongst the church broadly, in the areas where their type of knowing is acceptable. It is social because it is in relationship with female friends that authenticate, listen, and co-construct knowledge. Finally, it is social because the women partake in the divine life. Their knowing stems directly from the experience and relationship with the Holy Spirit that inspires and authenticates their understanding and God-knowledge.

⁷⁷⁸ Kempe and Bale, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. 119.

⁷⁷⁹ McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*. 194.

⁷⁸⁰ Heidi Grasswick, ‘Feminist Epistemology’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Social Epistemology*, ed. Miranda Fricker et al. (New York: Routledge, 2020). 295.

Conclusion

God knowledge in for the Newfrontiers research participants is authorised in the mystical Charismatic experiences and female friendship communities. In this environment, the complementarian beliefs of the church can be both questioned and accepted. The participants differed in their response to male eldership in the churches yet despite this variety of discontent and acceptance all choose to remain in the churches.

This chapter has analysed the mechanisms that women employ to negotiate their own space within the ecclesial boundaries and without them in order to develop their spirituality and their voice. Women in Newfrontiers make use of similar mechanisms in their faith epistemology as mystics. This God-knowing is both within and without the church, it engages with the church in the marginal areas of normative practices. These marginal areas of practice offer family resemblance with the church's female mystics of history. These epistemic mechanisms lend credibility to the women in the church through the authority of the Holy Spirit. These mechanisms are recognised by the women and by the church. Not all types of God-knowing is rendered acceptable for the interview participants in their communities of faith, including elements of embodiment. However, the Spirit inspired gifts and embodied practices that were described above are recognised by the women themselves and oftentimes by the church. This leads to a complex epistemological situation for the women, neither straightforwardly examples of injustice nor fully accepted as knowers of God with attendant authority. Their voices can be heard in the church but is frequently heard in the domestic sphere and amongst fellow female believers.

I have used the historical practices of mystical women to complexify and describe this epistemic behaviour, noting that both the mystic women of history and these modern Charismatic women employed the authority of the Holy Spirit in similar ways but within their own theological contexts. The medieval mystics used similar experiences and encounters to authenticate their crying out about God, but they were situated in a different theological epoch to the women participants of this research. The comparison that I make is fit for mechanisms of spirituality rather than the precise theological beliefs that the women have, although these do overlap in significant areas. The primary belief was in the ability for God to speak to women in ways that were important enough to be spoken abroad of their own lives.

Female theologising occurred for both groups of women in the church, on the margins of the church and to all female groups. The claim to experience the Holy Spirit in these spaces allowed women to claim authoritative experiences that gave them knowledge of God. This, in turn, was variously received both negatively and positively. The uncertainty of this God-knowledge is the reason that spaces are created domestically and socially beyond the ecclesial borders. These communities and practices contribute to a hermeneutical method of relating to one another about the knowledge they have about God.

The God-knowing that women describe cannot be described as universally unacceptable in Newfrontiers. There is, the women noted, significant change from the early years of the church and instances where their knowledge and their experiences are welcomed. The second section of this analysis examines the situations and mechanisms that allow for this welcomed knowledge. The primary mechanism can be described as mysticism. The women's practices and experiences have a familial resemblance to the mystical women in church history who claim authority in their communities by their experiences of God. These experiences of God are for the Newfrontiers women encounters with the Holy Spirit that are held in high regard within Newfrontiers broadly. As such, when an experience occurs this conveys authority that momentarily disregards gender rules in the communities. This disregarding of the rules does not ignore gender completely, and the women describe their authority as negotiated and accepted partially because of their behaviour relating to their gendered bodies. A key example of this was the way in which food was controlled in order to aid in the experiences of God that are so sought after. Alongside the authority sought and negotiated in the church at large women also make use of their female only spaces to experience God and develop their knowledge of their experiences. This is in keeping with their vacillation between occupying the church as a mixed gendered space for all and friendships and communities with women only as 'women-church'. Consequently, in the same way that I describe epistemic certainty increasing as the women occupy more female spaces than male so also does the agency women have to create their epistemic justice and be received as knowers of God. In women only spaces this is more certain and predictable, whereas in male lead spaces within the wider Newfrontiers church it is possible to speak with God-knowledge authority but this is unreliable and negotiated by the women.

God-knowledge for the congregations of Newfrontiers is a centre for contested epistemic authority. Those who are able to speak with authority are primarily men, and they do so within the church as directive voices of God's will. This is illustrated in the women's stories in the

theme 'Newfrontiers is a very much about male leadership of churches'. The centre of male God-knowing is described by the participants as an area where women have less access and ability to speak. Women negotiate a less certain epistemological situation where their God-knowledge is questioned and does not have the automatic authority that men (particularly elders) have.

In this analysis, I have examined the nature of epistemic injustice in this faith context and relate it to the authority of God-knowledge. I have shown that God-knowledge stems from embodiment within this Charismatic denomination and that women's bodies are troubling sites of God-knowledge. Women's bodies are both sources of God-knowledge because they are in receipt of the Holy Spirit but also sources of uncertainty and possible pollution because of their gender. These uncertainties are compounded with intersectionality, in this instance to do with ethnicity. Authority in God-knowledge, therefore, must move from the central spaces that are male dominated towards areas where women describe better ability to both experience God and share that experience with others. God-knowledge is accessed and demonstrated in these marginal spaces of the church. This God-knowing travels towards the outskirts of the church where female groups and friendships form amongst the women who share their God-knowing with one another. As this God-knowing travels outwards from the centre of the church which is male dominated the home becomes an important space of experiencing and describing God-knowledge. The first section, thus, describes the areas in which God-knowledge is considered unacceptable and tracks the courses to the outer spheres of the church community where women are generating and sharing their God-knowing with one another.

The constructive chapter in this thesis, which forms stage 3 of the Charismatic research methodology, will take the analysis of women's theologising in Newfrontiers and construct a restoried account of their own self-understanding based on scripture. The Bible is a normative text within the movement, and it gives authority to decision making. It is also in keeping with the research methodology that engaging with scripture is a suitable task for a Charismatic Practical Theology. A contribution to the hermeneutic of women in Newfrontiers is a contribution to justice in the women's hermeneutical practice.

Chapter 6: Hermeneutics of the Mystical and Spirit-filled: Restorying the Women of Newfrontiers

Charismatic theologising is the interaction of the storied lives of those in the Spirit that creates text which engages with the text of scripture. This intertextuality is not static but is renewed by the new stories of the community brought into conversation, and this is the hermeneutical practice of Charismatic Christians. The women, as storytellers and tellers of *the* story, interact with the Bible as part of their own lives' stories and by so doing find their stories interact with biblical narratives.⁷⁸¹ This is a reader-centred hermeneutic that recognises the reader brings themselves to the text.⁷⁸² To take the developing experiences of women in Newfrontiers as experiences that are different from when Aune researched and still changing is part of the hermeneutical process that recognises the need for renewed understandings. To create this renewed understanding the previous description of women who speak with authority in

⁷⁸¹ See: Claudia Setzer, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Paul C. Gutjahr, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190258849.013.42>. Setzer notes that Feminist interpretation seeks to make women the subject of interpretation. Despite a plurality of approaches and interests, patriarchal domination of text and hermeneutic are foci that are consistent in feminist interpretation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza seeks the liberative possibilities in the text via 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (See *In Memory of Her*) which allows for the story to connect with women still. Womanist scholar, Wilda C. Gafney, makes use of 'midrash' to recover and to 'wrestle' with it as received scripture of value (Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, First edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017). Setzer also highlights the Latin American interpretation methodologies that includes the combination of women's experience, biblical scholarship and liberating practices (page 137). Christina Büchmann and Celina Spiegel, eds., *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, 1st ed (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994). In the introduction to this text the editors question earlier feminist scholarship that rejects the bible as not useful and too patriarchal and instead seek to understand how and how could women read the bible. They note the tendency to focus on female characters and the 'extraordinary sustaining power that identification with Biblical figures and events can have', xii. Phyllis Trible's famous 'Texts of Terror' seeks to tell the 'sad stories' of women subject to terror in the bible, without resolution, because these stories are for Trible still pertinent: 'to account for these stories as relics of a distant, primitive, and inferior past is invalid'. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, 40th anniversary edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022). 2. Similarly Dalit feminist hermeneutics seek to reread the texts of scripture to relate situations of Dalit oppression to the narratives, see Eve Parker, 'Solidarity with the "Stinking Womb": Contemplating the Experiences of Pregnant Dalit Women and Hagar', in Karen O'Donnell and Claire Williams, eds., *Pregnancy and Birth: Critical Theological Conceptions* (S.I.: SCM PRESS, 2024).

⁷⁸² Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse*. 8.

Newfrontiers as having a 'Jezebel spirit' should be understood. I will argue that this is not a suitable manner of self-understanding for women who express agency and authority in their churches. I will then suggest that Jezebel herself can be reinterpreted in light of the testimonies of the women who shared their lives. In so doing, I will suggest a compassionate hermeneutical reading of the Jezebel story. Then, I will seek to develop this narrative that can locate the women's experience of when they do encounter epistemic credibility and where they can find rhyme with that in scripture. The one place in scripture where women come together and have conversations in the Spirit with one another is in Luke's gospel between Mary and Elizabeth. Making use of John Christopher Thomas' belief that the interpretative event involves the selection of the text to renew understanding in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the community while using 'associative hermeneutics' to bridge the gap between those researched and the researcher, I choose a text that represents the community's words to me and that I understood to be fitting.

The data analysis chapters have exposed in the testimony of the women both discontent and joy in their lives. I have described the women as participating in a tradition of female mystics who find authority and some agency through Spirit inspired epistemological claims. This chapter throughout focuses on addressing the concerns raised and about the ways of life described by the women and finding resonance in scripture. These ideas were: negotiating epistemic authority and acceptability in the church, encounter of God in the domestic sphere, a female and embodied mystical practice, women-church, the community of God, and the wider world.

Part 1: Epistemic Complexities

The association with the women of Newfrontiers churches and Jezebel comes, as is indicated in the literature review, as an historical interpretation of the women's quest for influence and power given a biblical antecedent and moral condemnation. In Wendy Virgo's⁷⁸³ work about women in the church, she spends two chapters exploring the power of Jezebel in the lives of women in the church. She gives anecdotes about women who have gifts of prophecy but try to use them to direct the church's behaviour. In her story the woman, called Isobel, is described as controlling and manipulative, Charismatic and damaging.⁷⁸⁴ Ultimately this woman is causing damage in the

⁷⁸³ Wife of Terry Virgo, founder and original leader of the Newfrontiers network.

⁷⁸⁴ Virgo, *Influential Women*. 165-175.

church in her quest for control and the only one able to recognise this is one male elder, who has insight into her manipulations, the narrative concludes,

Eventually it transpired that Isobel had already been put out of fellowship in a church in another town. She was known to be dominating, manipulative, and adept at ensnaring naïve people into immoral situations, justifying her behaviour with seemingly spiritual jargon.⁷⁸⁵

This is, according to Virgo, a ‘jezebelic attack’ on the church.⁷⁸⁶ Virgo describes Jezebel as on a quest for power and despising those who have it. She is one who dominates and intimidates.⁷⁸⁷ The spirit of Jezebel is available to infect both men and women according to Virgo. This is not entirely gendered towards women. Virgo then describes her own situation where she believes that she was influenced by such a spirit during a time when she wished for women to be more recognised within Newfrontiers. This association between the ‘jezebelic spirit’ constructed from the Biblical narratives in 1 and 2 Kings alongside the desire for power and recognition in the church means that a rhyme can be discerned between the scripture and the experience of women in Newfrontiers in this research. This is not a rhyme that I have constructed fully myself as the researcher but one which was created within the community. The work of the research here is to determine the extent of the rhyme and whether the hermeneutical process of reading alongside the women of Newfrontiers reveals or constructs new self-understanding for the women of Newfrontiers. I suggest that they are not similar to Jezebel. They fundamentally different from her, but that also a fresh insight into scripture is found with reading the Jezebel story again with the Newfrontiers women’s testimony.

1. Epistemic Complexities: No Room at the Table

Women in Newfrontiers explained the situation that they found in churches to be one where their knowledge of God was questioned because of their gender,

‘What about talking about theology, or whatever?’ I really feel like as a woman it’s a bit of a – I keep telling myself I shouldn’t feel weird saying things that wouldn’t be

⁷⁸⁵ Virgo. 175.

⁷⁸⁶ Virgo. 176.

⁷⁸⁷ Virgo. 175-6.

stereotypically a woman's thing to bring up – but I do feel a lack of not being able to discuss things or debate, or even just listen to people debating. I always really enjoy that kind of thing.⁷⁸⁸

Elizabeth described her situation where she would like to enter into conversation about theology, about matters of importance, but that this was not for women – only men. The place for women in Newfrontiers is not within these conversations. They are omitted from them.

Making use of the idea of Natalie Wigg Stevenson of disruptive space, I invite the reader to consider standing with Jezebel in the balcony looking out through the window.⁷⁸⁹ From this space, she is at once looking backwards over her life and forwards towards her death. It is there, in this disruptive space where the tragedy and confusion of her life comes into sharp relief. Jezebel's disruptive space can be read in order to relate some of her experiences to the women of Newfrontiers.

The historic reading of Jezebel's story in Newfrontiers described Jezebel and those like her as motivated by pride, power, and false prophecy. However, the data indicates a change in Newfrontiers where, although ultimacy exists only with men, there is negotiated space for women. Jezebel negotiates on behalf of her husband and illustrates her own power and education. Gafney notes that Jezebel is the only woman in scripture described as writing and evidence of her writing exists today in a ninth century seal. Jezebel has ability and insight into the politics of her day and negotiates through alternative means to enact what she believes to be good. This is also the case with the Newfrontiers women who make use of alternative routes – through mystical behaviour – to enact their good.

Epistemic injustices are revealed in the accounts of women in Newfrontiers and this corresponds with Jezebel's story. Jezebel's knowledge is unacceptable, she knows Baal and Baal is not an acceptable form of divine revelation. The interviewed women expressed ideas about being 'hidden' and 'left out', that 'women shouldn't be here'. They are describing situations similar to Jezebel who is also in a place where she is not seen for her own self but is seen in light of facts

⁷⁸⁸ Elizabeth, Interview 14.

⁷⁸⁹ Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, 'From Proclamation to Conversation: Ethnographic Disruptions to Theological Normativity', *Palgrave Communications* 1, no. 1 (13 October 2015): 15024, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2015.24>.

that describe her. She is known as a Baal worshipper, as her husband's wife, and as a source of sinful syncretism and idolatry. As previously mentioned, we note that she is not introduced by her name without reference to men nor is she so referred in her death scene. Post-colonial theologian, Judith E. McKinlay, highlights that Jezebel is the only woman in 1 Kings 17.8-24 and 2 Kings 4.1-7 who is named. For McKinlay this is significant because the other women in the narratives don't require a name. They are plot devices to highlight the male prophets and the male Gods – Yahweh and Baal.⁷⁹⁰ Whereas Jezebel's name means, 'Where is the Prince?', a reference to the provision of Baal during drought and lack.⁷⁹¹ Or, other translations suggest her name means 'dung' or 'pile of faeces'.⁷⁹² Jezebel's identity is subsumed beneath these theological aims of the biblical author, 'the Bible flattens Jezebel out, and she becomes little more than a trope – a caricature who serves only to bear the castigation and ridicule of the biblical text and its interpreters'.⁷⁹³ In the same way that we do not know the true name of Julian of Norwich, and the women in Newfrontiers' identities were subsumed beneath men – either in meetings where they were forgotten, or only known in their relationships to others – so too is Jezebel's identity and her own self-knowledge ignored. She is the victim, in this way, of epistemological injustices.

Newfrontiers women experienced intersections with their gender and other identities in this instance race. If Jezebel's identity is made complex by commodification of her name for patriarchal ends, then her identity via her cultural and ethnic situation is shown as unacceptable. Her epistemic complexity continues through her self-identification as the once and always Phoenician princess. The intersection between Jezebel's gender and her country of origin have been shown to be problematic for her story. So too do these elements cause dissatisfaction and injustice for Newfrontiers women. Angela's experience of double marginalisation and epistemic injustice is similar,

I don't think I've ever seen a woman of ethnic minority in any Newfrontiers circles speak in any context. I think I've seen one or two women, now, speak on a platform, but two

⁷⁹⁰ Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus*, 1st pbk. ed (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006). 65.

