

# From Exception to Norm? Women in Theology

Ann Loades

This essay arose from my contribution to the lecture series which commemorates the remarkable achievements of the Smith sisters, known in the course of time as Dr. Margaret Gibson and Dr. Agnes Lewis. My tactics in this essay are to offer a look, both retrospective and prospective, via a narrative with comments which may, I hope, stimulate some discussion. I am hoping that women in this day and age may continue to contribute to theology and religious studies, as they have for some considerable time both without and within an institutional base of some kind. In other words, in engaging with the past I am looking and hoping for stimulus for the present and the future. It is recognised, however, that there will be problems to face in engaging with theology and religious studies, since some of these relate to issues intrinsic to Christian tradition in much need of reform. Since this particular lecture series is the gift of the University of St Andrews, I relate my essay to connections there so far as possible.

## The Smith Sisters as Independent Scholars

Since some readers may know little or nothing about the Smith sisters, I would urge those of you unfamiliar with their story to track down the book about them by Janet Martin Soskice, *Sisters of Sinai* (2009). She delivered the first Smith lecture. Her lecture-presentation on her book is available online as delivered in the Mullen Library of the Catholic University in Washington, DC. I will be returning to this book by Soskice at the conclusion of this essay, since she continues to be a redoubtable contributor to constructive discussion of theology and the new situation in which women have found themselves, as theology has developed in a variety of locations in the last century.

Let us recall a little about the twin Smith sisters, and by doing so alert ourselves to why and how it was that well into the twentieth century a few women were able to contribute to theology, following in the footsteps of those who had previously put their energies into social reform. To understand the situation in the era of the Smith twins it is, I think, helpful to remember that through the first part of the twentieth century, children in Britain left school to enter the world of work by the ages of eleven or twelve, and even by the middle of the twentieth century the vast majority left school by age fifteen. We recall that households needed every penny their members could contribute if they were to survive. Managing a household required the energies of everyone apart from the very young or the very old, one and all vulnerable to disease or accident. In any event the elderly would have had little or no chance to save for the days when they could no longer work.

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So far as women's engagement with theology was concerned, much therefore depended on being born into a family with considerable financial resources, with parents delighted to be able to educate clever daughters. Daughters

could and did benefit from what parents themselves could offer by way of instruction, who might well also employ live-in governesses to teach several languages, with other subject areas brought in by tutors. Beyond that, in the nineteenth century there had developed some excellent "academic" boarding schools in which their daughters might spend just a few years to take them well beyond what they might be offered in their homes. This became especially important if they were to seize the new opportunities for university-level education as these became available, even if actually being awarded a degree was not in prospect. It was of course important to avoid being thought to be intellectual, since that could well damage their marriage prospects! In addition, a family might well have sufficient resources to fund holidays in mainland Europe, such expeditions being a welcome opportunity to explore different cultures and religious traditions. What some young women did with such opportunities obviously varied from time to time and place to place, but it was possible that they might find interests in the "visual" dimension of theology in one form or another. Writing books recording their travels, and the attention they gave to "shrines and cities," could be one important way of exploring theology, not least given the opportunity to survey different forms of worship.

To turn to the Smith sisters: Margaret and Agnes were twins having to grow up without their mother, who had died three weeks after their birth (1843). Home territory was Irvine, Presbyterian Ayrshire. Their father had inherited a fortune, and he organized trips abroad for them, all on condition that they had learned the relevant language. Hence, their initial visits to France, Germany, Spain, and Italy. They inherited his wealth on his death when they were twenty-three, by which time they had become perfectly capable of organizing their own expeditions, accompanied, of course, by a chaperone. Agnes became a travel-writer and novelist. Both added Greek to their Latin and other languages, as they needed them.

In 1880 Margaret married James Young Gibson, a translator of Spanish literature. She completed some of his work when he died from tuberculosis just four years later. It is noteworthy that women wrote memoirs of their fathers and husbands in this era—another resource for understanding their perspectives on their own lives. Biographies of the women themselves were yet to be written when they became sufficiently important! Agnes moved into the Gibson household, and their joint projects continued, e.g., learning Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac, and photographing manuscripts at the point of discovery.

Then in 1888, Agnes married the Revd. Samuel Savage Lewis, Librarian of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He died unexpectedly of heart failure two years later, having provided initial contact with some of the scholars of the university. The cooperation of such men was essential for some—but by no means all—expeditions to difficult places. Equally, without the linguistic skills of the sisters, some of the extraordinary discoveries made would have had to wait for later generations, such as the finds in the Cairo Genizah of a hoard of Hebrew manuscripts crucial for the history of the Jewish people.

