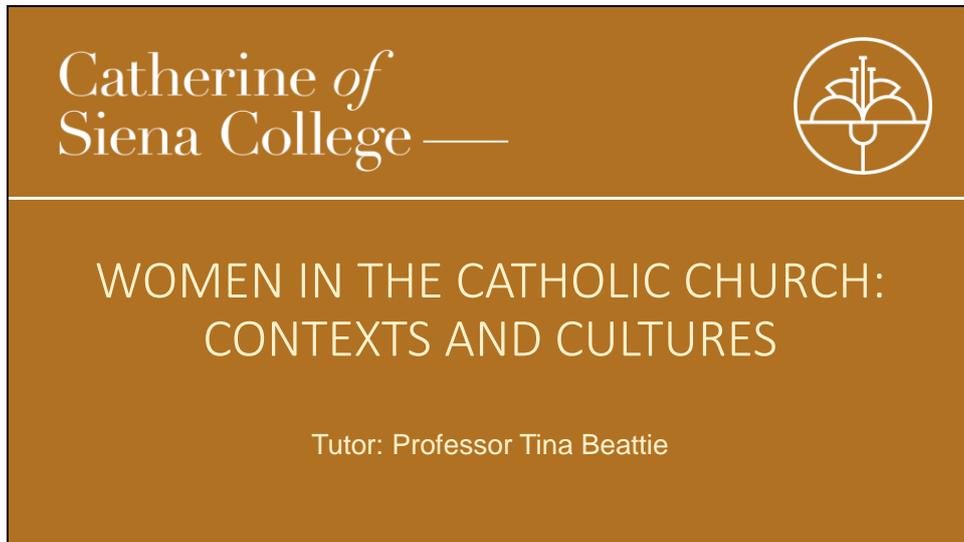


WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: CONTEXTS AND CULTURES
TRANSCRIPT OF LECTURE – WEEK 1

Slide 1



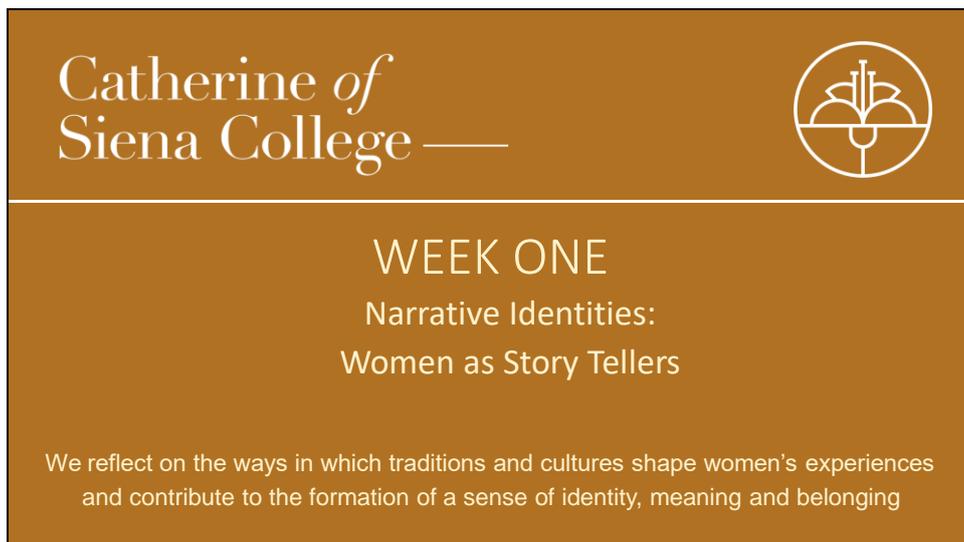
Catherine of
Siena College — 

WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH:
CONTEXTS AND CULTURES

Tutor: Professor Tina Beattie

Hello, and welcome to this six week Catherine of Siena course, “Women in the Catholic Church: Contexts and Cultures”. My name is Tina Beattie. I’m Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Roehampton in London and Director of Catherine of Siena College, and I’m going to be the person guiding you through these presentations. Remember, if you have problems accessing these lectures because of poor internet connections or other problems, you can download a PDF transcript of the lecture with slides from the Moodle site each week.

Slide 2



Catherine of
Siena College — 

WEEK ONE
Narrative Identities:
Women as Story Tellers

We reflect on the ways in which traditions and cultures shape women’s experiences and contribute to the formation of a sense of identity, meaning and belonging

This week, we familiarise ourselves with the course themes and contexts, and we ask what theological method is best suited to our studies and explorations.