⁷⁹¹ Phyllis Trible, 'The Odd Couple: Elijah and Jezebel', in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, ed. Christina Büchmann and Celina Spiegel, 1st ed (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994). 170.

⁷⁹² Melissa Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). 246.

⁷⁹³ Jackson. 245.

women in 27 years. 'That's painful. I wouldn't have spoken up about it, I just would have sensed it, felt it, held it in.'⁷⁹⁴

Womanist theologian, Wilda C. Gafney, reflecting upon Jezebel's name, also suggests these intersections:

Jezebel's biblical name has become a byword for women of a certain type: assertive, sexualized, allegedly promiscuous...Black women have been regularly constructed as Jezebels and castigated for that construction, the elements of which have very little to do with the biblical narrative.⁷⁹⁵

The troubling space of the balcony with Jezebel becomes charged with racism and becomes a 'third space' that isn't safe. It is where Jezebel's and the Newfrontiers women's cultural meanings are illustrated. Jezebel's knowledge of her own religious upbringing corresponds to Angela's account of her knowings about her own experiences of racial discrimination and the denial of that reality by those who hear her. Both Angela and Jezebel are victims of a colonisation of their own experience and their stories about it. Jezebel's identity comprised of her gender, her nationality and her faith is eroded from when her betrothal to the Israelite King is arranged.

Although some biblical and later interpreters dismiss Jezebel on the basis of her allegiances, she embodies the tension between firm boundaries and a complex, sometimes fluid world where the God of Israel is also, at times, known as the God of all nations.⁷⁹⁶

Janet Everhart illustrates this third space that Jezebel inhabits could be understood as one where God is able to transgress the boundaries of her difference. Yet, her personal commitment to the ways of her father's house, the Baal cultic worship, and the mechanisms of Phoenician power, combine to not only identify her as other but to direct her steps and her choices in ways that are found wanting by the narrators of her story.

⁷⁹⁴ Angela, Interview 11.

⁷⁹⁵ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*. 240.

⁷⁹⁶ Everhart, Janet S., 'Jezebel: Framed by Eunuchs?', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2010): 688–98. 689.

2. Gender and Embodiment

Mary's embodied experience of losing her hair and her daughter playing with her are acts of religious and embodied resistance to the potential of death. Mary discovered that her act of resistance against evil and fear of death was to encounter God and family. She feared losing her family, feared her identity being lost through her illness, her hair lost, and her mortality.

I've never had a fear of death and for me personally, I guess for me the thing was, what about the kids? Also because I knew I'd had the spiritual surgery as it were, I don't know if there was cancer elsewhere in my body.

Claire: There certainly wasn't when they went to look.

Absolutely, although the original scans of my whole body did show up a lump in the lung and a lump in the womb as well, which I thought was quite interesting and then when they did later ones, they'd completely gone.⁷⁹⁷

Once we have entered the palace of Queen Jezebel we can stand with her at the window with her make-up on. This make-up is also an act of embodied resistance, Jezebel hears of Jehu's approach and applies her make-up as a consequence. She knows that she meets either her death or her oppressor violently. She adorns her head.

I listen for Jezebel's voice in and between the lines of the Scriptures, and I don't hear a sound. Instead I hear the words of the gospel hymn 'May the Work I've Done Speak for Me.' Jezebel's final words are her beautifully made-up face and her gorgeously arranged hair. She is the first woman to rule Israel...⁷⁹⁸

Jezebel *does* lose her family – they are dead. She does lose her identity, and her act of resistance is to make herself externally beautiful. Mary is able to realise something about gendered expectations of beauty and feel optimistic about leaving them behind. Jezebel doesn't do that. Reading Jezebel's story with Mary, I cannot but think that this is a tragic outcome for Jezebel.

⁷⁹⁷ Mary, Interview 4.

⁷⁹⁸ Gafney. 247.

She is brave and she resists, she is gorgeous, as Gafney insists, but she doesn't get to hear the voice of God reassuring her of her worth and her future the way that Mary does.

The ways in which Jezebel behaves is found to be at fault, and thus also there is rhyme with the unacceptable embodied behaviour of the Newfrontiers women. Their bodies are the sites of temptation, and they use their bodies as weapons against the religiously pure elite men. Hannah explained her concerns about dancing in this way,

I still find it a bit odd. I feel like you don't want to be distracting the worship of people around you, but I think it's helped me to overcome that idea, so now when I'm at home on my own, I can dance and it feels like worship, and not like I'm just dancing. I think I would still be hesitant to do it in public unless it felt very much like God had said, 'Okay, you need to do this'.⁷⁹⁹

In 2 Kings 9.22, Jezebel is described just before her death as a whore and a sorceress. This does not necessarily mean that she was unfaithful to her husband – there is no evidence for this – rather that she was not a faithful worshipper of Yahweh, something which wasn't usually expected of foreign brides.⁸⁰⁰ There is also no record of her sorceries of which she is accused. Gafney asks, why does Jezebel prepare for her death and put on makeup? The eunuchs who push her out of the window could not be influenced by sexual manipulation from a beautiful Queen. Gafney argues that it is about her sense of self,

Jezebel is a woman and a foreigner, doubly marginalized and doubly despised. As a woman, culturally constructed through the artifice of beauty, she will go to her death.⁸⁰¹

This derogatory and gendered view of Jezebel is reflected in the 'indecent' felt by women in Newfrontiers. Their very gender and their polluting potential make their bodies a risk for the men around them. Hannah's concerns about her potential to tempt men and even cause idolatrous behaviour rhyme with Jezebel's supposed guilt for the idolatry of Israel and the baseless claims that this relates to her 'whoredom'. The indecency of the bodies of Hannah and Jezebel comes from assumptions made about intention that is baseless. Hannah accredits this to

⁷⁹⁹ Hannah.

⁸⁰⁰ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*. 244-5.

⁸⁰¹ Gafney. 245-6.

fear of the female form. Jezebel does not seduce or prostitute herself according to the account in 1 Kings; yet by 2 Kings, mere chapters away, she is a whore. The legislative gaze of men in both situations centres on their presumed sinful sexuality.

In Jezebel's final scenes she stands at the window and her face is 'painted'. Why does the narrator make this comment? The assumption of immoral sexual behaviour looms large even when denied by commentators, biblical scholar, Donald Wiseman, says of Jezebel's eye makeup 'she was not necessarily acting coquettishly' having in his earlier remarks assumed that Jezebel is afraid ('the queen sends a messenger, because she is afraid to confront Elijah in person')⁸⁰² despite the only person noted in the text as afraid is Elijah (1 Kings 19.1-3).⁸⁰³ Editorial glosses by the narrators of 2 Kings are perpetuated by the glosses of commentators. Such assumptions about the nature, intention, and behaviour of Jezebel find fault in her actions from much guesswork and assumption. Stephanie found this in her experience as an outsider (from South Africa) in Newfrontiers churches, that her behaviour was unacceptable and interpreted incorrectly. Stephanie described herself as 'maybe I'm too abrasive or too heavy'.⁸⁰⁴ Presence of 'other' bodies – female, non-British – give rise to a gaze that is judicial and presumptive. Such a gaze condemns both Jezebel and women in Newfrontiers without claim.

Jezebel and the women in Newfrontiers share the power of their gender and their embodiment to resist the patriarchal structures and the threat of death. The women of Newfrontiers take their God-knowledge into the domestic sphere. They 'ritualise' their home life and encounter the Spirit in the quotidian and domestic. Tracey encounters angels in her home. Gaby dances in the kitchen and as such they make *ekklēsia gynaikeōn*. Jezebel's domestic behaviour reinforces her beliefs in Baal and his ways. She does not dance in the Spirit, nor does she entertain angels in her balconied room.

Jezebel's embodiment condemns her and does not give her opportunities. The female mystical-prophetic hermeneutical practice that Mother Julian and Margery Kempe began and that the women of Newfrontiers persist in is not something that Jezebel can join in with. The women of Newfrontiers who know something the world does not know, who see themselves as separate

⁸⁰² D. J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, v. 9 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008). 183.

⁸⁰³ Wiseman. 236.

⁸⁰⁴ Stephanie, Interview 12.

and distinct from those that do not know of God. When Margery hung out of her own window she was not thrown to her death – although she was disapproved of – but she preached a Christian message. When Jezebel hangs out of the window, she meets her death as one who preached Baal. The female solidarity that women in Newfrontiers describe in their alternative communities is something from which Jezebel remains on the outside. Jezebel would fall on the margins of the community yet again. From the Newfrontiers particular socio-economic perspective this is a partial reading of Jezebel that is located in their own testimony. By reading their own story and reclaiming their testimony, the reading based upon Newfrontiers women contributes to testimonial injustice for Jezebel. She still does not have the opportunity to speak about her own situation. Jezebel's commonality with Newfrontiers women is found in her many subjugations and othering, not in the desperate and unapproved quest for power. This is a hermeneutic of charity towards Jezebel that has yet to be demonstrated in some commentators' analysis of her life. I suggest, however, that we are left with a 'sad story' still because we cannot hear Jezebel's response.

Jezebel and the women of Newfrontiers have in the past been found to be similar in their 'unacceptability' and questing for power. Those that seek to exhibit power and authority in the ecclesia are accused of having a 'Jezebelic spirit'. I have suggested that there are similarities but that these are prejudicial and unjust. Both Jezebel and Newfrontiers women are subject to gender based inequality and epistemic prejudice. Their negotiated epistemologies, their outsider status and their gendered oppressions mean that they should and could view Jezebel with charity. They do share similarities. They do have a Jezebelic spirit, but the cause of such a spirit is different to the normative and male storytelling.

The women who gave their testimony about their knowledge of God and their life in the church told of being on the outside of church with only negotiated access to power and authority. They sought to find avenues to know and express their worship of God in alternative spaces – in particular their homes and their female communities. These spaces are found in places where they regularly exercise their devotions to God,

I actually find there's real hotspots in my home where I regularly worship and rest and meet God. I think its angels gather, possibly.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰⁵ Tracey, Interview 24.

Newfrontiers women are ‘unacceptable’ because of their gender and their God knowledge is heard only partially.

It is not the actions of Jezebel alone that make her ‘unacceptable’, It is the state of being on the outside. Jezebel is ‘other’ and by being ‘other’ not having had the opportunity to be an Israelite princess raised in the Hebrew cult tradition and understanding the rules of the Hebrew religion. Newfrontiers women are also ‘other’ because they are not the normative gender that hears from God authoritatively:

So I think if you are young male, probably married, probably University trained, probably like wearing check shirts, and in new frontiers they may consider that you would be appropriate for eldership. But I think if you are outside of that criteria there is very little opportunity or expectation that you would ever have a call to leadership.⁸⁰⁶

Lisa’s view is that the non-normative gender makes her an outsider. The women who also accounted for racism found their outsider status magnified. For Angela, during the Black Lives Matter movement’s beginnings she felt that the church was part of the problem, ‘God, this is a joke. Your church is complicit in some of this, and I’m finding it really painful’.⁸⁰⁷

Jezebel is also an outsider, one whose racial identity puts her at odds with the normative faith expression,

As a womanist writing in the age of the Black Lives Matters movement, that gives me pause. Jezebel’s preparations for her death are also preparation to join her son in death.⁸⁰⁸

Jezebel’s ultimate scene has assonance with both the women who cite racial oppressions and account of their experience Black Lives Matter and assonance with Lisa whose son also died. The hermeneutic of Newfrontiers women reads Jezebel as oppressed and bereaved and in solidarity with many other women who find themselves oppressed. Jezebel joins the women who have lost their sons to police racial violence in America, and for whom the Black Lives Matters

⁸⁰⁶ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁸⁰⁷ Angela.

⁸⁰⁸ Gafney, Womanist Midrash. 246.

protests began. This reading finishes with a note of grief. Jezebel dies, brutally and alone, having lost her husband and her son whilst in a foreign land. Jezebel's sense of self as a woman is doubly condemned when her gender intersects with her nationality. Feminist hermeneutics has begun to recognise the 'connection of the feminist with a postcolonial analysis of the Bible'.⁸⁰⁹ Jezebel is the 'other' woman and the other woman here is one that is a racially and territorially *other*.

In the beginning Jezebel forfeited her Phoenician homeland for Israelite territory. In the end this land not only obliterates her but it defecates on her identity and memory.⁸¹⁰

The stories told to me by some of the women of Newfrontiers also situate themselves as territorially other. They find themselves worshipping in the homes, in their kitchen for want of space that is suitably theirs. For those who, like Jezebel, have racial identities that situate their bodies in hybrid spaces, they are doubly marginalised.

Jezebel is known for two separate things in the text: Ba'al worship of a zealous manner and the depiction of her wedding day that is found in Psalm 45 where a Phoenician princess marries into Israel. Jezebel is the only candidate in scripture for this. If this psalm is about her then it is hopeful and optimistic before she is infamous.

Jezebel joins a long line of foreign brides, from the time of the patriarchs through Moses himself to the golden era of David and Solomon and beyond. David is never critiqued for his foreign marriages; Solomon is critiqued for their number and aftereffects, but not their initiation.⁸¹¹

But, Jezebel doesn't follow the psalm's advice and forget her father and her nation. She continues to worship the god of her homeland says Gafney.

⁸⁰⁹ Susanne Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). 107.

⁸¹⁰ Phyllis Trible, 'The Odd Couple: Elijah and Jezebel'. 177.

⁸¹¹ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*. 241.

When Jezebel dies, she dies with her face made up and hair done...When Jezebel dies, she dies having remained faithful to her gods unto death. It is a painful irony that the biblical authors castigate the Israelites for failing to model this kind of fidelity.⁸¹²

Jezebel is not unique in being a foreign bride within Israel. Therefore, perhaps, it is her devotion to Baal that is the problem. Gafney describes her as a fundamentalist, killing the prophets of the local religion, something of a coloniser. Yet, Jezebel is the victim of a nation that colonises her. Jezebel should not be read without attention to her cultural situation. This would be to fall into the trap of assuming all women are oppressed in identical ways.⁸¹³ A post-colonial reading notes that it is her gender in relationship with her colonised status that particularises Jezebel's story. An analysis of Jezebel's story with both gender and post coloniality in view allows the complexities of Jezebel's powerfulness and powerlessness to be held in tension. Melissa Jackson reads this with a post-colonial lens, who remains fundamentally other in the story. She says,

Postcolonialism uses the term 'binary' to refer to dichotomies that have been imposed and have served to define the 'self' over against the 'other' – us/them, imperial/colonial, superior/inferior, center/margin, inside/outside – and rejects these binary constructs in favor of 'hybridity'.⁸¹⁴

For now, it is worth showing that Jezebel is considered the other, the outsider, and foreign bride who doesn't conform to the Hebrew religion.

Jezebel suffers from being removed from one space and translated to another with different rules and values. She is, says Jackson, part of Ahab's condemnation. She brings with her further influence of Baal.⁸¹⁵ Indeed, Jezebel is always pitted against a hero, always a male, who is on the correct side – Yahweh's unlike Jezebel.⁸¹⁶ The fundamental flaw that Jezebel has is that she stays faithful to Baal, to the religion of her home and childhood. However, it is the postcolonial-hermeneutic possibility that, whilst not absolving Jezebel of her murders, she should be seen as

⁸¹² Gafney. 241-2.

⁸¹³ Susanne Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). 109.

⁸¹⁴ Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*. 241.

⁸¹⁵ Jackson. 242.

⁸¹⁶ Jackson. 243.

culturally located. One whom learnt different rules about Queenly behaviour.⁸¹⁷ We see this in the episode about the vineyard. Jackson suggests that Jezebel understands the situation as a King's right to the land that he desires unaware of the promises about land ownership made by Yahweh, indeed,

She may see Naboth's response only as insubordination to the crown – an unacceptable response of a subject to royalty. Thus, her response could be intended to 'save face' for a king who has been defied.⁸¹⁸

Jezebel doesn't know, or doesn't try to know, the ways of Yahweh. She is hybrid. She is placed in a middle space and doesn't compromise what she understands to be true. Jezebel's hybridity highlights the hybrid state of Newfrontiers women who experience intersections.

