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**STITCHING THE SACRED:  
BOUND IN THE BUNDLE OF LIFE**

**A PROJECT/DISSERTATION**

**Presented to**

**THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE**

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**for the degree of**

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**Catherine Cornutt**

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## Dedication

I dedicate my story to my children Rob and Lois.

While my story is a portion of their story as well, my story is the way I have defined and interpreted the world as I have experienced it. Their understanding of themselves necessitates a new telling of the story. I wish them well on their personal narratives; I hope they will value the listening and the telling of their own as well as other people's stories. I wonder how their stories will evolve.

## Abstract

I have created a liturgical quilt based upon images found in two verses of Scripture. The first verse is 1 Samuel 25:29. It is a proclamation by Abigail to David that his life would be securely bound in *God's bundle* of life. The second verse is John 14:2. It is an affirmation made by Jesus telling his followers that in God's house there were *many mansions*. I have interpreted the images from both verses and created a stitching reflecting my belief that everyone, regardless of gender, race, colour, sexual orientation or religious belief is at home in God's bundle.

I have presented the quilt to people and encouraged them to respond. People told me their stories of how difficult it was in their own lives to relate to the religious buildings that were stitched on the quilt. When it came to the bundle of life, people could more easily relate and readily engaged. They shared their dreams and hopes about humanity, and how there needs to be interdependency among people fostering mutuality, dignity and respect among all people.

I have written the stories people told me when they engaged with my quilt. I have extracted themes and common threads from their vignettes. I have tied Feminist theology and theory together with my own stories and reflections to produce a tapestry of shalom, healing and wholeness. I invite observers to enter this world and to listen to their own stories through the medium of my liturgical quilt.

## Acknowledgements

A project of this nature has many layers. Devoted friends and supportive people throughout the process have contributed greatly to its successful completion. Much time and effort was cheerfully shared by the following...

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## Chapter I : Introduction

### Studio Tour

I am sitting in my studio...the studio of my mind, that is. Yes, one day I hope to have a real studio. It will have lots of skylights so that there will be plenty of natural light from above, and there will be huge windows for light from outside. My studio will be a large room without obstruction, so that I can easily spread my quilts on the floor while I am working on them. There will be well organized cupboards and shelves to accommodate all of my supplies...my enormous and eclectic fabric stash, my scissors, and threads, and buttons and beads, and feathers and shells, and all the other little oddities that I pick up because they catch my eye at flea markets, garage sales, and the Goodwill. Perhaps when my studio is a reality, my sewing machines will find permanent places and will be securely attached to a table or stand. There will be a special place for a kettle for making tea, and a spot for my little CD player and the CDs I've collected over the past little while, as I've grown to love to listen to music as I stitch. And there will be large bookshelves to house the masses of quilting and design books, and magazines that I've accumulated over the past number of years...

Postcards from the future. I'm dreaming dreams. I'm dreaming that one day I will be known as a famous liturgical artist. People will come from miles around to see my quilted wall hangings. They will ask me, "What do these mean?" and I will tell them the stories that have inspired me to stitch. In turn, they will tell me their stories because story begets story. And in telling the stories of their lives, they will find new insights and meanings in their events, just as I have found in mine.

Allow me to introduce the quilts currently hanging in my studio. The first one is entitled the Creator (Plate 1). This stitching is a fabric collage of impressions accumulated from my

reading in Feminist Theology. Specifically, it reflects pictorial images from the traditional Genesis stories of Creation expressed through appliqué and quilting. When I was making this quilt, the ideas for the actual “picture” came so spontaneously that I would like to believe they were stored in a reservoir deep within my soul.

In Genesis chapter one, verse nine, it says that the Lord God made all kinds of trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food, and that in the centre of the garden (of Eden) there were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The central figure of the first quilt is that of a tree, and this tree represents the Creator. (Behold the goddess.) She gazes upon her creation through eyes of love and tenderness. Her torso is a myriad of leaves and branches; her breasts are inverted mountains. Her womb is pregnant with the planet earth, and she will soon give birth to it. Birds of the air have made their nest in the hair upon her head.

While the creator herself is not a tree in reality, she finds expression in nature in this symbol. Her roots that sink deeply into the ground are strong anchors to keep her trunk and upper extremities secure; they stretch deeply into the earth, constantly supplying her with nourishment. The apples at the base of the tree symbolize her continuous pursuit of knowledge. Background detail of the stitching includes an infinite array of tiny butterflies that represent nature and the ongoing life cycles within it.

I love trees; for me they are life giving in many, many ways. When I was growing up as a child, my parents instilled in me a keen sense of respect for all living things. I learned to be particularly sensitive to the length of time required to grow a tree after seeing a cross-section of the rings inside the trunk of a huge dead tree that had been cut down on our property. I learned to recognize trees by their leaves, berries and nuts, and sometimes even by their particular smells.

Trees are a dynamic symbol of perpetual regeneration, especially deciduous trees that I have chosen to portray in this particular quilt. Trees that shed their leaves in the fall and cover themselves with leafy foliage in the spring are vibrant signs of the dynamic life cycle in which we live and move and have our being. Trees symbolize the cyclical character of cosmic development in death and renewal and re-creation. They also symbolize different levels of the cosmos. Their upper branches reach to the light of the heavens, their trunks and lower branches place them within the earth's realm, and their roots that burrow deep into the soil connect them to the underworld. Thus, trees are a perpetual symbol of the relational balance that has been established between the heavens and the earth.

Biblically, in the traditional creation story of Genesis, the fruit of a tree in the Garden of Eden was the instrument of Adam's fall. In the New Testament, the tree is symbolic of the Cross upon which life was taken so that Christ could give life back to all who believe in the redemptive power of this action. The tree is also symbolic of the growth of the Kingdom of God that starts out as a tiny mustard seed and grows to such a size that the birds of the air are able to perch in its shade. In the book of Revelation, the tree of life is mentioned several times; its leaves are said to be for the healing of the nations.

I have chosen jewel tones for this piece of ecclesiastical stitching to represent the richness of Creation. I believe the Creator calls us to join her in an ongoing celebration of this Creation, one with another! When I reflect upon this quilt in my own spiritual journey, I am invigorated and empowered. It reminds me that I am able to step figuratively beyond the limitations that are so often imposed upon women in our society. No longer am I restrained in my spirit by the patriarchal doctrine of the past. And, I feel a direct connection with the Creator; she and I are linked through the nurture and care that we both give and receive in the dynamic

cycle of life.

The second quilt of which I would like to make mention on our studio tour is entitled, “O What a Tangled Web We Weave” (when first we practice to deceive) (Plate 2). Its central focus is a huge spider web suspended from the trunk and limb of an old, yet strong and seemingly barren tree. The quotation, from which this quilt takes its title, is a famous one penned by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). I stitched this quilt in the wake of a broken personal relationship of which the onset threatened to devastate me. The web of my own life had been broken and torn, and although I could not know it at the time, the process of rebuilding my life would come largely with the making of this quilt. Through the wisdom, guidance and mentoring of two companion quilters<sup>1</sup>, I was able to gather strength and find healing for my soul.

There are many layers of meaning in this quilt, and many stories emerge. First of all, I have drawn upon the ancient myth of Arachne in Greek mythology. Arachne was a Lydian girl, the daughter of Idmon of Colophon. She was an expert weaver, and as such, she ventured to challenge Athena, the patron goddess of weaving, to do better than she could. Athena came to her disguised as an old woman and warned her not to be impudent, but Arachne refused the warning, and Athena resuming her own shape, took up the challenge.

Athena wove a tapestry with portraits of the twelve Olympians in all their majesty and in the four corners of the fabric she depicted the punishments of presumptuous mortals who dared to defy them. In response to this transcendental picture of a higher reality to which

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to acknowledge and thank two very special quilters: Bernice Santor, an acclaimed liturgical stitcher who is well known in the United Church of Canada for her liturgical, quilted wall hangings, and also, Lorna Bowker Pennie who has been my trusted and dear friend for thirty years.

Arachne (mortals) could not attain, Arachne wove the scandalous love affairs of the gods and mortal women. Enraged, Athena struck Arachne with her shuttle and in anger tore the work to shreds. In despair, Arachne hanged herself but the goddess saved her and changed her into a spider, to hang and swing forever at the end of a thread. Legend has it that the spider kept all of Arachne's skill as a weaver.<sup>2</sup>

Another layer of story that this quilt intends to tell is one from Hopi Native Indian Spirituality. In the beginning, Spider Woman created the world. She brought into being the four elements of wind, water, fire and earth (depicted in coloured fabric and bric-a-brac on the design) and she established the four corners of the earth: north, south, west and east. These are represented on the web by a star, shell, sun and moon. Spider Woman also created the four races of people in the world: red, black, yellow and white, and it is from these that the whole colour scheme of the quilt takes its essence. The spider in the lower left-hand corner of the quilt has her own story to tell. She is made in soft sculpture from a fabric scrap of black longhaired sparse mohair, given to me by my friend and renowned Canadian teddy-bear artist, Lorraine Chien. I made the spider as close to scale as possible after a careful study of spiders and she is anatomically correct with respect to legs, eyes and body parts. Her legs are made flexible by the use of pipe cleaners, which I beaded to add to her beauty.

Perhaps the most important layer of story for me in this quilt comes from the feminist writer, Starhawk. In an excerpt from Dreaming the Dark, she writes,

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<sup>2</sup>I have drawn from two sources for this information: Michael Grant and John Hazed, Gods and Mortals in Classical Mythology (Springfield Massachusetts: G & C Merriam Company Publishers, 1973), 66. Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, trans. John Buchanan-Brown, A Dictionary of Symbols, London England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1996), 904.

So I speak of the Goddess as weaver, and I begin to pay attention to the spiders that build webs in my corners. I experience the web as a rhythm of strands and spaces. I see that there are points of connection and openings... that this interplay of stuff and space gives the whole web a tension that is taut yet elastic that it springs...I will search my own life for those points of connection, for those spaces in words, in relationships...and knowing the feel of the web gives me the power to be able to feel for that same tautness in the knots and spaces of my life... As I see the spider draw threads from her body, I can learn to draw cords of energy from my body, to weave these into new forms; to draw words from my head, my hands...to weave on the page.<sup>3</sup>

Starhawk's writing was a message of healing for me and as I worked on this quilt I began to see myself as the spider of her words. I began to draw upon the strength of my own inner resources of faith as a woman, as a web builder and as a source of creation. I looked to points of connection in my life with friends and family that helped me have the confidence to confront my demons and move ahead with my life. Over time, I was able to see that my web (my life) could be rebuilt and that it could be even more beautiful than ever before. In the construction of the actual quilt, I used fabric and lace and trim that had been handed down through the generations of my family and I found comfort in giving new life to these old bits of historical scrap.

This story of this quilt is bittersweet and as such is reminiscent of much of life. Therefore, in the centre of the web on the quilt, I have appliquéd a gold heart to symbolize the love which draws and holds the whole work together and I have attached a pearl teardrop as a

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<sup>3</sup>Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 74.

reminder that the project emerged from a time of much sadness in my life. As I reflect upon this quilt I am reminded of a verse from Psalm 30 that says, “weeping may endure for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning”.