Much of the material for this course is interactive. You will be asked to pause during these lecture sessions to reflect on certain questions in the context of your own life, culture, religious environment and personal experience. This is an important aspect of the learning process, so try to allow yourself time to engage fully with these more reflective aspects of the

course. You can always pause and come back later to resume the lecture if you want to take a break. Do use a journal in whatever form suits you, so that you can record your questions, ideas, insights and struggles and revisit these as time goes on to see how your thinking and ideas have developed and perhaps changed.

All the lectures are divided into different parts to enable you to take frequent breaks if you need to. I hope this allows you to work through the materials at your own pace, and to do as much additional reading and research as time allows. Remember that you can always come back later if you don't have time to do as much as you'd like to in any particular week. The most important tasks are to watch the presentation, do the essential reading, contribute to the discussion forum, and participate in the live chat. We understand that poor internet connections sometimes prevent people from logging in to the live chat. Please let us know if you have problems and do your best to participate as often as you can. The course will be available to you for six weeks after the end date, so you'll have time to catch up on any readings or lectures you might have missed.

Slide 3



In this first part of this week's session, let's familiarise ourselves with the resources we'll be using which draw primarily on writings and other materials from Catholic Women Speak.

Slide 4



The course is based on a book edited by Tina Beattie and Diana Culbertson on behalf of Catholic Women Speak – *Visions and Vocations* (Paulist Press, 2018). It’s a collection of writings and reflections by more than 60 women from more than 20 different countries. The youngest contributor is 14 and the oldest is 86. A PDF of the final version of the book is available to download from Moodle for students registered on this course, as well as a PDF of a previously published book titled *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table* (Paulist Press, 2015). These two books form the main reading resources for this course. The essential readings will be from the more recent book, but you can also find essays in the other book as well as links to other reading material, videos and podcasts for each week’s session – all of which are available online.

Slide 5

Please click on the logo to go to the website: 

Scroll down through the website until you come to the section about the book and read about some of the contributors:

Meet some of the contributors and read extracts from the book by clicking on the images below





You may have familiarised yourself with the Catholic Women Speak website and the resources available through that website, but you might like to revisit these to refresh your memory. Please go to the link in Moodle and scroll down to read about some of the contributors to the book by clicking on their photographs, and you can see a range of other resources and information that set the context for the readings in the book. Both these books were published by Catholic Women Speak to coincide with Synods of Bishops – the first in

2015 on The Family, and in 2018 on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment. In both instances we encouraged our women contributors to reflect broadly on the Synod themes, in order to draw attention to the voices that are missing from the Synods, and to invite engagement and dialogue between the bishops and their representatives and a wider forum of women who represent something of the diversity and complexity of Catholic women's lives around the world. Both these books were made available in the Synod hall where the bishops were meeting. In 2018, Cardinal Bo of Myanmar held up one of our books at a Synod press conference and said he was looking forward to reading it!

Slide 6

END OF PART ONE

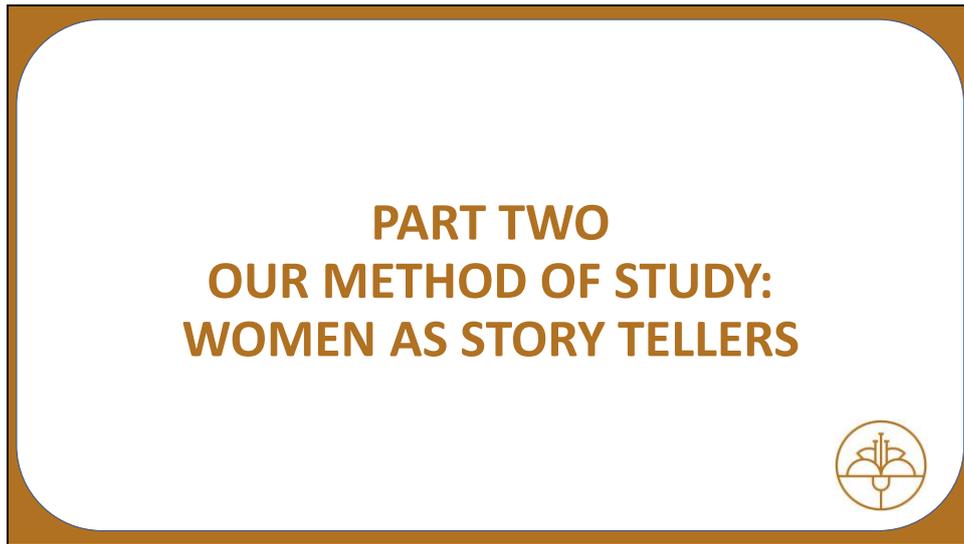
- Before continuing, you might like to spend time browsing through the contents page of the book and the list of contributors on the website. Reflect on which topics particularly interest you, and why. We cover a wide range of material in this course, and you will enjoy it more if you can focus your reading and learning on the areas that are most relevant or engaging for you.
- When you are ready, please come back and resume the lecture.