I have suggested that reading alongside the women of Newfrontiers the story of Jezebel should cause us to reread both of the stories. I have found assonance with the story and the Newfrontiers women, so that a rhyme can be illustrated. Yet, it is not the same rhyme that was previously found. Newfrontiers women have suggested a change in the way the church allows them to speak and know. They experience more freedom than the original reading of Jezebel suggests. They also still stand on the margins of their churches and this necessitates creating new spaces for their experiences. This marginal position is reflected in Jezebel who experiences similar oppressions. Unlike the original rhyme which found similarity with Jezebel because women were conceived of as power hungry, manipulative, and deceitful, I have shown that a hermeneutic of charity changes both Jezebel's story and the story of Newfrontiers women. I can find a rhyme, following Sechrest, but it is a new rhyme with a new aim – to expose the epistemic injustice that both parties are subject to. This charitable hermeneutic suggests innovation in the response to Jezebel, understanding her as powerful and decisive but also a victim of sexual abuse, of racism, and of bereavement. This hermeneutic suggests that we respond to Jezebel with grief rather than judgement.

⁸¹⁷ Jackson. 248.

⁸¹⁸ Jackson. 248.

Part 2: Towards Epistemic Credibility

The rest of this chapter will continue to focus upon constructive possibilities for self-understanding of Newfrontiers women. Newfrontiers women are shown to be like Jezebel for reasons that are new. They are like Jezebel because of their mutual epistemic injustices. However, women in Newfrontiers also accounted for epistemic credibility, and therefore other stories of scripture relate to their self-understanding. The key themes of the data provide a model for understanding those themes as part of the biblical narrative about women, power, and epistemology. The themes are identified as negotiating epistemic authority and acceptability in the church, encounter of God in the domestic sphere, a female and embodied mystical practice, women-church, the community of God, and the wider world.

To redress the hermeneutical and testimonial injustice of women's story being allied with Jezebel's narrative (to the disadvantage of both Newfrontiers women and Jezebel), I make use of the testimonies in the data and draw upon the narrative of Elizabeth in Luke's gospel. This develops Elizabeth as a part of the female church who negotiates with the patriarchy for epistemic credibility. This mirrors the adaptations and ultimately authority of Newfrontiers women. I make use of Elizabeth for two reasons, which reflect Musa W. Dube's suggestion for liberation hermeneutics.⁸¹⁹ Firstly, Elizabeth is a suitable frame for Newfrontiers women's practices because her actions mirror many of the women's accounts of their behaviour. Secondly, Elizabeth 'represents the struggle' of Newfrontiers women.⁸²⁰ She does so by acting in the power of the Holy Spirit in her embodiment and in her community with Mary but navigates this within a patriarchal society that does not recognise her ability to speak authoritatively about God.

1. Making a Space in the Church: Embodied and Mystical Authority

Women have described being on the outside of their church communities when it relates to their epistemic authority. For these women leadership is the ultimate source of this authority, and they do not have access to it formally within the church, as Lisa told me,

I think if you are outside of that criteria there is very little opportunity or expectation

⁸¹⁹ Musa W. Dube, 'Talitha Cum Hermeneutics of Liberation', in *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation*, ed. Alejandro F. Botta and Pablo R. Andinach, Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies 59 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). 138.

⁸²⁰ Dube. 138.

that you would ever have a call to leadership.⁸²¹

Nonetheless, the second major theme in the data is ‘towards epistemic credibility’. In this theme the practices that are adaptive and outside of the church are shown as ways in which women circumvent the restrictions on their actions by encountering the Spirit in different spaces. Reading Elizabeth’s story alongside these expressions of illustrates the way in which this can be found to rhyme with the biblical narratives of women who negotiate their epistemic authority.

Elizabeth exists in a complex patriarchal situation where she is both independent because of her spiritual authority but also subject to male governance. Elizabeth in the gospel narrative appears to be known entirely by the relationships she has with others, reducing her identity. This is paralleled with the Newfrontiers women who are known by their husbands or find loss of identity without husbands. She is known because of Zechariah because she is the cousin of Mary and finally the mother of John. This is the same as Sarah (interview 6) and her description of her experience of feeling ‘hidden’. Both Sarah and Elizabeth are unseen by the male church leaders. For Elizabeth her testimony is not believed and requires male authentication. Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan questions Luke’s portrayal of women, particularly, Mary, Elizabeth, and the prophetess Anna, asking are they positively faithful or negatively submissive?⁸²² It is this question, which cannot be easily resolved with the text available that is at the heart of the issue for women in Newfrontiers and is part of the complex relationship with Jezebel. The women’s relationship to Jezebel is not the one the network promoted. Could it be then that also the association with Elizabeth is complex? Elizabeth, I shall show, is not the pure, subservient, and holy woman compared to Jezebel’s pagan seductions. Rather, Elizabeth, like Jezebel, mirrors the Newfrontiers women in complex ways. The references that the women made to feminism, and their rejection of it, suggests that they do not always associate their circumstance with oppressions. Rather, within their situatedness in the network, they wish to articulate a female focused form of agency that would allow for their own power but would not be the same as male power that they witness.⁸²³ This complex dichotomy between dominant masculine power and subversive female spirituality can be positively drawn, as women acting with divine agency despite their circumstances and also negatively – these women are subject to conditions that do

⁸²¹ Lisa, Interview 3.

⁸²² Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*. 5.

⁸²³ Angela, Interview 11. ‘I’m not into women’s rights or ethnic minority rights, but I am into justice, and the heart of God, and God’s kingdom coming, and part of that is seeing things change’.

not allow them full freedom where they must negotiate within structures that they do not control. In the process of this, it is shown that God values these women and their knowledge and speech, even if the men in their culture do not.

Embodiment leads to epistemological freedoms which reveals the competing assessments made regarding these women. The complex dynamic described by the women, who feel their bodies are either polluting or sites of encounter with the Holy Spirit, is found in the stories of Hannah's dancing, of Mary's cancer treatment, and of Anne's close association with Christ on the cross during her hospital admission. This is mirrored in Elizabeth's story, who in turn is made in the image of the barren women of scripture: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah.⁸²⁴ The embodiment of the Newfrontiers women and the biblical women is both positive and negative. This is the impact of patriarchal tradition according to Elizabeth Johnson which finds worth of women in their ability to bear children. Despite this culturally conditioned valuelessness, Elizabeth is called 'righteous' and is a sign or of significance to Mary. It appears that the value of Elizabeth is different in God's eyes than it might be in the gaze of men around her. The Newfrontiers women speak similarly. They describe themselves as being known by God even if they are not by male leaders, like Sarah and her description of being hidden but also of being shown angels and known by God.⁸²⁵ Elizabeth recognises the work of God 'so the Lord has done to me' compared to her husband who does not and is silenced because of it.⁸²⁶ Elizabeth speaks of the humiliation that she suffered from her barrenness. Argues Barbara Reid, 'Although Elizabeth has suffered humiliation in her childlessness, she does not identify the suffering with God's will. Rather, she sees God's hand in the new life she bears and in the lifting of her public disgrace.'⁸²⁷ This illustrates 'a deeply incarnational theology, recognising God in bodiliness'.⁸²⁸ Thus, the story begins to reveal the two competing value systems at play, those of the divine and those of the patriarchal culture. Elizabeth's embodied epistemology is suggestive of a way that her body makes space for her spiritual encounters with God despite it being the same body that puts her on the outside of her social and religious culture.

⁸²⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003). 261.

⁸²⁵ Sarah, Interview 6.

⁸²⁶ Johnson. 261.

⁸²⁷ Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1996). 62.

⁸²⁸ Reid. 62.

Elizabeth negotiates her epistemic vulnerabilities in similar ways to the interviewed women. Even though she is considered potentially culpable for her 'barrenness', Elizabeth fulfils what Luke believes is core in discipleship: 'readiness and expectation of the coming of God's Messiah, perseverance, faith, obedience, joy, and openness to receive the word despite difficulties'.⁸²⁹ She has more faith than her husband and is the better part of the parallel there. It is that what is recognised in her by God and by the author of the gospel is not recognised by her contemporaries reliably. She, like the Newfrontiers women, negotiates her epistemic vulnerability amongst peers by relying upon the authenticating power of the Spirit who fills her and gives her Christological knowledge (v.41). This provokes the 'grief' in this hermeneutic, the world that Elizabeth exists in is one which oppresses her. Yet, the story will go on to show that to some extent this is overcome in her ability to speak powerfully and create her own space that is welcoming.

Elizabeth makes use of this powerful speech and by so doing associates with the tradition of female prophets. God, via the angelic messenger, silences the man, Zechariah, and then the woman of faith speaks. Johnson says that even though Luke doesn't give Elizabeth a title of 'prophet', she still behaves like one.⁸³⁰ In the same way, men do not name women in Newfrontiers for what they are as church leaders and elders, but this doesn't prevent their God from empowering and recognising them as such. Indeed, the women account for seeing angels themselves, e.g. Tracey (interview 24). Elizabeth goes on to bless Mary, 'Her words echo the praise addressed to other women famous in Israelite history who have helped people, the prophet Deborah utters, "Most blessed be Jael among women"' (Judges 5.24).⁸³¹ We begin to see that the speech of Elizabeth is empowered within the tradition of prophets and that as such reverses the status of Elizabeth as rejected. Rather, the centre of the story and the centre of God's revelation moves away from the religious community dominated by tradition and male leadership into the home of a socially ostracised woman.

Elizabeth's exuberant praise shouted with unrestrained joy joins Mary to solidarity with a long heritage of women whose creative action, undertaken in the power of the Spirit, brings liberation in God's name. Moreover, this blessing weds her historic pregnancy to

⁸²⁹ Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*. 9.

⁸³⁰ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*. 262.

⁸³¹ Johnson. 262.

her faith, again depicting her as someone who hears the word of God and acts upon it even in her own body.⁸³²

As such Elizabeth operates with prophetic authority, speaking truth, illustrating injustice and revealing the action of God.

Elizabeth again speaks with authority when she tells the name of her son. Reid suggests that Elizabeth naming John is powerful and more usually a male task⁸³³ – perhaps we can see how the certainty of the call from God has made Elizabeth bold in confronting social norms and this is reflective of the way in which women act in Newfrontiers – when their prophetic voice is provoked they will risk approbation to speak the words of God. For example, Jennifer suggests that working towards women feeling liberated is something that provokes in her a feeling of guilt,

Then you think no, hold on, this is important, we are right to keep saying these things. It's that whole, I will not apologise for this. It's always the impulse is there to apologise, I'm just like, no. We need to just keep encouraging one another.⁸³⁴

Elizabeth shows the possibility and legitimacy of a prophetic voice that garners revelation and speaks from a particularised and embodied female environment.

Newfrontiers women speak with inspirited speech. They claim to know and hear from God. Sarah spoke of God wishing to reveal to her 'the systems of Heaven, how he delivered things from Heaven to earth'.⁸³⁵ Inspired speech for Elizabeth is also prophetic speech. It is an indicator of the knowledge of God that Elizabeth has. However, it is also speech that changes situations and interrupts the social environment causing God's purposes to be enacted. This means that Elizabeth's speech is revelatory and transformative, prophetic, and priestly. Barbara E. Reid says that few notice in the scholarly world that Elizabeth is introduced as of equal standing to her husband.⁸³⁶ As Brown suggests that it is significant that Zechariah cannot speak

⁸³² Johnson. 262.

⁸³³ Reid, *Choosing the Better Part?* 63.

⁸³⁴ Jennifer, Interview 9. 16.

⁸³⁵ Sarah.

⁸³⁶ Reid, *Choosing the Better Part?* 57.

and therefore cannot offer the priestly blessing that would be his role in the temple.⁸³⁷ Elizabeth is already given a priestly association because of her name's links with the only Elizabeth in the Hebrew Bible – Aaron's wife (Exodus 6.23). The reader is to think of her as closely aligned to the priestly world. Also, Elizabeth's moral worth, rather than her natalist worth, is depicted as rarely equalled. Her righteousness prefigures Jesus who is referred to as righteous in Acts 3.14, 7.52, and 22.14.

In the midst of a wider discussion about source and redaction history Raymond Brown notes the similarities in the Luke-Acts composition between the infancy narrative and the expression of gifts of the Spirit in Acts. In particular he notes, Spirit baptised speech of Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah and the prophetic spirit in Acts 2.17.⁸³⁸ Elizabeth is aligned with those believers who, having correctly identified Christ, are filled with the Spirit for their ongoing lives and ministry. She speaks with authority, prophetically, but not only prophetically. She speaks with priestly authority also. When Mary enters Elizabeth's house, pregnant, traumatised (says O'Donnell), and seeking refuge Elizabeth emerges from her months of solitude, with her silent husband and takes upon his mantle as a priest in her home. She says to Mary, 'Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' (1.42). Brown says that the word Elizabeth uses here is *εὐλογημένη* is the passive participle. For example, in the beatitudes, it is the adjectival word which 'does not confer a blessing but recognize an existing state of happiness or blessing'. 'In this participial sense "blessed" is properly addressed to God who is to be blessed by human beings. When it is extended to men or women, it invoke on them the blessing of God',⁸³⁹ implying, therefore, the conferring of a blessing in the manner of a priest.⁸⁴⁰ John T. Carroll sees this as 'Elizabeth pronounces a double blessing: both Mary and the child she carries are blessed

⁸³⁷ Raymond Edward Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New updated ed., [Nachdr.] (New Haven, Conn. London: Yale University Press, 2007). 280.

⁸³⁸ Brown. 243.

⁸³⁹ Brown. 333.

⁸⁴⁰ John Noland, contests, 'Elizabeth does not wish or offer blessing, but recognises blessedness'. This seems less likely especially as Noland makes no account for the use of the passive participle here. Rather, Mary is recognised by Elizabeth as being in the tradition of Jael and Judith (Judges 5.24, Judith 13.18). John Noland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015). 67 and Raymond Edward Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New updated ed., [Nachdr.] (New Haven. London: Yale University Press, 2007). 33.

(v. 42)'.⁸⁴¹ The blessing Elizabeth gives is doubly inspired because it reflects the qualification that Jesus makes when the crowd bless Mary in Luke 8.21.

Elizabeth recognises what Jesus himself says that Mary is blessed by her belief rather than simply her motherhood. Elizabeth recognises the importance of knowledge and faith. She recognises the Christ child before he is born. She recognises his call to follow him as disciples which is a radically reorientating call of faith rather than any other kin ties. Similarly, Elizabeth's ability to discern prophetically and know is demonstrated in the naming of the baby. As Brown puts it, 'the reader is probably meant to think that Elizabeth's decision was a spontaneous and marvellous confirmation of God's plan'. Zechariah was presumably mute and deaf because of the use of sign language and a writing implement 2.62-63. Thus, Elizabeth's prophetic speech is empowered to offer blessings. It is authoritative and holy speech that is directive. Here is how we know Christ and follow him. The Newfrontiers women can be challenged by Elizabeth to understand themselves as able to do as Elizabeth does. They are able to hear from God and direct events based upon that knowledge. They exist in an environment that does not recognise their epistemological authority and are discontented and even oppressed by that, however, so also does Elizabeth. This does not remove the complexity of their diminished situation, but it does reveal a pathway to their own self-description.