The third quilt on our studio tour has a wonderful story behind it! Several years ago, the quilting guild to which I belong in Hamilton was planning to hold an exhibition. A challenge went out to all quilters of the guild to make a quilt for the show that would best represent the theme of “The Galaxy” (Plate 3). To a traditional quilter, such a challenge brings to mind stars and points, accuracy and bright patterns. To a non-traditional quilter such as myself, I searched for a way of being authentic to the art of liturgical stitching while at the same time, working within the theme of the upcoming exhibition. Much to my delight and excitement, I found exactly what I was looking for in the beautiful words of Psalm 147: God determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name; God covers the heavens with clouds, and prepares rain for the earth; God makes the grass grow upon the mountains; God feeds the cattle on the hillside and feeds the young raven when it calls; God sends the snow like wool, and scatters frost like ashes; God causes the wind to blow and the waters to flow. Through a combination of richly coloured fabrics, embroidery, appliqué and ornament, my quilted wall hanging took on a life of its own. It told the story of the cosmos, with a special glimpse into the richness and busyness of what God had created on planet earth.

I would like to draw particular attention to the raven in the quilt that I stitched by using soft sculpture and feathers. When the quilt was on display at a second exhibition entitled “Art at

the Park”<sup>4</sup>, the raven was touched a lot by people who came to the show. At first I was quite dismayed that the poor bird had become so dishevelled that it looked awful. Try as I might, I could not make the bird look as it did when the quilt was originally made. I thought I was going to have to make another bird because it was so very mangled. However the more I thought about it, the more I appreciated the need for people to reach out and touch the quilt (and bird). There is something very significant about the value of touching, and the comfort and satisfaction that touching brings to our lives. Touching is salvation.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, I have decided that the mangled bird is part of the story of this particular quilt and the bird will probably always look a bit ruffled. Like the Velveteen Rabbit in the famous children’s story by Margery Williams<sup>6</sup>, the soft black bird in my quilt has been touched and stroked. It is Real.

So, basically, we have come to an end of the studio tour for the moment. The empty space on the large wall at the far end? Yes, that is where my current undertaking will hang when it is completed in the near future. That quilt is entitled “Bound in the Bundle of the

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<sup>4</sup>West Park Hospital where I am employed, has an art show each September for three days in which employees, residents and friends of the hospital are invited to display their creative works for the local community (Etobicoke, Toronto). I submitted all three of my quilts for the show in 1997.

<sup>5</sup>As I make this assertion, I am reminded of the story of the hemorrhaging woman in the gospel of Mark (5:25-34). The woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, when she heard about Jesus, thought that if she could just touch his clothes she would be healed. The connection between touching and healing is dynamic in that the biblical Greek word used in the text for healing is *sodzo*, which means “to save”. Healing means salvation and wholeness; it is a parallel word for *shalom*. There is healing, peace and wholeness in the action of the touch.

<sup>6</sup>In the story of The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams (New York: Avon Books, 1975), 17, the Skin Horse says to the Velveteen Rabbit, “Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

Living” and it’s a statement of where I currently find myself on my spiritual journey; it’s a personal statement of what holds meaning for me in my life.

### The Pattern

Where does one begin to tell the story of one’s own personal search for meaning? Every life is a story, yet events by themselves do not make the story. ‘Story’ is the vehicle through which we organize the things that happens to us; it is the mechanism through which we explain our world and come to an understanding of who we are. From the day we are born until the day we die human beings search to make sense out of their world. Events that happen are merely experiences until we interpret and assign meaning and importance to them. Two people can observe the same event yet each will tell an entirely different story about what they saw.

(The following sentence is meant to be read aloud:)

Up until the last few decades, there was an unquestioned, unexamined and unchallenged acceptance of the belief, that the world as it looked to men, was the only world, and that the way of dealing with it, (that men had created) was the only way, and that the values men had evolved, were the only ones. Within patriarchy, the history and values of men were considered to be the only valid frame of reference for society as a whole. Generally speaking, women’s experiences, values, and meanings were excluded from society’s story of experiences, values and meanings. Acclaimed feminist artist Judy Chicago tells her story of being an undergraduate student at UCLA, and taking a course entitled “The Intellectual History of Europe”. She says that the professor, who was a respected historian, promised that at the end of the last class he would discuss women’s contributions to Western thought. She says that she waited eagerly all semester, and then at the final meeting, the instructor strode into class and announced,

“Women’s contributions to European intellectual history? They made none.”<sup>7</sup> Chicago’s reaction to this comment was one of total devastation. Further studies over the next few years convinced her that the idea that women had no history was “prejudice elevated to intellectual dogma” and she began to conclude that people accepted such notions primarily because they had never been exposed to a different perspective.<sup>8</sup>

A tendency to see the world from a male perspective has influenced the kind of information that has been preserved and valued. Dating back to the earliest cave paintings, through visual art we have learned some of the stories of what people did, thought and revered. Myths, legends and tales were passed from generation to generation through the oral tradition of storytelling. One person was usually designated as the “keeper of the tales” and it was his or her responsibility to learn all the stories going back at times for thousands of years, and commit to memory the wisdom of the past.<sup>9</sup> Eventually the stories were written down so that the details would not be forgotten. As they were written, the wisdom and truth that these stories were perceived to contain grew to hold considerable power.

This has certainly been the situation in the Judeo-Christian tradition in regard to the Bible that is perceived by many people to be a sacred, definitive and authoritative text. A collection of writings dated 12 to 3 centuries before the birth of Christ and a number of years after Christ’s death, has survived to legitimize societal and ecclesiastical patriarchy, and woman’s divinely ordained place within it. Stories written by men, for men, and for the most

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<sup>7</sup>Judy Chicago, The Dinner Party (New York: Viking Penguin, 1996), 3.

<sup>8</sup>Chicago, 1996, 4.

<sup>9</sup>Richard Stone, The Healing Art of Storytelling: A Sacred Journey of Personal Discovery (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 81.

part about men, describe the changes in economic, political and religious life in an array of Mesopotamian clans, tribal leagues, independent monarchies and exiled communities. Few women are named, and most are significant only as adjunct to men, significant only in men's activities. Feminist Biblical scholar Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza explains that when maleness is the norm, then femaleness constitutes a deviation from the norm.<sup>10</sup>

While it is apparent that many people in society have evolved into a Post-Christian era, the influences of historical Christianity are still strongly evident. The misogyny of the Church Fathers [Tertullian, who informed women in general: "You are the devil's gateway"; Augustine who proclaimed that women were not made in the image of God; Thomas Aquinas who defined women as misbegotten males; Martin Luther who remarked that God created Adam lord over all living creatures and that Eve spoiled it. etc] is still filtered and perpetuated in the 1990's as fuel for oppression and abuse against women in traditional, right-wing, conservative, evangelical and fundamentalist circles. Because some religious people consider it sinful to contradict the teaching of the Church, the abuse and misogyny continues. And what does the Church teach? On the one hand, within Christian doctrine it seems that women both provoked the Fall and produced the Saviour; we provided the major source of sin and the primary symbol of purity. A curious mix of chivalry, piety and misogyny over time has been the outcome! And furthermore, the workings of sexism were not merely restricted to the Church; they were to be found in the division of labour in and out of the home, in sexuality, in the family, in health care, in child care, in language, in the law, in education, in the arts, in the media and in government policy.

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<sup>10</sup>Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988), 42.

However, this paper is not specifically about abuse, sexism and the oppression of women: it is the telling of a story that is very near and dear to my heart. It is the telling of the story that for millennia women have brought meaning, beauty, and a sense of the sacred into their lives and the lives of others (their families, friends and the Church) through stitchery. This story includes a premise that women and men operate from different vantage points of ascribing value to their world.<sup>11</sup> It also assumes an understanding that the telling of any woman's story needs to be heard with an acute awareness to the constraints and influences that living in a male-centred world bring upon it.

Across a wide spectrum, generally speaking, women's stories have been overlooked. Too often, women's creativity has been labelled "women's work", and has been devalued. Because women's creative talents and gifts have usually lacked a monetary value and women have not earned a wage for their work, we have been discredited or have not been taken seriously. Sometimes, in order to be taken seriously, women have had to assume male identities.<sup>12</sup> "Women's work" in yarn, fabric, food, the beautification of home, gardening and the like, is ephemeral; it does not last for centuries in the way that a sculpture, building, institutional system and other "man's work" lasts. Women's contributions are constantly used, consumed and erased from consciousness. However, with the awareness that Feminism has brought about in recent years, female genres such as fabric art, cooking and personal narratives that have been undervalued in the past, have begun to be recognized as having merit. Not only

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<sup>11</sup>Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (U.S.A.: Harvard University Press, 1982) especially chapters 1 and 6.

<sup>12</sup>A well known example of this would be found in the author Mary Ann Evans Cross (1819-1880) alias George Eliot, who wrote such famous novels as Silas Marner, The Mill on the Floss, Adam Bede, etc.

are artefacts and “women’s work” being identified as significant, but also the processes, objects, contexts and people involved are being acknowledged as well. Let us take for example “the quilt” as artefact, and consider it in terms of a process, an object, a context and the people who are involved. In addition to its practical household functions, the traditional quilt can be seen to be an object of art made according to customary aesthetic norms of production. The makers of the quilt (neighbours, relatives, church ladies), the occasions of its production (quilts were made to mark rites of passage e.g. births, weddings, leaving home, even deaths), the purpose of the quilt (for warmth or comfort) and the internal artistic form and pattern of the quilt all converge to describe the context of its significance. The occasion itself of making a quilt often acknowledged a story already in process.

A quilting bee was frequently the social milieu of the quilt’s construction. The woman convening the bee would invite friends or relatives who were noted for their skill in needlework to participate. The ideal would be to produce a quilt with excellent quality of stitch (small, straight and even stitches). This would be especially true for “fancy” quilts as opposed to “everyday” or merely “functional” quilts where the design would be fairly simple, and the fabric would be plain cotton or fabric composed of cotton blends. Novices and inexperienced quilters would be permitted to work on the latter. There is an obvious discrepancy in knowing *how* to quilt and actually *doing it*: performance of the skill is a highly valued commodity. However, getting the whole family together and having fun could be equally as important as producing a formally perfect quilt. I would like to include a little story to illustrate this particular notion. A conversation between a grandmother and her daughters reported in an article by Susan Roach in Women’s Folklore, Women’s Culture expresses the dismay of the older quilter’s failing eyesight. Grandma says,

“On this blue, I’m making stitches about two feet long.” Her daughter, an experienced quilter, replied, “Well, that’ll be all right”, and another daughter says, “Well, I’m glad it’s a pallet (floor) quilt, ‘cause little bitty babies will not have \_\_\_ We’ll put little socks on it, so it won’t get its toenails hung in the stitches.”<sup>13</sup>

This particular “bee” represented the efforts of three generations working together in co-operation to produce a functional and traditional floor quilt for a new, fourth generation baby. As an object of art and as a beautiful heirloom that will be treasured cross-generationally, the quilt symbolizes love and sharing and a story of coming together to produce it. Perfection in terms of stitch size is not as important as the fact that grandma is able to add her stitches. Thus the quilt needs to be understood and appreciated in the context of story; its overlapping functions and how they relate to other aspects of the culture influence the message of the quilt.

When time and effort are taken to examine women’s aesthetics in an attempt to understand how we (women) see ourselves and our world (often times this means looking into and at a woman’s private world which is her home) we learn what women make in and of their everyday lives. Expressive creations such as stories, games, songs, craft and rituals are the media. The discriminating choices that are made, that is, the ways in which beauty and meaning are brought into daily living, are important in that they help give incredible insight into what it means to be a woman living in a male world. Women’s power to create (despite male dominance of one sort or another) moves beyond men’s historical pattern of describing us as men see or don’t see us. We tell our story through our activities as well as our words.