Cambridge contacts also made possible publication of their work, resulting in an extraordinary list by each of them taken separately, quite apart from joint publications. Together they also produced dozens of articles in newspapers, magazines, and journals, the result of the long hours of work they enjoyed as “independent scholars”—a role which became more familiar in the twentieth century.

The sisters donated land to enable Westminster College to move from London to Cambridge in 1899. The college website includes portraits of them wearing academic dress, but not, of course, that of the University of Cambridge because, apart from the sisters being Scots and Presbyterian, Cambridge did not authorise degrees for women until 1948. In contrast, Durham had enabled women to graduate in all faculties by 1895—save Divinity, which was associated with ordination. The sisters could in time choose from a range of academic robes, the available options being from a doctorate from Halle to honour Agnes, Doctor of Theology degrees to both of them from Heidelberg, a DLitt from Trinity College, Dublin, and, in 1904, Doctor of Laws from St Andrews. Finally, in 1915, the sisters were awarded the Triennial Gold Medal of the Royal Asiatic Society for their “special eminence in Oriental research.” Margaret died in 1920, and Agnes in 1926.

It is clear from recent evaluation and interest post-*Sisters of Sinai* that a reassessment of the sisters’ work is still to be achieved. Such reassessment, of course, requires specialist scholarly expertise but continues to be important for “history of the Bible” projects such as those undertaken by John Barton, Bart Ehrman, and the digitalisation of texts by David Parker. All such projects reveal much of the fascinating and complicated history of the Bible in one or other of its forms.<sup>1</sup>

Even without expertise in specialist languages it could be interesting to read Agnes’s novels and records of travel, especially the work she discovered written over the text of Old Syriac Gospels. She had, of course, learned that it was common practice to scrape off a text written on expensive vellum (animal skin) in order to write another. The vellum she discovered was first and foremost a Syriac Gospels text, but from the over-writing she translated and produced *Select Narratives of Holy Women* (about a dozen of them), published in 1900. This includes material about Pelagia, a celebrated courtesan who found peace in the desert, and the astonishing Eugenia, who apparently lived as a man and became abbot of a monastery!

Agnes’ work reminds us of Sr. Benedicta Ward’s *Harlots of the Desert* (1987) and *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (1975). Ward was a member of what is now a very small Church of England religious order, the Sisters of the Love of God, and a distinguished historian

and interpreter of Latin theology and history, especially of Bede and St. Anselm.<sup>2</sup> After a grammar-school education, her first degree was from the University of Manchester, and she received her second, a doctorate from Oxford, in her mid-forties. Her interests connect us both to the legacy of the Smith sisters but also beyond them to those of Evelyn Underhill, Lucy Menzies, Helen Waddell, and Dorothy L. Sayers.<sup>3</sup>

### Grace Warrack and the Discovery of Theologian Julian of Norwich

Before turning to that group, however, we need to attend to the work of another brilliant linguist, Grace Warrack.<sup>4</sup> She was born in 1855 in Leith, into a well-to-do Presbyterian family of four daughters. Warrack’s mother died in 1857, but the girls’ father saw to their education. Warrack became a distinguished linguist in both French and Italian and tracked down surviving copies of Julian of Norwich’s *Showings* in both Paris and London.

*Showings*, written in the fourteenth–fifteenth century, is commonly described as the first book of theology written in vernacular English. Its author was an anchoress—that is, one who had voluntarily “side-stepped” into an exceptional form of religious life. This meant being enclosed in a cell with a funeral rite, from which she would never again emerge alive. She was clearly well educated, able to write as well as to read. She would have a “squint” into the church by which she could follow the Mass, and a window at which she could be consulted. She would need a servant as go-between to access the outside world. Someone supplied her with the writing materials she needed and collected her book from her cell after her death.