The ways in which Elizabeth develops her prophetic voice are insightful for Newfrontiers women. Elizabeth is shown by Luke as welcoming to her own embodied experiences. She is welcoming to herself as one who is able to know God through her own personhood, through mystical and female embodiment. This is the way in which the women of Newfrontiers also receive knowledge of God, through their bodies, through fasting, and experiences located in their flesh. Bonnie Miller McLemore writes of the knowledge of women, of, in this instance, pregnant women, to be a form of receiving into themselves (contra subject to projection). Thus, in pregnancy, the maternal knowing is an embodied reception.⁸⁴² In Elizabeth, this maternal knowing is not only via John, the male foetus who leaps in the womb, but the female body that receives and nurtures him and through faith accepts the pregnancy. This is an embodied epistemology that recognises the experience of the *un/pregnant* body which describes

⁸⁴¹ John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

⁸⁴² Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J., "Epistemology or Bust: A Maternal Feminist Knowledge of Knowing," *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 (1992): 229–47. 242.

something of the ambiguity both of the body that is capable of becoming pregnant, but is not pregnant, or was pregnant but isn't now. Or the body that longs to be pregnant but is not. Or the body that has given birth but is still birthing.⁸⁴³

Elizabeth's bodily knowing, her *un/pregnant* knowing, was both before she was pregnant but still knew God and was righteous and also after she was pregnant when her hospitable body recognised the Lord before her. The recognition, which is so often situated with John the-soon-to-be Baptist, is in fact facilitated by the body and knowing of Elizabeth. So, as McLemore suggests, instead of the masculine ministerial ideal, here we see ministry, priestly facilitation, through the pregnant female body. The *un/pregnant* female body is collaborative. It works alongside another to receive revelation and knowledge. This illustrates the authority that is seen in Elizabeth's story to the embodied God-knowledge that women experience in Newfrontiers. Whether it is ticker-tape prophetic words or experienced love of God during chemotherapy, these embodied experiences are authentic and biblically attested expression of God-knowledge that is potentially world-changing, as it was in Elizabeth's Christological statement.

Elizabeth's word is not enough for the crowd of people who want to know what the baby will be called, they required Zechariah to confirm it. Elizabeth and the Newfrontiers women encounter similar types of epistemic injustice. Their word is either not sought or not believed. For example, Angela tells of the times when she is ignored or Anne's difficult relationship with her church and her prophetic gift,

To be frank with you, I think it was in order to keep an eye on me and keep a control on what I was up to.⁸⁴⁴

Anne's knowledge is controlled and authenticated by those with power in the same way that Elizabeth's is by the crowd. Even though Elizabeth had believed when Zechariah did not and indeed believed through a second-hand account of a prophecy rather than seeing the angel herself,⁸⁴⁵ her knowledge of what is to happen is considered insufficient to the crowd. Yet, it seems that her knowledge and her belief is sufficient to God. She, in her God-knowledge, is

⁸⁴³ Karen O'Donnell and Claire Williams, eds., 'Conception', in *Theologies from the Inside Out* (London: SCM PRESS, n.d.). 5.

⁸⁴⁴ Anne, Interview 25.

⁸⁴⁵ Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*. 18.

blessed even as she is condemned by those who are sinfully patriarchal. ‘Elizabeth is the first person to make a Christological statement, when, upon greeting Mary, she said, “How does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”’ (Luke 1.43).⁸⁴⁶ This knowledge, for Elizabeth comes in community with Mary. She cannot know who is growing in her cousin’s womb yet. When Mary arrives newly pregnant and physically before her the embodied, female knowledge found in the space between the two of them allows for Elizabeth to receive a revelation that is in many ways salvific.

Elizabeth is the older and wiser relative to whom Mary turns when she is in need. Emerging from her isolation during which time, we might imagine that she was contemplative and reflective. Elizabeth offers a safe and pastorally responsive place for Mary. Reid notes that both Mary and Elizabeth are highlighted as contemplative and that this is a quality of a prophet.⁸⁴⁷ The prophetic and contemplative wisdom that Elizabeth offers has also a pastoral and caring element. She is able to welcome with hospitality those that seek her out of her space of reflection upon God and righteousness in her person.

The priestly and prophetic function, known because of its truth and God’s authentication of it, are still qualified in the cultural context and the space in which it is offered. It was not acceptable knowledge of the name of Elizabeth’s baby in the normative community. Elizabeth’s voice was not received as trustworthy, and Zechariah was the only one allowed to name the child. To a male authority the observers of 1.62 turn, and he confirms what should have been trusted. Brigitte Kahl finds that the

patriarchal house of Zechariah, as the nucleus of the social structure of domination, becomes a mothers’ and children’s house in which sisterliness and brotherliness reign in place of ‘paternal power’ (*patria potestas*.) The initiative to act and speak lies exclusively with the women and the unborn boy, John, who precipitates Elizabeth to utter her spirit-filled words.⁸⁴⁸

⁸⁴⁶ Getty-Sullivan. 18.

⁸⁴⁷ Barbara E. Reid, ‘Prophetic Voices of Elizabeth, Mary and Anna in Luke 1-2’, in *New Perspectives on the Nativity*, ed. Jeremy Corley (London: T & T Clark, 2009). 40.

⁸⁴⁸ Brigitte Kahl, ‘Reading Luke against Luke: Non-Uniformity of Text, Hermeneutics of Conspiracy and the “scriptural Principle” in Luke 1’, in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004). 80.

It is the space and the domestic sphere that is changed in this time, where the priest is silent. I shall pick up the threads of the home of Elizabeth as transformative of priestly power in the next section. However, for now, it is my argument that Elizabeth's function is one which seeks to circumnavigate the male authority in her culture but which does not always succeed fully. The homes of Newfrontiers women are holy spaces. They dance in their kitchens, and they have 'hot spots' where the Spirit is encountered. Elizabeth illustrates the transformation of a domestic 'space' into a space of divine encounter so also do Newfrontiers women. Thus, it can be suggested that this space is not an alternative space necessarily but a legitimate and primary space for encountering God.

I have argued that Elizabeth can be described as a priestly prophet and so also can the Newfrontiers women. She and they speak with divinely inspired authority, proclaiming Christological truth and dispensing the blessings of God upon others. For the women of Newfrontiers, this offers scope for recognising that their speech, their knowledge, and their mystic actions as authoritative and constructive. In the same way that Elizabeth offers a holy space in her home, which reveals the will and purposes of God and ministers to others so also can Newfrontiers women. For the women in Newfrontiers, their homes are spaces of embodied spiritual action. They worship God in their kitchens and experience mystical spaces that are close to God. They carve out spaces where their spiritual agency is revealed. That this must be done in negotiation with the patriarchal powers in the culture is recognised as temporary and not of God. This is the state of sin that the culture upholds rather than the God-ordained order of the faithful community.

2. God Knowledge and Prophecy for Newfrontiers Women in Community

If the domestic spaces can be understood as legitimate, then so also can the words spoken in them, amongst the other women in the community.

I guess I felt quite humbled by it because he sent an angel to a women. That was quite unusual because obviously, Newfrontiers is very much about male leadership of churches.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁹ Sarah, Interview 6.

Speech is an important element of the authority of Newfrontiers women. For Elizabeth, she is given the chance to speak by God when she enters into the presence of another woman. Both women are found to be faithful by God when Zechariah has not believed and is therefore rendered mute. His silence is because of his failure to know a truth. Elizabeth's faithful declaration is testimony to her epistemic authority and to God's epistemic justice being delivered for her. Reid says that Elizabeth echoes the experience of women who are silenced in churches.⁸⁵⁰ What she says is true, but she is not initially believed. This reflects the negotiation that the Newfrontiers women speak of, knowledge has to be authorised and recognised to be acceptable. It is possible to speak truth as a woman but not straightforward. Reid offers this suggestion,

Moreover, it is very important for women to articulate their experience of God in their own voice and their own language and with their own imagery. Likewise, it is very important for the whole community to hear how God speaks through female experiences. Sometimes, as in the case of Elizabeth, it is only when male voices are silenced that space is made for females to speak. It is also the case that some women need to be encouraged to find their own voice and claim it, so that their valuable contribution can be heard.⁸⁵¹

For Newfrontiers, the emphasis on ecclesial structures and the authority of male voices has missed the radical communitarian ethos with which the movement began.

As I have shown in the participant observations (chapter 3) and the 'Call to Testimony' (chapter 4), Newfrontiers is already constituted as alternative, worshipping communities that reject denominational and ecclesial influence. Rather than embracing the dismantling of power structures of the church in denominational form, it has entrenched local power into the hands of elders who are male. This begins to change as women's voices are more recently heard such as in the local meeting where women are prophets and meeting leaders. However, for the fully radicalised version to be realised, the powerful prophetic and priestly voice of Elizabeth should be recognised and transition to a *mystic-church* that understands gender constructions as destructive and bodies as sources of theology realised. This transition is ongoing and

⁸⁵⁰ Barbara E. Reid, 'Prophetic Voices of Elizabeth, Mary and Anna in Luke 1-2', in *New Perspectives on the Nativity*, ed. Jeremy Corley (London: T & T Clark, 2009). 42.

⁸⁵¹ Reid. 42.

Newfrontiers would be wise to realise it fully. Subversive communities should be *the* communities, and the Newfrontiers network of churches would do well to have a resourcement of their own first things – that they are communities of believers without the heavy shepherding of ecclesial leadership. The feminist rejection of traditional church communities sits well with the Newfrontiers rejection of the same. Although from different origins, this is fruitful in purpose. The old structures do not fulfil the call of the kingdom of God.

it's a lot of women with some influence in some way, whether that's in the church or in the culture, encouraging one another. I think that to not have those support networks, you can feel a little bit like the one woman trying. Then you think no, hold on, this is important, we are right to keep saying these things. It's that whole, I will not apologise for this. It's always the impulse is there to apologise, I'm just like, no. We need to just keep encouraging one another.⁸⁵²

I have illustrated how Elizabeth is shown by Luke to be a woman of prophetic and priestly gifting who is recognised by God as such despite the patriarchal world she exists in. Now, I shall develop this idea by showing how she turns her home into a space that is hospitable to others and by so doing offers an example of a radically different community that is structured without reference to gender but to willingness to hear from God.

In the domestic space of Elizabeth's home, a woman-church experience occurs that creates an alternative community to the one which is male dominated. Nonetheless, it is not women-exclusive; rather, it illustrates the radical alternativity of the new community focused upon Christ which welcomes all. Elizabeth welcomes her kin – Mary – but not only female kin. She resides in her silent home with her husband and welcomes the pregnancy of her male foetus. She also welcomes those who greet her newborn, even as they do not recognise the priestly-prophetic voice she has.

Mary and Elizabeth constitute a nascent community of faith. Yet, when Mary and Elizabeth come together, it is rare that we see two women alone in the bible. 'It is Mary and Elizabeth who will theologize and speak authoritatively about God's newest deeds'.⁸⁵³ Elizabeth blesses Mary

⁸⁵² Jennifer, Interview 9.

⁸⁵³ Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996). 71.

first and then the fruit of her womb.⁸⁵⁴ Showing that Mary is of worth and welcome in her home. The parallelism between Mary and Elizabeth is deliberate for Luke who wishes to indicate their links of faith rather than of kin.⁸⁵⁵ In the same way that Mary is to be honoured, according to Jesus, because of her faith not her maternity (Luke 8.19-21), so also is the link between Elizabeth and Mary to do with their faith. Getty-Sullivan makes the case that Luke particularly values the community of faith over familial communities. He suggests that disciples should leave their family for the sake of the kingdom (Luke 14.26, 18.29) and finds family in discipleship instead.⁸⁵⁶ Elizabeth models a welcoming community of faith that is egalitarian in the value it places on those who would otherwise be considered less-than, such as her unmarried and pregnant cousin. Johnson cites Luise Schottroff who suggests Mary and Elizabeth are ‘pregnant crone and the unmarried, pregnant bride of suspected adultery’.⁸⁵⁷

This community of two demonstrates a particular kind of welcome and safety. For Mary to visit Elizabeth could be conceived of as trust whilst in distress. Karen O'Donnell describes the annunciation/incarnation event as a type of trauma for Mary, ‘her bodily integrity is ruptured’,⁸⁵⁸ and this is even despite her consent given. She does not understand how the events occur since she is a virgin. Thus, her visit to Elizabeth is a trauma response for O'Donnell. She goes to a ‘place of safety’ by her travelling to Elizabeth.⁸⁵⁹ Similarly to Johnson, O'Donnell understands this as a quest for solidarity with another woman who understands her situation. ‘In this place of refuge Mary reclaims her bodily integrity and identity as one who is not a victim’.⁸⁶⁰ Johnson argues that Mary and Elizabeth meet because of a need for community of similarity, of solidarity. Both Mary and Elizabeth face similar circumstances as one another. She cites Tina Pippin and a ‘politics of meeting’ that it is in the meeting together that the empowerment comes. This is where their ability to speak is found.⁸⁶¹ That God is on the side of the lowly. Mary here is not the ‘humble handmaid of the patriarchal imagination’.⁸⁶² Johnson understands this as the dangerous

⁸⁵⁴ Reid. 72.

⁸⁵⁵ Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Liturgical Press, 2017). 28.

⁸⁵⁶ Getty-Sullivan. 28.

⁸⁵⁷ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*. quoted 261.

⁸⁵⁸ Karen O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2019). 168.

⁸⁵⁹ O'Donnell.

⁸⁶⁰ O'Donnell. 175.

⁸⁶¹ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*. 260.

⁸⁶² Johnson. 260.

memory of Mary and to that we might add Elizabeth. ‘Susan Ross envisions yet another way this text is dangerous: it portrays women looking to each other for validation of their authority rather than to men’.⁸⁶³ In this way, the women of Newfrontiers who create their alternative spaces do so in the tradition of women stretching back to Mary and Elizabeth. God is found in their own terms and their own style, embodied, and fleshed out.

The focus on Mary and Elizabeth as prophets allows for women to be described in terms of their hearing from God, their domestic/divine reality, their co-creation of communities, and their intentions towards good in the world. To some extent, it sidesteps the authoritative roles in the church and says that women can speak truth to power in the midst of their oppression, fully aware that in the same way Mary did. She anticipated something greater but did so amidst a patriarchal society that did not allow her to operate to her fullest extent. ‘Together Mary and Elizabeth affirm the grace of God in their own lives and help one another to name that grace’.⁸⁶⁴ The co-operation between them is noteworthy, two pregnant women who are not at odds with each other unlike other pregnant women in scripture like Hagar and Sarah (Gen 16, 21), Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29-31), and Peninnah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1). Perhaps more similar to the birth of Moses where three women all collaborate to allow Moses’ safe delivery (Exodus 2.1-10). Reid highlights that they are joined in mutuality. They support one another and are unselfish in their aims. This is contrasted to the disciples who compete for who is most important. Reid notes that the behaviour of Mary and Elizabeth together reflects the behaviour of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1–4) and Moses’ mother and sister and Pharaoh’s daughter (Exodus 2.1-10) who work together to accomplish God’s will.⁸⁶⁵ Elizabeth’s seclusion followed by her community with Mary demonstrates two typical characteristics that the Newfrontiers women reflected also – ability to mystically meditate alone and to construct knowledge together. Elizabeth’s practice authorises the Newfrontiers women. It shows them that their conscious dialectic between community with God in the Spirit and community with one another is the normative way of subverting patriarchal control and operating with agency in the kingdom of God.

In order to avoid an idealised and romantic form of communitarianism or a perplexing dialectic between autonomy and community, I can present a troubled middle where the ontology of Mary and Elizabeth forms the epistemology in a complex way that is not an oversimplification of

⁸⁶³ Johnson. 260.

⁸⁶⁴ Reid, *Choosing the Better Part?* 73.

⁸⁶⁵ Reid, ‘Prophetic Voices of Elizabeth, Mary and Anna in Luke 1-2’. 40.

woman-church idealism. Such oversimplification would lead to a gendered particularity of female communities of faith that exist only as alternativity but so because of essential gendered assumptions. Rather, the reading of Mary and Elizabeth, and in which I suggest best fits Newfrontiers women's self-understanding, is one of prophetic, embodied witness to the whole world that seeks to liberate those who are oppressed including the prophets themselves. Their knowing is nuanced in their community with one another, but it exists outside of that community also. It is neither socially constructed faith experiences nor the experience of an autonomous spiritual agent. Bonnie Miller-McLemore notes that the 'monological subject' of modern scientific method where the independent mind operates with distance from other minds and subjects in her article, 'what happened to the body?'⁸⁶⁶ So, what happens to the community and body in Newfrontiers theologizing?