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<sup>13</sup>Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik, ed., Women’s Folklore, Women’s Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 62.

## Project Dissertation

This brings me to the story of my project/dissertation. I am convinced that “doing every-day work” is sacred activity and has value. Stitching is an every-day activity and I wish to honour it at this particular time through this particular event in my life. I am delighted that I am able to combine my interest, passion and talent to create a liturgical wall-hanging quilt, and that in combination with this written account, for doctoral accomplishment, it will be accepted as “a work of art”. Art is a way of communicating. I believe that a picture expresses a story in a way that words cannot. Colours, shapes and symbols all invoke dialogue and discussion within the human soul. To my way of thinking, telling one’s story, that is, giving voice to whatever creates meaning in a person’s life, is truly a spiritual exercise.

As mentioned in the introduction, quilting is a profoundly spiritual experience for me. I believe that a personal quest for wholeness closely parallels the construction of the quilt. On one layer of understanding there is the activity of selecting and joining together separate pieces of fabric to make a new cohesive whole; on another layer, there is the interpreting (assigning meaning) and piecing together of the events of one’s life to make a cohesive whole. The finished product includes connecting, piecing as reparative work, and ritual as sacred expression. The cutting, dismantling and rearranging of something old, like a favourite blouse or shirt that one has had for many years, involves risk and takes courage, yet the creation of something new is liberating and exciting. Similarly, the dismantling and rearranging of old ways of thinking, interpreting and believing that one has used for many years in a patriarchal world, involve risk and take courage, yet the outcome of the new reality is liberating and exciting. I have learned through my studies in Feminist Theology that a break with patriarchal tradition requires risk, incredible energy and an initiative to challenge the institutions of our

predominantly male heritage. It means evaluating what was formerly considered to be normative and cohesive; it means saving what has value and what is life giving; it means reconstructing a paradigm that meets the new-found need.

Joel Barker, in defining “paradigm” includes the following: A paradigm is a basic way of perceiving, thinking, valuing and doing associated with a particular vision of reality. A dominant paradigm is seldom if ever stated explicitly; it exists as an unquestioned, tacit understanding that is transmitted through culture and to succeeding generations through direct experience rather than being taught.<sup>14</sup> When I speak of reconstructing a paradigm that meets new needs, and when I filter it through the aforementioned definition, I am aware that a change of this magnitude is something that will take years to accomplish. It will develop and evolve in the culture in proportion to its perceived importance. A change in a paradigm (i.e. a paradigm shift) implies a change to the rules of the game. It seems to me that because the stakes are so high, mutuality and inclusivity must be adopted if men and women are to survive and prosper in future generations.

The religious or spiritual theme that I have chosen to portray through liturgical stitching in the major project of my dissertation illustrates this paradigm shift. I have drawn from two Biblical references to create a story depicting inclusivity. From the Old Testament story of David and Abigail (that is found in 1 Samuel 25), I have drawn upon an image in verse 29 that is particularly rich from my perspective. It includes a proclamation, or blessing which for me captures the essence of God’s care for everyone. The story of which I speak takes place immediately after the death of the prophet Samuel, when King Saul is in pursuit of David.

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<sup>14</sup>Joel Arthur Barker, Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future (New York: Harper Collins, 1992),

David seeks provisions for his men from Abigail's husband, Nabal, while he is in flight. Despite the fact that it is the time of the sheep-shearing feast, a festive time of traditional hospitality, Nabal rudely turns down David's request of food for his men. Seething with anger, David plots punitive action against Nabal for the insult. In retaliation, he plans to kill Nabal and his entire household. One of Nabal's servants informs Abigail of David's plan of revenge, and Abigail carefully strategizes an intervention to avert the threatened destruction of her household. She makes a peace offering of food for David and his entourage, she humbles herself in her posture before him, and she reminds David that God has saved him from shedding any blood (one of Israel's laws of holiness that deals with the root of revenge). Abigail also prophesies that God will establish a lasting dynasty for David (25:28) because he has fought the battles of the Lord, and has never been found to be evil, all his days. Abigail says, (25:29) "Yet a man is risen to pursue thee and to seek thy soul: but *the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God...*" This is the image that is the focus of my liturgical stitching.

The phrase, 'the bundle of life' (tseror in Hebrew) occurs only once in this context in the Bible. Because the expression is unique, it is somewhat challenging to define. In Ecclesiasticus (6:16) 'bundle' depicts the place where life, with a clear sense of salvation is preserved. An archaeological discovery of a cuneiform tablet excavated from the Mesopotamian site of Nuzu bears the markings (ts-r-r) which is said to relate directly to the concept of 'bundle' in which one may describe the activity of collecting accounts, used in taking the inventory of livestock.<sup>15</sup> The Bible uses this same terminology of accountancy when

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.31, quoting Willis Harmon in An Incomplete Guide to the Future (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970).

<sup>15</sup>Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, 137.

describing the act of putting money in a purse or bag (Genesis 42:35; Proverbs 7:20; Haggai 1:6; Isaiah 46:6), or placing some other valuable item(s) into a bundle.

One writer has suggested that the verse from 1 Samuel 25:29 (above) is a metaphor for the custom of binding up valuable things in a bundle to prevent their being injured.<sup>16</sup> What could be more valuable than all the lives of God's created beings? I like this image of inclusivity and valuing. It is a concept of nurturing in which I find comfort and peace. It is an image of God that is important for people to grasp in their search for belonging, relating, finding meaning in life and finding a place to call home. To me, it conveys acceptance, unconditional love, healing and wholeness. It is the ultimate message of hope.

When I was designing this quilt, I decided to connect the Old Testament image from 1 Samuel of being bound in the bundle with another "picture". In the New Testament, in the gospel of John (14:2), Jesus says, "*In God's house are many mansions*: if it were not so, I would have told you..." For me, this is an inclusive statement that implies there is room for everyone in God's dwelling place, or in other words, there is room for everyone in God's bundle. As this raises the ever-important question, "where does God dwell?" I have attempted to illustrate, through imagery with appliqué and piecework that God dwells everywhere. Through representation of five different "dwelling places of God" (Shinto Temple, Mosque, Synagogue, Cathedral and Jain Temple) in the background detail of the quilt, the infinite love and inclusivity of God's bundle is portrayed.

My work of art emerges from a personal faith journey and a need to find my place in my God's bundle; my artwork expresses my need to be accepted and valued as a woman, as an

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<sup>16</sup>James Hastings, The Greater Men and Women of the Bible (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 248.

artist, and as a human being. In the story of Abigail and David, I am encouraged and heartened by Abigail's acts of courage and insight in dealing with a life-threatening situation in the way that she did. She chose to take control of her destiny and to take responsibility for all who would be affected by the one, poor, selfish decision that her husband had made. She knew what the consequences of her husband's actions would be. The text does not luxuriate in details of Abigail's household, but we can imagine that if Abigail had children, she would have anguished over the mere thought of their impending deaths. She saw that an injustice had been done and knew that she could do something that would make a difference. She didn't try to change her husband's mind; she did not defer to his traditional authority. Abigail used her God-given gifts of intelligence and creative ability to defuse a potentially volatile situation. What this story says to me in the context of my own faith journey is that God has given me talents and gifts to share with the world. In some small ways, I am able to evoke change because my artwork is a vehicle for healing.

I think it is possible for healing to occur on several different levels. First of all, healing occurs at a personal level. As I have described at an earlier place in this paper with reference to the spider quilt, I was able to concentrate my energy over the course of several months into the hundreds of stitches that went into the construction of the quilt. As I stitched, I had time to think and reflect upon my story. I reflected upon my place and purpose in my world. In the process of creating a piece of work that had beauty and value, I was able to see my own beauty and value as well. As healing had taken place in my life, I was ready to be and give of myself.

An article published recently in *Chatelaine Magazine* (October 1998) described one woman's healing journey that came about through quilting, when she found that her "life was unravelling as fast as a hem on a cheap dress". Her marriage of almost 19 years had come to an

end. Distraught and anxious, she found the rhythm of stitching soothing. Listen to accounts of her journey. She said,

I joined squares of cloth, manipulated them, managed them, controlled them and created something new and whole...I started a simple quilt of repeated traditional blocks, Storm at Sea. The metaphor was so apt; my new life was progressing uneasily. But as I worked on the quilt, the rows of stormy blocks changed. The work demanded something different. Two birds, looking forward, planted themselves near the top of the work; the blacks and greys gave way to gentle mauves and sea greens. The optimism of the quilt surprised me. It had taken me by the hand and showed me that I wasn't drowning after all. I was getting to shore, stroke by stroke.<sup>17</sup>

Healing can also take place on another level. When my quilts were on display at an art show last year, I was surprised at how many people openly shared their stories with me. Because art is defined and interpreted through one's own personal story, it often functions as a catalyst for spiritual reflection, growth and healing. If those who view the quilts can dialogue with the quilt-story such that it helps them resist their own experience and find new meaning, or if it invites rethinking, dreaming and reflection, then my quilts will have achieved a very valuable purpose. Story begets story, and when one person tells their story to another person who actively listens and hears what is being said, healing may begin to take place.

### Beginning Stories

My first remembrances of stitching, which for me have become an important means of

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<sup>17</sup>Paulette Bourgeois, "By a Thread" *Chatelaine*, October 1998, 112.

understanding and telling my own story, go back to the time when I was a very young girl. During my early years, my whole life was centred around the church where my father was the Sunday School Superintendent, a Sunday School teacher and an elder; my mother convened bazaars, bridge parties, church suppers and Christmas hampers for the poor. I sang in the junior choir, went to summer church camps, attended Brownies, C.G.I.T. and Young Peoples. Even today I still have the medals for perfect Sunday School attendance for years in a row and have beautiful certificates with gold calligraphy for huge passages of scripture once memorized.

An only child and the only female of a very small extended family (counting all of my cousins and aunts and uncles and even my parents and myself brought the total to eleven), I had an aunt who was very fond of me. I was probably the child and daughter she would or could never have. Andria was her name, and she was an accomplished stitcher. Essentially as soon as I could hold a needle and put it to good use, she began to teach me to sew. Perhaps I was four or five when I first learned to embroider and to do French knots, lazy daisy, stem and chain stitches. I remember working on little cloth serviettes and a tablecloth (probably for a doll's tea party set) that I was given as a gift for Christmas. The pattern to be embroidered was stamped on the little bits of factory cotton. Perhaps you will recall having something of the same genre when you were a young girl too.

My first truly creative venture of haute couture was an attempt to make a pair of shorts and a bandeau top that I cut out from an old pillowcase and stitched with great big running stitches at the age of six. Needless to say, I never wore the creation. However, I knew what I wanted to do and I had a very simplistic idea as to how to go about it. I also remember at a very early age (I think even before the age of 6) dressing a bronze figurine that my grandparents had in their living room. I remember feeling very uncomfortable about this bronze figure because it

was of a nude woman standing on the floor, who was holding high in her hands an amber coloured ashtray. I was always making primitive robes for her to wear. Because she was metal, she was always cold to the touch. I was also quite uncomfortable with the fact that she was naked...and coming from a very prim and proper family, I was quite embarrassed that the poor woman was in public view without her clothes.