Before continuing, you might like to spend time browsing through the contents page of the book and the list of contributors on the website. Reflect on which topics particularly interest you, and why. We cover a wide range of material in this course, and you will enjoy it more if you can focus your reading and learning on the areas that are most relevant or engaging for you, whether in the context of personal interest, professional development or vocational training. Feel free to engage in whatever way best suits your interests and aims in doing the course.

You might like to use your journal to note down your own reactions, points of resistance or inspiration, which you might refer to over time to see how your ideas have changed and developed.

When you are ready, please come back and resume the lecture.



In the second part of this week's session, we consider issues of experience, interpretation, language and meaning. I suggest that the best way to approach the materials in the course is to think in terms of women as story tellers. What theological insights can we gain from listening to women's stories? What has been omitted from the historical record, from religious doctrine and from our understanding of what it means to be human, by the exclusion, censorship or trivialisation of women's stories?

A slide with a white background and a brown border. The text is centered and reads "From this week's reading: Tina Beattie, 'Women's Cultures, Women's Callings':" in a bold, brown, sans-serif font. Below this, there are two bullet points in a smaller, brown, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small circular logo featuring a stylized figure holding a cross.

From this week's reading:

Tina Beattie, "Women's Cultures, Women's Callings":

- In a remarkable letter addressed to the world's women on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, Pope John Paul II observed that women "have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. ... And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry." He went on to acknowledge that, while women have contributed to human history as much as men have, "[V]ery little of women's achievements in history can be registered by the science of history. But even though time may have buried the documentary evidence of those achievements, their beneficent influence can be felt as a force which has shaped the lives of successive generations, right up to our own." ...
- Women around the world are beginning to realize that the cultural and vocational resources available to them have not emerged from the acquired wisdom of women themselves. Rather, they are all too often masculine projections that cast the female in a shadowy realm of subordinate otherness, closed off from access to much that is essential for human freedom and flourishing.

Consider this extract from this week's essential reading – Tina Beattie, "Women's Cultures, Women's Callings", which is the introduction to the course book:

In a remarkable letter addressed to the world's women on the occasion of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, Pope John Paul II observed that women "have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. ... And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry."

That's quite a remarkable apology to women for what the Church has failed to remember, record and acknowledge of women's contributions to society.

Pope John Paul II went on to acknowledge that, while women have contributed to human history as much as men have, "[V]ery little of women's achievements in history can be registered by the science of history. But even though time may have buried the documentary evidence of those achievements, their beneficent influence can be felt as a force which has shaped the lives of successive generations, right up to our own." ...

In other words, it's difficult to find a full and equal record of all that women have contributed to the shaping of societies, cultures and religions over the course of human development, but that's not to say that women are lacking from that story. It's just that it's much more difficult to find their interpretations and stories, which have not been recorded with the same authority and diligence as those of men.

Of course, many men's stories are also missing from the record. Poor people generally have not been part of the historical record. So in retrieving these marginalised and forgotten voices, we also have to look beyond gender to other factors that lead to the exclusion of people on the grounds of race, religion, culture, economics, from what counts as history.

When we focus on questions of women, we can see that women around the world are beginning to realize that the cultural and vocational resources available to them have not emerged from the acquired wisdom of women themselves. It's difficult to find resources which can help women to look back and piece together the story of women's development, wisdom and insights over time. It's often said that men learn by standing on the shoulders of giants. In other words, each generation of learned men draws on what previous generations have contributed to knowledge and understanding, whereas women all too often have to start all over again at ground level in every generation. What women have access to are all too often masculine projections that cast the female in a shadowy realm of subordinate otherness, closed off from access to much that is essential for human freedom and flourishing. We might think even today of statistics which show that girls have far less access to education than boys, and across the world in institutions of authority, influence and significance, women are still under-represented at all levels of society.