F. Scott Spencer claims that it is not the purpose of the Elizabeth-Mary narrative to present Mary as 'an idyllic icon impossible for other women to even approximate'; rather, it is to do with the relationship between them the 'female-maternal-spirited bond'.⁸⁶⁷ It is important also that the Magnificat is given 'to Elizabeth in Elizabeth's home'.⁸⁶⁸ However, there are two male babies also present and a disabled husband. This helps us recall that Newfrontiers women did also relate and construct theological knowledge with men present. As Serene Jones notes, it is not that ideal feminist communities are female only spaces.⁸⁶⁹ In light of this, it seems fitting to introduce work from elsewhere that constructs a liberative and subversive community ethic that does not require gender essentialism in its construct. Writing about autism and theology, I suggested that a community based on a reading of Pentecost that saw plurality and difference as maintained and perfected in the Spirit, as enforcing the divine rejection of the homogenising and powerful elites in the tower of Babel episode and of celebrating different types of speech.⁸⁷⁰ Elizabeth prefigures this move, but it is not surprising that both Elizabeth and Pentecost are described by the same Lucan voice, one that subverts authority and homogenisation. Elizabeth, speaking with Mary, prophetically and in embodied community by the power of the Holy Spirit, anticipates the time

⁸⁶⁶ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, 'Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology: What Happened to the Body?', *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 5 (October 2013): 743–58, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0510-3>. 755.

⁸⁶⁷ Franklin Scott Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). 77.

⁸⁶⁸ Spencer. 77.

⁸⁶⁹ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). 129.

⁸⁷⁰ Claire Williams, *Peculiar Discipleship: A Liberation Theology of Neurodiversity* (London: SCM PRESS, 2023). Chapter 5.

when all – including Newfrontiers women – are empowered to do the same. These faithful communities of speech and knowledge are constructed not by gender, be that male or female, but by the Spirit who gives to those who are righteous and who recognise Christ. Elizabeth is a model for Newfrontiers women, in this way, not because of her gender, but because of her rejection of the patriarchy that attempts to suppress her and the recognition by God that she has authority to speak divinely revealed truth.

This type of community means that authority in the church is relativised because knowledge of God. However, it does not stop there in the alternative space but opens out towards others. In keeping with Elizabeth's pronouncement of blessing, we also understand something that is a message throughout Luke about the community of the kingdom of God. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that Luke's redaction in Luke 18.29b indicates wives are left behind in the new order of familial relationships and that the radical discipleship of the kingdom is male only.⁸⁷¹ However, Mary is a faithful disciple who is included in the new kingdom order (Luke 11.27-28), and yet we already knew this because Elizabeth has proclaimed it and fulfilled it. She also is happy because she has heard the word of the God and kept it. Thus, Fiorenza's denouement that the patriarchal family is no more in Q sayings, and Mark is also the case that I argue for Luke, and, in particular, this is the case illustrated by Elizabeth. If Fiorenza makes particular claim to this because of the house church movement,⁸⁷² then we can see perhaps the first iteration of a house church in the conversation between Mary and Elizabeth in her home.

It is important that I do not essentialise or romanticise a female only, essentially constructed, gender orientated space as a normative move authorised by particular readings of Elizabeth. Indeed, in the words of Serene Jones, 'feminists also recognize the significant roles race, class, sexuality, geography, and ethnicity play in forming and maintaining communal practices and identities'.⁸⁷³ This intersection is reflected in the data of the research but also in the experience of social othering for Elizabeth. Rather, we see this as a hospitable space by a person who is both socially constructed and embodying an *un/pregnant* existence. She is newly pregnant and engaging in a biological experience that is non-normative in a patriarchal society. Yet, Elizabeth welcomes

⁸⁷¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 2nd ed (London: SCM, 1995). 146.

⁸⁷² Fiorenza. 148.

⁸⁷³ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). 129.

in new life in her son and in her Lord and others in her home – Mary and her husband who would need extensive help in his newly disabled state.

Natalie Webb reminds us that this meeting is not a ‘giddy baby shower’ but a radically reconstituting and political meeting.⁸⁷⁴ In the manner that the women in Newfrontiers account for alternative and subversive connections that allow them to enact their God-knowledge, this behaviour first occurred in Elizabeth’s home. ‘The scene culminates in the canticle of Mary (1.46-56) which also holds up a radically different model of power’.⁸⁷⁵ Mary speaks prophetically (like Miriam in Exodus 15.1-18). ‘Mary, like Elizabeth, recognizes God in bodiliness, conception, and incarnation, not as removed to a purely spiritual plane’.⁸⁷⁶

To develop this requires taking the notion of *un/pregnant* which rejects gender construction and essentialism as well as the value judgements of pro-nativity and expand it to incorporate the constructions of gender in Elizabeth’s world. Taking Elizabeth’s *un/pregnant* body and putting it in community with others suggests that the ecclesia can also be considered without reference to social gender constructions. If indeed the new community no longer has male or female (Galatians 3.28) but does have bodies that know, then I propose a new way of describing this in plurality. The people who form the community for Elizabeth are priestly-prophetic bodies who are in ‘woman-church’ but not exclusively. They are *mystic-church*.

In this final section, I have suggested that Elizabeth offers up a scriptural example of a woman who constructs both herself and her home as a welcoming space for faith-filled believers and those who are yet to understand. Developing the idea of *un/pregnant* to describe embodied knowing that is deliberately rejecting gender constructions of society, but also deliberately welcoming God-knowledge that stems from the body, I have suggested what this might look when understood in ecclesial terms. I suggest that the hierarchy of Newfrontiers churches with male eldership as primary sources of authority forgets their first calling as alternative societies. Indeed, the construction of internal subversive communities speaks to this original *raison d’être*. Women have felt required to move their worship into their homes or into alternative spaces. This stands as a judgement against the movement’s failure to reject fully ecclesial power

⁸⁷⁴ Natalie Webb, ‘Overcoming Fear with Mary of Nazareth: Women’s Experience alongside Luke 1:26–56’, *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 1 (February 2018): 96–103, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637317753949>.

⁸⁷⁵ Reid, *Choosing the Better Part?* 74.

⁸⁷⁶ Reid. 77.

structures. The data from interviews and the story of Elizabeth suggest that true authorising power comes from God via the Spirit empowered speech of the righteous. This suggests that the church value not gender but those people who recognise God - 'who am I that the mother of my Lord...' – and speak powerfully. Those people, making use of their mystical knowledge, welcome those that are willing to hear in a radically and politically diverse community of the faithful and the not-yet faithful.

3. The Prophetic Priestly Mystic-Church

In this second half of the chapter, I have suggested that Elizabeth is also a suitable choice for an accurate self-understanding of Newfrontiers women. I have argued that she is suitable because she is similar to Newfrontiers women in gender construction, social situation, and embodied experience. She is suitable because she demonstrates empowered speech in the same way as Newfrontiers women which reflects an epistemic authority that can be constructed as prophetic and priestly. Finally, the space in Elizabeth's home is a hospitable one that functions as a worshipping community that welcomes all. It is an alternative space which allows those whose epistemic authority is contested to meet. In this space, where the prophetic and priestly gifts function, there is the potential for the community to disregard gender constructions and embrace the mystic possibilities of those who are attentive to the Spirit. I have argued that such a space makes possible women's self-understanding to develop in a community that does not isolate power according to gendered roles. Instead, the community understands equability and the relativisation of power structures in light of the gift of the Spirit.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have completed the Charismatic research methodology that I set out in the introduction and developed in the methodology. I have read the scriptures alongside testimonies from Newfrontiers women and alongside the key areas of importance that I described in the data and analysis chapters that formed the second and third moves of my methodology. The interweaving of stories in scripture with stories of women corresponds to the nature of testimony giving where the stories mutually inform the self-understanding of the storytellers and the ways in which the scriptures are understood within a given community of interpretation. The story of Jezebel had been a story that was told about Newfrontiers women who sought influence in ecclesial communities. This was read using the hermeneutical methods of Cheryl Bridges Johns and Love Lazarus Sechrest's 'associative hermeneutics'. In so doing, I proposed a different

rhyme between the women of Newfrontiers and Jezebel, one not of similarity in theologising and behaviour but one in which Jezebel corresponds to the women in their experience of epistemic injustice.

Jezebel was shown not to be a suitable way to describe women who speak with authority in the churches because that characterisation does not fit Jezebel herself nor the women's accounts. Jezebel and Newfrontiers women are both shown to have unacceptable knowledge that is constructed as such because of their gender and their ethnicity. Both Jezebel and the women have 'unacceptable' bodies that tempt and distract men from their 'godly' calling. This is where the women can claim similarities with Jezebel. The reading that I offer does not provide any hope in the sad story of Jezebel. It names the injustice that she is subject to but the social situation of the Newfrontiers women does not reveal epistemic parity with Jezebel. She is still voiceless, and the reading does not offer her a new voice. However, the way in which Newfrontiers women tell their stories also creates the conditions for a new reading of the Jezebel narrative. Part of the renewed self-understanding of Newfrontiers women is the power that they have to introduce a charitable hermeneutic. Reading Jezebel again with this hermeneutic reveals a tragic story of a bereaved wife and mother who was treated like chattel and given moral responsibility unfairly. The tragic story reveals the continuing lack of a hermeneutic that hears Jezebel anew. Telling Jezebel's story alongside the Newfrontiers women reveals that Jezebel still has no acceptable testimony.

After the rhyme with Jezebel was shown to not illustrate a suitable self-understanding for women as previously conceived, I also showed what additional rhyme that there might be via the gospel story of Elizabeth. Elizabeth is shown as an appropriate model for Newfrontiers women. Elizabeth is an example of a woman who has prophetic and priestly authority in the relativised community of faith. Her authority and speech are produced in the authorising relationship with the Holy Spirit in her home which is a mystic-church where women and men are welcome. This potentially describes a Newfrontiers ecclesiology that reduces the authority of the male elder by embracing the prophetic and priestly authority of all those, regardless of gender, in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the women of Newfrontiers can be heard using a Charismatic theological method of hearing testimony. By hearing testimony, their voices can be attended to as speaking of their experiences in life and the church and their knowledge of God. This is then used to complement the work of Kristin Aune, which was completed twenty years ago and to renew the biblical hermeneutical process that was used to describe the role and nature of women in these churches. Women who participate in the congregational life of Newfrontiers churches are in a space of ambiguous epistemic freedom. They claim authoritative encounters with God via the Charismatic belief in the active work of the Holy Spirit in their lives alongside rich and joyful faith communities. They also report dissatisfaction and feelings of oppression that result in accounts of unfulfilled vocations and a lack of agency in their faith communities. I began this project from a number of starting points – my own personal experience in the Newfrontiers faith community and my previous academic work. My provisional early research that suggested more could be known about Newfrontiers' women's spirituality. Added to this was a desire to construct a methodological approach that sat within the Charismatic theological tradition and that allowed for accounts of encounter with God that were reported as good as well as accounts that required naming and liberating. Alongside those methodological outcomes I also focused on a methodological process that was important to me – a research method that was founded in a spiritual practice. This endeavours to be faithful to my own beliefs, to ensure the research was thoroughly theological and to respond to Helen Collins' call to develop such research methods.⁸⁷⁷ The research question that I developed in response to these strands of interest was: **What is the testimony of Newfrontiers women concerning their experiences of God and the church?**

Summarising the Argument

In the introduction, I situated the research question and methodology within Charismatic Theology and the history of Newfrontiers. The methodological contribution to Charismatic theology that I seek to offer is a liberative framework that also celebrates the good of divine interaction. In this the work follows on from Cheryl Bridges Johns' theology of Pentecostal formation that says liberation is necessary in order to free people to worship God. Thus, this has the socio-political element of liberation alongside the Christological and Pneumatological focus

⁸⁷⁷ Helen Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflections Starting with Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 2020), <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9780334058588>. 129.

that both Pentecostal and Charismatic theology demand. The belief of Charismatics and Pentecostals that God interacts in the world and with believers, and that that gives them a testimony to tell, which serves as a spiritual practice. That makes my research method both theological and confessional. Alongside this methodological concern, the introduction briefly described Newfrontiers, the neo-Charismatic, house church network which grew from small beginnings in the 1970s to an international group of congregations. This network is Charismatic in profession and complementarian in church governance. It values community and friendship. The recent development of this network and its particular spirituality and governance means both that there is little written about it and also that there is knowledge to be gained from investigation. This thesis contributes to this nascent field.

Newfrontiers women are poorly represented in the literature surrounding Newfrontiers which itself is not plentiful because of the emerging growth of the movement. Thus, I situate the women of Newfrontiers in their wider setting of Evangelical and Charismatic women and as women who are nonliberal in their confession. The paucity of research into women in Newfrontiers means that this thesis primarily develops Kristin Aune's work, which described the women as postfeminist. This thesis finds less value in the feminist frameworks than Aune's work did, and also describes the spirituality of these women, something that Aune by her own confession was not able to do. I have sought to move on somewhat from particular categories of feminist description to fill the gap in knowledge about the lived religion of the women, their embodiment, and their understanding of God. This meant that the thesis takes seriously accounts of divine action, supplements Aune's study with further detail, and examines the lived theology of Newfrontiers women.

The most suitable way to access the testimonies of Newfrontiers women was deemed to be via Practical Theological methodologies and methods. This allowed for my own faith commitments, the faith commitment of the researched community, and a space to explore the professed beliefs and experiences of the women. I reflexively and iteratively designed a method that was able to hear testimony as it would be given in churches, asking the women 'tell me about your relationship with God'. The research that I undertook exists within the broader family of methodologies that are Evangelical and Charismatic. However, it developed in a particular way to construct a method that was spiritually informed, similar to the work of Catherine Sexton and

Helen Collins.⁸⁷⁸ Using a posture of ‘holy listening’, I heard testimony as an experience of hearing the divine, making a space that was open to the move of the Spirit. As such this offered the chance for participants to pray and to prophesy during the research interviews.

Newfrontiers churches are communities of Charismatic faith that value friendship and community alongside expressions of spiritual gifts. They speak of their own self-understanding in terms of societies of faith that are separate to the world around them but also connected to it, reaching out beyond their own borders to meet others evangelistically. The worship services are informal and are similar to family gatherings. The services demonstrate use of spiritual gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues and also women leading and directing services but only occasionally. These observations compounded the desire to seek answers as to how the values expressed were replicated or changed by women, who are less visible than men, and also have less agency in these churches.

Through interviews held on Zoom during the pandemic, I was able to hear the testimony of 24 women in response to the question ‘tell me about your relationship with God’. At the beginning of each interview, we prayed, and the participants went on to tell me about their lives. After a period of coding and thematic analysis of these interviews, I developed some themes that reflected my interpretation of the data. The overarching theme was ‘making space’. Women described ways in which they created worshipful environments and expressed their agency and choices in the faith communities and in their homes. The women testified to feelings of unacceptability in the church because of their gender, particularly, those women who sought to fulfil vocations to church leadership or speaking. Unacceptability became a sub theme that I developed. Taking note of their reported embodied experiences, I also described their accounts of intersections where race and gender combined to exacerbate their feelings of unacceptability. The primary way in which this unacceptability was experienced was through the authority and space allowed in the church for the women’s claims about their knowledge of God. However, this was not all that the women told me about in relation to their status in the churches. They also reported ways in which they were beginning to feel acceptable. They negotiated their own spaces within church structures, avoiding being called ‘elders’ which is reserved for men, and still participating in ways that ordered, received, and recognised some of their God-knowledge. They

⁸⁷⁸ Catherine Sexton, ‘Method as Contemplative Enquiry: From Holy Listening to Sacred Reading and Shared Horizons’, *Practical Theology* 12, no. 1 (January 2019): 44–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2019.1575042>. Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflections Starting with Scripture*.

told me that they led worship services, discerned prophetic voices, gave prophetic words, and were recognised as legitimate conduits of the Spirit within their faith communities. This developing legitimacy was supported by a tendency towards finding spaces at home, separate but part of the community. These spaces were sometimes with women from the church, and the value placed on these friendships was almost sacramental. These friends were facilitating their encounter with God, and communities of women gathered as subversive and alternative spaces where God-knowledge was valued. Alongside this, embodiment was critical to the space making and knowledge of God. Despite their embodiment being problematic for the church, it was significantly enabling for their own personal spirituality. Bodies were managed by way of fasting and other sacrificial practices, and bodies were also sources of particular revelation, especially in times of illness or suffering. This tended towards a redemptive quality. The very bodies that cause women's experience of unacceptability were the same bodies that facilitated profound and valued encounters with God.