My initiation into the world of quilting came when I was about seven or eight years of age. My mother's home church was Cooke's Presbyterian Church on Queen Street East in Toronto. I have wonderful memories as a little girl of going with my mother to Mission Band at Cooke's once a month on a Thursday after school. We lived in North Toronto; my mother didn't drive a car, so she would walk to school to get me, and after school was over, we would walk a mile or so to Bayview Avenue, catch a bus and then the subway to go downtown. In the basement of Cooke's Church, old ladies were gathered together around several quilt frames, very busy at their work. I loved to watch them and would occasionally be invited to join in and add my stitches, while my mother helped in the kitchen to prepare the evening meal. After dinner there would be a devotional service. Mother and I would leave shortly after we had eaten to catch the subway to Eglinton where my father would meet us. Quilting has always been a special event for me and its introduction had a nurturing component to it with the white haired ladies of another era.

### Artistic Underpinnings

Quilting is a primal women's art form. The history of women working with fabric dates

back some 20,000 years to the Palaeolithic Age.<sup>18</sup> Quilting is an art form that is related to touch, to intimacy and to the home. It is my belief that the making of a quilt is a sacred journey in which pieces of fabric are stitched together to form a cohesive whole. Making a quilt is often described as a metaphor for one's life journey as the process includes the piecing of fragments to make something of beauty. It is an art form that has been handed down from woman to woman through many generations, and as an art form, the quilt is a unique representation of "women's work". Quilting allows women to connect with the centuries of women who have expressed themselves in like manner through the humble works of their hands.

This is one of the reasons that I am honoured to join in a great tradition of quilters. The quilts that I have chosen to stitch over the last several years fall into the broad category of liturgical/ ecclesiastical fabric art. This type of religious art has been revered throughout the history of the church. The expressions, liturgical art, ecclesiastical art, and religious art are used rather interchangeably within the same context to express the same notion. Historically and aesthetically, the purpose of this type of art was for the purpose of enriching and enhancing the environment in which people worshipped.<sup>19</sup> Enriching the environment was important in order to open the worshippers to the Holy, to help them experience God, and to share the Holy with others by taking God into themselves. In a very liberal sense, my quilts go beyond the traditional scope of boundary definition that would imply ecclesiastical art is mainly for the purpose of enhancing worship space. On an emotional and spiritual level, my quilts celebrate

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<sup>18</sup>Elizabeth Wayland Barber, Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth and Society in Early Times (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 43.

<sup>19</sup>In the introduction to Art of the Spirit: Contemporary Canadian Fabric Art, Nancy-Lou Patterson says that liturgical art is art used in the context of worship and that religious ritual must take place in a physical setting.

the fact that women's work is sacred and that throughout history, women have worked to create sacred space in everyday life. And, because I believe that the sacred is encountered in the ordinary, I believe that it is difficult to define, restrict and confine what is to be considered "religious" art. Wherever the art form is given place, one's sacred story will be told.

Historically, however, enhancing and beautifying the worship environment has not been without considerable contention. The prohibition of the use of "graven images" in Jewish worship in the Old Testament times had a profound affect on the whole Biblical tradition of theology and spirituality. God could not be represented in a visual form that was worthy of adoration and worship; in some ways, God was beyond the grasp of a human being's comprehension. In New Testament times, God was made known through the incarnation, that is, an *image* of God was revealed. This imagery came to exist through a rich vocabulary of symbols. In Doors of Perception: Icons and their Spiritual Significance, John Baggley states that the word "symbol" is derived from the Greek words meaning "to draw together" (the opposite is "diabolic" which means "that which tears apart"). "Symbols allow drawing together different perceptions, different levels of understanding and meaning, different dimensions to human experience; symbols become the focal point at which the material and spiritual, the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, the human and the divine converge in human perception."<sup>20</sup> Thus, symbolism served a very important function in the decorative art of the churches. Water, wine, bread, stone, fire and rock were common examples in both testaments. Symbolic expression was found in sculpture, carving, pottery, stained glass, mosaic, painting, fabric (both banner and vestment), to name some of the venues.

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<sup>20</sup>John Baggley, Doors of Perception: Icons and their Spiritual Significance (London and Oxford: A.R. Mobray and Company, 1987), 33.

It is recognized that societies live by their symbols or myths; we order our institutions and unwritten laws by them. Another way of expressing this would be to say that we experience the world according to the pictures that we have constructed in our own minds, words and imaginations. What we believe can be more powerful than the actual facts themselves. Thus, the artist and the image-maker (who are both “storytellers” in the broad sense of the word) play decisive roles within our society. When an artist captures a small part of the human experience in an attempt to express the greater part, he or she has the unique role of that of a communicator with the opportunity and potential to shape and focus shared human life. “Art is not an ornament to an existing world: it is the primary means of forming that world.”<sup>21</sup> Thus art does not emerge as a result of an historical development (which is what the history of art presupposes); rather works of art emerge out of the actions of people within the particularities of a situation.<sup>22</sup>

I think these quotations are important truths and I have cited them in an attempt to again place the devaluing of “women’s work” into a framework of understanding in my own spiritual journey, and the importance for me in my artwork to celebrate what for so long has been suppressed. Women have been stitching and working with fabric for 20,000 years. We have been silently shaping culture and forming the world through our artwork; we have been artistically creating meaning, beauty and a sense of the sacred through stitchery for centuries. However, art made with thread, and art made with paint have been perceived to be intrinsically unequal as the former has been considered to be artistically less significant. Historically, the

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<sup>21</sup>John W. Jr. Dixon, Art and Theological Imagination (New York: Seabury Press , 1978), 12.

<sup>22</sup>Dixon, 1978, 14.

real differences between the two were defined (by men) in terms of where they were made and who made them. Needlework was usually made in the domestic sphere “for love” by women, and painting was usually produced in the public sphere, for remuneration by men. Rather than acknowledge that needlework and painting were two different but equal arts, stitchery was often labelled as craft associated with women, and accorded lesser value. In fact, embroidery and a stereotype of femininity actually became collapsed into each other; they were both characterised as mindless, decorative, delicate, and devoid of significant content.<sup>23</sup> It was generally understood that when women embroidered, it was not art but rather it was an expression of femininity.<sup>24</sup>

The division of art forms into a hierarchical classification of arts and crafts has been ascribed to factors of class within the economic and social system, separating art from artisan. The fine arts, for example painting and sculpture, were considered the proper sphere of the privileged classes while craft or the applied arts, like furniture making or silver smithy, were associated with the working class. There emerged an important connection between the hierarchy of the arts and the sexual categories of male and female. The development of an ideology of femininity coincided historically with the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft.<sup>25</sup> While men’s storyboard was respected as “art”, women’s was relegated to “craft”.

An interesting story to share at this point is as follows. As recently as 1975 in Britain, a

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<sup>23</sup>Dixon, 1978, 6.

<sup>24</sup>Rozsika Parker, The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1984), 5.

<sup>25</sup>Parker, 1989, 5.

feminist postal art project 'Feministo' came into being in protest and opposition to established male-dominated modes of art practice. Women began exchanging art works through the mail, setting up a visual dialogue about their lives as housewives and mothers. They utilized whatever materials they had at hand and whichever domestic skills they possessed. 'Feministo' departed from the norm of competitive individualism that was fostered and promoted by the institutions associated with fine arts. Monica Ross, a participant in 'Feministo' said the following: "Our creativity derives from non-prestigious folk traditions. It is diverse and integrated into our lives; it is cooked and eaten, washed and worn. Contemporary standards either ignore our creativity or rate it as second-class. We communicate; we don't compete. We share images and experiences..."<sup>26</sup>

### Historical Remnants

It is difficult to assign a date to the beginning of textile art. Archaeological discoveries at Robenhausen in Switzerland have shown that flax was grown and processed into fine linen cloth during the Stone Age.<sup>27</sup> It is known that cloth that had been dyed purple by the Phoenicians 5500 years ago was used in international trade and in bartering for wool and spices throughout the Mediterranean. Discoveries of ancient tapestries reveal that the primary materials used in their construction were linen thread from the flax plant, wool from sheep, wild cotton, and wild silk from silkworms. Civilizations that were advanced to produce and/or collect these materials had the potential for producing wearable and displayable textile art.

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<sup>26</sup>Parker, 1989, 208.

<sup>27</sup>Barber, 1994, 90.

The Old Testament contains some of the earliest written accounts of weaving and of material that was used for tapestry and vestment.<sup>28</sup> In Exodus 26:1-14 there is a description of how the tabernacle was to be adorned. Moses said to “make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen, and blue and purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman”. These were no doubt, works that would be considered to be “tapestry”. In the book of Esther (1:1-7), the wealth and opulence of King Xerxes is described which included a reference to hangings in the garden “of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars”.

The Hebrew woman who worked industriously at home for the household good is described by the writer of Proverbs (31:10-25). The text indicates that stitching was a normative part of her life.

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her...She *seeks wool, and flax, and works willingly with her hands*. She is like the merchants' ships; she brings her food from afar. She rises also while it is yet night, and gives meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considers a field, and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard... She perceives that her merchandise is good: her candle does not go out by night. *She lays*

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<sup>28</sup>As wall-hanging rather than vestment is the prime focus of this paper, a study of garments will not be included. Suffice it to say that textile art was very prominent as wearable art. One example to substantiate this claim would be to note the detail that is given to the making of garments for Aaron and his sons (Exodus 28:1-43; Leviticus 8:6-9). It is sufficient here to say that the whole of these vestments, whether it was texture or material or workmanship was the very best of its kind: fine linen, pure gold, precious stones, costly ointment, exquisite workmanship, all used for glory and beauty. For a brief but concise synopsis of vestments, please refer to Jill Liddell, *The Patchwork Pilgrimage: How to Create Vibrant Church Decorations and Vestments with Quilting Techniques*, (New York: Viking Studio Books, 1993), 3-19.

*her hands to the spindle, and her hands to the distaff.* She stretches out her hand to the poor; yes, she stretches forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: *for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is [fine linen] and purple...She makes fine linen and sells it; and delivers girdles to the merchant.* Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

Tradition has it that in AD 312, Constantine, at the head of his army on a march from York in England to Rome to take the capital from his rival Maxentius, saw the Greek letters chi and rho in front of the sun and the words, '*in hoc signo vinces*', meaning 'in this sign shalt thou conquer'. Constantine believed that the God of the Christians divinely inspired his vision, as the Greek letters X and P is a monogram for 'Christ'. Up until this time, Christianity had been a forbidden religion and its followers were severely persecuted. However, because Constantine was triumphant in battle, he was convinced that the Christian God had given him victory and he decreed that Christianity was to be the state religion of Rome and the Empire. Constantine was baptized into the faith and as a visible sign of his conversion, he removed the Roman eagle from the standard of the Imperial Cavalry and replaced it with the chi-rho. Banners with this emblem adorned church walls, and on high and holy days, they were carried through the streets in processions.<sup>29</sup>

European societies in the Middle Ages developed heraldic symbols to adorn cloaks, shields and banners in order to announce in some detail who the bearers were. Knights were so completely covered with armour that their personal identities were hidden. Their banners,

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<sup>29</sup>Gisela Banbury & Angela Dewar, How to design and make BANNERS for Sacred and Secular festivals, (Kent, Great Britain: Burns and Oates/Search Press, 1992), 6.

which were commonly heavily embroidered pieces, were used as rallying points in battle. The importance of these banners must not be underestimated in that not everyone was able to read and write; the visual recognition of a symbol or picture could be crucial to winning a battle. Message carriers needed to be able to locate the intended recipients with ease and accuracy.