You might like to pause and reflect on how much your own cultural and historical tradition has retained of women's stories, achievements and influences. What role models, historical figures and scriptural, legendary or fictional characters inspire your tradition, religion or culture? How many of them are women? What changes might come about, if women's experiences and contributions to the making of history were given equal weight to those of men?

Again, at this point you might like to make some jottings in your journal about some of the ideas and questions that occur to you as you reflect on this.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (1993):

- The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past. The use of women's experience in feminist theology, therefore, explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on *male* experience rather than on universal human experience. Feminist theology makes the sociology of theological knowledge visible, no longer hidden behind mystifications of objectified divine and universal authority. (1983, 13, emphasis original)
- Ruether argues that the 'critical principle' for feminist theology is 'the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive', whereas 'what does promote the full humanity of women is of the Holy' (1983: 18-19).



The question then arises about what resources we might draw upon to begin to piece together the story of women that emerges from women themselves, and not from the stories that men of influence and authority have told about women, often in ways that make women subservient to their own desires and expectations of what women should be.

To respond to questions such as these, we must begin to construct theological narratives by and about women, using whatever resources are available to us. These include past, present and future perspectives.

- What have women contributed in the past to the making of the Christian story in scripture, tradition and theology?
- How are women today living the Christian story in such a way that their personal and collective endeavours become part of the ongoing narrative?
- What visions, hopes and aspirations do women have for the future, and how does their faith shape those visions?

In asking this, we must remember that the Christian story, the story of Christ in the world, the story of the influence of the Christian Church in the making of human history, is an unfinished story. Much of it is yet to be told. Christian doctrine tells us that, at the end of time, all will be reconciled and healed and brought to joyful and loving union with God through the redeeming work of Christ. Other religions have different interpretations of the direction and purpose and meaning of history. But one way or the other, if we are within the Christian story, we are living an unfinished story. The ending that we hope for is an ending of mystery – none of us can say what the eschaton will be like (the second coming of Christ and the redemption of creation), but we know that we are living through a story that still has many chapters to come and many revelations to discover in the context of the biblical and theological tradition that, for Roman Catholics, is the particular part of that story which they belong within.

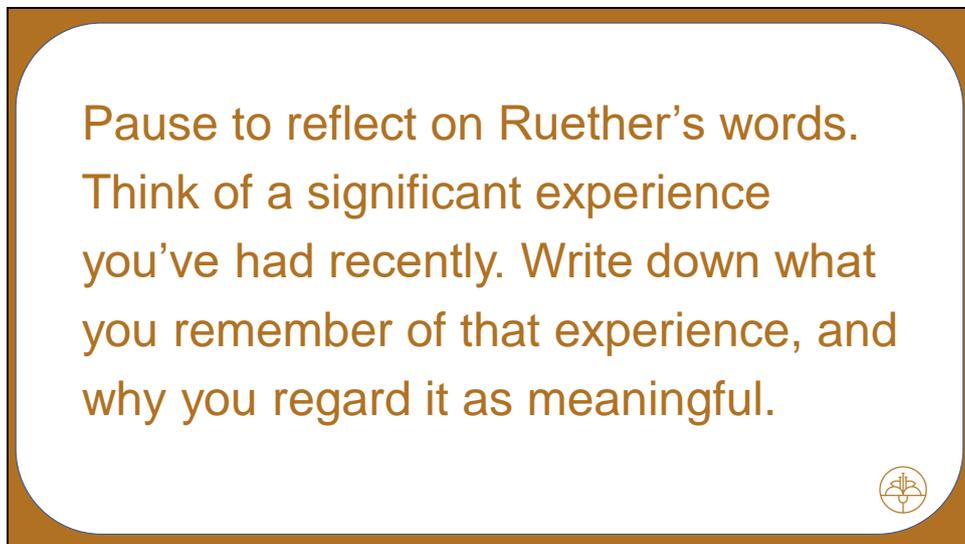
When women theologians in the 1960s first began considering questions about what resources can women use to construct theologies by, about and for women, there were few resources available to them. This was the era when the women's movement, postcolonialism and equal rights campaigns were all starting to have a dramatic impact on cultures around the world. These early women theologians turned to women's experience as the foundation upon which to build feminist theology.

