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CHAPTER 5

DISCURSIVE TENSIONS

Like romances, alliances are built on hopes and dreams – what might happen if certain opportunities are pursued. (Kanter, 1994, p.99)

Within the Catholic education organisation, various discourses circulate about women. These discourses have their origins in both the secular and the sacred realms. As an element of this case study, an analysis of such discourses is important because they create the potential for particular subjectivities which women may adopt or reject. These subjectivities may include career-mindedness. The discourses that are analysed as elements of the case study include, teaching as ministry and Church teaching on women from both the traditional patriarchal perspective and from a contemporary Christian feminist perspective. In addition, the secular discourse of gender equity is also analysed as an important organisational discourse for women in Catholic education.

The various discourses create organisational cultures which position women differently to men. This chapter explains elements of these discourses and explores the tensions between discourses that shape career outlook for women in Catholic education. Weedon (1987) suggests that, like it or not, individuals are shaped by institutions and are subject to the social meanings produced within the institutional discourses. Further, despite their best intentions, the extent to which individuals can bring about change within these institutions is questionable. Weedon describes individuals not as authors of change but as the agents of change.

Weedon states that change can either continue to “serve hegemonic interests” or can “challenge existing power relations” (1987, p.25). It follows that women’s identity formation and sense of agency is affected through positioning within particular discourses. However, power operates in a contradictory fashion. Women can feel both

powerful and powerless in different discursive spaces. Blackmore (1999) indicates that women are constituted by discourses but this does not mean they are determined by discourses: "Subjectivity conceptualises identity formation as an ongoing contradictory, precarious and complex process" (p.17). Discourses are central in producing shared meanings in institutions, but people negotiate these meanings. Within the case study organisation, I wanted to understand how particular women positioned themselves within particular organisational discourses. I wondered how women negotiated the contradictory discourses of equal opportunity that sets out new meanings for the transformation of gendered power relations and Church discourse on women. This latter discourse raises questions concerning the assumptions, ideas and definitions that dominate Church thinking and how women's' subjectivities may be formed in relation to these ideas.

Kanter's (1994) notion of the formation of alliances in the pursuit of opportunities for women to exercise power and act authoritatively is a helpful concept. Alliances are formed within social, political and religious contexts by women operating at the local and wider levels of society recognising and empowering the full dignity of women. Within Catholic education, alliances have been formed between women concerned with the sexist and andro-centric biases upon which the Catholic religious tradition is based and women interested in promoting gender justice within organisational structures.

Discursive shifts have occurred promoting different positions for women in Catholic education as a result of the alliances women have forged. These alliances have emerged through the promotion in public policy domains of gender equity. Gender equity is best recognised through the adoption of policies such as equal employment opportunity for women in the workforce. Furthermore, feminist scripture scholars have reclaimed women's place in the history of the Church. They have insisted on the use of

inclusive language in Church liturgy and have encouraged feminine naming of God in addition to the male prerogative in naming the deity. These discursive shifts impact at the ideational level - the level of the symbolic universe (Wainwright, 1999). The ideational level is intimately linked to the social and structural levels impacting on women's lives through the images, metaphors, stories, myths and language that support such levels. Feminist theology and feminist perspectives on the roles of women in society help to disrupt the narrow gender identities allocated by the Catholic Church to women. Traditional Catholic views of marriage and mothering or alternatively, the state of virginity within single or religious life presents as the extent of the subjectivities available to women within the church vision. However, the continued marginalisation within the Catholic Church of feminist theology and feminist scripture scholarship remains problematic for women seeking change in the Church.

A further tension exists in the fact that gender equity discourse represents a discursive shift within Catholic education that has not been adopted in the Catholic Church. This discourse is a product of the present, having its genesis in the political force brought to bear on public policy by feminist bureaucrats in Australia in the 1970's and 1980's. Tension also exists because the impact of gender equity policies in the workforce has not achieved what feminist activists in the beginning had hoped for. In the public arena gender equity is considered to be "at a moment of disjuncture" (Blackmore, 1999). There is a need to refocus gender equity policy from an emphasis on changing individual women to deal with male-dominated organisations, to one, which drives an impetus for changing systems and organisations. Nevertheless, these discursive incursions into organisational life provide a counter-hegemonic response to the sexist and androcentric mindset which is depicted in Catholic Church teaching on women. Such discourses promote the potential for full inclusion of women in the full

range of ministry in the Church. From the point of view of most of the women in the case study, however, the current perception of ministry as an expression of the teaching career in Catholic education, is a tenuous concept locked into a masculine identity.

Reflections on the Discourse of Ministry

Confusion Reigns

The interface of the sacred notion of teaching as ministry and the more secular concept of a professional career presents tensions within the Catholic education organisation which are described in the interview conducted with the Gender Equity Officer for the case study diocese. Her broad experience of Catholic education and the Catholic Church is informed by the several years she spent in religious life before leaving to marry. She has first-hand experience of the difficulties of transition back into teaching after several years out of the workforce devoting her time to work in the home and raising four children. The desire to take on other roles beyond classroom teaching within Catholic education as part of the experience of an organisational career was seen as an important personal agenda but not well supported within the organisation. The Gender Equity Officer saw ministry as another word for vocation.

Teaching as ministry is very much attuned to the notion of vocation that is defined in the Collins English Dictionary as: a special urge to a particular calling or career, especially a religious one. (IT7)

She saw confusion occurring in Catholic education as a result of different understandings of the notion of vocation. Vocation as a Church concept is understood as a special calling by God, whilst in the secular sense, it can be understood as a special aptitude for teaching. Vocation can be disempowering for women in the secular meaning because teaching is considered to be a maternal type activity and therefore, lacks professional status. An emphasis on ministry does not necessarily accommodate

the desires, aspirations and sense of personal autonomy of the individual woman in the way a professional career might. The following narrative demonstrates the tension the Gender Equity Officer saw in using ministry or vocation as an expression of career.

If teaching is a career, then it implies some sort of free choice, a voluntary commitment and an understanding that there are rules and regulations which govern the fulfilment of that career. The word 'career' sets in mind a journey, which will continually offer more challenges and provide more rewards. If I want to become more involved in the power area of the organisation, then I have a responsibility to equip myself with the skills and knowledge necessary for the role. A vocation however, implies that there is a set job to do and you have been chosen by an outside force to do it (called to be a teacher by God). If the organisation wishes to use you, then so be it. If they choose to ignore your contribution, then that is their prerogative. I would suggest that the Catholic Education Office is permeated with the old Thomistic thinking (based on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas) which sees that God controls everything and all we have to do is to find our predestined niche. (IT7)

The tension associated with the ministry/career discourse is a consequence of the organisation operating within two realms. On the one hand Catholic education creates, in the minds of teachers, expectations for career progression through the alignment of credentials with positions of added responsibility, creating hierarchical positions which are defined through increased power and/or responsibility and remuneration. On the other hand, teachers are seen by the organisation as responding to a strong sense of vocation, making themselves available to the organisation. Individuals are sometimes confused about how you can make career progress in the organisation. Is it a question of waiting to be chosen by the organisation or of actively seeking promoted positions? The social constraint under which a teacher negotiates a professional identity is given little attention in the organisation's career context.

There is a perceived lack of transparency in the recruitment process that contributes to such a position. The Director was described by the Gender Equity Officer as acting in a 'Godlike' fashion in appointing an individual to a particular career position. This was in response to a belief that other candidates for the position had the correct credentials but were overlooked despite the fact that the chosen candidate was known not to have the correct credentials specified for the position. The potential for disappointment is high if gaining credentials remains pivotal for preparation for senior positions but is ignored in the recruitment process. The employment procedures provide no recourse through either a grievance procedure or a formalised approach to giving feedback to candidates.

Ministry by Stealth

Defining teaching as a career suggests that individuals have some control over their working lives whereas ministry is associated with giving oneself over to the organisation with the possibility of forfeiting individual agency. The emphasis on ministry has the potential for a teacher's destiny to be placed in the hands of some grand puppetmaster often disguised as priests, bishops and their auxiliaries in Catholic education offices.