As well as providing a visual place for social messages, displaying banners was a common way of making ordinary space special, even sacred. The people of Sumatra placed a special *ritual cloth*, made by the women of the family, as a backdrop to the key participants in the most important rites of passage in their lives, such as marriage, birth or death.<sup>30</sup> Special *figured cloths* delineated sacred space for the Greeks in their funeral rituals in the Geometric period (around 800 B.C.E.). These cloths were hung over or behind the deceased. Greek mythology tells the story of the young hero Ion, who was abandoned by his mother as a baby, on the steps of Apollo's temple at Delphi. Having grown up as a temple servant and preparing to reunite with his father, Ion had both the right and the duty to select from the rich temple storehouses, a series of *ornate cloths* with which to make tent walls to shelter their sacred feast. In Greek mythology again, in the third book of the Iliad, Helen of Troy was described as weaving into her *purple cloth*, the many episodes of the Trojan Wars.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the most famous story cloth in the world is the Bayeux Tapestry that was stitched over 900 years ago. Worked in both word and picture by wool embroidery on an already woven linen ground (surface), the work covers a band of cloth over 200 feet in length. Intended for celebration at the Cathedral of Bayeux, it tells the story of the Norman Conquest,

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<sup>30</sup>Barber, 1994, 151.

<sup>31</sup>Barber, 1994, 153.

the Battle of Hastings of 1066. It is extremely valuable in an historical sense in that it offers an artistic documentation as to how eleventh century Normans viewed and perceived their world.

Liturgical stitching has a rich and historical past as is illustrated briefly above. Storytelling cloths, or tapestries have marked special people, places and times, and have announced specific information that was deemed to be very important to the storytellers. Cloth, because of its perishable nature, has not always survived to tell its intended story. When archaeological excavations were first done, excavators threw pieces of cloth away because they were not considered to have value. For the most part, women's contributions to the fabric of life were therefore irretrievably lost. It seems to me that the hardest thing to notice is what isn't there. That's what appeals to me in choosing to honour the whole scope of stitching and women's work. What is important to me is that the truth I find within myself as I stitch, emerges from my quest to discover the reality of lives lived (often in harsh and dire circumstances), well before my time. By doing the same kind of work that women have done for thousands of years, I am able in a small way to enter into their lives and live the legacy that has been passed down to me. I have chosen to employ two specific genres in my artwork, those of embroidery and quilting. Thus by honouring these stitchery types with the stories of their particular heritages I am better able to explain the legacy they contribute to the artwork.

### Embroidery

The origins of embroidery are unclear; scholars are uncertain as to whether embroidery was a natural development of the needle and thread, especially in the Near or Far East and was gradually spread throughout the known world, or whether the needlework technique was spontaneous and coincidental in several early cultures. Archaeological excavations in Denmark

have revealed embroidered clothing from as early as the Bronze Age (1500-500 B.C.E.).<sup>32</sup> Despite the fragile and delicate nature of the embroideries, and the damp and wet weather conditions of Europe, many have survived from the Middle Ages, which attest to the skill and patience of many craftspeople, both male and female. This period of time in history (in Europe) was one in which there was an enormous growth in commerce that resulted from geographical discoveries of this era. Renaissance explorers returned to Europe with gold, spices, silver, pearls and other luxurious commodities. The merchant class spent their wealth on clothes, table and bed covers, cushions, wall hangings and expensive fabrics that were imported from the East. A class of professional embroiderers evolved to stitch the elaborate fancywork that was fashionable for upholstery, curtains, clothing and decorative wall hangings. Workshops employed hundreds of people (male and female) at various levels of expertise; guilds and craft communities flourished. Patronage was an important component of the craft.

Coinciding with the expansion of trade during the period of 1477 to late 1520's, was the development of printing, the impact of which was experienced through the availability of printed pattern books for embroiderers. Embroidered samplers were popular at this time too; people who could not afford to purchase pattern books would often copy patterns by reproducing them on pieces of cloth, experimenting with different coloured threads and a variety of stitches. Scrap samplers were important on which to practice these stitches. Because of the high cost of fabric, one could not afford to make a mistake when stitching an unfamiliar design or with an unusual thread. Rich cloths, silks tapestries and embroideries were vital symbols of wealth and status, second only to precious metals and jewels.

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<sup>32</sup>Kay Staniland, Medieval Craftsmen EMBROIDERERS (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 4.

Ornamentation by embroidery was a consistently important element in ecclesiastical life as time progressed, however from the information currently available, it seems likely that embroidery was used rarely and sparingly upon secular garments in the early Middle Ages. The examples of embroidered vestments that have survived in church and cathedral treasuries were preserved in specially constructed chests. Embroidery was considered a respectable occupation in convents as long as the work was devoted to worthy ends and did not distract from worship. Some believed that idleness was the root of all evil, so in order to keep busy, nuns were encouraged to stitch. Many early church vestments, altar and wall hangings were produced in this context.

The practice of giving clothing and hangings to the church was common. In Thread of Gold Sylvia Hogarth writes that before the Reformation it was the custom of every individual to bequeath a gift to the church. Such gifts were known as mortuary gifts and in many instances it was customary to bequeath to the church one's "best gown".<sup>33</sup> These were usually made into altar furnishings or vestments and this custom has continued into the 20th century. A magnificently embroidered ball gown of the eighteenth century was purchased by the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry for the creation of a dossal for their chapel in York Minster on the occasion of a visit of the Colonel-in-Chief in 1947. Many of the donated articles of clothing would be cut down, altered, remodelled or even totally reconstructed. Thus, patchwork (literally) with seams running at very peculiar angles and mismatched patterns, was not uncommon at all.

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<sup>33</sup>Sylvia Hogarth, Thread of Gold: The Embroideries and Textiles in York Minster, ed. Elizabeth Ingram (Andover, England: Pitkin Pictorials, 1987), 12.

During the Reformation in England, because the Roman Catholics were persecuted and driven “underground”, priests were forced to travel in peril of their lives to private houses to celebrate the Mass. Many were required to disguise themselves as peddlers carrying their sacred paraphernalia around in backpacks. Their chasubles were probably deliberately made of patchwork so that if they were challenged, the chasuble could pass as a bed covering. A cross, stitched into the overall pattern, would escape detection if the garment was rolled or folded into a knapsack.<sup>34</sup>

In Canada, the story of embroidery is eclectic. Because our country is comparatively young, a history of stitching is not as lengthy. Women who emigrated from Europe brought with them to this country the wonderful stitching skills that had been passed down through generations of women. In Canada the guilds were primarily responsible for providing education for their members, inviting first English embroiderers and then American embroiderers to join Canadian teachers in leading intensive workshops.<sup>35</sup> There has also been a continuous tradition of ecclesiastical textiles and group projects for churches, schools and hospitals which has kept this age old technical tradition alive.

In 1962 in Lausanne, Switzerland, the international tapestry biennial was inaugurated. In the history of embroidery this is very exciting because it was the first time stitchery as art was truly recognized. It celebrated not only fabric pictures that were woven on a loom, but also works of textile art that employed a wide spectrum of artistry technique in three dimensions. One hundred and fifty two tapestries were submitted from 17 different countries. In total, 57

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<sup>34</sup>Liddell, 1994, 11.

<sup>35</sup>Barbara Lee Smith, Celebrating the Stitch: Contemporary Embroidery of North America (Newtown, CT: Tauton Press, 1991), 4.

were selected by jury to be exhibited. This traditional exhibition has continued.

During the last 30 years, embroidery in the United States and Canada has experienced a rebirth in the art world. It has been a time of recreating the medium, a simultaneous acknowledgement of the work of the past and an exploration of the new. Using old techniques, and adding interesting combinations of beads, lace, embroidery, wood, feathers, paper, plastics, and ritualistic objects (the list of accoutrements is possibly endless) contemporary wall hangings are unique works of art.<sup>36</sup> By blurring the boundaries of both medium and technique, exceptionally rich results in contemporary art have been achieved. Cloth, despite its apparent fragility, is an amazingly transformable medium and as such, offers the artist the potential for a huge range of powerful responses. Delicate and strong, elegant and coarse, comforting and frightening: the possibilities are limited only by an artist's dream and/or vision.

### Quilting

Quilting is thought to have originated in China and Egypt. While the Chinese used quilted material to retain body heat and exclude the cold, the Egyptians used quilted fabric to protect themselves from the sun. Quilts were used in Roman and Greek times for the same purposes, as well as for sleeping mats. The Latin word *culcita*, meaning "cushion", is the origin of the English word "quilt".

There was a very severe cold spell in Europe during the fourteenth century wherein

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<sup>36</sup>Kay Staniland (1991, 5) says that symbols of wealth such as pearls, cameos, enamels, semi-precious stones were all incorporated into medieval embroideries to provide additional enrichment. She says that later in the period, motifs in solid gold were added as well, so much so that the stitchery became merely functional, holding the pearls or ornaments in place, thus the term "embroidery" became less appropriate.

people turned to quilted household furnishings to keep warm. Clothing, bedding, curtains and hangings were created to combat the bitter cold. In Spain particularly, quilting and appliqué were very popular. By 1527 the grandees of the Spanish court wore clothes that were elaborately decorated with appliqué and embroidery worked over a quilted base. This style was adopted by the Portuguese and later on, by the Italians.

It was not uncommon for Italian churches to use heavy tapestry curtains instead of doors inside their buildings. Admittedly, there were practical reasons for the use of tapestry. Door hangings and decorative wall coverings minimized draughts and provided a type of insulation from the cold and dampness. Tapestries were often designed according to architectural constraints as well as to religious ones; design was developed according to the surface that needed to be covered. Through the passage of time, the Church became a patron of the needle arts for robes, hangings and other religious articles.

In Canada in the late 1700's and early 1800's, settlers brought with them their own quilts from their homelands. The people were very poor, and tended to recycle all their clothing when it was worn beyond mending as a means of obtaining cloth for the quilts. Many beautiful articles were made by utilizing tiny scraps. Crazy quilts were often created by piecing different sizes and textures of fabric and then by embroidering over the seam lines for added strength, stability and decoration.

Quilts brought to Canada influenced the way in which quilts were made here. One remarkable feature was that European quilting was done on whole cloth as contrasted to Canadian quilting that was pieced, because in Europe, whole cloth was much more easily obtained. The batting (or in-between layer) was usually carded wool. Cotton was very scarce in Canada and it was not until 1790 that cotton mills were established in New England, and not

until 1845 that the first cotton mills opened in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Linen was used as a substitute for cotton. It was produced from flax that when harvested, was processed and prepared for spinning, dyeing or bleaching and weaving. The actual process just to make the fabric for quilting could take up to eighteen months.