Those who spent long hours in unwelcome solitude during the COVID-19 pandemic may be best able to appreciate the long period of preparation she must have undertaken—perhaps in a Benedictine house—in order to opt for such a life. If you are visiting Norwich Cathedral you can see the retable of Christ’s crucifixion installed there in 1372, which Julian may possibly have seen before her enclosure the following year, aged thirty.<sup>5</sup>

As for Warrack, we know that she worked on the London manuscript copy of Julian’s book. She transcribed and edited it, and published it in 1901, with a frontispiece by Phoebe Anna Traquair. The latter was Irish, a contributor to the Scottish Arts and Crafts movement, and married to a Scot who became Keeper of what is now known as the National Museum of Scotland. Much of her work is to be seen in and around Edinburgh. Warrack herself was also a patron of the arts, giving much advice (not always welcome) to the stained-glass artist Douglas Strachan when he was working on the windows of what was then the High Kirk of the Free Church of Scotland. She died in 1932. The windows were completed just two years later. Then, in just another two years, the building became New College Library, where the windows can still be seen. They remain a valuable example of the interplay of the arts with theology.

The importance of Warrack’s publication of Julian’s text, which had survived the upheavals of the centuries, has been confirmed by different kinds of readers. There has been much interest from that first publication up to our own day, despite long-standing suspicion of those who claim to have “direct personal experience” of the “divine,” let alone if such experience is combined with a woman writing theology. One memorable text from *Showings* continues to

be: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

Thanks to Warrack, Julian’s book has become one of the most widely read texts in western Christian religious history and has been appropriated in various ways by an extraordinary range of writers. These include medieval historian Margaret Spufford (who endured an agonising experience of illness in her own person as well as in her daughter);<sup>6</sup> Iris Murdoch in two of her novels, *The Bell* and *Nuns and Soldiers*; the poet Denise Levertov; and author Annie Dillard.<sup>7</sup>

Julian’s book has long familiarised her readers with the metaphor of divine “mothering,” which she integrates into her exploration of central Christian doctrines. The scriptural origins of the metaphor are to be found in the last chapter of the book of Isaiah, and in the lament of Jesus in Matt 23:37, Jesus’s longing to gather people together “even as a hen gathers her children under her wings.” It became familiar in monastic spirituality in the Middle Ages, and one easily accessible example is to be found in Anselm’s Prayer to St. Paul, in Ward’s edition of *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*, where both the Lord and, amazingly, St. Paul are addressed as “mother.”<sup>8</sup> Two examples from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries provide instances of how theology that has originated in a context far different from our own can nonetheless be taken to heart in our own time.

The metaphor of “mother” may, for all sorts of reasons, have seemed too startling for some readers (as indeed it seems to me) in a prayer to St. Paul, but one person integrated the metaphor into her theology, that is, Grace Jantzen (London and Manchester). She was a member of the Society of Friends, a tradition not commonly associated with formal theology. An expert in the philosophy of Foucault prompted Jantzen to ask a question about what it might mean to live as “ anchoress” in modernity. That in turn was one way of asking the question of what it could mean to be a feminist and a theologian in a modern university. Taking seriously Hannah Arendt’s focus on the importance of “natality”—the capacity to start anew—and true to the fundamental commitment of the Friends to “peacemaking,” she developed a profound critique of what she identified as the violence and “necrophilia” of much Christian theology, arguing rather for delight in the world in which we find ourselves, for flourishing and fulfilment.<sup>9</sup>

Not everyone can appropriate Julian in that constructive way, however, as Karen O’Donnell of Sarum College explains in her ground-breaking books on feminist “trauma theology,” on which she gave a seminar in St Andrews last February. Trauma theology, in her case, is concerned with “reproductive loss,” interrupting the silence surrounding pregnancy loss—one example of women’s experience completely ignored in theology. Like Jantzen, O’Donnell both requires a critique of much theology (including that of Julian), but also the exploration of traditions of prayer to be found in some other mystics whose writings succeed in enabling believers to pray in and from some profoundly dark and empty places.<sup>10</sup>

I note, however, that so far there has been very little attention given in trauma theology to male experiences of grief in response to reproductive and pregnancy loss, and the loss of born children. In addition, we may note the lives of living children are almost completely

ignored in theology, with the exception of some Lutheran theologians in the USA so far as I can see. Children are attended to, not as “persons but as objects of abuse.” I note also that the British Academy has a project about the wellbeing of children in our time which, as far as I can tell, has no theologian involved and, unsurprisingly, has no reference to theology.

I am ashamed to have to admit that it has been only very recently that I have put together the connections between the virtual absence of children from most worshipping congregations and the culture of indifference to their well-being so widespread in our culture more generally, despite the central importance of children in the lives of human communities.<sup>11</sup> So both O’Donnell and Jantzen may be seen as important examples of how women may reassess theology when they become members of an institution (university or college). Following in the footsteps of one’s predecessors may prompt much-needed radical reassessment and reform of theology.