These complex accounts of God-knowledge can be described using Miranda Fricker's theories of epistemic injustice.⁸⁷⁹ The claims for relationship with God that might impact the faith community were contested for the women. Male God-knowledge has surer foundations for the community and is more readily acceptable. The women, rather, are in a contradictory situation where their knowing is authoritative because they are gifted the Holy Spirit as believers, but contested because their gender makes them unacceptable to the community in particular ways. Thus, the women travel between the centre of authority in the church where they negotiate epistemic authority and to the margins where they develop Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's term, *ekklesia gynaikeōn*.⁸⁸⁰ This movement between centre and margins of the faith community is a movement towards epistemic credibility. There are significant instances both of injustice where women are not heard or treated with parity and where women's voices are directive and significant. These instances of encounter with God are joyful and fulfilling for the women, and my research methodology allowed for them to tell me what was good in their experience. The good that these women recount, and their movement towards epistemic credibility, sits within the wider framework of female mysticism. Women mystics of history and the present day use similar mechanisms of embodied spiritual experiences that are affective and empowering. Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich are suitable examples of this experience in history, occupying similarly challenging male-dominated spaces and speaking with varying levels of

⁸⁷⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

⁸⁸⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*.

epistemic credibility. Embodiment is a critical factor in epistemic credibility. The participants have mystical-erotic experiences that give women authority and self-belief. They had experiences that valued their own suffering as providing them with avenues for understanding the suffering of Christ. They also controlled their diet and consumption in order to facilitate a deeper experience of relationship with God. These acts of piety were within their domestic sphere as conscious acts of devotion to God. This mysticism that I describe is female focused and a way in which knowledge is developed. Alongside this individual response is the important communal response of women gathered together. I describe this as a hermeneutical community because the women, in line with mystical women of the past, tell stories together that reinforce their community and their self-understanding.

The experience of the negotiation of agency and authority is, as the literature review showed, found in the narrative about women who reach for power in churches. This stems from the re-reading in the church of the Jezebel narrative found in 1 and 2 Kings, and the accusation of having a 'Jezebel spirit'. This account was described by Kristin Aune as causal to the self-understanding of the women in Newfrontiers churches, effectively limiting their power by divine mandate through scripture. Taking the accounts of these women and following my methodological trajectory, I examined the Jezebel narrative with a renewed 'hermeneutic of the mystical and Spirit-filled'.

Firstly, I reread the story found in the biblical narrative as a source of grief rather than the rhyme that is suggested in the community literature. The women in the research do not experience the rhyme that is suggested to them with regards to Jezebel. However, there are similarities. Both Jezebel and the women experience testimonial injustice, where their own knowledge and way of being are limited and considered less-than the normative, male experience. The participants in the research *are* similar to Jezebel in their unacceptability both in their knowledge and their bodies. Jezebel suffers testimonial injustice in her story because she does not have an opportunity to speak. The women negotiate some justice because their mystical experience allows them to have spiritual authority that is received imperfectly and irregularly. As such, the hermeneutic allows a rereading of Jezebel's story, although not her own rereading, but one through the stories of the women in the research. In this hermeneutic, Jezebel's story is a tragedy. She is a bereaved and othered mother. She is racially prejudiced against and the similarities between the grieving mothers of police violence and Jezebel makes for a poignant reminder of the modern applications of Jezebel's story. Jezebel is an outsider to the faith

community that she was forced to join. The rhyme between Jezebel's story and the research participants is different to the one suggested in the literature of Newfrontiers. I argue, therefore, that the self-understanding, that was condemnatory of both Jezebel and women in authority, should be challenged.

This challenge results in a different possibility for self-description for women in power in Newfrontiers, and, for this, I suggest that Elizabeth, encountered in the gospel of Luke, is more suitable. In the prologue of Luke's gospel, we are shown a woman who is also similar to the research participants. She is one who knows God and identifies Christ through her embodiment. She offers a welcoming space to another woman in the midst of the patriarchal environment, similar to the women-church practices of the research participants. The outcome of using Elizabeth as a means to self-understanding is to enable the women of Newfrontiers to recognise in themselves a prophetic and priestly calling, embodied in Elizabeth, that circumvents patriarchal domination in a faith community. Elizabeth speaks blessings. She recognises Christ, and she facilitates worship of God (through hosting Mary). In her, there is a model of how church can be reorganised on the principles of hearing God and facilitating worship. This is not idealised woman-church, where the female gender is necessitated and removed from the rest of the community. That would not suit the research participants who accounted for friendships and the value of men in the community. Rather, in the same way Elizabeth does, it welcomes men into a space that is equal in standing before God, hearing the voices of all those who speak prophetically.

Aims of the Thesis

The aims of my thesis were both methodological, and to fill a gap in the knowledge of my own faith community. My methodological aims were twofold, to contribute to the growing area of research into Charismatic/Pentecostal liberation theologies and to offer an opportunity for research into the 'good' in Charismatic experience. These two aims were met by seeking testimony, itself, a Charismatic spiritual practice which honours the faith commitments of myself as a researcher and my research participants.

In order to bridge the gap in understanding exposed in my own research, and following Kristin Aune's sociological investigation twenty years ago, I aimed to richly describe the lives of women

in Newfrontiers, seeking to understand them within their complementarian context but also as more than just this gender dynamic.

Implications

Implications for Charismatic theology are found in three interconnected findings in this research. Firstly, that worship occurs in-keeping with the mystical tradition, in embodied ways and in places other than church services. The research indicates that the women participants found rich worship experiences in situations outside of the Sunday gathered worship and outside of singing. This compliments the findings of Pete Ward and the more recent work by David Lemley which seeks to draw attention to sung worship and Helen Collins' work on worship for new mothers.⁸⁸¹ The research does not suggest that songs and gathered worship aren't critical for the women but that there are other opportunities and instances of profound spiritual encounter that can be noticed. Churches, therefore, should work towards supporting and encouraging such lived religious practices, while recognising that in these spaces spiritual formation is occurring. Women are practising gifts and developing relationships that they may not be there for them in the gathered assembly.

Secondly, Charismatic theology can incorporate Practical Theological methodologies that promote both liberation and accounts of the good. This is in keeping with a belief that God liberates the oppressed, brings joy now into the lives of believers, and gives hope for the future. This is a development of Samuel Tranter's work on Evangelical Practical Theology and the need to develop a framework, particularly for student formation, that allows for accounts for the good.⁸⁸² It also responds to the Charismatic focus on the good, the tendency to share the experiences of divine encounters and the desire to express this theologically and with a critical and analytical research methodology.

⁸⁸¹ Pete Ward, *Selling Worship How What We Sing Has Changed the Church*, Reprint (Milton Keynes [u.a.]: Paternoster, 2008). Collins, 'Weaving Worship and Womb: A Feminist Practical Theology of Charismatic Worship from the Perspective of Early Motherhood'. David Lemley, *Becoming What We Sing: Formation through Contemporary Worship Music* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021).

⁸⁸² Samuel Tranter, "'Disciplined Wonder': On the Evangelical Possibility of Reflecting Theologically on Very Good Things, as Well as the Bad and the Ugly", *Practical Theology*, 8 February 2024, 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2024.2303549>.

Thirdly, complementarian Charismatic congregations such as Newfrontiers should recognise the difficulty that some women have with their roles in churches. These women deeply love their local communities and choose to remain despite their expressed dissatisfaction, but in order to do so they negotiate and work around the limitations that they discover. This research suggests a way forward that does not confront complementarian theology face on – in keeping with the research participants’ choices – but reflects their own negotiation of legitimacy. It is also in-keeping with the origins of Newfrontiers as house churches that met and formed community in homes. Newfrontiers rejected ecclesial structures as non-representative of the New Testament church. If this is to continue to be the case, then such structures of eldership should be relativised in light of the research and the hermeneutic that I offer. This sidesteps debates about male eldership as a fruitless discussion in the current environment and recognises the tendency within Newfrontiers to be subversive within their context. Michelle Lee-Barnewall argues in her own work that the egalitarian/complementarian categories have become polarised and entrenched.⁸⁸³ New categories of our understanding of gender should be considered that are more related to relationality.⁸⁸⁴ Although Lee-Barnewall continues in her work to consider elements of leadership, this research contributes to this frontier discussion in complementarian movements about recategorizing the debate and moving beyond questions concerning what a woman is permitted to do. To that end, Newfrontiers churches would do well to recognise that their origins as alternative societies have become institutionalised in the male dominated churches. This institutionalisation has led to questions of hierarchy and structure which draw in gender questions. The liberative agenda of this research is to both conscientize the church to the oppressive structures that have formed and to suggest that a manner of liberation is both possible and in motion. The alternative societies *within* the alternative society of Newfrontiers offer the corrective that is necessary to meet the dissatisfaction of the women.

Limitations and Future Research

This research did not address the key biblical texts linked to complementarianism; in part, this was deliberate. As noted in the introduction and in chapter two, this has become a fruitless avenue for continued investigation. As Jennifer suggested, this is a ‘hill Newfrontiers is prepared

⁸⁸³ Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*. 3.

⁸⁸⁴ Lee-Barnewall. 9.

to die on' and therefore isn't negotiable. It is also an issue that the movement believe to be fully theologically articulated. It has been repeatedly defended both within the movement and in the wider complementarian Evangelical theological community. In keeping with my desire to move past the entrenched gender and leadership debates, I sought to understand what else there was to know about Newfrontiers women. In so doing, I revealed something that I did not expect, that there was some dissatisfaction among the women about this issue. Therefore, I suggested a way around this debate focusing on a revisioning of what already occurs in Newfrontiers. This, I believe, is fruitful for the movement, and I have presented it in terms that might be received favourably. However, this research suggests that complementarianism may need revisiting internally by Newfrontiers. Women do indeed hold positions of authority, teach, and discern the Spirit. They simply do this inconsistently and without being able to call themselves 'elders'. Thus, the normative and operant theologies of the movement are potentially in conflict. Future research to develop an appropriate biblical response to this conflict would bring clarity for the movement.

The Covid pandemic and national and international lockdowns meant that much research was conducted online via Zoom. Further research internationally and with groups of women might expand the understanding of their lives, particularly, addressing the lack of respondents who occupied sociologically diverse circumstances and identities. The research did not attract respondents from the LGBTQ+ community. Does this identity cause additional difficulties in a church that rejects homosexuality as sinful? In what way does faith expression develop for women with such additional intersections? The nature of qualitative work is that it does not make claims to generalisability. This is particularly the case when intersections that exist remain unexamined in the research. Nonetheless, Newfrontiers is an international organisation and the conclusions that I have made focus on English Newfrontiers women in particular.

The Zoom format for interviews produced another limitation. The literature review suggested that a focus on spirituality might add to the knowledge of Newfrontiers women, and the data gathered suggested that embodiment was critical. However, this embodiment was only shared by accounts given. I, as the researcher, did not witness these women's embodied spiritual practices nor participate in any of their rituals or routines in their homes. If lived theological research can be described as 'attunement to a deeper mundane' that invites 'theologians to a full immersion in

the insights and exigencies of the field’,⁸⁸⁵ then it is possible that further insight to the embodied lives of the women in Newfrontiers would come from extending this research into embodied presence in the ‘mundane’ of their own homes, not simply via a Zoom window.

My methodological aims could also be further developed in subsequent research. Testimony is not the only spiritual practice that could be incorporated into a research framework, as Collins suggests, so also could *Lectio Divina*, prayer, confession, and other frequent practices.⁸⁸⁶ My experience of conducting the research illustrated that women were ready to bring prophetic words into the research setting, something that I did not expect. How could this freedom to speak and name the divine be further understood in the research setting?

My intention in conducting this research was to describe both the joy and the difficulty that it is possible to experience as a woman in a Newfrontiers church. I had hoped to find a way to show that women experienced God through many different and fascinating ways and found their relationship with God to be a source of delight and comfort. From an insider position, I wished to challenge Newfrontiers, the church that I am part of and love, to reconsider its position on women and to recognise the gift that many women are and could be in their church communities. I would also hope that the churches would consider repenting of the pain that they have caused women, speaking out and naming the injustice against women that has existed. Fundamentally, as a Charismatic researcher, I wished to tell a story – a testimony of hope and resilience and the love of God in the lives of women.

⁸⁸⁵ Marsh, ‘Introduction’. 9.

⁸⁸⁶ See also, Sexton, ‘Method as Contemplative Enquiry’.

Appendices

Appendix 1

This account of my experience of Newfrontiers is based on the time between 2011 and 2023.

My first encounter with Newfrontiers began when my church, a long time Baptist congregation, requested another local congregation amalgamated with us. For an extended period the congregation where I was a member had struggled with internal leadership disputes amongst the male eldership. These became intractable and the collective of elders, five in all, decided that they should seek external help. The help they sought was from another local congregation – part of Newfrontiers – whom they had connections with through families, friendships and shared missional endeavours. After a sustained period of attempting to resolve the problems with the oversight of the leaders of this Newfrontiers church it was concluded that no such resolution was possible. The elders of my congregation resigned and our church was taken over by the Newfrontiers church elders. Overnight we ceased to be a Baptist church and became a Newfrontiers church.

Many Newfrontiers churches began this way, by choosing to join in the movement through friendship and relationships with people already in the movement.⁸⁸⁷ The church's amalgamation with another meant that there was now one congregation comprising of approx. 300 members spread across two adjacent areas of my town. Our congregation had been predominantly white and middle class with professionals and business owners predominating. Young families comprised the majority of the congregation alongside retired people. As the town doesn't have a university the majority of the young people who attended the youth group, itself at least 20 individuals, would leave to go to university and not return. For a long time myself and my husband as recent graduates were the youngest members of that congregation. This community was then, after the amalgamation joined by another quite different group. The Newfrontiers church we became part of was based in a very large, somewhat infamous sink estate nearby. The congregation were mixed middle and working class people with the addition of a number of congregants outside of employment and in receipt of state benefits. The church operated a significant ministry for this estate that comprised of a café (run at cost to keep it affordable for the local area), a charity shop (items donated were sold for 20 pence), a food bank and at the time employed three members of staff as community workers. This joining of these communities was relatively smooth, surprisingly, and this was accredited by the leadership to God's intervention. The community became overnight significantly more diverse than either had been before. Now the church had three buildings to its new name: a small village chapel, a large converted secondary school where the church offices and the main meeting hall were, and the building on the estate which had housed the congregation's Sunday services and the community work. The congregation began to meet on Sundays in the converted school as it was bigger and had better facilities for Sunday school. The community work continued at the estate building which was open 5 or 6 days per week running these activities. Both congregations continued toddler groups that served their communities. The youth groups joined together and became one

⁸⁸⁷ See Jefferey, "A World-Wide Family on a Mission": The History of the Newfrontiers Network in Transnational Perspective, c.1980-2011'. For the origins of the movement in this way.

large group which would eventually host 60 plus young people including from other local churches.