It was not only in the churches that liturgical art took form. Patchwork and quilting of the functional items for the home were created with very religious themes. Pioneer women in North America demonstrated their faith in God through quilt designs based on Old and New Testament stories. Jacob's Ladder, Job's Tears, Star of Bethlehem, Crown of Thorns, and Caesar's Crown are names of several traditional quilting designs that were inspired by faith. Quilt patterns often reflected the cultural values of the people who made them and these patterns with religious names are a true testimony to the women who stitched them. Quilts were (and still are) expressions of how the sacred was encountered in every day life. In colonial Americas, quilts originated out of a physical necessity for warmth, and as mentioned above, the style of piecing hundreds of little scraps emerged out of economic necessity.<sup>37</sup>

One of the stories that substantiate the recognition of quilting as a recognized art form is important to tell in this brief history. During the seventies, the line dividing craft from fine art started to become more blurred. Quilting was not only considered a cottage craft: it began to be seriously recognized as a legitimate art form. Quilting began to move from the women's section

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<sup>37</sup>The source of reference for the information on "Quilting" thus far is Mary Conroy, 300 Years of Canada's Quilts, (Toronto: Griffin House), 1976. For a more thorough discussion of the history of Canadian quilts (she gives a breakdown according to province and specific periods of time) please refer to Ms. Conroy's book. Because she deals primarily with bed quilts (as contrasted with story-telling quilted hangings) and because my interest lies with the latter I have provided only a brief historical sketch. I have chosen to omit discussing quilts of the war years and the changing role of women, demographics etc.

of the local fair into the art gallery. The impetus for this movement came from two Americans, Gail van der Hoof (a textile artist) and Jonathan Holstein (a writer) from New York. One day, in an antique store they discovered several quilts that reminded them of contemporary art. The quilts contained abstract designs and were stitched by women who had not intended to create “great art”. The designs were said to be as sophisticated as anything easel artists painted. Hoof and Holstein perceived that quilts were to be valued for their artistic creativity, so they took a number of them on a tour of the U.S. and Europe in 1971. Critics were enthusiastic about the artistic quality of the quilts, and acclaimed them to be objects of art and not merely craft-work. It was the beginning of a whole new way of looking at folk art.<sup>38</sup>

### The Canadian Quilt Story

In the early 1950’s, Thor Hansen (artist and designer of the interior of the then-newly built British-American Oil Building in Toronto) wrote: “A strong and vigorous folk art movement, embracing all the legitimate crafts, assures a healthy, continuous growth in the fine arts of a nation. Much has already been done toward the building and maintenance of such craft activities in Canada with the gratifying result that Canadian folk art is gaining recognition as a nation wide cultural development.”<sup>39</sup> The motifs and designs used in the British-American building were chosen by selecting subject matter that could be attached to a distinctive Canadian symbolism. Hansen was one of the first professional artists in Canada to recognize quilting as an art medium and this marked the beginning of the rise of the status of quilting

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<sup>38</sup>Conroy, 1976, 104-105.

<sup>39</sup>Conroy, 1976, 98.

from a cottage craft to an art.

The first art gallery in Canada to show quilts was the Owens Gallery, at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick (1967). This coincided with Canada's centennial celebrations and a virtual resurgence in quilting. Many people celebrated the 100 years of Confederation by making a quilt to commemorate their nationalistic spirit.

In the introduction to Art of the Spirit: Contemporary Canadian Fabric Art, the writers suggest 1970 as the year in which specialized interest in liturgical art took root.<sup>40</sup> They believe there was a direct link between Vatican II and the trend toward an interest and subsequent desire for liturgical banners in Canada. Norman Laliberte, a Canadian artist was commissioned to create a series of banners for the Vatican Pavilion at the New York World's Fair (1964-65). A variety of liturgical textile exhibitions were held in the early 1970's providing a significant venue for the display of such works, and the interest generated by these shows contributed greatly to the establishment of the reputation of Canadian liturgical textile artists.<sup>41</sup> Exhibitions of this nature have continued over the last 27 years, establishing liturgical/ecclesiastical stitching as a major form of Canadian art. Contemporary liturgical art in fabric is said to be experiencing a "renaissance" in Canada.<sup>42</sup>

### Warp and Weft

Male naming of the sacred in patriarchal religion for me, and for many other women,

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<sup>40</sup>Helen Bradfield, Joan Pringle, Judy Ridout, Art of the Spirit: Contemporary Canadian Fabric Art (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992), 10.

<sup>41</sup>Bradfield, Pringle, Ridout, 1992, 10. For a listing of these exhibitions please refer to same.

<sup>42</sup>Patterson, Ibid, 10.

has been very limiting and restrictive. Priests, nuns, ministers, rabbis, saints, popes...cathedrals, temples, synagogues, mosques...the Bible, the Torah, the Koran...these images of holiness have an aura of protocol and authority attached to them. There is a distance, an “other-worldliness”, a magic and an elevated aura that restrict entry into the sacred club. The mundane, routine, ordinariness of everyday life does not usually conjure the same sense of the sacred. Susan Lyndon in The Knitting Sutra clearly substantiates my point as she questions whether female spirituality through the ages has been concealed in the minutiae of domestic life rather than expressed in the grandiosity and pomposity of churches and sermons.<sup>43</sup> I believe that in the context of time, living one’s life every day reveals a richness of human relationship that must be recognized as sacred. God “out there” instead of God “in here” alienates us from the reality of the sacred. Our naming of the sacred in everyday life allows us to live in closer relationship with ourselves, with others, with our planet. As women, we have not been socialized to recognize that what we do and what we think has value, let alone is sacred.

Radka Donnell says that making quilts is unlike any previously learned art skill, yet quilt making is like all activities done by women in their work of child rearing and homemaking including the work of surviving as a person in the welter of emotional commitments.<sup>44</sup> There is a carryover of emotion into a quilt when one is making it; what a woman is experiencing “inside” herself may be automatically carried into the work. The conversations of one’s heart are transferred into the stitching and piecing of projects. A

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<sup>43</sup>Susan Gordon Lydon, The Knitting Sutra: Craft as Spiritual Practice (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 10.

<sup>44</sup>Radka Donnell, Quilts as Women’s Art (North Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Gallerie Publications, 1990), 40.

wonderful illustration of this is to be observed in the following snippet from *Anonymous Was a Woman*, as Marguerite Ickis remembers the words of her great grandmother:

It took me more than twenty years, nearly twenty-five, I reckon, in the evenings after supper when the children were all put to bed. My whole life is in that quilt. It scares me sometimes when I look at it. All my joys and all my sorrows are stitched into those little pieces. When I was proud of the boys and when I was downright provoked and angry with them. When the girls annoyed me or when they gave me a warm feeling around my heart. And John too. He was stitched into that quilt and all the thirty years we were married. Sometimes I loved him and sometimes I sat there hating him as I pieced the patches together. So they are all in that quilt, my hopes and fears, my joys and sorrows, my loves and hates. I tremble sometimes when I remember what that quilt knows about me.<sup>45</sup>

The stories of which this grandmother speaks are sacred, holy stories that sum up her life experience. The quilt is the medium of expression; it is the storyboard of the grandmother's life. While the reader does not know the design or pattern that was stitched in this quilt, one could speculate that it might have been a tremendously detailed and complicated piece of artwork in that it took 25 years to complete. What is thought-provoking is that the woman in this account was able to preserve her sanity through the thirty years of her marriage by quilting. Quilting her story allowed her to survive as a person throughout the extremely difficult times of her life; it gave her a space to celebrate her delights and accomplishments as well. Anyone looking at the

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<sup>45</sup>Joan Newlon Radner, ed., *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 32. Marguerite Ickis, quoting her great-grandmother in *Anonymous Was a Woman*, Mira Bank (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 94.

quilt would not necessarily be able to recognize the key events of which the grandmother spoke, yet for her they would have been coded into the stitching and/or into the pattern of the design.

It goes without saying that not everyone is meant to hear the voices of the quilt story as well. In the resistance movement in Chile (since the military coup in 1973), poor women have adapted their traditional needlework skills to produce arpillaras, appliqué and patchwork pictures, that represent the lives of working-class Chileans. Sold internationally to raise money, the arpillaras depict not only traditional rural life, but also urban shantytowns and soup kitchens, military brutality, and the anguish of the families of the disappeared. The women have used protective codes in their handiwork, representing the members of junta as vultures among doves, or as clowns in a sinister circus, or portraying the Andes in the background as the symbol of grandeur and promise against which to measure the cramped, grinding existence imposed by their present-day social system. This documentation of injustice would be dangerous if the military authorities knew how to read the symbols of folk needlework, but they have not been trained to attend to the lives or arts of women. “The women of the shanty-towns do not measure up to their idea of artists, nor do the little landscapes, street scenes and interiors excite their Pavlovian response to the clichés of left agitation”.<sup>46</sup> Some stories are best told in a whisper.

I would like to honour stitching and storytelling with one more story (story begets story) to illustrate the coded messages known very well among women through the activity of quilting. In Susan Glaspell’s story “A Jury of Her Peers” (1917), two women “read the kitchen” of a third woman and come to a series of understandings. There has been a murder in a rural

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<sup>46</sup>Radner, 1993, vii.

North American community: the miserly John Wright has been strangled in his sleep with a rope and his wife, Minnie, has been arrested. No motive is known, but Minnie's claim that she simply slept through the murder... in the same bed... is hardly convincing. The story focuses on the sheriff's wife and the wife of a neighbour, who accompany their husbands to the Wright farm to hunt for clues.

While the men tramp upstairs, downstairs, and out to the barn searching in vain for traces of a motive, their wives sit in the accused woman's kitchen. They notice chaotic details: a filthy hand towel; dirty dishes under the sink; a bag half-filled with sugar sitting next to the open sugar bucket; an empty bird cage with a broken door. Observing such disorder, the men scoff that Minnie Wright lacks "the home-making instinct," yet the women see in the kitchen evidence not of slipshod habits but of anguish and lonely despair. Their reading of the signs is confirmed when they take up Minnie's sewing to find that she had been skilfully piecing some Log Cabin quilt squares but that the last square she had worked on was grotesquely missewn.

As the women begin to understand the horror of Minnie's life, they focus on the "crazy sewing" of the quilt block, which one of them quickly begins to repair. "Holding the block made her feel queer, as if the distracted thoughts of the woman who had perhaps turned to it to try and quiet herself were communicating themselves to her". By the time the women find the crucial clue... Minnie Wright's canary, dead, its neck wrung by her cruel husband... they have also recognized the oppressiveness of their own married lives and have become allies in protecting Minnie against the masculine world, which dismisses women's concerns as "worrying over trifles." They conceal the damning evidence, and the investigators return to town without the clues they had gone

to find. The men are unable *to piece into significant patterns the scraps of Minnie Wrights' life* and laugh at their wives' interest - at such a serious moment - *in an activity so trivial as quilting*<sup>47</sup> (my italics for emphasis).

What Radner and Lanser have described above is an insightful description of "women's cultures" wherein a conceptualization of gender itself is said to be constructed through the social relations of particular communities. While women's experiences, material circumstances, understandings and identities will vary across cultures, communities and individuals, in many societies, there is a realm of practice that is primarily women's domain. Through it women develop a set of common signifying practices (beliefs, understandings, behaviours, rituals - hence a *culture*) whose meanings are not necessarily accessible to men of the same group.<sup>48</sup> In the preceding excerpt from Glaspell's writing, a subtle yet distinct separation between men's and women's spheres of activity is clearly portrayed. While the men are busy looking for apparent evidence at the scene of the crime, the women are adeptly reading "feminist messages" at the scene of a much more complex crime. The women do not see "feminist messages" merely because they are looking for them, nor would they even call themselves "feminists." However, by reading Minnie's story through the visible signs in her kitchen and in the unfinished quilt block, they are able not only to understand the circumstances of the tragic event... they are also able to interpret their own lives as well as hers. Presumably they are able to save Minnie Wright

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<sup>47</sup>Radner, 1993, 1-2.

<sup>48</sup>Radner, 1993, 2.

at least from death, if not from imprisonment because they are able to decipher the *coded*<sup>49</sup> messages implicit in Minnie's unspoken story. Whether Minnie Wright was communicating mere distractedness and nervousness or angry mockery about her domestic role is for the reader to "hear". One's interpretation of the situation is often dependent upon how one "listens" to the voices of the story.