The Gender Equity Officer was able to develop a picture of the position of women through her work throughout the diocese in promulgating the Diocesan Affirmative Action Policy and collecting statistics for government reporting purposes. She also surveyed all teachers in the diocese concerning their understanding and experience of affirmative action in the workplace. Her views in summarising the responses coincide with those of Sampson (1987), who concluded in her study of the occupation of teaching in Australia, that men have a career while women teach. In providing statistics to demonstrate this proposition in the diocese, the Gender Equity Officer's study

indicated that the total percentage of men employed in Catholic schools 1997 was 18% of the total with the percentage of men in principal's positions being 48%. There was little concern expressed by teachers regarding these statistics. In her view, there exists an attitudinal barrier which she described as existing "as much within women as within men" that a career for a man is viewed as more important than a career for a woman because men are still seen "as the family breadwinner" (IT7).

The research gathered by the Gender Equity Officer also revealed generation differences within the organisation. In discussions with women in their fifties and sixties who had remained in the classroom in several cases, the Gender Equity Officer believed these women experienced a double burden which has impacted on their sense of not having a career in teaching. They began teaching in a system that historically relied on the voluntary labour of men and women religious and in limited cases, married women (often untrained) who were serving their parishes by teaching in the local Catholic school. This practice supported the notion that teaching was like mothering and teaching also fitted in well with family responsibilities. The virtues of motherhood coupled with the religious notion of the vocation of teaching have, according to the Gender Equity Officer, limited the aspirations of many women. In contrast, many young single women now expect that they will be able to access career advancement and combine this successfully with other lifestyle options such as parenting.

There are important issues for the organisation to address regarding women and careers according to the Gender Equity Officer. She sees the continued maintenance of a gender-segregated workforce as a growing concern as women are not applying for senior management roles in significant numbers. In many respects, women in the Catholic education system face the same issues that women in other organisations

grapple with. These issues include the notion of career commitment that is associated with masculine ideals of long hours and constant availability to the organisation which limits family priorities. In addition, an overt masculine culture of management persists. Ironically, the nature of this organisation, which is anchored within the Catholic Church, presents another context for considering the organisation from the perspective of women. Within its history, Catholic education has the example of women religious in positions of power and authority. Reclaiming their stories has the potential of both illustrating just how novel their lives as women actually were and of legitimising the natural sphere of women beyond the domesticity of the home.

If, as the Gender Equity Officer indicates, there is a state of confusion within the organisation, the relationship between teaching as ministry and the secular understanding of a career must be clarified. As Acker (1996) notes in considering the nature of teaching as work:

(T)eaching is a service performed in exchange for pay and employee benefits, . . . it is done in institutions under better or worse conditions . . . it has a career and opportunity structure (and) it has produced unions and federations to look after members' interests. (p.102)

The need to emphasise that “teachers are workers, teaching is work and the school is a workplace” (Connell, 1985, p.69) is in response to the pervasive conception of teaching as a calling and of teachers as adults who do what they do mostly because they care deeply about children. In the case of teachers in Catholic schools, one might add to this list the idea of the teacher as called by God in service to the mission of the Church.

The combined effect of these conceptualisations in shaping the occupational culture within the Catholic education organisation is an unspoken view of teaching as non-work. This is a result of teaching being associated with a perception of women engaged in natural, quasi-maternal caring as Acker (1996) points out and, the selfless giving of

oneself to ministry. Furthermore, there is a lack of acknowledgment of paid work as the means of satisfying life needs and providing intellectual challenge. If work is limited to a religiously inspired vocation, such needs are secondary to the contribution one makes to the Christian mission. There still exists a view that, for many women, teaching represents 'pin money' or it supplements the family income which is more likely to be provided by the male breadwinner. The fact that women may desire intellectual challenge is not considered. The congruence between career and ministry has not been tested.

If 'career' is understood to include, but to be more than, a set of opportunity and incentive structures, it is possible to see that the discourse of ministry is not antithetical to career. A career can be a path in life (Connell, 1985), or even a series of experiences in an institution (Acker, 1996). In religious and secular definitions there remains a need for definitions of career that will provide a better match with the realities of women's lives (Grant, 1989). If the notion of ministry is to accommodate the lives of women it must take account of women's career patterns and the current marginalisation of women within the malestream understanding of a career. The unresolved issue of the role of women in ministerial leadership in the Church continues to present a limited vision for women in leadership in Catholic education as well.

A woman in a senior leadership role who participated in this research expressed her preferred view of the ideal Catholic teacher:

For most people in schools now they know that their role is one of educational ministry within the Church and to do that well they have to be the best teachers they can be, they have to be gospel people and evangelistic in their work. (IT5)

This response, however, ignores the importance of workplace experiences. Within a Catholic organisation, these experiences may be influenced by the local Catholic Church context. Authority for Catholic schools is vested in the local diocesan Bishop

who must be satisfied that the staffing arrangements and employment policies and practices for Catholic schools will maintain the distinctiveness of these schools. The particular leanings of the Bishop of the day may be influenced by a conservative or reformist church paradigm (Green, 1995). The conservative paradigm operates primarily to maintain traditional hierarchical social structures and values. In the institutional Catholic Church it serves to legitimate, as divinely ordained, its hierarchical social organisation. The reformist paradigm, although reflecting hierarchical values, is influenced by existential philosophy and focuses on the maximisation of the potential of individuals through reforms in their attitudes and the way they relate to others.

Clarifying the influence of particular Church orientations within the case study diocese and the impact of such orientation on the position of women, brings an understanding of intentional agency afforded to women by the Church authorities and the potential for a shift in gender relations. Church orientations also have an influence on the use and abuse of power. Currently, tensions exist within the Catholic Church in Australia as the influence of the Church's civil service, the Roman Curia, has been seen to minimise the growth of the community model of Church. The Curia has promoted a preference for a return to a pre-Vatican institutional and hierarchical model of Church (McLaughlin 2000). Ministry, according to the present Curia refers to the ordained ministry of the male priesthood. Women within this perspective on ministry are still regarded as "unworthy to enter the 'holy sanctuary' (which) reinforces the attitude that women are less than men, are mere objects" (Coll, 1994, p.176).

In the midst of the struggle for pre-eminence of either the reformist Church paradigm or the emerging conservative revisionism, teachers in Catholic schools are employed within an organisational context which sees teaching as a religious cultural

norm based on the notion of ministry. For women, ministry presents an ambiguous and contradictory subjectivity.

Furtado (2000) provides two interesting perspectives on the linking of the work of the teacher with ministry. Firstly, he argues that the suggestion that teachers are ministers rather than workers presents a 'romantic view' of their roles, while abjectly ignoring the reality of working life for many teachers. Furthermore, the social justice teaching of the Church suggests that all work is or ought to be graced as an act of co-creation, not just the work of teachers in Catholic schools. Secondly, the emphasis on ministry and the almost exclusive formation in the ministry of teaching as a priority for professional development sponsored by the Catholic education authority can often account for deficiency of performance in other more professional areas.

Living with Patriarchy

Whilst as a basis for the analysis of the case study organisation, I cannot make generalisations about women as a collectivity, I have considered how individual women in this research recognise themselves within the Church discourse and go on to produce career-minded subjectivities. For some women the need to learn how to operate within the constraints of organisation is a response to the subordinate position of women. A woman in a very senior position in Catholic education indicated her need to learn to deal with the organisational reality. She showed both a sense of frustration with the institutional Church and a strategy for dealing with this frustration and a sense of hope presented this view in straightforward language:

My belief is that the official Church has no respect for women. I think women are seen very much as an appendage to the ordained male ministry and I think that women's opinions and women's place is second to absolutely anything else . . . so my response is to totally disregard so much of the hierarchical nonsense that goes on in the Church. Until we have more than just the rhetoric that this Pope goes on with which in some instances is just ridicule of women, we wont see any advance in

the position of women in the official Church. And the reality is that women are doing an awful lot about the Church and really creating the new Church unbeknown to the official Church. Women are attending to the things that are important. I think there is nothing greater than the care and education of children and until we recognise that bringing the gospel alive in the classroom, in the playground with the child at the centre is genuine church, then women's work is not going to be valued. The thing that I do when a barrier is put up is to find another way and I believe other women are doing that too. (IT5)

Whilst this woman has developed her own way of dealing with the Catholic Church, for other women there are issues associated with working for the Church which may be too compromising for the individual to begin to address. The question of personal assent to Church teachings is one such issue. Such questions are important when the Catholic school is potentially the only experience of the Catholic Church for many students. Teachers have an obligation to assist students to gain some understanding of the Church but may themselves hold a range of views about the Church which are not always in accord with the preferred Church teaching. The power of the laity to change the Church is ambiguous. Tensions associated with contentions by some that the Church should remain unchanged and, by others that it has changed too little do not find a platform for debate amongst clergy and laity in any formal sense. Power within the Catholic Church remains very centralised and hierarchical. For some Catholics, however, the decision to give intellectual assent to all Church teachings remains a personal choice. In this sense, individuals who remain in the Church maintain a sense of personal power. Within the employment context and in order to accomplish a career, however, there is the pressure to conform within the parameters of the religious organisation with its set rules and policies.