### Other Early Women Theologians

We could of course examine the lives of a number of women, each of whom, so to speak, embodied the longstanding problem for women derived from 1 Tim 2:12: “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (KJV). One from Julian’s era is Margery Kempe, born in 1343, of the parish of St. Margaret, King’s Lynn (which still exists and in which she is now commemorated). She was probably able to read but required the help of those who took her seriously to write down for her a kind of autobiography.

Kempe, for years, suffered from comparison with Julian, whom she visited for advice—the only person she could trust with her own “revelations.” It has at last been realized that the spirituality of a married woman who had given birth to a dozen or more children and who helped her husband run their brewery was bound to be different from that of a celibate anchoress. Thanks to the work of recent historians, we now know far more about her context.

Kempe arranged with her husband to leave him for a time to improve her status in a culture in which virginity and celibacy was most highly valued, with widowhood and marriage the least. Kempe became a traveller to pilgrimage sites in England to begin with, and then joined groups of pilgrims to the Holy Land (a predecessor of the Smith sisters). She is sometimes referred to as the patron saint of travel agents. She happens to exemplify the longstanding problem derived from 1 Tim 2:12, because wherever Kempe went, she spoke of the gospel, and so, was repeatedly threatened with imprisonment or being burnt alive. Julian was safe in her enclosure and probably died in 1416, by which time teaching in what was to become the University of St Andrews had just begun. Kempe was anything but safe until she returned home, probably dying in 1438. She would have known of the death of her parish priest, executed in London by being burnt at the stake in 1401 as a “Loller,” a “mumbler.” This was a term of contempt for someone who read Scripture in the vernacular, as we all now do thanks to some of those who even lost their lives for making the translations.<sup>12</sup>

We could also trace the problem of women teaching and preaching in the astonishing progress of the remarkable entrepreneur, Mary

Ward. This was a Yorkshire woman born in 1585, a pioneer of women's ministry, also widely travelled in both England and mainland Europe. She founded a major teaching order focussed on the education of girls world-wide, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Since 2002, there is a branch of her foundation able to identify themselves as the "Congregation of Jesus" (C. J.). Women, she said, "in time to come will do much." Ward died in 1645, in the century which saw the birth of many virtually unmanageable female preachers and prophets, one of whom was Margaret Fell (of the Society of Friends) who, in 1666, published her claim for "women's speaking justified, proved and allowed of by the Scriptures."

### The Modern Era

Instructive though each of their predecessors is, I now want to return to the era of the Smith sisters, first to Evelyn Underhill, some thirty years younger than they, then to Lucy Menzies, a little younger again. In both cases, a familiar pattern re-emerges. Underhill was the only child born in the household of a lawyer, who moved from Birmingham and developed a distinguished career in London. She had an uncle who was a parish priest in Liverpool, and a cousin who was an Anglo-Catholic modernist in Birmingham (subsequently a bishop). Her own immediate family seem to have been no more than conventionally Christian, hence, the later importance of Baron Friedrich von Hügel in her life.

Languages learned and tested in expeditions to pre-war Europe and three years away at school led to attendance at the "Ladies Department" of King's College, London, through which university-level education became possible for women. Moreover, the university recognised her distinction, making her first an Honorary Fellow, and then its first woman Fellow in 1927, acknowledging thereby her poetry and her three novels, as well as her book on *Christian Mysticism* (1911). This latter was the first of her publications on mysticism for a vast reading public and was much emended during her lifetime. Eventually, and under the tutelage of Baron von Hügel, in 1921, she recommitted herself to public identification with the Church of England and developed a reputation for giving talks to audiences of both women and men, including the clergy. She was the first woman to lecture in Oxford under the aegis of Manchester College, in 1921. She did not threaten the clergy by arguing for the ordination of women, however!

Underhill began to visit Pleshey, the retreat house of the Diocese of Chelmsford in 1922, and two years later began to direct retreats there (and in many other places). She soon roped Menzies into Pleshey, who eventually took over the retreats herself between 1928 and 1938 when Underhill became too exhausted to do so and had another major book to finish. (So much for 1 Tim 2:12!)