The appeal to women's experience formed a benchmark for much feminist theology between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. Perhaps the most frequently cited explanation of why women's experience was regarded as fundamental comes from Rosemary Radford Ruether's pioneering book, *Sexism and God-Talk* (1993). Ruether writes:

The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past. The use of women's experience in feminist theology, therefore, explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on *male* experience rather than on universal human experience. Feminist theology makes the sociology of theological knowledge visible, no longer hidden behind mystifications of objectified divine and universal authority. (p. 13, emphasis in original)

Ruether argues that the 'critical principle' for feminist theology is 'the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive', whereas 'what does promote the full humanity of women is of the Holy' (1983: 18-19).

Slide 10



Pause to reflect on Ruether's words. Think of a significant experience you've had recently. Write down what you remember of that experience, and why you regard it as meaningful.

Let's allow time for reflection before we continue. Maybe you can think of a significant experience you've had recently. Write down what you remember of that experience, and why you regard it as meaningful. Take your time, reflect on it, and try to find the words that best encapsulate what that experience meant for you.

Slide 11

Now read through what you've written and consider the following questions:

- What kind of language did you use?
- Did you find it difficult to put the experience into words?
- What concepts, ideas or beliefs did you draw upon?
- How closely does what you've written resemble how you felt at the time of the experience?



Think about the process of writing about your experience, and how it felt. These questions might help you to reflect.

- How did it feel writing about that experience?
- Did you struggle?
- What kind of language did you use?
- Did you find it difficult to put the experience into words?
- What concepts, ideas or beliefs did you draw upon?
- How closely does what you've written resemble how you felt at the time of the experience?

Think about those questions and try to match up what you've written with the experience you're recalling.

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END OF PART TWO

Please take some time to reflect on what you have learned so far:

- What insights have you gained?
- What ideas have you found difficult or challenging?
- What can you do to deepen your understanding of these issues and ideas?

You might like to post a question or idea on the discussion forum to find out what others are thinking.

When you are ready, please come back and do the final part of this week's lecture.



Feel free to pause here, engage with some of the materials on Moodle, and come back when you're ready to resume the lecture.

- What insights have you gained?
- What ideas have you found difficult or challenging?
- What can you do to deepen your understanding of these issues and ideas?

You might like to post a question or idea on the discussion forum to find out what others are thinking.

Slide 13

**The Linguistic Turn:
Criticising the Appeal to Experience**

- All experience is linguistically mediated and interpreted.
- How we understand our experiences is influenced to a significant extent by our cultural and religious traditions and values.
- Concepts such as “the full humanity of women” – based on appeals to experience – fail to respect the complex dynamics of language, interpretation, communication and meaning.



In this third part of week 1, I want us to look more closely at why Ruether’s concept of “woman” and her idea of a theology based on the appeal to experience soon came under critical scrutiny. It was quickly pointed out by many scholars of colour and different economic and cultural contexts that the “woman” whose full humanity was being affirmed and whose experiences were being validated and given scholarly authority was, in the eyes of many critics, white, liberal, middle-class, and heterosexual.

A wide range of contextualized women’s voices soon began to speak from positions of otherness in ways that undermined the concept of “woman” as a singular theoretical category and political or theological subject. This exposed profound and enduring tensions between the feminist quest for justice, which requires being able to make some universal or normative claims about women, and recognition of the diversity of women’s identities, aspirations, and experiences which defies such universalization. How can we campaign for equality and rights for women when we take into consideration how very diverse women are in their different contexts and cultures? Does the idea of “woman” become almost empty of meaning – or not? You might like to consider this question in the light of the very different experiences and stories of the women who contributed to *Visions and Vocations*. What do they have in common? Is it gender, is it faith, is it something else? These are questions to consider.

These questions and the challenges they pose to the idea of “woman” are associated with the so-called “linguistic turn”, which in the early 1990s shifted the focus of feminism and women’s studies away from appeals to experience with their politicised demands for justice, towards an emphasis on the role played by language and culture in mediating and interpreting experience. Such theories draw on a wide range of linguistic, psychoanalytic, sociological and philosophical sources to analyse the relationship between language, culture and individual identity and meaning. They draw attention not only to the conscious ways in which we use language in conformity with social norms, identities and values, but to the ways in which hidden desires and fears influence our experiences and shape our identities, even though we may be unconscious of these influences.