In terms of the understanding of a career in Catholic education as fitting within the discourse of ministry, women in senior administration positions and women who

blended their school lives with parish responsibilities were more aware of this interpretation of career than were classroom teachers. One explanation for this is that when people take on administrative roles, they must engage in religious and Catholic school studies. By studying, individuals come to know the language and understanding of the organisational slant on career. Women in senior positions have learnt the 'rules of the game' and articulate or reproduce the organisational views. The acceptance of the concept of ministry by teachers is still in an embryonic stage and in some cases, is simply not acknowledged. For those women who have an awareness of the relationship between ministry and teaching, this awareness was often tempered by discursive positioning of women as equal but different within Church discourse. For other participants in this research, ministry was a vague although benign concept when related to their teaching careers.

The responses of different women in the case study reveal a range of views to both the ideas of ministry and of professional career. In general it can be concluded that the women in the case study do not have a strong understanding of exactly what the organisational career context is or what it means in terms of internalising the notion of ministry. They did, however, express strong conviction for women being able to access positions of authority if they so desired and that the teaching career in general must acquire more value as a career of choice. Women questioned where and when Catholic education attempts to develop an understanding of how a professional career is important to women. Women were keen to have the organisation come to understand women's experiences, desires and expectations for career progression.

Career management processes, including career development options, were not seen as intentional elements of the organisation. Performance review, however, is practised and women in senior positions expressed some concerns about the process because it

overemphasised accountability at the expense of professional development. Various levels of accountability for principals appear to be ‘checked out and checked off’ and the outcomes are tied to limited tenure contracts. This does not contribute to career efficacy. As one woman principal said:

These requirements contribute to the eroding of the sense of trust and mutual obligation that ministry in Catholic education is meant to engender. I have never been given any training for my principalship by the organisation and yet they feel they can place me under this pressure. When I had my appraisal, I have never felt such scrutiny. I thought they might put up a booth in the shopping centre asking people to come and have a say about how I am as principal. I do not want to go through that again. If they can’t come up with a better process I’ll continue to express my disgust. I’d like to see priests appraised but it will never happen. (IT3)

Although ministry takes precedence over professional career in the understanding of the role of the teacher in the institutional rhetoric of Catholic education, in surveying the advertisements for various positions within the case study diocese, the word ‘ministry’ did not appear. A woman teacher expressed a degree of objection to the term ministry with the following statement: “It’s really ministry by stealth because I wasn’t trained as a minister, I was trained as a teacher. My qualification is in teaching, not in ministry” (FG4). From a gender perspective, ministry is culturally defined as a masculine enterprise. As an accepted concept in the mindset of teachers, my research suggests it remains an unexamined and often totally ignored concept.

From a feminist perspective, ministry remains linked with a clerical, masculine power structure, which understands relationships in terms of superiority and inferiority, power and powerlessness, domination and subordination. Ministry is also linked to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. The classical view of the teaching office of the Church has associated it with the magisterium, referring exclusively to the authority of the Pope and bishops. These were understood to possess a ‘different source of

knowledge' from the ordinary Christian, who had no teaching authority. In contrast to the vertical pattern of the classical model of the magisterium, the Second Vatican Council emphasised that all people of God are led by the spirit in the labour of deciphering authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the world (Stevens, 1991). Given the tensions within the various paradigms of Church seeking ascendancy and the ongoing struggle for women to be accepted as ordained ministers of the Catholic Church, the position of women in Catholic education remains ambiguous in regard to the concept of ministry. Women themselves need to be included in any dialogue concerning this concept:

Catholic schools must be all the more intentional in promoting a community of critique and agency among women, with the ironic hope that they will disrupt and transform the very social conditions which marginalise them and others in the Catholic school, the Catholic Church, and the field of education. (Lacey, 1996, p.269)

Assessing the Discursive Shift

One way that a community of critique in the Catholic Church has been made possible is through the work of feminist Christian scholars. The traditional discourses of the Catholic Church on women have been far from liberating but feminist interpretations have forged new understandings for improving women's place in the Church. It is important, therefore, to review the traditional Church discourse on women and the discursive shift that is made possible through the work of Christian feminist scholars. Women who choose to work within a Catholic Church organisation have to accommodate themselves within a patriarchal worldview, which does not accommodate a contemporary understanding of equality of the sexes. Elizabeth Johnson CSJ states that, as a result of a dualistic anthropology underpinning Church teaching, women are identified with their reproductive function, praised as virgins and mothers, and

cautioned against losing their femininity in the search for equality (cited in Leonard, 1995, p.v). Not every woman will want to join the priesthood but the impact on women's identity formation of the impenetrability of the 'stained glass ceiling' reinforces a theology of domination. The following section brings attention to the creation of a tradition in the Church that locates woman as the second sex, the lesser sex.

Discourse on Women in the Catholic Church

Women in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition

A great deal of the literature on women in the Church has focused on demonstrating how theological beliefs and practices have served to reinforce women's different and inferior position to men. Benedictine sister and feminist theologian, Joan Chittister (1983) describes how medieval Roman Catholic scholastics argued that:

Man by virtue of his life giving potential was the spirit, reason and power in the image of God, but woman was carnal, emotional and passive. Woman is secondary both in purpose (sex) and material (body). (p.2)

Chittister associates this view to 'false anthropology' that she links to the false biology held by some primitive societies and later used within Church teaching. Early Church scholars saw the seed (semen) being implanted in the soil (woman's body) by the man. The woman appeared to contribute nothing but the environment in which the man's life could reproduce itself. Hence the woman was inferior (cited in McLay, 1989, p.5). This version of anthropology was first developed by the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, who postulated the view that the man's semen gave human form (spirit or soul) and the woman gave matter or body. Spirit was seen as much superior to matter. Matter was considered irrational whilst spirit was rational. The medieval Roman Catholic scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas built on this dichotomy between matter

and spirit, seeing the masculine as closest to God. This view was expressed as, “Man was the one who gave spirit. God was one indivisible spirit. Thus the male became the norm. Women were subordinate and dangerous as a source of carnal temptation” (McLay, 1989, p.5).

The Catholic Church has taken an essentialist understanding of ‘woman’ as the basic model for women in the Catholic world. Even though biology has long since verified the life-giving role of the ovum, and women are now seen as intellectually competent and able to participate in a range of working roles, in the teachings of the Catholic Church, a ‘theology of limitations’ still prevails. Strongly patriarchal images of women have been “handed down from books such as the Old Testament where woman was said to have been created not as a being in her own right, but simply as Adam’s helpmate and consoler” (Turner, 1992, p.321). More importantly, Eve enabled Adam to have descendants. Notwithstanding this procreative importance, in the Judaeo-Christian framework woman was also responsible for the fall of the human race and was to bear this shame for all ages. As a consequence, she was to be dominated by man. In one of several admonitions toward women, Tertullian, a fourth century theologian, makes it clear how the early Church regarded women:

And do you not know that each of you is Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the Devil’s gateway: you are the unsealer of that tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You so easily destroyed God’s image, man. On account of your desert, that is, death, even the Son of God has to die. (as cited in Smith, 1989, p.52)

Eve has provided the role model of woman as temptress and seductress and manipulator of men. The other role model for women in the Catholic Church is Mary the mother of God. The Church has portrayed Mary as humble, submissive and serving

as a model to women. This model is quite evident in the Church's portrayal of Mary as Our Lady of Fatima which is:

. . . evidence of how the institutional church would like women to be: narrow shoulders indicate a lack of strength, her neck is meekly inclined to accept whatever might come her way, her hands are joined in prayer and her slight boyish figure, merely glimpsed through an enveloping robe, never hints of womanly curves. She presents an anaemic, lifeless image, totally and hopelessly irrelevant to young women in the 1990's. And the Church, stressing that this is a Virgin Mother, wants Catholic women to imitate the Mary they depict. (Turner, 1992, p.321)

The image of the virgin is a hugely significant Christian image and in the case of Mary, she is accorded the highest status. This status, however, does not equate to a celebration of female power, but more to the point, denies women power because this masculine image of the 'good woman' falls within acceptable parameters which do not pose a threat to men. American novelist Mary Gordon (1982), explains her view on the need for women of earlier Catholic generations to reject the limitations on women's identity within the narrow range of gender stereotypes promoted in the Catholic Church most potently in the image of the Virgin Mary: Gordon explains:

For women like me, it was necessary to reject the image of Mary in order to hold onto the fragile hope of intellectual achievement, independence of identity, and sexual fulfilment. Yet we were offered no alternative to this Marion image; hence we were denied a potent female image whose application was universal. (1982, p.179)

Mary's perpetual virginity as espoused in Church literature denies sex its natural function even within marriage and has left sexuality mired in a strictly heterosexual mindset with the mists of disgust and loathing of the sexual act still clinging. Whilst emergent feminist theological thinking has challenged these attitudes, there is still no real acceptance of such feminist views leaving one to think that the roles of males and

females as delineated in the scriptures should be seen as immutable. Being woman in the literature of the Catholic Church is associated with flesh, the emotions and the mutable on the one hand and with the ideal of the fragile, pure and conforming on the other (Carr, 1988). The heavy cultural baggage of being gendered is magnified by the dominant Catholic-Christian religious tradition. The superior position of being male is confirmed.