A major interpreter of Underhill and her relationship with Menzies is now Robyn Wrigley-Carr, who gained a doctorate in St Andrews. On a visit to Pleshey, Wrigley-Carr recognised first one and then the second of the prayer books written up by Underhill for the conduct of retreats, books long assumed to have been lost. She combined them into one with helpful notes, published it in 2018, and found herself with an international best-seller on her hands. From there she has published a series of books and articles both on Underhill and on her relationship with Menzies. She was a contributor to the

international conference on Underhill's work based at Pleshey in 2021, the centenary of the latter's own re-identification as a member of the Church of England.

Wrigley-Carr has most recently attended especially to Underhill's exceptional understanding of worship, a matter which is of central importance in the life of Christian churches, in all its ecclesial dimensions. This is another area largely ignored in theology, except by liturgists, not commonly to be found in academic departments in the UK.<sup>13</sup> Underhill's 1936 book on worship yet awaits re-evaluation and development, and that apart, is in my view very possibly reliant on Menzies's insight into both the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) as they then were. Menzies had joined the SEC in 1925, and her entry into the SEC Calendar is the result of the effort made by her grandson, Mr. John Hunter.

In 1938, Underhill was offered a Doctor of Divinity degree by the University of Aberdeen, although she was too frail to make the journey. She died in 1941, leaving Menzies as her literary executor. Menzies collected and edited her work, and embarked on a biography of Underhill which was to be finished by Margaret Cropper in 1958. The accidental rediscovery of Cropper—Lakeland poet, hymn writer, and friend of both Underhill and Menzies—we owe to Sabine Hyland.<sup>14</sup>

We find in Menzies another case of formidable education, in that she and her sister were born into the household of Professor Alan Menzies, at the time a Church of Scotland minister in Abernethy. He sent his daughters to Heidelberg where there were some family connections, acquiring German in addition to certain other languages. As an adult, Menzies established herself as a translator and writer, with perhaps a sense of light relief producing *The First Friend: An Anthology of the Friendships of Man and Dog Compiled from the Literature of All Ages, 1400 BC–1921 AD* (1929).

In my view, she had a more secure and extensive education than that of Underhill. In particular, as William Hyland has shown, her two major books of the 1920s on St. Columba and then on St. Margaret reveal her profound sympathy with medieval sanctity.<sup>15</sup> It was Underhill's review of the former which introduced them to one another. For these and a formidable range of publications Menzies herself was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity in St Andrews in 1954 (the year of her death). It is as the result of Professor Judith Wolfe's initiative that we have a portrait of Menzies now hanging in College Hall in the School of Divinity in St Andrews. The Revd. Giles Dove has seen to the restoration of her family gravestone. This particular group of women—Evelyn Underhill, Lucy Menzies, and Margaret Cropper—must surely have been delighted by the honorary DLitt degree awarded to Helen Waddell by the University of St Andrews in 1936, one of many such honours, and to that extent comparable to the recognition of the work of the Smith sisters.

### Unexpected and Unpredictable Changes up to the Present Day

It is with Helen Waddell and Dorothy Sayers that we can identify a significant shift important for my narrative, notwithstanding that their lives began in profoundly different circumstances.

Waddell was the youngest in a family of ten children born in Tokyo, where her father was a Presbyterian missionary who

returned to Ireland when Helen was eleven, whereas Sayers was the single child of a Church of England clergyman. Both were able to gain BA degrees—Waddell in English Language and Literature, from Queen's, Belfast in 1911, and Sayers in Medieval Languages from Oxford in 1920, the first year in which that was possible for women. Both had to earn their own livings without any institutional base; both published plays that were performed on stage. Sayers also responded to invitations to write plays for performance in cathedrals, never losing an opportunity to bring doctrine alive for those who attended, and she also became widely appreciated for the “religious drama” she wrote for the BBC, a new institution available in every home, and a wholly new medium for the transmission of “theology.”

Like Menzies, both Waddell and Sayers turned to the medieval world for their theology. In Waddell's case, this was the period in which learning in the Western Latin-speaking world was shifting from monastery and cathedral to city and university, as in the case of St Andrews. She, above all, brought the literature and life of that world to the imagination and sympathy of readers of her own time.<sup>16</sup> Both reached back to the world which fascinated Sr. Benedicta Ward. Waddell produced *Beasts and Saints* (1934), a rare instance of a work springing from the Celtic world, illustrated by Robert Gibbings's enchanting woodcuts. Sayers turned to the Council of Nicea for her last play, *The Emperor Constantine* (1951), written for Colchester, with a shortened version performed in London on stage. Both produced best sellers. Waddell wrote a brilliant novel on Peter Abelard, (1933; three editions in six months, translated into nine languages), familiarising readers with Heloise. Sayers published the first volume of her translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* in 1949, relating it to the horrors of the recently concluded war.