### Seamless

The making of quilts for me is an attempt to reclaim an art form of the past as I listen to the voices of many stories, and give voice through stitching to my own. I wish to pay tribute to women's historic and creative relationship to the art, and at the same time I wish to raise awareness to the fact that women have been devalued through patriarchy because their work has not been deemed to be important. As has been discussed in this paper, needle arts in particular have been considered feminine and insignificant, however I suggest that femininity in this context is a source of strength rather than a sign of weakness. The quilt is a symbol of the sacred; many women contributed to the welfare of their families and to society through their loving stitches in making quilts. Quilting is a tactile tradition. Knowledge of the art form has been passed down intergenerationally so that the precious techniques of quilt making will not be lost.

Women's creativity in this capacity has not been celebrated as being sacred. Incredible energy is put into the making of the quilt, and from my perspective, the quilt is a wonderful example of "women's work". The activities of joining, space filling, layering (of materials) in

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<sup>49</sup>Radner, 1993, 3.

quilt-making all contribute metaphorically to an understanding of women's work. Radka Donnell states that we have yet to learn to enjoy the structure of quilts as "femmage".<sup>50</sup> The word "femmage" refers to the piecing methods developed by women in their everyday life. Thus the importance of quilting as an art form is that it speaks to the simple things in life that women do and it invites us to draw meaning from our own everyday experiences. It invites us to celebrate the creative skills that have made us who we are, and who we are becoming.

My art work speaks in an unheard voice to those who experience it. I think that my ministry as a hospital chaplain could be described in much the same way. Many of the people with whom I journey, as their home pastor, cannot communicate in traditional ways. Many do not hear or comprehend the spoken word. "Religious language" in the context of the Church is meaningless to them. I have learned that communication takes many forms. Sometimes it involves holding a lonely person's hand or gently stroking their arm; sometimes it involves walking around and around the nursing unit with a restless Alzheimer resident; sometimes it involves patiently feeding a resident who does not have the ability to do this simple task for himself or herself. The list is endless; the message that is communicated is always the same. There is nothing more important than being here with you, at this time, doing what we are doing, or being what we are being, together. You have value; you are important; you are loved. The time we spend together is sacred; the place in which we spend time together is sacred; the sacred is present in our everyday lives.

This brings me to a point of conclusion in which I want to say that I have found God in the ongoing activity of everyday life... in the piecing, in the layering, in the joining, in the

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<sup>50</sup>Donnell, 1990, 7.

space filling, and in the story-telling. God is not the needle, the thread or the finished quilt; God is in the process of the making. I believe that women have a different experience of the world and a different way of relating to it because of the patriarchal constraints that have been hereto imposed. I believe that if men and women are going to live in a state of wellness and wholeness (sodzo), we must relate inclusively. One group cannot be known or perceived to be better, superior or more powerful than another. And so this brings me to the unique image of the "bundle", around which this project and dissertation is centred. I think the image of the bundle jumped out at me when I first read the text of 1 Samuel 25 because, as a person who thinks in pictures, I could clearly see myself in the bundle. I liked the feeling of belonging, and being connected to all the people who would be in that bundle. I also liked the idea that as a verb or an action (bundling), there would be an intentional and deliberate putting together of things. To be secure in God's bundle intimated positive and mutual relationships; it suggested an interconnectedness and belonging. It alluded to feelings of comfort, ease and of being at home. Implicit in its composition was dignity and respect for all people, places and things. Immediately I recognized a sacredness that was concealed in the ordinariness of everyday occurrences and a blending of goals and desires. I intuited as well that I was involved in the process because I too am a creator, piecing, layering, joining, space filling, listening to and telling story, wherever the journey may lead.

## Chapter II : The Method

The aim of this dissertation and project has been to celebrate women's historic and creative relationship to the art of quilt making as a vehicle of communicating story. Quilting has been an important art form for women to express their stories for centuries. Quilting and stitching in general have not been valued because women's story and women's work have not been valued in the patriarchal world in which we live. As I discussed in Chapter 1 of the dissertation, a patriarchal worldview does not reflect women's lives.

The quilt that I have created is a storyboard in fabric; it tells my story. To ascertain if my story resonated with the stories of other people, I showed my quilt and talked about my personal experiences. In turn, I invited people to share their stories. I listened to what people told me when they observed my quilt. I wrote down their stories.

To assess carefully what people told me, I read through all their stories many times. With reference to each particular story and incident that was shared, I would ask myself, "What did the experience of this person *mean* to them?" And, I read the stories as a totality until I could elicit basic themes and construct a summarizing story for myself. I reflected upon what people had to say and how their stories were either similar or different to my stories of life experiences.

To hear people's responses to my quilt, I arranged three occasions for observation. Two were small focus groups (five to seven people) with colleagues of my profession; the third was a cascading open forum at West Park Hospital where people came and went according to their own schedules. Sometimes a group would form; sometimes the interaction would be one-on-one. In total, about thirty people attended the hospital gathering. Some people spontaneously told their stories; others did not. Some responded with e-mail messages

as I had invited them.

All the people who attended the aforementioned gatherings were familiar with my stitching and were aware that I was working on a project of doctoral studies. The events were planned and invitations were extended in advance of the meetings. Everyone with whom I spoke agreed to share their responses knowing that their feedback would be included in the written part of my dissertation. Overall, people were very excited to participate in this experience with me.

### Making the Quilt

When I began the story of “Stitching the Sacred”, I introduced my readers to the passion of my soul with an imaginary studio tour. Today, I invite readers to join me in a visual and pictorial tour of my project quilt entitled “Bound in the Bundle of the Living” (Plate 4). I started working on this quilt at the end of February 1998 with the encouragement and blessing of the three women on my doctoral committee (Jean Clandinin, Jean Waters and Fran Hare) who agreed to coach and mentor me on the final leg of my journey.

Perhaps I had roughly sketched my dreams for this quilt on a scrap piece of paper; I can't recall. What I do remember is that the first thing I did when I came home from my meetings in Edmonton was to weave the bundle from which this quilt derives its name. Using a wooden frame with nails set about one half an inch apart, I strung the warp fibres of the loom with a heavy-gauge household string. Then I began to weave the weft or cross threads with a variety of woollen fibres that I'd been collecting. I had been collecting interesting fabrics and bits of wool in the colour range I thought I would like to use in the Bundle Quilt

for a year or more. Some of the woollen pieces I had hand dyed and painted with acrylics to accent and/or blend with the colours in the fabrics I thought I would use in the quilt. As I proceed with the description of specific areas of the quilt, I will tell the unique and individual stories that make up its whole.

Weaving the bundle was a very pleasing and rewarding activity. I say this because the item being created took shape quickly, inch by inch, before my eyes. Alan, the carpenter at the hospital where I am employed, made the loom (Please see Appendix A) and the shuttle especially for me. I explained to him what I needed with hand gestures and a pencil sketch, and he set out to make it. (“Where else could I work where one day I am making a hand support for a wheelchair, and the next day, a loom for the chaplain?” he asked me.) The wood for the loom is a beautiful golden brown honey oak that came from the backboard of a turn-of-the-century Haines upright piano. “Sacrilege,” I thought when I heard about the piano. “Recycling,” I was told when I questioned its source. Alan, who is a piano tuner when he is not a carpenter, was called to the home of an acquaintance that could not move the old piano out of the cellar. Renovations to the lower level after the fact prevented its removal. A sledgehammer did the dastardly task of breaking the piano apart for recycling. Alan assured me that every possible piece of it was put to good use (even the piano wire)! I am delighted with the loom and cherish its historical background. It continues to foster the arts, although now in a different creative capacity!

Join me please for a walking tour of the quilt. Overall the quilt measures about 12’ x 5’. In the top right hand corner there is a Shinto temple (Plate 5); to the left and next down is a Jain temple (Plate 6); to the right and down is a synagogue (Plate 7); to the left and down is a mosque (Plate 8); and to the right and down is a cathedral (Plate 9). The entire right hand

side of the quilt from top to bottom is a vertical panel arrangement of traditional “log cabin” squares. Typically, the piece of fabric in the centre of a log cabin square would be the colour red to symbolize the hearth of the home and the fire from which the family draws its warmth and sustenance. Occasionally, these centre squares might be yellow instead of red, symbolizing the sunshine as the source of energy for the log cabin. When I was making my Bundle Quilt I was fortunate to stumble upon some fabric that was printed with what appear to be watercolour images of native Indian women. I have chosen to put them in the centre of the log cabin squares to celebrate and honour women as the centre of the home. When it came time to quilt these squares, I chose to stitch a labyrinth pattern to commemorate the ancient, sacred spiritual exercise of pursuing healing and wholeness.

Below the buildings of worship, to the left of the quilt at the bottom is the figure of a woman. She is very large in stature, and she is holding in her embrace the Bundle of Life, from which my quilt is titled (Plate 10). The bundle contains 10 different people who represent a variety of racial, cultural and religious groups. From the right hand of the woman holding the bundle, there is a piece of green twine that freely and sporadically weaves its way connecting all the buildings together, returning to be part of the bundle again. Occasionally, there are leaves attached to the string that suggest it may be a vine. On one level I wanted to illustrate life and vitality and by attaching the leaves to it, the twine seemed to be alive. Twine can be made from hemp or sisal that are extremely strong natural fibres grown from the soil. On another, deeper level, I also wanted to acknowledge the fact that we are all held together and connected by a common cord.

The buildings of worship are separated by pieces of purple, green, gold and black sashing that are meant to resemble roads. They symbolize the many roads a person may

travel in a lifetime to search for and ultimately experience their God. The same sashing is used around the perimeter as well. Almost all of the piecing of the quilt has been done with hand stitches except for the assembling of the log cabin squares, the connecting of the sashing around the perimeter and the connecting of the green pieces of background material behind the places of worship. All the rest is hand sewn. Hand stitching satisfies my need to thoroughly interact with the fabric on an intimate level. By the time I have worked with a piece of material, I know it very well. I have experienced its character, its texture and its elasticity. Ultimately, I let the fabric lead me to the composition because it suggests how it is going to work. By the time I have finished quilting the work, my fingers are bandaged and callused from needing to feel every needle press and prick through at least three layers of material.

I'd like to describe in greater detail various parts of the quilt that I think will be of interest to the reader. Let's begin at the top with the Shinto temple. In 1997 I had the privilege of travelling in the Orient for three weeks. While I did not travel to Japan where the Shinto religion actually has its source, I thoroughly immersed myself in the architecture of ancient Asian temples. The Shinto temple of the quilt is a composite of impressions I collected while I was travelling in this part of the world. Its variegated roof is made in smocking technique, and of course there is a story to tell about this. The roof of the temple is part of a dress that I smocked for my daughter Lois (she is now 22 years of age) when she was just a little girl. The dress was a pastel blue colour however I have painted it green for the quilt so that it would better blend with the overall colour scheme. The roof is trimmed with antique blue floral silk ribbon that came from my grandmother's ribbon and lace collection. I chose a light burgundy cotton fabric with a vertical stripe for the main part of the

building as I thought this might represent the bamboo poles that are tightly secured together to make the walls of the structure. The main construction is trimmed with a heavy satin green cord (primarily for decoration), and the windows and doors are created from a piece of cotton ribbon. I've chosen a background fabric that represents cherry blossoms ...surroundings often associated with the Orient.

The next building on the tour is the Jain temple. I constructed this after seeing a picture in a book with this likeness. The base of the temple is beaded all over with tiny iridescent beads to represent the glitter of sun upon the sandstone of the structure. The top of the temple is embroidered with a visage traditionally seen on temples in the east. A fancy topaz jewel has been stitched in the centre of the forehead of the face for embellishment. The top part of the structure is ziggurat, decorated with a ric-rac trim to symbolize the steps that climb directly to the top. The yellow pearl diamond button in the centre of the lower part is to embellish a triangular print in the fabric design. It comes from an old chartreuse coloured "house-dress" that my mother wore when I was a very little girl. The pale green background fabric behind the temple is full of little paisley designs that I thought perfectly echoed the eyes in the face in the top of the temple.