Contemporary Church Teaching on Women

Throughout the last 100 years, the various Popes of this era have spoken on the issue of women about forty times (Leonard, 1995). There is an important and recurring theme in the teachings of the Church in regard to women: women should not be exploited in the workplace, by political systems, or in the home. The special status of women which is linked to an ongoing paternalism in Church teaching is notable: “Women have special status because of their ‘feminine nature’ and their appropriate roles are as homemaker, wife and mother. Virginitly in the consecrated life is the highest calling that a woman can pursue” (Leonard, 1995, p.10). There are several advances in the present papal teaching that contrast with earlier pronouncements on women. Women who enter into public and political life are praised and supported and the single woman who is not in consecrated life attracts special attention.

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical Mulieris Dignitatem (1988), which translated means On the Dignity of Women, represents his personal meditation on the theological and scriptural foundations of an understanding of women in relation to men. This document fuses together the two separate areas prominent in papal teaching on women, mariological teaching based upon papal pronouncements on Mary the Mother of God and Catholic social teaching which includes pronouncements on moral teaching as this relates to marriage and personal formation (Leonard, 1995).

The themes within this teaching about Mary as exemplar of virginity, motherhood and femininity, are returned to by Pope John Paul II in the papal encyclical, In Communion of Love: Women Teachers of Peace (1995). This encyclical restates previous assumptions about women's call to 'higher things' through their vocation as virgins and mothers. This invitation to become teachers of peace, directed particularly to women, is based on a realisation that, to them, God 'entrusts the human being in a special way.' The encyclical, however, is not to be understood in an exclusive sense, but rather according to the logic of the complementary roles present in the common vocation to love, which calls men and women to seek peace with one accord and to work together in building it. The document re-states the emphasised heterosexual bias of the Catholic Church with the view that man and woman are made for each other although this does not mean that God created them incomplete. God created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be a 'helpmate' to the other, for they are equal as persons ('bone of my bones,' as expressed in the book of Genesis) and complementary as masculine and feminine. Reciprocity and complementarity are the two fundamental characteristics of the human couple. In an ambiguous twist, the encyclical promotes women's public role:

When women are able fully to share their gifts with the whole community, the very way in which society understands and organises itself is improved and comes to reflect in a better way the substantial unity of the human family. Here we see the most important condition for the consolidation of authentic peace. The growing presence of women in social, economic and political life at the local, national and international levels is thus a very positive development. Women have a full right to become actively involved in all areas of public life, and this right must be affirmed and guaranteed, also, where necessary, through appropriate legislation. This acknowledgment of the public role of women should not however detract from their unique role within the family. Here their contribution to the welfare and progress of society, even if its importance is not sufficiently appreciated, is truly incalculable.

In this regard I will continue to ask that more decisive steps be taken in order to recognise and promote this very important reality. (p.3)

The power of the woman to save the world from ruin through devotion to family and home is an ironic twist on the more traditional understanding of the 'saviour'. Although such an understanding of the role of women in society insists on the equality of nature between men and women, the dualism apparent in defining the distinctiveness of the public and private spheres in which women operate, limits the application of equality of social roles. The notion of a career woman remains an anathema.

Given the paucity of thinking by the Catholic Church about men's roles in parenting and in family life by the Catholic Church, women may be left wondering what changes the clergy have made in their understanding of contemporary family life. At least some in the clergy would have changed their thinking minimally from the views expressed by Archbishop James Duhig who, in 1953, instructed women on the preferred Church model of 'the good Catholic woman':

I have often said to girls at school that their first resolution and one which they should never abandon ought to be not 'I will be a writer' or enter this or that profession, but 'I will be a good woman' ... It is only when the flower of young womanhood is fading in them and their popularity has begun to wane that many of them begin to realise the loss of precious opportunities that came and that have passed probably never to return. (cited in Turner, 1992, p.323)

In addition to such admonitions, during this period girls in Australian Catholic schools were subjected to the teachings of material such as Christian Courtesy for Catholic Girls (Sisters of St. Joseph, 1956). This material taught amongst other things that the blame for the decay of home life, as well as the only hope of reform for that evil, rests with women. In addition the responsibility for the domestic sphere was clearly placed with the woman. Any girl who intended to marry was obliged, 'in

justice,' to equip herself to contribute to the happiness of her new home by demonstrating self-sacrifice, patience and amiability, as well as developing the requisite knowledge of cooking and household affairs.

Catholic women have also assisted in perpetuating a model of 'woman' limited to pursuing home and family responsibilities. Turner (1992) quotes the words of Catherine Kaye (1953) who wrote a weekly feature for a small, unnamed newspaper:

Women should never be put in a position of public authority . . . Women in any position of authority are tougher than men . . . Whether you want to admit it or not, a woman is ruled by her emotions. I don't care who she is or what she is, I don't care how many academic qualifications she's stacked up, she is a feeling rather than a thinking being . . . she cant help it, and she shouldn't want to. If that's the way God made her, He must have had good reason for it . . . It does, to a great extent, unfit her for any other career except the one for which she is designed, and those allied careers which make full use of her femininity . . . the man really is, and should be, the head of the house . . . there has to be a final authority in all things, and God just didn't give it to women. (p.324)

Whilst it can be said that these views are no longer relevant, it must be acknowledged that many of the priests and bishops today have come from this tradition and may not necessarily have taken a feminist perspective into account. The priesthood today is inhabited by mostly ageing priests. There are few if any young priests or seminarians in the Catholic Church in Australia and none from the case study diocese. Most of the priests who still work in parishes (and who have exclusive authority within a Catholic school by virtue of Canon law) in the case study diocese, studied in seminaries which promoted those views expressed by Archbishop Duhig.

The formation of Catholic priests in their seminarian studies indicates the promulgation of a view of women amongst other more maternal views, as dangerous, able to lead one into sin, and hence to be kept under control. This position is presented

by ex-Catholic priest Michael Costigan (1977), on his experience as a seminarian from 1949 –1956:

The seminary world that I knew was essentially a segregated male world and that, as far as we were concerned, women were the excluded half of the human race. They were ineligible for the priesthood; they could never be admitted to the clerical 'club'; and because they were seen as a danger to the vocation of seminarians and priests, it was necessary to keep them at a safe distance. (p.4)

Costigan explains that the only women above suspicion for some priests were religious women:

The serving communities of Sisters had another function in seminaries besides those of cooks, cleaners, infirmarians, and spiritual intermediaries. They were living demonstrations of a particular role which we readily acknowledged as wholly laudable, appropriate and belonging *ex natura sua* to consecrated female members of the church: the humble, hidden service of Christ in the person of his chosen followers (ourselves). (p.5)

In Costigan's view, it was not surprising then that young priests took it for granted that the natural role of the Catholic women who were not consecrated virgins was to be house-bound mothers, preferably of large families. And among Catholic mothers, special honour was due to those with a priest in their offspring.