Both Waddell and Sayers were to be honoured with biographies. Dame Felicitas Corrigan (OSB) was awarded a major prize for hers on Waddell.<sup>17</sup> The distinguished Italian scholar Barbara Reynolds received a DLitt degree from Durham in the centenary year, 1995, as the major biographer of Sayers, editor of her letters and of much else. (This was the centenary of the Durham university decision by which degrees had been made possible for women in all faculties except Divinity.) In addition, both writers also worked well outside the limits of theology: Waddell on the eighteenth-century Abbé Prévost and Manon Lescaut, and Sayers inventing detective fiction about her own era. In many different ways, both were sources of theology for their readers, well beyond the curricula in theology characteristic of their era.

One might possibly have thought that from this point on, women might be able to identify institutional positions for which they could apply or to which they might be invited. Take for instance, Helen Oppenheimer (1926–2022). Her education began at home with a governess, and then in a nearby day school. Once her family moved from London to Cheltenham to escape wartime London, she completed an excellent education as a boarder at Cheltenham Ladies College, from which she had thought to proceed to read English in Oxford. Her headmistress and her mother put their heads together to help her change her mind, however, and she embarked on the BA in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. She graduated with an excellent degree, married in 1947, and then completed a BPhil.

She joined a distinguished Oxford group known as the “Metaphysicals” (resisting the dominance of logical positivism). To them she dedicated her first book *Incarnation and Immanence* (1973). She was roped into a sequence of Church of England commissions to consider a variety of reports important for legislative changes, given that she made a significant contribution to questions about the integration of theology with ethics. In 1960 Robert Runcie became Principal of Cuddesdon College, which prepared candidates for ordination. He invited her to give a course of lectures on theology and ethics, which was at the time a significant innovation in such establishments. She became a most distinguished preacher.<sup>18</sup> When Runcie became Archbishop, he awarded her a Lambeth Doctor of Divinity in 1993, her first formal qualification in theology. However, she remained an “independent scholar,” for her social position was such that she was the last person to need a post in a university, and she could be influential in many other contexts instead, like some of her predecessors.

Oppenheimer was thus well placed to aid the establishment of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics. Its first president was Peter Baelz, by then Dean of Durham, and she became its second. She probably was the first woman to become a “president” of a society concerned with theology in the Church of England. She presided over the society's first conference in 1985, the theme of which was “Power and Authority.” A major paper on that occasion was devoted to revealing some of the crisis in theology so far as women were concerned.

### A New and Challenging World

The point here is that access to institutions (rather than working as “independent scholars”) occurred in the era in which the critique of Christian tradition became possible not as “reform” but as “rejection.” Just three years after the death of Waddell, Mary Daly had published the first of her critiques of the Christian tradition as she had received it: “We do not wish to be redeemed by a god, to be adopted as sons, or to have the spirit of a god's son poured into our hearts, crying “Father.””<sup>19</sup> More was to come from many other writers. A controversial paper at the first Christian Ethics conference in 1985 was delivered by Daphne Hampson on “Power and Gender.”<sup>20</sup> Hampson, by this stage in her career, had a permanent position in the School of Divinity at St Andrews, but by this time had concluded both that Christianity was false and that it was detrimental to women. Nevertheless, she was given a personal chair in St Andrews in 2002 in “post-Christian thought,” which no doubt made for an interesting time in the School of Divinity!

Thus, it occurred that by the time women gained access to positions in theology (and religious studies), a sustained critique of Christian tradition had developed. Yet some also negotiated the critique, and my example here is Martin Soskice with whose work we began. Soskice (born in 1951) came to study Biblical Studies in Sheffield. This was when she could not gain entry to the universities which most interested her in the USA, because they did not take women. She subsequently completed a doctorate in Oxford and married. In 1979, Cuddesdon admitted women in training for ordination, and she applied for her first teaching appointment there, given that there had to be at least one woman on the staff. Once appointed, she became an acute analyst and critic of both Cuddesdon and

Oxford, publishing essays on the subject in the early 1990s, which is where I first encountered her writing.<sup>21</sup> She was President of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain (1992–1994), an indication that she was never convinced by the arguments of some of the Christian tradition's most perceptive critics.