So whenever an experience is communicated or described, it is interpreted according to the linguistic and cultural norms that give meaning and a sense of order to the otherwise random events of everyday life. In this process, we may attempt to fit our experiences into accepted conventions and social norms, repressing or denying those aspects that fail to fit comfortably into our cultural contexts. There is therefore often a sense of lack or inadequacy about the relationship between the language we use and the identities we assume – including those associated with gender – and the deep desires, fears, hopes and anxieties that form the repressed or negated aspects of our experiences and that resist being “tidied up” to “fit” the public persona we assume in our social and institutional interactions.

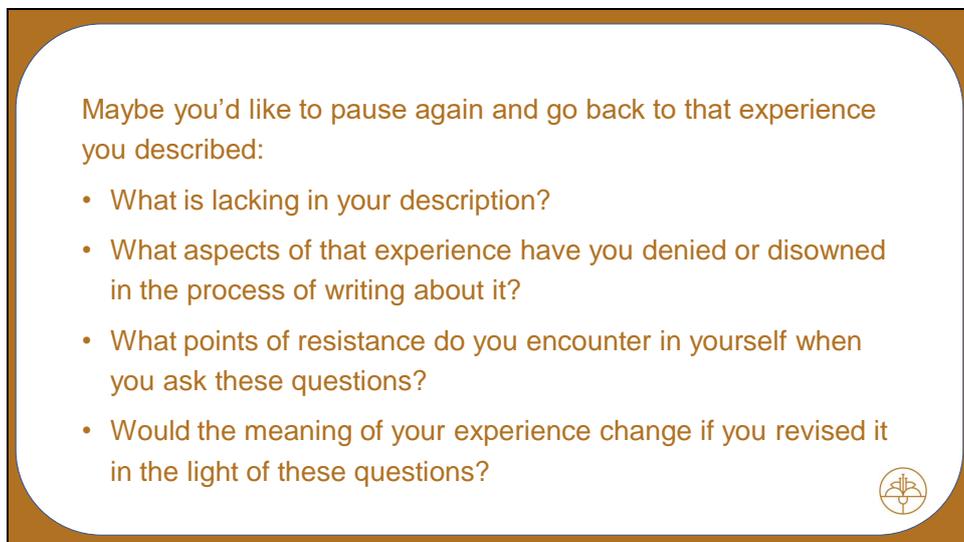
The shift to a linguistic rather than an experiential approach to women’s lives calls into question the reliability of appeals to experience. How do we know that our immediate interpretation and perception of our own experience is not distorted even to ourselves by some of these hidden and unacknowledged influences that come from many different historical, religious and cultural sources, and from our own deep psychological conditioning and turbulence, that we may not always fully understand.

This also raises the question of gender and the role of language in constructing sexual identities according to acceptable social norms and stereotypes – feminine women and masculine men, maternal women and paternal men, submissive women and authoritative men. There are many such stereotypes in all cultures, though they also vary from culture to culture.

Thus even as women and girls around the world continue to experience many forms of violence, impoverishment, exploitation and exclusion on the grounds of their sex, the very concept of “woman” is being challenged by wider issues to do with the politics of gender and identity. That is an ongoing issue for debate that we shall undoubtedly return to through the course.

If you want to find out more about these issues of gender and language, you might consider doing the course “Understanding Gender” next year, which is also taught by me, and I’ll be teaching a course on theological approaches to women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights in which we explore some of these questions.

Slide 14



Maybe you'd like to pause again and go back to that experience you described:

- What is lacking in your description?
- What aspects of that experience have you denied or disowned in the process of writing about it?
- What points of resistance do you encounter in yourself when you ask these questions?
- Would the meaning of your experience change if you revised it in the light of these questions?



You might want to pause again and go back to that experience you described earlier. Read through your account again:

- What is lacking in your description?

- What aspects of that experience have you denied or disowned in the process of writing about it – that perhaps resisted articulation and were too difficult to find words for?
- What points of resistance do you encounter in yourself when you ask these questions?
- Would the meaning of your experience shift if you revised it in the light of these questions?