There was no halfway mark. Uncloistered spinsterhood usually gave rise to a suspicion of selfishness ... the concept of an unmarried 'career woman' was treated as a little bizarre. (p.9)

Beneath these ideas of the model woman Costigan reveals:

What seemed a pedestal...was in truth a footstool, for the system made it clear enough that women were regarded as its most dangerous threat, that they were not to be trusted and that as far as possible their company was to be avoided. (p.9)

In reflecting on Michael Costigan's words, I was reminded of a conversation I had with

an elderly priest in the case study diocese, who lamented the change from a time gone by when priests spent all of Sunday evening in training to overcome any sexual desires that may surface. Women were to be kept at bay and out of the minds of priests. Costigan's views provide an insight into the approach to sexuality within the Catholic Church. A woman's true destiny is virginity or motherhood. Any other lifestyle or sexual preference taints her as suspicious. The diocese in the case study employs many women who are of an age that suggests they grew up in the Church described by Costigan. For one of these women, aged fifty-six, the process of socialisation was undeniable:

Being brought up a Catholic meant I knew exactly what a good girl did and what a bad girl did! I knew the rules and tried hard to conform because I honestly believed that my own feelings and views were secondary to those who knew, like the nuns and priests. I've finally come to realise they know less than I do about the big things in life like making a living and bringing up kids. (FG4)

Whilst there are still Catholic women who accept what has been taught by the Church, there are other Catholic women who resist the denigrating and restrictive elements of these teachings. Along with women in secular life, Catholic women have been emboldened by the demands for women's rights made prominent through the Women's Movement. For another woman research participant, fear of repercussions either 'in this life or the next', is no longer a shackle preventing women speaking out for change:

I think the Church is changing because women have changed. We've finally got over the hurdle of damnation if we err and that's brought some freedom but in a way that insists we take personal responsibility for our words and actions and that means we have to think carefully about issues, we have to find things out and make decisions. I don't think women have had to make big decisions in the past especially with the Church because all the thinking was done for you. I'm really

supporting women's ordination because I think it will make the Church a better institution and I think it's an issue I should be able to speak freely about in my school and I do but in some other schools I doubt that I could. (IT3)

Accustomed to some measure of progress in the secular world, women in the Catholic Church are claiming their own voice and their own authority (Wainwright, 1997). The case study revealed that, in some cases, some women are simply rejecting outright, the Church's insistent clinging to a discredited paradigm, which they see as based on an inappropriate theological anthropology of essentialism and duality.

A lot of what the Church is on about is quite irrelevant today. I find the whole attitude towards women appalling. Women are still seen as less than men because it is still so very patriarchal. (FG1)

The official Catholic Church, however, has not as yet recognised the views of women seeking change to the male, clerical and hierarchical structure, nor has it incorporated feminist theology into its teachings. "To do so would produce a salutary examination of its traditions and outlook, which for centuries, have been based on a patriarchal and hierarchical structure" (Turner, 1992, p.334). Sister Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ states that the theological anthropology favoured by the institutional church continues to:

... preserve the custom of male rule, a dualistic anthropology of complementarity in which sexual difference becomes elevated to an ontological norm dividing human beings into two separate types. Women are cast as polar opposites to men and the differences between them are maximised. (cited in Leonard, 1995, p. v)

Whilst Pope John Paul II has affirmed women and men as equal in their human dignity, he holds fast to the distinctive qualities the Church has defined for women's nature. Women continue to be identified by their biological functions, to be burdened

with upholding the moral order of society and to have their femininity romanticised as the essence of their 'special nature'. These views are very much attuned to those of Archbishop Duhig of the 1950's era. Women, it seems, are so exalted by papal decree that they are almost 'too good' to get involved in the messiness of public life. This gendered stereotyping inevitably privileges men in terms of psychological and political power and therefore perpetuates discrimination as this applies to equality of social roles for women.

The idea of being an ambitious and successful career woman, with the possibility of being seen as an intelligent, articulate and even 'a hard-nosed executive officer', seems out of place in the Church view of a woman's role. Being a teacher, however, complies more readily with the maternal ethos of Church teaching on women. But this vision of the teacher is a far cry from the image of an intelligent, dedicated, well-educated and skilled professional. This professional teacher is also appropriately remunerated and valued by the community for the significance of the task they perform and whose human, spiritual and professional values will match the dignity of the career they have chosen to follow (McNamara, 1998). The teacher of the new millennium is described by Seddon (1999) as a self-managing teaching professional for the learning society who recognises that learning may occur in new spaces and places. Teachers are now knowledge workers in the information economy, linking learning work and organisational development in a local and global world.

Christian Feminist Critique

Women in the Catholic Church have been culturally oppressed through the perpetuation of images and myths that for many women today seem incongruous. The Judaeo-Christian tradition has contributed to the creation of the big gender myths of separate public and private spheres and the male sense of superiority upon which

patriarchy is based. The impact of Church teaching on women has been to naturalise the contradictory existences of men and women. Women, however, have become adept at managing these myths. Feminist research has openly challenged patriarchal discourses and their ways of omitting or devaluing the female voice (Schneiders, 1990; Winter, Lummis & Stokes, 1995). It also questions what causes gender relations to change over time, how gender relations are constituted and sustained in people's lives and how meanings are created about masculinity and femininity.

Christian feminist critique through feminist theologising continues to emerge as an analytical system that can deconstruct the myths about women in the Catholic religious tradition. Engaging the ideological terms through which the myths were constructed helps to bring about an understanding of the interpretive posture of the patriarchy inherent in clericalism. Clerics control scriptural and philosophical texts and govern the choices of principles which ground decision-making about the place of women in the Church. Feminist theologies allow a rethinking and renaming of beliefs and practices in more gender-sensitive terms. This is being achieved in various ways and in the process has brought different feminist perspectives into the debate (O'Toole, 1995). Feminist theology seeks to reformulate the dualist and dialectic paradigms that have governed Church teachings. "It demands both the transformation of individual lives and commitment to the transformation of the world" (Coll, 1994, p.191).

The influence of such feminist leanings in the case study diocese can be found in examples of prayer and liturgy prepared by teachers in school which is careful to use both masculine and feminine images of the deity and changes the traditional exclusive Church language to inclusive language. There are also women's spirituality groups. In addition, the diocese has invited several women religious theologians to provide a feminist perspective on issues, most recently being the naming of God and the

participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. The Australian Catholic University offers courses in feminist perspectives on the Catholic Church. These initiatives help to create a sense of inclusiveness for women. It has also contributed to creating feelings of worthiness of women in an organisation in which women's contribution to the tradition of the Catholic religion has not been fairly or competently recorded throughout its history.

Discourse on Gender Equity

A Discourse of Hope

Within the Catholic education organisation, the discourse of gender equity sits well with the discursive influence of feminist theologising. Together, these discourses are part of the many discursive influences on women's subjectivities which ultimately assists each woman to construct a unique understanding of career within the constraints of the Catholic organisational career context and other personal lifestream issues.

As a Church organisation, Catholic education claims social justice as a hallmark of its identity. This is revealed through the organisation showing special concern for, and understanding of the uniqueness of each person, the living out of gospel values of hope, love, justice and freedom and commitment to a prophetic role in society (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 1997). Gender equity is encompassed within this social justice framework and is defined as:

A state of fairness or impartiality where all women and men are equally valued and given equal opportunities to develop to their full potential. Gender equity fosters genuine equality, dignity and freedom of choice. (p.1)

Social justice principles have traditionally applied more to the role of Catholic education in such issues as peace and justice, the education of girls and the environment than with issues such as the different positions of men and women employed within the organisation. This situation changed with the passing of the Affirmative Action (Equal

Employment Opportunity for Women) Act in Australia in 1986. Catholic employers were originally exempt from the provisions of this Commonwealth legislation, but subsequent amendments to the Act, passed through Parliament in December 1992, required all employers with over one hundred employees to undertake an Affirmative Action program and submit an Annual Report to the Affirmative Action Agency. The case study diocese was required to comply with the legislation. In two consecutive years it was awarded best practice recognition which in turn meant reporting was not required for the year following the award.

In response to the legislation, there was a concerted effort to give serious consideration to gender equity within the policy development processes across the various arenas of the Catholic education organisation. The National Catholic Education Commission published a statement titled Towards Gender Equity in Catholic Education (1997); the Queensland Catholic Education Commission published a Framework for the Development and Implementation of Gender Equity Policy (1997); and, the case study diocese developed a policy on Affirmative Action for Women (1997). This policy states that “the organisation has a responsibility to ensure that women employees are not disadvantaged because of gender”. As such, several strategies are listed to address any inequities identified. These strategies include:

- changing workplace culture and structures to guarantee that women are as genuinely able as their male counterparts to develop their abilities and aptitudes;
- fostering a positive, inclusive work environment in which sexual harassment, discrimination and dismissal of the issue as trivial are not tolerated;
- reviewing procedures for appointment and promotion to positions of leadership to ensure that such appointments are based entirely on merit, skills and qualifications, and on commitment to the ideals of Catholic education; and

- providing in-service to interview panels at school and system level on the principles and practices of Affirmative Action.