During her time at Cuddesdon she finished her first book, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (1985), whilst caring for her young daughter. When I was in a college in the USA working with a colleague on a book in philosophy of religion, I had an unforgettable experience. It was my task to try out pieces proposed for the book with a final year class. For one seminar, I allocated a chapter from Soskice's book to one young man for him to introduce to the others. At the end of his presentation, he blurted out: "This stuff is so difficult, I can't believe it's written by a woman." I leave you with your own reflections on what assumptions about women might be revealed by his observation, and what their implication might be for women in institutions concerned with theology and religious studies!

## Notes

This article was delivered as the St Andrews University School of Divinity 2022 Smith Lecture and was first published in the *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 6/2 (2022) 5–20. It is reproduced here, lightly edited, with kind permission.

1. See Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, "Sisters of Semitics: A Fresh Appreciation of the Scholarship of Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson," *Medieval Feminist Forum: Journal for the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship* 45/1 (2009) 23–49; and <https://www.academia.edu> for a wealth of references.
2. Sr Benedicta Ward died on 23 May 2022, after this Lecture was delivered.
3. See the appreciation of her work in *Prayer and Thought in Monastic Tradition. Essays in Honour of Benedicta Ward SLG*, ed. Santha Bhattacharji, Rowan Williams, and Dominic Mattos (Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2014).
4. See Jane Shaw, "Grace Warrack, Julian of Norwich and the Early Twentieth-century Revival of Mysticism," *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 5/4 (2021) 11–20.
5. Ann Loades, "Reforming Women in England and Scotland: Claiming Authority to Speak of God," in *Contemporary Feminist Theologies: Power, Authority, Love*, ed. Kerrie Handasyde, Cathryn McKinney, and Rebekah Pryor (Routledge, 2021) 100–16.
6. Some extracts from Professor Spufford's reflections on her own experience (which resulted in a television documentary), and some writing published for the first time by both herself and her daughter are to be found in Ann Loades, *Spiritual Classics from the Late Twentieth Century* (National Society and Church House, 1995) 68–103.
7. For a discussion of all three together see Susan Yore, *The Mystic Way in Postmodernity: Transcending Theological Boundaries in the Writings of Iris Murdoch, Denise Levertov, and Annie Dillard* (Lang, 2009).
8. *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Prologion*, trans. and ed. Sister Benedicta Ward (Penguin, 1973) 152–56.
9. See Morna Joy, "Grace Jantzen and the Power of Love," in *Grace Jantzen: Redeeming the Present*, ed. Elaine Graham (Ashgate, 2009) 23–39.
10. Karen O'Donnell, *The Dark Womb: Re-Conceiving Theology through Reproductive Loss* (SCM, 2022).
11. Ann Loades, "Children are Church," in *Lively Oracles of God: Perspectives on the Bible and Liturgy*, ed. Gordon Jeanes and Bridget Nichols (Liturgical, 2022) 206–26.

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13. Robyn Wrigley-Carr, "'Essentials' for Worship: Evelyn Underhill's Prayer Book," *Studia Liturgica* 5/2 (2021) 187–202.
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15. William Hyland, "Lucy Menzies (1882–1954) and the Christian Ideal of Sanctity in Medieval Scotland," *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 5/4 (2021) 39–55.
16. See Gabriel Daly, "Helen Waddell," *The Furrow* 16/8 (1965) 479–83, as he writes not an obituary but gratitude for the sheer enjoyment as well as profit she brought to her readers.
17. In addition, see Jennifer FitzGerald, *Helen Waddell and Maude Clarke* (Lang, 2012); Jennifer FitzGerald, ed., *Helen Waddell Reassessed* (Lang, 2013).
18. See Loades, *Spiritual Classics*, 1–43, for some examples of her writing.
19. For an introduction to Mary Daly's importance, see "Practical Consequences," in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades (SPCK, 1990) 181–94; the quotation is from Mary Daly, *Pure Lust* (Women's Press, 1984) 9.
20. Daphne Hampson, "On Power and Gender," *Modern Theology* 4/3 (1988) 234–50.
21. Her work from this period is selected in Loades, *Spiritual Classics*, 46–67.



**Ann Loades** (1938–2022) was Professor Emerita of Divinity at Durham University, England, and Honorary Professor at the University of St Andrews, Scotland.

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