A word of caution: if this exercise troubles you, you need to give yourself time and space to reflect. Asking ourselves questions like these can trigger deep reactions that we may not be ready to deal with. Please don't push yourself beyond your own emotional and spiritual resources. Some questions take weeks, months or even years to find a place within us and evoke a response. They are part of our lifelong learning process – discovering those aspects of our spiritual and psychological resources that are influencing us beyond what we immediately recognise, influences that shape the ways in which we experience the world and sometimes can distort and repress those aspects of ourselves that can't find room to flourish and grow in the selves we hope to be and in the ways we're trying to live our lives. Patience and discernment are an essential part of this process, and you may at some stage need to work through some of these questions with a spiritual director or counsellor. This is a course that raises questions which might some day have to be dealt with, but the time and place to do it is probably not right now.

Slide 15

To summarise the foregoing:

Challenges to the appeal to experience – the “linguistic turn”:

- Experience is interpreted and communicated through language.
- Language shapes the ways in which we give meaning to our experience.
- Our language is encoded with the values, norms and expectations of our many different cultures, traditions and histories, including our language of gender.
- Within language are the suppressed desires, fears and hauntings of the soul that threaten our sense of self and disrupt the identity and role that the status quo confers upon us, including our gendered identities and roles.
- Concepts such as “the full humanity of women” are to a large extent influenced if not determined by cultural and religious concepts that vary widely from context to context.



Let me summarise the foregoing.

This slide summarises the ways in which experience is interpreted and communicated through language, so that personal experience and communal meanings are woven together in complex and intricate patterns of interaction and mutual transformation.

While we present ourselves to society in the conventions and concepts that constitute the status quo, our language also harbours semi-articulate or repressed fears and longings which create a dynamic and sometimes turbulent relationship between the socialised, gendered “I” we present to the world, and our inner worlds which can often seem far more fragmentary, fluid or even incoherent.

Let's consider Paul Ricoeur's idea of “narrative identity” as a way to help us to navigate through these linguistic and cultural challenges.

Just to say, I'm aware that this week's lecture is quite long – it's longer than it will be in other weeks. If you're struggling to keep up, I hope you'll be reassured to know that this is the longest of the lectures because I'm introducing new ideas and contextualising the course.

A narrative approach:

- Humans are story-telling creatures – linguistically complex with a capacity for imagination, memory, reasoned reflection, decision-making and intentional activity that differentiates us from other species with which we share the planet
- We make sense of ourselves and the world by weaving together the random events and experiences of everyday life into a purposeful and meaningful whole that shapes our identity and informs our behaviour and activities
- In doing this, we draw on the meanings available to us through our cultural, religious and historical traditions.
- As individuals, we also influence our traditions, in a threefold dynamic process of interpretation, and in so doing we acquire “narrative identity” (Paul Ricoeur):
- Prefiguration – the process of interpreting what happens to us by using words and concepts that are immediately available to us through our social and linguistic contexts.
- Configuration – the joining up of these experiences and events into a meaningful narrative about who we are in relation to our social and religious contexts.
- Refiguration – the struggle to understand experiences and feelings that don’t “fit” the narratives available to us, so that the experiencing individual and the larger communal contexts she or he inhabits are in a constant wrestling for meaning.
- Personal identities emerge through the continuous exchange between each individual’s lived experiences and the wider communal context within which that person lives. We tell our own stories in the context of larger, more all-encompassing stories about the world (historical – i.e. drawing on the past – and imaginary – i.e. projecting ourselves into future possibilities), and in this process we acquire “narrative identities”.



Let me summarise a narrative approach based on the approach of French philosopher and religious thinker Paul Ricoeur.

In this course, we reflect on the experiences of many women from around the world, seeking to understand how different cultural influences and traditions shape their understanding of who they are. We approach these as forms of story-telling, filtered through the sacraments, symbols, beliefs and traditions of the Catholic faith, but also shaped by the economic, political, cultural and domestic contexts within which women seek to make meaning of their lives.

In reflecting on these various influences, I suggest we bear in mind Ricoeur’s idea of “narrative identity” based on a threefold process of interpretation, unfolding and revisiting itself upon us through time:

Prefiguration: We interpret our experiences soon after the event by drawing on the meanings available to us in our different linguistic and cultural contexts. You might like to think how you would make sense of an experience without language. Even if it arouses deep feelings, you need language to say what these feelings mean.

Configuration: As time passes, we begin selecting and putting together these random episodes into a meaningful story about ourselves, so that in the process of telling our stories we are forming our identities with all their markers of gender, culture, language and belief through a selective process. We don’t count everything that happens to us every day as equally significant. We choose, on the basis of who we think we are and how experiences resonate with us, what we’re going to remember and what we’re going to build into our life story. This entails a creative process of remembering and imagining, drawing on historical experience (individual and collective), as well as on scriptural, mythical or fictional sources and informed by future hopes and possibilities. In this sense, text and context, self and community, are in a constant process of interaction and dynamic development through time. Past, present and future shape the ways we understand what’s happening to us and what it means.