To comply with the legislation, employers were required to report on the composition of the workforce with particular emphasis on identifying the various positions held by women and men and overcoming notable gender stratification in subsequent years. As an incentive, the Australian Government provided both the threat of public disclosure of companies and organisations within which women were notably disadvantaged or, alternatively, the reward of best practice recognition. It is notable that the case study diocese received two best practice awards during the life of this legislation. The Affirmative Action (Equal Employment for Women) Act was replaced in 1999 by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act. This Act is seen as less punitive than the previous Act. It has the potential to improve workplace conditions through the requirement on organisations to develop, implement and report on workplace programs, but it remains to be seen what impact it will have on improving the position of women generally and especially those in female-dominated industries.

Establishing Structures to Implement Gender Equity

In order that policy text could be interpreted into meaningful activity, in the case study diocese, the Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Committee was established. This committee began in an inauspicious way in 1993 under the title of Diocesan Affirmative Action Committee with the role of collecting data for reporting to government. With a new title, women in the case study diocese now see the Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Committee as an essential structure for the organisation. In the first instance, the committee had the status of a sub-committee of the Diocesan Staffing Committee and it seemed that equal opportunity policy was to be the conceptual heading under which all women's issues in

the organisation were to fall. Because of the concerted efforts of the committee and strong leadership from the Gender Equity Officer working in a role that was and remains paid on a very part-time basis but requires many hours of effort, the committee was given its own identity as a Standing Committee of the diocese. The committee still has major responsibility for reporting to the government on the composition of the workforce but has expanded its agenda in response to the employment matters listed under the new Act. These matters include:

- the recruitment procedure and selection criteria, appointment and engagement in the organisational workplace;
- the promotion, transfer and termination of employment;
- training and development in all organisational positions;
- work organisation;
- conditions of service;
- arrangements for dealing with sex-based harassment; and
- arrangements for dealing with pregnancy and employees who are breastfeeding their children.

The committee has taken as its most pressing concern, the awareness raising of women and men in the organisation of the legislation and the diocesan policy on Equal Employment Opportunity for Women. Such awareness raising has been accomplished through innovative communication strategies such as attaching an information brochure and questionnaire to every teacher's pay-slip. This brochure and questionnaire was concerned with the implementation of the diocesan policy on Affirmative Action for women. As a strategy to empower women, the committee has encouraged face-to-face gatherings. A forum was organised in 1997 for women employed in any position in the Catholic Education Office at which issues associated with women and their careers

were prioritised and used as the basis for the shaping diocesan policies and encouraging change in schools. This was followed by a conference titled Celebrating Women in Catholic Education, which was held early in 2000 to which women in every position in the organisation were invited. Eighty women attended with representation from teaching and non-teaching staff.

The impact of such gatherings is not designed to change the organisational culture per se but is more to do with raising the expectations of women and their awareness of structural change that has impacted both positively and negatively for women. The conference provided knowledge of issues across a broad range of topics pertinent to women's lifestream including financial planning and superannuation, feminist perspectives on scripture, career planning and health issues relevant to the teaching workplace. Ultimately, the committee hopes to contribute to building an inclusive organisational culture in which women feel they are as empowered as men to speak up, to have their demands heard and have change instigated where this is desirable and possible within the resource constraints of the organisation or individual school. The establishment of 'communities of practice' (Blackmore, 1999), combining the skills and talents of those charged with leading the organisation and of women themselves, is considered the way to establish an inclusive organisational culture.

Equity as an Organisational Responsibility

Gender equity discourse in all sectors of the Catholic education organisation has focused more heavily on the individual than on the organisation. It has, however, created a sense of the discursive gaps that can be exploited within organisational discursive structures including enterprise bargaining, career management policies and workplace conditions. In addition, the promotion of a Christian feminist critique of the Catholic religious tradition has received an impetus through such organisational

critique. In this sense the discourse has become an organisational tool for women in the on-going transformation and re-imagining of organisation to establish processes of inclusion rather than exclusion. This may lead to new ways of understanding the intersection between the personal and the organisational.

Organisations construct their own meanings, activities and cultures rather than simply responding to an external environment. One particularly important rendering of this point is that organisational inequalities are at least in part the result of organisational processes and are not simply derived from wider economic and social environment (Halford, et al., 1996). The need for Catholic education authorities to consider the issues, which contribute to the creation of a gender-blind organisational culture was raised with senior personnel, interviewed for this case study. Whilst there was strong support for equity from both the women and the men who were interviewed, the idea of a gendered organisation was a new concept. The total career context as a gendered cultural artefact of the organisation was an unexamined issue.

Women individually and collectively have continued to exploit discursive gaps. This can be observed in the changing understanding of women taking on leadership roles in the case study diocese. In one case, the woman in question insisting that part-time arrangements exist for senior positions changed the home-workplace nexus. This required a disruption of the gendered logic which sees senior administration only being possible from a person who is available and committed all day, every day. The introduction of family-friendly policies in the form of job sharing is a direct result of seeing the different experiences, responsibilities and obligations of men and women as being of relevance to the organisation. Single and childfree married women also have a vested interest in changing the gendered logic of organisations in that they must still confront and cope with domestic self-maintenance, time and role pressures (Poole &

Langan-Fox, 1997). What is clear is that an organisation cannot treat employees identically within a workplace strategy that promotes equity. Issues surrounding the interconnection between work and family roles will continue to contribute to women's career orientations, success and life satisfaction over the life course according to Poole and Langan-Fox (1997). These lifestream issues, however, are only part of the reassessment of the nature of career and organisations that gender equity reform has begun to address.

Some of the issues that remain on the agenda of gender equity reform include addressing any barriers to effective participation by women within the organisation. These barriers are associated with issues such as the marginalisation of teachers to organisational decision-making, the lack of professional development resources for gender equity reform, the dynamics of recruitment and selection processes, the age factor, the lack of female mentors, and continuing narrow community perceptions about women in leadership roles. Blackmore (1999) highlights the need for constant vigilance in dealing with the discursive cultural practices of organisations. Such practices continue to position women as lesser, powerless and undervalued particularly in regard to women accessing leadership positions. Within the case study diocese, gender equity has a focus through the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace committee. The committee agenda includes looking specifically at ensuring women are encouraged to apply for senior administration positions, selection panels are gender balanced and processes are not discriminatory, the development of sexual harassment policies in schools and the provision of opportunities for job-sharing.

An important focus for gender equity reform is the need to deal with resistance to such reform. Blackmore (1999) states:

(I)n times of scarcity and the radical restructuring of the social, economic and political relations due to economic globalisation and cultural uncertainty, new

opportunities for resistance to gender equity and social transformation of gender relations arise. (p.4).

In recent times, equity for women has been re-conceptualised as individual choice within the marketplace as opposed to affirmative action and quotas for employment. This means inequitable power relations are naturalised as market forces at work. Ironically for women in Catholic education, the interventionist strategies of the State in the form of legislative requirements associated with the Sex-Discrimination Act and public policy on Equal Opportunity in Employment have provided them with a sense of real justice. This is in contrast to the Catholic Church, which promotes itself as committed to social justice but has lagged behind the secular society in promoting equity for women. This position was made abundantly clear in Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus (Macdonald et al., 1999). This report states in the summary that “a policy of non-discrimination between men and women in the Church leadership would represent ‘no more than catching up with what is recognised, and indeed lawful, in other fields of human endeavour’ ” (p. 388). Within both the secular and the sacred arenas, gender equity reform contributes to an instability of gender relations as power is wielded and resisted by women and by men. Women can overcome their inarticulacy in the organisational context.

The inarticulacy of women in Catholic education has particular significance. Women still feel the “dead weight of the (Catholic Church) hierarchy’s frozen mythology about women” and, any signs of “initiative, energy, confidence and intelligence can be interpreted as disloyalty to the Church by the clergy” (Kennedy, 1985, p.233). The appropriation of the gender equity discourse by women in Catholic education has created a space for them to develop a language to articulate an understanding of their place in the organisation. Through the process of articulation,

women can address the emotional and intellectual elements of their career ambitions and needs to achieve career success.

The Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Committee is seen as the vehicle for channelling the views of women to the Director concerning their place in the organisation and how this might be changed for the better. The committee is also seen as being able to create awareness in women within the organisation in order that they may be co-opted to support initiatives that may help create an inclusive organisational culture. A practical example of co-option was the support expressed by women past the age of childbearing to have paid maternity leave introduced which was achieved in 1998 through the process of enterprise bargaining. Six weeks paid maternity leave is now the standard. A further issue yet to be resolved by the committee concerns the mandated period of leave prior to confinement that the case study diocese currently requires. The organisation requires the maximum six weeks leave to be taken whilst there is room within the Family Leave Act for this period to be reduced. Since this is unpaid leave, some women consider the length of the mandated leave period extreme. The committee invited women in the case study diocese to assist in developing the agenda for further action.

Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) state that “(t)o achieve better choices and outcomes for women in their life careers will require a powerful portfolio of strategies – in legislation; removal of workplace barriers; changes in the culture and the structure of organisations; and the development of women’s personal and career competencies” (p.246). The Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in Workforce Committee has become both a structure for promoting a woman and family-friendly perspective in the organisation and a conduit for communication to and from women within the broader

organisation. The following commentary from participants in the case study supports this analysis:

1. At least with the committee there is the opportunity for women to have a say and be heard. Before this we just relied on the good will of the Director to make good decisions. But I think women haven't really known what to say in the past, let alone who to say it to and know you would be listened to and could get something done. I guess the union has played a role too. (FG4)

2. Affirmative action has been used for more than just getting more women into principal jobs. I think women now feel able to say what they really think about work conditions. I can think of a few things that have been put on the formal agenda like having enough staff toilets and in locations where women can access them. Another thing was changing the process for staff meetings so that we could deal with professional issues as well as all the fiddly things that used to get the whole focus. (IT5).

Comments such the above illustrate both the sense of discomfort for women and the alleviation of a degree of this discomfort with organisational processes as a result of the communication process that has emerged out of gender equity reform. Such discomfort in the past continued in Catholic education because women stayed silent. Silence was enforced through the lack of formal communication structures and by assumed and real differences between the laity and the religious personnel who were learning to work together. Breaking the silence creates the possibility of alternative ways of being in Catholic education and is tied to alternative ways of thinking and speaking. The discourse of gender equity has created the discursive space for women to create a counter-hegemonic language to change gender relations. This applies not just to speech, but to wider forms of articulacy, to acting confidently, claiming space for issues and seizing opportunities.

Catholic education has experienced a discursive shift as a result of equal opportunity legislation. This shift has not, however, overcome gender distinctions within the organisation. The complexity of the gendered sub-text of the organisation steers the organisation in the direction of gross distinction between organisational and individual arrangements (J. Acker, 1992). The reconstruction of the gender sub-text in the organisation through hegemonic gender regulation plays a crucial part in the masculine preferment for organisational leadership. This gender regulation occurs through organisational measures pertaining to the structure and culture of the organisation social processes pertaining to the way people deal with each other and identify themselves and others. According to Blackmore, “(m)asculinism has been a critical element in obstructing gender equity reform and its ongoing dominance has been achieved in subtle and not so subtle ways” (1999, p.128). The discourse of equal employment opportunity does not of itself bring about desired change. In fact, according to Blackmore, gender equity policies have focused upon changing women to ‘cope’ with male advantage. With reference to the organisational documents produced on gender equity, the notion of male advantage within gendered organisations is incorporated:

Organisations are not gender-neutral. Catholic educational organisations need to examine the allocation of staff by gender to promotion positions. If men predominantly hold the positions of leadership and authority and women are allocated the duties of care, the gender construction of the organisation institutionalises and reinforces gender inequity. (National Catholic Education Commission, 1997)

Within the discourse of equity as interpreted by the Catholic education organisation lies an implied understanding of the contested reality of the organisation for women. All issues to do with women and their careers, from the Director’s

perspective, are placed in the 'equal opportunity basket'. This assumes a sameness about such issues. Questions concerning ways of accommodating differing realities and the criteria by which to make judgements about the position of women within the organisation have not found a place on the organisational agenda. As a consequence, social justice and equity concerns are removed from the circle of influence within the organisation. The following comments from the focus group participants in the research indicate that, for some, the teaching career is not efficacious:

- I feel a lack of worth being a teacher. I actually love teaching but who cares!
- We aren't informed about career development. We often don't know what's available, what we have to do in terms of study or training.
- There are opportunities but you have to go out on a limb to take them.
- At forty (years of age) and with 18 years in the one school I think of taking time off because I've never been encouraged to move along a career path and I need to think about my options but I don't know what's possible.
- Principals have got a really tough job and I believe women don't see the principalship as attractive.
- I heard a male principal say at a Staffing Committee meeting: 'Don't give me any woman between thirty and thirty-five (years of age). They all want to get pregnant'.

In considering the position of women in Catholic education, the issue of power is an important concern. Power can be thought of and experienced in its original sense as the ability to do or effect something and as such can be viewed as 'power over' or 'power with' depending on the prevailing organisational logic. Within the Catholic education organisation, it is the former understanding of power that has pre-eminence. Discourses are played out within an organisational context in which women are positioned and in

which they position themselves, so that control is asserted and resisted through the use of power.

Foucault indicates that an individual is never trapped by power and can exercise resistance, using precise strategy. Discourse can be strategic for an individual (Foucault, 1991). This view of power recognises that individuals may appear to choose to be complicit in their own oppression. In the Catholic Church, power is linked to authority within the clerical hierarchy. Power as the liberty 'to be' for the individual and 'lowly' lay person has been obscured within the logic of the Catholic Church (Kennedy, 1985).

In terms of considering the compatibilities and incompatibilities for women and their career efficacy that may exist within the career context of the case study organisation, the question of power is an important one. When considered with the cultural construction of teaching as 'unautonomous' work, the intersection of agency with social structure can be recognised. Women teachers are caught between an institution which is not of their making, and a desire to do important work upon which they can place their own stamp (Yates, 1993). The discourses of gender equity and Christian feminist critique becomes a critical means of deconstructing the myths about women's place in the world, allowing an engagement with those ideological terms through which the myths were constructed.

Such discursive intervention in the organisation creates the means of rapprochement between sacred and secular worldviews and the public and private spheres into which women and men have been differently positioned. Without these conditions it would be difficult to create the conditions for a re-visioning of career models to include non-linear ones that encourage non-hierarchical approaches and leadership throughout the organisation. Such models must also accommodate an individual's availability to the organisation which is mitigated by other commitments

which arise both simultaneously and sequentially over the life course (Raabe, 1996).

Women's Relationship to Catholic Education

Affiliated, Ambivalent or Alienated

Women in this case study, as organisational participants, experience the organisation in examined and unexamined ways. Either way, each woman is living the reality of organisational life within the parameters of a religious organisation with set rules and policies. They are also impacted by the organisation's approach to gender equity as a social justice issue. To gauge an understanding of the impact of this reality, the following question was asked as part of the focus group exercise: How do you find Catholic education as a place to pursue your career and to what extent is your view influenced by recent moves to promote gender equity?

The answers to this question revealed that each woman had a profound sense that it was different being part of a religious organisation when considering a career than if one worked in a secular organisation. The answers given were sometimes amusing ("I didn't know they had promoted 'Gender Equity'. Good for her!") and other times quite poignant ("Being a Non-Catholic doesn't help me get to be an Assistant to the Principal Religious Education even with equal opportunity"). In categorising the responses, I chose to align the focus group responses to one of three categories depending on the way the individual woman had experienced the organisation. These categories are addressed below:

Affiliated. Women in this category expressed a general sense that the structures and processes of the organisation and the opportunities for women to pursue an organisational career are congruent. The Catholic identity of the organisation for these women is a source of cohesiveness and creates a sense of belonging. Within this stance, there was a definite view that the introduction of an Affirmative Action policy was

helpful in bringing attention to the needs of women. Furthermore, the organisation was considered to be on the right track in terms of career issues especially in assisting teachers to develop their spiritual lives. In terms of the impact on individuals of the religious ideology of the organisation, it was considered important that an individual understood that if you want to work for Catholic education, you should be prepared to comply with all requirements and obligations set by the Catholic Church. If a person felt strongly antagonistic about Church teaching, the best option according to the affiliated woman, would be to choose a different organisation in which to pursue a career in teaching. Women in this group indicated a strong affiliation with the Catholic Church or a high sensitivity to the authority of Church teaching.