Community and family life

My experience at the time of this merger was one of excitement and opportunity. The congregations, despite some nervousness, threw themselves into the project of getting to know one another. This was my first encounter with the Newfrontiers way of forming community and was so striking that it would eventually shape my academic work. Having experienced close friends in the church community through shared experiences of raising toddlers I noticed that this was multiplied and continued throughout the Newfrontiers church. People knew each other really well, generations of families would share their lives together. They met much more frequently than simply each week on a Sunday. There were house groups that served as mid-week organised church meetings that, as the name suggests, met in church member's homes. There were also close knit groups of friends that would go on holidays together, take one another to hospital appointments, meet up at the weekends and do as much as possible with one another. I noticed this particularly with the women in the congregation. They had not only raised their children together but also shared interests and hobbies. They lived alongside one another sharing all aspects of their lives together. Over the years that followed I have noticed that these friendship groups did not remain exclusive but merged and shifted to incorporate the new groups and members. If a new person joined the church they were treated as a family member that nobody had met yet and they were invited to participate in this shared existence and largely expected to do so. I found this way of being fascinating and somewhat unnerving. As an autistic person this level of intimacy with so many different people was something that appealed deeply. I wished to belong in this way and had failed until now to ever achieve it. Here were groups of people who generously included anyone that wished to join – be they ex-offenders, drug addicts, CEOs, local GPs, single mothers – if there was a desire to be part of this community there was usually a space found or made. Perhaps my focus on this aspect of the church was formed by my own interest in friendships borne of an autistic life without many friends. I would later notice when I returned to theological education at an Anglican theological college that not all Christians behaved this way. Launching myself into the theological community with the same ideas of family life as I had at church became rapidly disabused of this hope when the other students were polite and friendly but didn't want to come round for dinner especially nor form similar relationships that I found in my own church. This was, I suspected, part of being a non-residential college, but the difference was apparent, nonetheless.

Family life at church was a life lived alongside lots of other people. The church meets in multiple locations throughout the week and once or twice on Sundays. It continues to run the community work in the estate and once a month there is a service in the church building there. The church has an active table tennis group and another group called 'Silver Service' for elderly congregants. My experience of being part of the community is of an all consuming social world. We have had members of the church come to our house for Christmas dinner, we have lived next door to church members, I even had one come round when I was in labour with my third child to watch my older children. The church works, in my experience, as a closely connected group of families and single who are regularly in and out of each other's lives.

The close connection is developed in a plethora of ways. Alongside time spent in and out of each other's homes we also hear each other's stories. It is common on a Sunday service to hear people give their testimonies. These testimonies are sometimes profound – such as charting a journey from drug abuse to sobriety – sometimes mundane – a train journey disrupted by cancellations 'but God got me to my final destination'. The alongside living of life in community is mirrored in the story telling that the community promotes. I have told stories myself, often intertwined with

theological reflections, of my own life and have benefitted from the meaning making that comes from it as well as the sense of connecting more completely with those that receive my stories with compassion and joy.

My experience of the change from Baptist to Newfrontiers was initially encouraging. I had found it difficult to navigate the strict gender rules of the Baptist church. If I met with one of the Baptist church leaders in the church offices something of a performance was undertaken to make sure that we were not alone in the building, that no doors were shut for us to speak behind, window coverings were open and visibility was maintained. Mention of the Billy Graham rule – no meetings alone with anyone that isn't one's wife – were made and I felt like a dangerous presence in the room. I withdrew from such meetings. In contrast the Newfrontiers elders, comprised of four men who were much more relaxed about such things. It was fine to go on car drives with another elder and not declare it in advance or travel separately. If doors were shut during meetings, no eyelids were batted. I felt much less like a dangerous woman in their presence.

My husband joined the eldership team as the fifth member and we began to understand what being in the leadership of a church might involve. Primarily I was frustrated, we were regularly expected to attend 'elders and wives' meetings on a Sunday evening. I disliked being an 'and wife' and couldn't understand the role I was expected to play in this environment. When I questioned it I was told by another elder's wife that it was to bring the emotional and affective aspect to the male leader's decision making. Effectively, she said, I was to make sure they didn't offend people in their strategic church-wide decisions. I left that conversation feeling hopeless, never having particular strengths in these areas and knowing that my husband was more than capable of attending to emotions if he so chose. This began my discomfort with the gender roles that formed in the church, especially around leadership. As we continued in this new group of leaders and their wives I noticed that the younger wives were more ready to reject the traditional gender roles. They were less likely to follow their husbands to meetings with other couples, or to host regular dinners at their houses. The older women viewed themselves as 'co-labourers' in their husband's vocation and would facilitate this domestically. Whilst I was still full time at home with four very young children I did not feel particularly like I wanted to do this also. Yet women appeared to have a complicated relationship with these gender roles. Some women were primarily based at home, did not have employment and would mostly spend their time meeting with other women in the church. These were both social and spiritual 'meetings for coffee' and a great deal of the church's wider community that I described above seemed to flow from these relationships. Other women were employed professionally outside the home – headteachers, doctors, educational psychologists – and they seemed to have to work quite hard to access and maintain the level of friendships that are required to connect socially with the church. This has become increasingly evident to me as I have re-joined the workforce and am less available to take part in this form of socialising. Our whole family has suffered the lack of this regular connection that I was responsible for.

The gender roles translated also into complicated expectations in the church, when my husband was made an elder I was asked if I had my 'first lady outfit' ready for the service. This became a metaphor for the role that I was stepping into, in the same way a first lady in American politics often has her own career and life, she is also always connected to the role that her husband plays as commander in chief. She becomes famous in light of this connection to her husband. So was I, suddenly thrust into view as a visible 'wife' of a church leader. People that I didn't know knew who I was and appeared to have expectations of what that knowledge allowed. They would

know aspects of my life and the names of my children, they would speak to me as if they expected me to have an interest in them (I did, but I understood that as being part of the church rather than as a wife of an elder). Recently I was called by the church to have a disclosure and disbaring service (DBS) check. I queried it, I did not currently have any role in the church that necessitated that check. The response was, because I was the wife of an elder and might therefore be involved in pastoral care. This expectation of a role in relationship to my husband challenges me. I do not wish to deliberately subvert it as much of what is hoped for by the church is good and for the benefit of others. However, to gain my identity from my husband's position and to have my own abilities and interests subsumed to his feels oppressive. Not many of the people who know my name know anything more about me. They know me in relationship to my husband rather as an individual in my own right. Yet I, like all the other women in the church, has a rich and interesting life of my own. One which God forms and shapes, that includes a faith life that is both part of the church but also my own to make of what I will.

During my years as a member of the church I have been involved in the toddler group, children's groups, I have preached and led teaching activities, I have led retreats and Advent courses, I have taught on programmes for leaders in the network and I have attended 'theology forums' for my local Newfrontiers sphere. I am the only person in the church to have a master's degree in theology and to have published theological books and yet I am considered unable to have a leadership role. For a few years I struggled to find a place for my particular calling and what I believed were my skills. If I had wanted, I could have perhaps worked for the church as an administrator or perhaps in a children's work role. Yet I could not bring skills in theology to an employed role. This was because the only avenue for that was through church leadership and I was not permitted to do this in the complementarian church structure that exists. I was told there was no route for me by a number of different men in the church. Nonetheless, I continued to be asked to teach for the network amongst other men who had paid positions in their churches. Once I spent a whole week contributing to a teaching session with one of the sphere leaders. As payment I was sent a cake. This cake came to represent for me that ways in which I had come into contact with the glass ceiling in Newfrontiers. I was allowed to teach and preach to other women and to men despite the complementarian doctrine that in other types of churches would prevent it. I was allowed to contribute at a trans-local level to theological discussions that would be passed down to eldership teams in churches as guidance. These seemed to me to be positions of leadership. However, if I had wanted an official role there was none to be found. As I raised these issues and questioned these problems I stopped being asked to do these tasks. The regular communication I had with these men in the leadership of Newfrontiers began to fade into nothing. I would again to feel like the dangerous woman that I felt like in the days of the Baptist church. For a church that defines itself as relational I was being cast out into the cold.

I was particularly aware of the differences that my experience as a woman in the church created. One theological forum I was invited to attend was about the roles of women in church leadership. I had thought I wasn't going to be able to attend, there was a clash in my diary. I let the convener know, who went on to beg me to come as I would be the only woman there. He was, embarrassed to admit, unaware of any other women who might be able to contribute. At the time I remember thinking that any other theologically trained women have probably left the church. I did attend and the two days I was there were profoundly challenging. The discussion seemed to focus not on the biblical passages that the church believed were forbidding of women in leadership but rather their common-sense view of why women couldn't possibly run churches. This seemed to centre around the inability for women to be 'discipled' by the male leaders in the network. Discipleship as they described it required overnight stays to get to know one another in remote locations. This was impossible they claimed, a woman could not take part in such an

event for reasons that were assumed to be self-evident. Stories were told around the table of times when male leaders had been hijacked by needy, sexualised women who wanted to have affairs with them and had lured them into pastoral visits that hid ulterior motives. One moment over lunch stood out, I suggested to the sphere leader that complementarianism might have a direct, or even indirect, link to domestic violence. Could complementarianism ever be seen to tacitly condone violence because of the view that men were heads of households? I thought perhaps it could. The man I spoke to scoffed at me and said ‘no I don’t think so.’ Because of his position of power in that environment I did not argue back, I had already spent so much time trying to speak up for myself and perhaps even for women over those few days that I had no more words to say. I came away from those few days with a renewed sense of myself as a woman looking into a church that saw me as uncertain and possibly contaminating. Even though the church had initially seemed more open to the contribution of women because it allowed preaching and teaching and the leaders of my congregation did not handle me as if I were a temptress, this did not seem to me to continue across the network.

What then can be said about my own experiences of being a woman in Newfrontiers? In many ways it is a more liberating experience than that of other complementarian churches in the UK. I have a public voice, sometimes, I could occasionally speak and be heard in the wider church network. Those opportunities are less now and I often reflect that I am viewed as difficult, someone who complains too much. In contrast the women that I see in public spaces in Newfrontiers are more compliant with the complementarian message, they take on the accepted roles of being wives and mothers, they speak publicly about accepted subjects or they lead worship (which is acceptable to the church). I am occasionally invited to speak in Newfrontiers environments, but it is very rare now. If anything I am better known as a theologian now than I was in the days of regular invites, yet I am welcomed less in Newfrontiers. My family and I are part of a church community locally that we love and feel that we are loved in return. My husband remains an elder and the incongruity of his male eldership and my feminist theology is a regular source of lively conversation. The ambiguity I feel is about a church that both welcomes and uninvites women to the table of church leadership.

Appendix 2

Email for recruitment of participants

Experiences of the Holy Spirit for women in Newfrontiers

The aim of this study is to understand the spiritual experiences of women who are part of Newfrontiers congregations. The study will particularly focus upon descriptions made by the women of their encounters with the Holy Spirit, their spiritual practices both at home and at church and their life as a Christian woman. It is anticipated that this study will be concluded by January 2024. My intention with this work is to move the discussion about women in Newfrontiers away from complementarianism (male eldership) and address the gaps in knowledge that exist about the experience of women who are part of Newfrontiers and choose to remain so. I will be asking you about how you experience God in your daily life, the things that you do and the experiences you have had. I will ask you about specific things that relate to you as a woman and how you take that to God or how God has impacted those things. My work is designed to be a positive account of how God impacts our world. To hear the testimony of the experiences of women and describe them theologically as events that are real. I will also hear and take account of negative and painful experiences and write a full and detailed account of everything about the lives of women, as a real and accurate representation of the complexities of a life walked with God.

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be interviewed by Claire via Zoom, this will take approximately one hour. There will be one interview and a maximum of one follow up Zoom (also one hour). If you wish the transcripts of the interview will be sent to you for you to comment upon and correct.

During the course of the interview you are able to able to refuse to answer any questions at any time.

If you are interested in taking part in this research and contributing to the understanding of Newfrontiers then do please contact me at: claire_williams@live.co.uk. We can arrange a time to meet on zoom and I can answer any questions you might have.

Thank you in anticipation!

Claire

Claire Williams

BA Oxon | MA
PhD Candidate in Practical Theology
St Augustine's College of Theology and Durham University
Faculty of Theology

Interviews: Consent forms and Data information sheets

Consent Form

Project title: Experiences of the Holy Spirit for women in Newfrontiers

Researcher(s): Claire Williams

Department: Theology and Religion

Contact details: slmj65@durham.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Pete Ward and Alan Gregory

Supervisor contact details peter.ward@durham.ac.uk a.gregory@staugustinescollege.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 01/01/2021 and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I consent to being audio recorded / being video recorded / having my photo taken, and understand how recordings / photos will be used in research outputs.	
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, and other research outputs.	

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____ (NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) _____

Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Experiences of the Holy Spirit for women in Newfrontiers

Researcher(s): Claire Williams

Department: Theology

Contact details: slmj65@durham.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Pete Ward and Alan Gregory

Supervisor contact details: peter.ward@durham.ac.uk

a.gregory@staugustinescollege.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my PhD studies with Durham University and St Augustine's College of Theology

This study has received ethical approval from the Department of Theology and Religion of Durham University.

Before you decide whether to agree to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter/>

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to understand the spiritual experiences of women who are part of Newfrontiers congregations. The study will particularly focus upon descriptions made by the women of their encounters with the Holy Spirit, their spiritual practices both at home and at church and their life as a Christian woman. It is anticipated that this study will be concluded by January 2024.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you are a member of Newfrontiers church and regularly attend there. For the purposes of this study 'regularly' refers to one Sunday per month.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Your rights in relation to withdrawing any data that is identifiable to you are explained in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be interviewed by Claire via Zoom, this will take approximately one hour. There will be one interview and a maximum of one follow up Zoom (also one hour). If you wish the transcripts of the interview will be sent to you for you to comment upon and correct.

During the course of the interview you are able to refuse to answer any questions at any time.

Are there any potential risks involved?

During the interview you will be asked about potentially sensitive topics. These may include birth trauma, bereavement and wider questions around suffering. If you feel that this will act as a triggering conversation it is advisable for you not to take part.

Will my data be kept confidential?

All information obtained during the study will be kept confidential. If the data is published it will be entirely anonymous and will not be identifiable as yours. Quotes from the interviews will be used and permission sought for this.

Full details are included in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to the results of the project?

This project will be written up as a thesis for the PhD programme and will contain anonymised material from the interviews. It is possible that the results of this work will be published either as a book or as research articles for journals and possibly both. The data will not be shared for others to use in any form.

All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for 10 years after the completion of the PhD project (anticipated as January 2024). Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's [Complaints Process](#).

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

Privacy Notice



PART 1 – GENERIC PRIVACY NOTICE

Durham University has a responsibility under data protection legislation to provide individuals with information about how we process their personal data. We do this in a number of ways, one of which is the publication of privacy notices. Organisations variously call them a privacy statement, a fair processing notice or a privacy policy.

To ensure that we process your personal data fairly and lawfully we are required to inform you:

- Why we collect your data
- How it will be used
- Who it will be shared with

We will also explain what rights you have to control how we use your information and how to inform us about your wishes. Durham University will make the Privacy Notice available via the website and at the point we request personal data.

Our privacy notices comprise two parts – a generic part (ie common to all of our privacy notices) and a part tailored to the specific processing activity being undertaken.

Data Controller

The Data Controller is Durham University. If you would like more information about how the University uses your personal data, please see the University's [Information Governance webpages](#) or contact Information Governance Unit:

Telephone: (0191 33) 46246 or 46103

E-mail: information.governance@durham.ac.uk

Information Governance Unit also coordinate response to individuals asserting their rights under the legislation. Please contact the Unit in the first instance.

Data Protection Officer

The Data Protection Officer is responsible for advising the University on compliance with Data Protection legislation and monitoring its performance against it. If you have any concerns regarding the way in which the University is processing your personal data, please contact the Data Protection Officer:

Jennifer Sewel

University Secretary

Telephone: (0191 33) 46144

E-mail: university.secretary@durham.ac.uk

Your rights in relation to your personal data

Privacy notices and/or consent

You have the right to be provided with information about how and why we process your personal data. Where you have the choice to determine how your personal data will be used, we will ask you for consent. Where you do not have a choice (for example, where we have a legal obligation to process the personal data), we will provide you with a privacy notice. A privacy notice is a verbal or written statement that explains how we use personal data.

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Right to rectification

If you believe that personal data we hold about you is inaccurate, please contact us and we will investigate. You can also request that we complete any incomplete data.

Once we have determined what we are going to do, we will contact you to let you know.

Right to erasure

You can ask us to erase your personal data in any of the following circumstances:

- We no longer need the personal data for the purpose it was originally collected
- You withdraw your consent and there is no other legal basis for the processing
- You object to the processing and there are no overriding legitimate grounds for the processing
- The personal data have been unlawfully processed
- The personal data have to be erased for compliance with a legal obligation
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- The processing is unlawful and you want us to restrict processing rather than erase it
- We no longer need the data for the purpose we originally collected it but you need it in order to establish, exercise or defend a legal claim and
- You have objected to the processing and you want us to restrict processing until we determine whether our legitimate interests in processing the data override your objection.