Refiguration: We are constantly revisiting our ideas and experiences in the light of new experiences and the knowledge and insights as well as the traumas and joys that can occur from these. This produces a creative struggle between our sense of personal identity and our social and cultural contexts, between historical traditions, lived realities and future expectations. Think, for example, of how a birth or a death, a marriage or a divorce, a new job or a job loss, transform the ways in which we remember and anticipate our life stories. Through this ongoing process unfolding in time, individual identities develop in ways that also develop and transform collective traditions, histories and identities.

There is no need to go more deeply into these complex and debated philosophical ideas like these for the purposes of this course, but if you want to read further you will find some references to Ricoeur and other sources in the Moodle site for this week.

Slide 17

Let's apply these theories. Please go back to the Moodle site and watch the video clips of these three women telling their stories:



Leslie Colvin
Alabama USA

Zuzanna Radzik
Poland

Gertrude Yema Jusufu
Sierra Leone



Now visit the Moodle site and watch the three short videos there. Think about these women's stories in the context of story-telling as a form of narrative identity. You might also like to read their contributions to the book. The interviews here were recorded when we were all in Rome for the symposium to launch *Visions and Vocations* in October 2018.

- How have these women's identities, vocations and activities been influenced by their cultural and religious contexts?
- In what ways do they conform to and/or challenge these contexts through their ideas and interpretations?

Take time to watch the videos and think about these women in the context of story-telling and narrative identity.

Narrative identity and women as story-tellers:

- How do these women's cultural, political and religious contexts shape their experiences?
- How do their experiences challenge or call into question the conventional norms and practices of their traditions?
- How do they seek to resolve these struggles and conflicts in the ways they interpret and live their lives?
- How would you understand "the full humanity of women" in the context of these three women's stories?
- Do you understand what is meant by "narrative identity" when you consider the ways in which these women tell their stories?



In seeking to understand what is meant by "narrative identity" in the context of women as story-tellers, we might reflect on questions such as:

- How do these women's cultural, political and religious contexts shape their experiences?
- How do their experiences challenge or call into question the conventional norms and practices of their traditions?
- How do they seek to resolve these struggles and conflicts in the ways they interpret and live their lives?
- How would you understand Ruether's concept of "the full humanity of women" in the context of these three women's stories?
- Do you understand what is meant by "narrative identity" when you consider the ways in which these women tell their stories?

These are questions that will recur throughout this course, as we consider the many stories women tell about themselves. As we shall discover, there is no "Catholic woman" who is representative of all Catholic women, but there are also connecting threads and shared insights which create a rich tapestry of womanly wisdom and insight, weaving together a complex tapestry of meaning out of many different cultures and individual identities. Perhaps you could bear in mind the question: to what extent does the Catholic tradition provide this connecting narrative? We could of course study women in any religious tradition and ask this question, but for the purposes of this course all the women self-identify as Catholic, so we situate their stories within the context of the Catholic tradition, both in its more problematic and repressive aspects for women, and its more liberating and revelatory aspects for women.

Slide 19

That is the end of this week's lecture. Thank you for listening. Please use the discussion forum to engage with others and to share some of your questions and insights. You might like to make a note in your journal of any particularly significant aspects of this week's learning experience.

If you want to reflect prayerfully on what you have learned this week, you will find a short meditation in the Moodle site that you can use if you find it helpful.



Along Life's Path
Everything in its Time



That is the end of this week's lecture. Remember that because it's a long lecture this week, you're not expected to engage with much else outside the lecture unless you have time and want to read more.

Thank you for listening. Please use the discussion forum to engage with others and to share some of your questions and insights. You might like to make a note in your journal of any particularly significant aspects of this week's learning experience.

Each week, I include a short scriptural meditation which you will find in the Moodle site for that week. This is entirely optional, but if you want to reflect on your learning experiences and insights through a scriptural lens, this provides an opportunity for you to do so.

Please remember to contribute to the discussion forum and the live chat sessions. If you have any problems with the course, please contact Anna Cantelmi at catherineofsiena@roehampton.ac.uk, or myself at t.beattie@roehampton.ac.uk.