The affiliated category is best represented by the following comments from two women who had very different experiences but similar expectations. The first woman left the case study diocese for family reasons and was keen to be employed within a Catholic organisation again. Her non-Catholic status, however, prevented her re-employment in another diocese. In revealing her disappointment at not getting a position in a Catholic school in her new location, she indicated that she had also lost her accrued long service leave and sick leave. However, she accepted the policy of the diocese in a preference for employing Catholic teachers. She reflected positively on her teaching experience within the case study organisation. In particular she noted the difference between the leadership styles of the women religious principals she had experienced and the style of the male principal she encountered when she moved into the government school system:

I worked in two Catholic schools and I know how the Catholic Education Office works. I found everyone supportive. There was a family atmosphere and even though I'm not Catholic, I was made to feel very welcome in both schools, and I felt it was my school. I never had any concerns about the religion bit and I actually

enjoyed the prayers and services that we had at school. I found the nuns to be very dedicated self-sufficient women. They were very well educated and intelligent women and I could never understand how the priests could dominate them. Now I'm working in the State system, I haven't felt this way because there's no feeling of belonging. Everyone seems to be out for themselves and don't want to share ideas or resources. I think this has a lot to do with the differences in the principals I've had. But it's also the size of the department. You just feel like a tiny cog in a huge machine. In the school I'm at now, there is a male principal and he's very 'old school' and tells you what to do rather than asking or inviting you. It's very male-dominated at the top but change is slowly creeping in. (IT6)

The second woman was a young teacher in her second year of teaching who had experienced the Beginning Teacher Program which the organisation offered. Her aspirations for career promotion were stated unambiguously and she felt she would have little problem pursuing her ambitions to move into senior management 'at the right time':

The beginning teacher program really helped me find my way and I learned so much more there than I did at university. My companion teacher is great and she really encourages me to look ahead as well as concentrate on being a good teacher right now. I have already set my sights on being a principal but I realise that I have to get the experience and do the study first. (FG4)

Ambivalent. Women in this category expressed views concerning their careers that were vague or had not really been seriously considered. These women expressed no real sense of wanting to teach in a Catholic school. They comply with the religious dimension of the organisation but only in the context of the school. Their private lives are kept quite separate to their working lives. There is no requirement therefore, from the ambivalent woman's view, for the organisation to critique itself. Within this category, Affirmative Action at best, raised awareness of the need to do something for women. Women in this category, however, were concerned with the interpretations that

may be put on issues to do with creating balance in their lives. Issues such as choosing to stay in the classroom or wanting to work part-time are still seen as open to misrepresentation according to the ambivalent woman, and not given adequate attention within policy development. The ambivalent stance is seen in the comments made by a young woman with seven years teaching experience in Catholic education:

I haven't really thought that much about pursuing my career in teaching. It's not given that much emphasis in my school. I don't think I'd be given much of a hearing if I wanted to apply for an admin job anyway because I don't go to church a lot and I'm not really that religious either. Even though I think I'm a good teacher – well parents haven't complained about me and the kids like me, I often think about leaving teaching to become an international air hostess. I've even done courses in first aid and hospitality to get to the interview stage. There aren't many choices in primary schools for real career moves. I think some women choose part time work because it's a change at least. That's only if you can afford to go part-time. (FG2)

Alienated. Women in this category expressed criticism of the organisation from both a structural and religiously oriented stance concerning the position of women within the organisation and the implications this has for their career outlook. Comments attached to this group on Affirmative Action indicated a feeling that practical outcomes have been limited because of a backlash mentality and there is a need for women and men to participate in professional development in the area of feminist theology.

The alienated stance is notable in the following comments made by a woman in a senior position in the organisation:

I don't know if the office (Catholic education office) really knows or cares what it is that women actually want from their careers? Do men really care whether women get a fair go? I think women are the backbone of Cath Ed but from the system point of view they are just a resource for running the business. Part of the problem is that some women are simply apologists for men so you hear things like, 'we need more men in teaching' but that just means more men will get into administration. Affirmative Action has just created one more way that men can ridicule women.

There's a saying I read that I think says it well, 'the fish stinks from the head down' so nothing's going to change until both the men in charge change themselves not just surface things and the organisation is designed to be more woman friendly. (IT5)

When asked about the impact of the Catholic Church teaching on women, the responses were directed at the structures of the Church and the exclusivity of the liturgy. There was no mention of the impact of the images of Eve and Mary but this may indicate that women in scripture just don't rate as role models, good or bad. In expressing their feelings about the Catholic Church, the various women did so with strong and sometimes harshly expressed words. For some, the feelings of anger may be encouragement to leave Catholic Education:

1. If I have to think about the Church I get angrier and angrier. Women can't fit into that absolutist philosophy. I think women would make brilliant priests by the way. Structurally and hierarchically, the Church presents an oppressive vision of career for women and encourages dominance in men. (FG1)
2. Seriously, the image of women in the Bible is limiting if you're looking for good role models. I just feel I'll be much freer to be myself if I'm not working in a Catholic school. I like the kids and the staff but I'm just not into religion at the moment. (FG1)

A woman principal gave similar, negative views:

I am very angry at times with the Church. Compared to any other part of my life this is the place where I actually feel of less value than a man. From the men in charge to the exclusivity of the liturgical language, women don't rate highly enough. (IT3)

Consistent with feminist literature on Catholic women in the Church, the following respondent's comment indicates a view of the 'stained glass ceiling' associated with the Church's power:

Let's face it, no woman is ever going to be the Chief Executive Officer (Pope) or the Regional Manager (the Bishop) or the Branch Manager (priest) so our power is very limited to make any real changes to the system. (IT6)

The anger and frustration felt by one woman was directed at the intransigence of the Catholic Church on issues of women's ordination. More strongly expressed, however, was the denial of women's voices on the issue:

What I've seen personally, and I could name many instances of this, is that women are angry with the Church over the ordination issue... they are very angry with the Pope that he came in with guns blazing, using the infallibility bullet and goodness knows what. That's such a male way of dealing with it. Not only that we won't have consultation but we're told it's not for discussion anymore. (IT5)

These comments provide a hint of the anger that some women feel in relation to the Catholic Church. Coll (1994) sees the need for women in Christian organisations to be able to see anger as a gift in the form of appropriate or virtuous anger. "It is a sign that a person has matured enough to stand alone, if need be, for one's principles" (p.120). Coll believes this view of anger is important because cultural restrictions on women, the definition of the good woman, have left them without the strength and courage to express legitimate anger.

Summary

This chapter has examined the tensions that exist within discourses circulating about women within Catholic education. These discourses have the potential to position women within the organisational understanding of career through the subjectivities women adopt in response to such discourses. Such positioning, however, does not necessarily lead to either a unitary subjectivity or to a view of women as victims of indoctrination or as passive in the formation of their power/powerlessness. Nias (1989) states that "Primary teaching is an occupation which requires the ability to live with,

and handle constructively, a multitude of dilemmas, tensions, contradictions, uncertainties, and paradoxes” (p.97). Within a Catholic education setting, I feel women are constantly dealing with all of the issues commonly associated with teaching and, in addition, other issues associated with the religious identity of the organisation.

This research would ascribe such conditions to secondary teaching as well as well as primary teaching. Within a Catholic education organisation, women “remake definitions of careers and commitments to suit their preferences and their possibilities, strategising for security and maximum flexibility within the particular ‘patriarchal bargain’ (Kandiyoti, 1988) offered by their circumstances” (Acker, 1994, p.120). In their efforts to make sense of the organisational career context, women are guided by their own and other women’s experiences in the workplace culture established within particular schools and within the organisation as a whole. The culture can provide sustenance as well as a framework for creation and sharing of views and experiences (Acker 1990). Notwithstanding this organisational culture, different women have different reserves to deal with the workplace.

There are limitations which organisations face in managing careers which include the largely absent level of conceptualisation of the internal labour market for teachers and the inadequate level of understanding displayed of the impact on women of divisions between classroom teaching and administration roles within the teaching profession.

Within all of the individual and subjective responses to the teaching career, however, lies the larger responsibility of those who govern the education organisation, define work rules, and shape working conditions in schools. In addressing this responsibility to greater or lesser degree, an organisation creates a certain career outlook that is subject to gender-sensitive or gender-blind scrutiny. Women themselves

recognise the barriers and constraints to their making career progress but they also impact the organisation through exploiting discursive gaps in an effort to create opportunities. This is the topic of the following chapter.