Once we have determined how we propose to restrict processing of the data, we will contact you to discuss and, where possible, agree this with you.

Retention

The University keeps personal data for as long as it is needed for the purpose for which it was originally collected. Most of these time periods are set out in the [University Records Retention Schedule](#).

Making a complaint

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Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: [Information Commissioner's Office](#)

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Project Title: Experiences of the Holy Spirit for women in Newfrontiers

Type(s) of personal data collected and held by the researcher and method of collection:

Personal data will be collected through online interviews held on the Zoom platform. This will include gaining information about name, address, date of birth. It will include your views upon your experience of the Holy Spirit, your practices of your faith both at home and at church and your descriptions and views of life as a woman in Newfrontiers.

Lawful Basis

Under data protection legislation, we need to tell you the lawful basis we are relying on to process your data. The lawful basis we are relying on is public task: the processing is necessary for an activity being carried out as part of the University's public task, which is defined as teaching, learning and research.

For further information see

<https://durham.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/governance/dp/legalbasis/>

How personal data is stored:

All personal data will be held securely and strictly confidential to the researcher. You will be allocated an anonymous number for data collection. Information that identifies you will be kept separate from the anonymised data.

All personal data in electronic form will be stored on a password protected computer, and any hardcopies will be kept in locked storage. Data will not be available to anyone other than the researcher. The conversation will be recorded and stored on an encrypted device until it has been transcribed by the researcher. No-one else will have access to the recording, and it will be erased once the transcript has been completed.

How personal data is processed:

The data will be collected to analyse responses according to the criteria established in the PhD. It will be anonymised at the point of analysis. The recorded conversation will be transcribed by the researcher and personal information will be removed and anonymised. The original recording will be stored on a password encrypted computer.

Withdrawal of data

You can request withdrawal of your data until it has been fully anonymised. Once this has happened it will not be possible to identify you from any of the data we hold.

Who the researcher shares personal data with:

Please be aware that if you disclose information which indicates the potential for serious and immediate harm to yourself or others, the researcher may be obliged to breach confidentiality and report this to relevant authorities. This includes disclosure of child protection offences such as the physical or sexual abuse of minors, the physical abuse of vulnerable adults, money laundering, or other crimes covered by prevention of terrorism legislation. Where you disclose behaviour (by yourself or others) that is potentially illegal but does not present serious and immediate danger to others, the researcher will, where appropriate, signpost you to relevant services, but the information you provide will be kept confidential (unless you explicitly request otherwise).

How long personal data is held by the researcher:

Identifiable data will be retained for 1 year after which it will be deleted.

How to object to the processing of your personal data for this project:

If you have any concerns regarding the processing of your personal data, or you wish to withdraw your data from the project, contact Claire Williams: slmj65@durham.ac.uk or Pete Ward peter.ward@durham.ac.uk (supervisor)

(Optional) Changes to this privacy notice:

Include this section if relevant (e.g. if the study is taking place over an extended period of time) – state the frequency with which this notice will be reviewed, and how participants will be informed of any changes.

Further information:

Include a name e.g. lead researcher or supervisor and a contact email address

Participant observation: consent form, participant information sheet and privacy notice

Consent Form

Project title: Experiences of the Holy Spirit for women in Newfrontiers

Researcher(s): Claire Williams

Department: Theology and Religion

Contact details: slmj65@durham.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Pete Ward

Supervisor contact details peter.ward@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated May 2023 and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	

Participant's Signature_____ Date_____
(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)_____

Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Experiences of the Holy Spirit for women in Newfrontiers

Researcher(s): Claire Williams

Department: Theology

Contact details: slmj65@durham.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Pete Ward

Supervisor contact details: peter.ward@durham.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my PhD studies with Durham University.

This study has received ethical approval from the Department of Theology and Religion of Durham University.

Before you decide whether to agree to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter/>

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to understand the spiritual experiences of women who are part of Newfrontiers congregations. The study will particularly focus upon descriptions made by the women of their encounters with the Holy Spirit, their spiritual practices both at home and at church and their life as a Christian woman. It is anticipated that this study will be concluded by January 2024.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because your congregation is a member of Newfrontiers.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Your rights in relation to withdrawing any data that is identifiable to you are explained in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the study Claire will attend your church for two Sunday services. These may be concurrent weeks or may not.

Are there any potential risks involved?

There are no risks associated with this research

Will my data be kept confidential?

All information obtained during the study will be kept confidential. If the data is published it will be entirely anonymous and will not be identifiable as yours.

Full details are included in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to the results of the project?

This project will be written up as a thesis for the PhD programme. It is possible that the results of this work will be published either as a book or as research articles for journals and possibly both. The data will not be shared for others to use in any form.

All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for 10 years after the completion of the PhD project (anticipated as January 2024). Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's [Complaints Process](#).

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

Privacy Notice



PART 1 – GENERIC PRIVACY NOTICE

Durham University has a responsibility under data protection legislation to provide individuals with information about how we process their personal data. We do this in a number of ways, one of which is the publication of privacy notices. Organisations variously call them a privacy statement, a fair processing notice or a privacy policy.

To ensure that we process your personal data fairly and lawfully we are required to inform you:

- Why we collect your data
- How it will be used
- Who it will be shared with

We will also explain what rights you have to control how we use your information and how to inform us about your wishes. Durham University will make the Privacy Notice available via the website and at the point we request personal data.

Our privacy notices comprise two parts – a generic part (ie common to all of our privacy notices) and a part tailored to the specific processing activity being undertaken.

Data Controller

The Data Controller is Durham University. If you would like more information about how the University uses your personal data, please see the University's [Information Governance webpages](#) or contact Information Governance Unit:

Telephone: (0191 33) 46246 or 46103

E-mail: information.governance@durham.ac.uk

Information Governance Unit also coordinate response to individuals asserting their rights under the legislation. Please contact the Unit in the first instance.

Data Protection Officer

The Data Protection Officer is responsible for advising the University on compliance with Data Protection legislation and monitoring its performance against it. If you have any concerns regarding the way in which the University is processing your personal data, please contact the Data Protection Officer:

Jennifer Sewel
University Secretary
Telephone: (0191 33) 46144
E-mail: university.secretary@durham.ac.uk

Your rights in relation to your personal data

Privacy notices and/or consent

You have the right to be provided with information about how and why we process your personal data. Where you have the choice to determine how your personal data will be used, we will ask you for consent. Where you do not have a choice (for example, where we have a legal obligation to process the personal data), we will provide you with a privacy notice. A privacy notice is a verbal or written statement that explains how we use personal data.

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Right to rectification

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Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: Information Commissioner's Office

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Project Title: Experiences of the Holy Spirit for women in Newfrontiers

Type(s) of personal data collected and held by the researcher and method of collection:

Observations of church services will be made for research purposes. Personal data will not be collected as part of this element of the research.

Lawful Basis

Under data protection legislation, we need to tell you the lawful basis we are relying on to process your data. The lawful basis we are relying on is public task: the processing is necessary for an activity being carried out as part of the University's public task, which is defined as teaching, learning and research.

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The data will be collected to analyse according to the criteria established in the PhD. It will be anonymised at the point of analysis.

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Identifiable data will be retained for 1 year after which it will be deleted.

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If you have any concerns regarding the processing of your personal data, or you wish to withdraw your data from the project, contact Claire Williams: slmj65@durham.ac.uk or Pete Ward peter.ward@durham.ac.uk (supervisor)

Changes to this privacy notice:

This privacy notice will be reviewed once every six months. If your data is still identifiable you will be informed of changes to the privacy notice.

Further information:

Claire Williams: slmj65@durham.ac.uk or Pete Ward peter.ward@durham.ac.uk (supervisor)

Appendix 3

Code Map: Making Space

1. Unacceptability in the Church

1.1 Women haven't 'got a seat at the table' – restricted from leadership – 12/24 interviews mentioned complementarianism

- Taught seminars at Newday but was not prayed for or acknowledged by church elders – nobody from the church came to hear her.
- Elder's wife 'I haven't pursued a career path' but has worked for free for the church instead.
- Impression is that you need to be 'young, male and married' to be acceptable to church leaders who appoint other leaders
- One participant blames other women for not pursuing their vocations in leadership but still maintains that men should be in charge of churches. Unclear what sort of leadership she has in mind.
- Vocations to leadership pursued quietly, 'without making too much of a fuss about it' and feels 'a sense of hiddenness' that male colleagues don't understand.
- 'Newfrontiers won't release them' to leadership if they are women.
- Theology is for men to pursue, not women for one participant
- Complementarity is a 'hill to die on' for Newfrontiers – an issue that has become the main idea that identifies Newfrontiers

1.2 Intersection of race - All women who identified as minority ethnic said that race was a factor in their unacceptability

1.3 Gender as a dangerous influence

- Dance that distracts male worshippers
- 'I do have some male friends too' signifying that it is unusual/questioned
- Men must not hear a woman preach
- Unacceptable for having opinions and voicing them v. comparisons with women who don't do that.

1.4 Subversive groups – 'pushing some doors' as groups of women

- Also separate women's ministry groups

2. Towards acceptability in the Church

2.1 Women describing themselves as 'leaders' or 'in leadership'

- Women have roles on the 'Apostolic teams' that are senior to local church leaderships
- Women lead worship in churches and facilitate meetings, including 'hearing' prophetic words and discerning suitability
- One woman is recognised as 'a prophet' who has led the way for other women, however 'but when you're acknowledged in leadership as a woman, that's different to being acknowledged as, say, a pastor or prophet or maybe an evangelist or some other thing...'

2.2 Some churches do allow women to preach sermons

2.3 Interpretation of tongues, giving of prophecy, leading services – positions of responsibility in the church related to conveying the words of God or knowledge about God.

- Gifts as special knowledge ('reading' the room) that provides legitimacy and authority – e.g. prophetic picture given 'at the front' during church. '...and then I'll almost hear a voice over dialogue of what is going on here...how God is interpreting it'
- Ability to bring novel gifts – rapping in tongues

2.4 God does not support the unacceptability

- Following being ignored 'it was my voice that made those stars and in your life you're going to see my voice do things that take my breath away in the same way that the stars take yours away'
- God uses characteristics that are perceived as negative for service to other women – e.g. hypersensitivity

2.5 Change in Newfrontiers is anticipated 'waiting for Terry Virgo to die' for it to happen

- Women elders anticipated in the next 10 years

2.6 Complementarity is something to be ignored or for other things to be viewed as more important. Women who see complementarian church leadership as a problem remain in Newfrontiers for other reasons

1. Being welcomed by God: legitimacy and presence Making a place in the daily: God outside the church service

1.1 Empowered by the Holy Spirit

- Gifts of the Holy Spirit displayed in churches and amongst friends – called 'stepping out' relating to confidence and vocation.
- Speaking in tongues and prophetic speech as giving words when articulate speech is absent e.g. during times of suffering or when one woman was mute as a child because of trauma.
- Holy Spirit as initiator and sustainer of spiritual disciplines
- Prayer is described as instinctive and necessary conversation.
- Reports of seeing angels
- Special knowledge and insight of situations that is given by God – seeing angels and seeing demons and reading situations that give authority to describe and interpret them

1.2 God as intimate friend

- God involved in the minutiae – 'Okay God, do I need to take an umbrella today?'
- Women report 'conversations' with God multiple times a day in ordinary activities like walking, exercise, cooking. Conversations are personal, chatty, irreverent – examples of reported speech. Necessarily like this because of how women relate to one another and because of caring responsibilities 'I

think it's [daily quiet times] probably taught by men who don't feed the babies or get the kids breakfast...'

- Story of Newfrontiers worship in Ghana that is 'much more corporate' rather than individual but in the midst of that worship 'God totally sorts out your emotion and your rubbish and everything else'.
- God in a moment affects speech 'I remember, it must have been the shortest most desperate breath, because I asked God to help me, and literally in an instant those words went.' – concerning swearing
- God gives appropriate spiritual gifts based on knowledge of the person – e.g. prophetic words to a writer rather than pictures
- Reject spiritual practices that are seen to de-emphasise relationship with God – call them 'ritual' or 'religion'. Practices that are good if they become habitual will be changed. Or adapted practices – Celtic breath prayers – made to emphasise the intimate relationship 'I trust you'

1.3 God known outside of church

- Spiritual experiences in the home 'hotspots' where 'angels gather'
- Seeing angels as sign of God's presence/legitimation
- Physical experiences of the presence of God – shaking, crying, feelings in stomach, heat, smell (part of assurance during struggles) – idea of a 'gland' that recognises God
- Worship in the kitchen

1.4 God making spaces and giving vocations

- Founded a charity based on a prophetic experience

1.5 'Sacrifice' to know God better

- Food – 'do I want food more than I want God?'/ prayer as 'nourishing' – many women mention fasting or food
- Sleep – 'am I willing to sacrifice sleep in order to be with Jesus?'/TV
- Developing self-control
- 'I'm all in'

1.6 God known through identity as women

- Miscarriage/IVF
- Only women sharing gospel in 'the parlours'
- God understanding and using PMDD
- 'healed through childbirth'

2. Making a place in the story of God

2.1 The power of giving personal testimony

- Stories of childhood experiences of God focusing on actions that a child was unlikely to understand. Gifts from the Holy Spirit are described as age appropriate – e.g. see pictures rather than give prophecies or begin to develop a 'language' for tongues that initially is sounds and develops into words.

- Importance of knowing God from childhood – speaking to God as long as speaking to parents/family?
- Common account of speaking in tongues as a child before understanding what it is.

2.2 Expecting good endings to stories

- Stories of children who have rejected God, expecting that the ending will be good.
- Singleness maintained for God – got married in the end
- God named the miscarried child, in heaven now
- Story of baby born without IVF working

2.3 God is in the story of suffering

- Death of a child, God's continual presence
- Suffering draws women closer to God
- 'Track record with God'
- When life is hard – making use of nature to show the consistency of God over time 'the seasons tell a story'
- Miscarriage – 'It's okay, God will have me, it's okay'

2.4 Mapping lives onto the biblical story

- 'Laugh at the days to come' reported speech of God, verse about a woman applied to a situation of 'spiritual attack'

3. Making a place in the community of God

3.1 Friendships as 'deep' community

- Sacramental descriptions
- Unable to worship outside of 'body' of believers – but 'church' is not the key metaphor, rather 'friendships' and 'family'.
- Experiences during prayer times with friends 'touching heaven'
- Socialising outside of worshipful practice valued less – this type of socialising seen as precursor to worshipful type. Builds community in order to worship together.
- Covid showed that church as family is very good
- Friendships create spiritual development compared to church which although has an initial role is not where spiritual growth is described.

5.2 Friendships with people similar to friendships with God

5.3 Subversive groups

5.4 Friendships with other women

- Those who are also 'all in', similar vocations v. friendships with non-Christians – friendships with Christian women are formative

4. Making a place in the wider world

4.1 Illustrating difference with the world – being in Christ v. culture

- Not drinking and sleeping with multiple partners like friends were

- Media executive demonstrating speaking in tongues to celebrities who had never heard it before – illustrating her differences to popular culture
 - Attracted to church in the first place because of ‘the joy’ that congregants had that was different to her life experience until now.
 - God liberates people from the worst of the culture – e.g. sex workers
- 4.2 Defending the place against the spirits of the world – spiritual warfare
- Knowing a ‘reality’ that others can’t see. Warnings given by God of this reality.
 - Slipping into ‘enemy territory’
- 4.3 ‘We have non-Christian friends too’ – being in and out of the world
- Valuing non-Christian people but seeing them as different because they lack ‘understanding’.
 - Attempts made to stay connected to ‘the non-Christian world’
 - Church is a family that works alongside biological families.
- 6.4 ‘Not a feminist takeover’ – rejecting feminism, being supportive of women in Newfrontiers is not the same as feminism outside of Newfrontiers.

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