Below the Jain temple and to the right is the synagogue. To construct this particular building I looked at several different synagogues in my geographical locale (Toronto, St. Catharines, Hamilton) and compiled the images. This quilt synagogue would be typical of synagogues built in Canada in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. The tablet over the main entrance represents the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses. The pinkish columns on either side of the doors are meant to represent stained glass windows. There is a yellow Star of David on the portico over the front doors. The Star of David is stitched in yellow as a

reminder that Jews were required to wear a similar yellow star during the time of persecution during the Holocaust. I've chosen a rich burgundy cotton print fabric for the synagogue that has an all-over design of little tiny triangular "bricks" and I've placed the synagogue on a light green background fabric that seems to look like sand. The affect is compelling because it is the way that sand looks in the desert when it is blown in rivulets by the wind. It reminds me of the story of how Moses and the Israelites wandered about in the desert for 40 years in ancient times.

The Islamic mosque was a challenge to make because of the intricacies of the design I had created for it. I began with a remnant of very interesting silk-like gold coloured cotton fabric. An intriguing pattern of what might be described as "a peacock's tail" was printed on the piece and tiny parts of the singular motif were reprinted at random. The mosque in Burlington (a city located about 15 minutes from where I live) so wonderfully represented other mosques I had seen in books, that I took photographs of it as a prototype for my quilt-mosque. Imagining that my mosque was located in the Holy Land, I added the wispy netting detail at the entrances of the three doorways on the lower level to create a mystical mood set in antiquity. I could visualize this gauzy material being blown gently in the warm summer breezes. I tried to capture the majesty and awe that I had experienced when I visited Jerusalem in 1990. To add an element of interest I added a small gold charm with coloured stones that might represent a mosaic decorating one of the walls. At the top of the minaret adjacent to the main building there is the traditional crescent moon made from imitation tortoise shell. I chose an olive green and white background fabric with an allover pattern of tiny leaves. This reminds me of the orchards of olive trees that are prolific and very characteristic of the Middle East environment. I can almost hear the muezzin calling Muslims

to prayer.

Below the mosque and to the right is a rather large building representing the Christian tradition. Westminster Abbey and the Cathedral at Chartres influenced my choice in making the immediately recognizable large rosette doily-window that came from my grandmother's lace collection. Actually, the other bits of tatting and lace trim came from this antique cache as well. There are two little red bells that are attached to the columns beside the front doors. These are very old Christmas tree decorations given to me by my uncle (whose wife died almost 25 years ago; she is the woman who taught me to stitch). There is a clock attached to an old, oval pearl button that is sewn into the centre column between the doors. The bell towers are made in different paisley materials, and there is a honeycomb pattern fabric that comprises much of the structure. I added a layer of flat sheer nylon voile over the honeycomb design at the top to add a dimension of contrast and depth. The pairing of diamond and oval lace doilies placed symmetrically at strategic points upon the building are meant to represent very old leaded glass windows. The delicate green and purple background fabric that I used here celebrates the memory of my maternal grandmother (also a Catherine) who loved bunches of purple violets, and who lovingly raised her family of five children in the Protestant tradition.

Now we come to the woman with the bundle. Who is she? When people have seen the quilt and have asked me who she is, I've said that she can be whomever they see or want or need her to be. I believe that a person's own story and imagination will inform their responses as to which she is. Who is she to me? Sometimes when I look at her she is a God-like figure. She is delicate yet strong; she is kind and hospitable. I know I like her a lot, and I want very much to be invited to be part of her entourage in the bundle. I want to be invited to

be part of her world. Sometimes when I look at her I see myself. When I look very closely at the face that I have stitched, I can see similarities with my own face. Most definitely, although I did not plan it to be such, the likeness is most obvious in the eyelids and the eyes (despite the fact that I gave the woman in the quilt green eyes instead of blue like my own). One of my friends is married to a portrait painter and his wife attests to the fact that whenever a portrait is done, there is always a piece of the artist in the picture. He claims there is quite a likeness in my face and the face in the quilt. So, for me, the woman with the bundle is God incarnate ... God working, living, breathing through me. As I live my life going about my daily tasks and being myself I am affirmed in the knowledge that ordinary life and everyday occurrences are sacred.

To create a pattern for her image, I had some friends trace my body outline on a large piece of brown wrapping paper while I sat upright against a wall. Instant head, neck, shoulders, torso, arms and hands!

The foundational piece of fabric for the whole quilt was a yardage of soft cotton plaid material. I selected it because the colours blended together magically and were abundantly wonderful: shades of turquoise, gold, pink, orange, burgundy and green. All of my colour choices for the quilt were derived from this initial piece of cloth, and all of my subsequent choices were meant to enhance and enrich it. The colours were warm and gentle while at the same time they were deliberate and firm.

After separating the material into two pieces with a pair of scissors and by folding and draping the fabric in a gently curving fashion, I began to create the garment that the woman holding the Bundle of Life would wear. I was able to design and form two enormously billowing sleeves with the cotton plaid material. I arranged and attached them to the torso

that I had molded from my body outline. The affect was surrealistic because the size of the arms seemed grossly exaggerated and yet, anatomically and physically, the arms were the correct length and proportion to “my” body size.

Because art is such a highly personal expression, and because it is subject to imperfection and overstatement, I felt fairly calm in the assurance that although the female image I had created looked a bit incongruous, her exaggerated measurements were not detrimental to her overall appearance. I was also reassured through my prior study of iconography that artists often distorted a body part or facial expression in order to make it the focus of attention. In fact, gods and goddesses with large wide-open eyes and aloof gazes were popular among the mystery religions; they were thought to be gazing into another world.<sup>51</sup>

In the Bound in the Bundle quilt, one of the messages that I wanted to convey to the observer was what I believe is the enormous capacity of the human spirit to nurture and care for others. Therefore it seemed quite appropriate that the woman’s arms should be distorted to illustrate how large and strong they need to be to carry and to support the bundle. I added vine and flower embroidery on the hands that hold the bundle to suggest the woman’s link to her place in the world of nature as well as to her place with people. I selected a background fabric of gentle forest greens with fossilized leaves to suggest the symbiotic relationship between woman and nature both in the present and in the past. The border of pansies at the bottom of the quilt is in memory of my mother who loved pansies and nurtured them with love and care in her garden each spring.

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<sup>51</sup> Kurt Weitzmann. The Icon: Holy Images, Sixth to Fourteenth Century. (New York: G. Braziller 1978), 14.

I stitched and embroidered all the people in the bundle before I attempted to embroider the face of the woman. To make facial features that were strong yet tender at the same time was the quintessential challenge that I was facing. I knew that the face of the woman was the pivotal piece of the entire quilt because it would either welcome people and invite them to engage, or it would turn people away.

To make the woman's hair, I followed the curving lines on a piece of reddish-brown cotton fabric that I managed to cut and then piece together again. This part took a lot of hand basting to actually tuck under all the raw edges and to gently align the curved pieces in such a way as to make a head of hair. The curly red hair of my quilt-woman reminds me of my mother who was a very capable woman and a wonderful nurturer. Six feet tall in height, my mother was a large person with big bones and a strong frame. She was proud of her size, and carried herself with poise and dignity.

I wanted to honour and celebrate the quilt-woman with a headdress of sorts, so I created the band of feathers to beautify and adorn her head. These feathers came from a feather duster that I found in a second hand store in Coquitlam, British Columbia (in January 1998) when I travelled West to conduct the funeral service for my Aunt Margery. I purchased the duster because I was entirely enraptured with the vibrant colours and delicate fluidity of the feathers. I did not know how the feathers would be used in the quilt yet I knew that somehow they would find a place in it. To put them together for the headdress, I plucked them from the duster first arranging them, then hand stitching them between two lengths of rayon bias tape. It was extremely difficult to stitch through all the layers of feather and fabric to attach them, however the end result was so striking that I was glad that I had persisted with the arduous task.

Now to the bundle of the living. There are 10 people in the bundle who represent a variety of different folk. There is a Mohawk Indian, an African tribesman, a Senorita, a Scottish person, an Arab, an Irish woman, an American woman, an Oriental woman, a Slavic woman, and a Latin American man. All have individually made costumes to complement their race and ethnic group. I have had a wonderful time making these people; they have personalities of their own, and in some cases, they have had their own stories to tell.

#### The Mohawk Indian

I created this man to represent the Canadian Native Indian people, some of whom live not far from my home in Ancaster. Located at Brantford there is a large Indian Reservation; this was and still is the ancestral home for many of these indigenous people. To depict the Mohawk hair-style typified with a brief strip of outcropped hair in the centre of the scalp, I've placed a small piece of black mink in the middle of his head. The piece of mink is the ball from a tassel off an old winter coat. I've given this person a beaded headband across his forehead and he is wearing an aboriginal shell amulet on a black cord around his neck.

#### The African Tribesman

When I was in my first year of high school, one of the books we studied in Literature was Prester John, written by Sir John Buchan. One of the main characters in the text, named Laputa, was a very tall black tribal figure. Out of my memory I have created a quilt-person in Laputa's likeness: tall, handsome and wise. Charming white curly hair spills over his tiger skin headband. He wears an ancestral tunic of animal skin much in the way his forebears did.

### The Senorita

Ola! This Mexican beauty is adorned in a rich chocolate taffeta trimmed with raven black lace. She is created in my remembrance of a very poor yet beautiful young woman I encountered on a mission trip to Mexico City in 1984 when I was a member of an evangelical church. I had purchased a lovely black lace mantilla to take with me on the trip, as we had been told that it was mandatory for women to cover their heads in places of worship. We had reached the end of our trip and we were attending our last service in a huge cathedral. I thought I would like to give away the mantilla that I had been wearing, as I would never really need it again. While I was having these thoughts, a striking young woman entered the sanctuary, head uncovered. From the platform at the front of the church I looked at her periodically during the service. To my surprise and delight at the end of the service, she made her way up to me at the front of the church and in broken English commented upon the beauty of the mantilla I was wearing. There was no hesitancy on my part as to what to do with my lovely headscarf. I wonder if she still has it. If so, I wonder if she wears it to services.

### The Scottish Person

I think that this person is named "Pat". I'm not certain if "Pat" is Patricia or Patrick; I'm not certain that it matters. Perhaps Pat is Presbyterian. Pat is purposely wearing plaid. (A lot of alliteration.) The jaunty feathered tweed cap gives Pat a bouncy look, and I would definitely look forward to being situated close to Pat in the bundle.

My mother's family was originally from Scotland, and yes, they were Presbyterian! And yes, her nickname was Pat, but her name was not Patricia!

### The Arab

The Arab in the bundle proudly wears his kefir. He brings to my remembrance the bus driver that carefully and skillfully guided my tour group through Israel and Jordan when I was visiting the Middle East in 1990. When it was appropriate to do so (for example when driving through an Arab neighbourhood or district), the bus driver would don his kefir; when it was not safe or appropriate to wear it because we were in an Israeli sector, off would come the kefir. The kefir that this person is wearing in the bundle is multi-coloured as opposed to the traditional colours of deep red and white, and the star on the black band of the kefir in the bundle is used primarily for decoration.

### The Irish Woman

The jet black hair, bright but sad blue eyes, and porcelain skin are characteristic of this lovely young woman from Ulster. She has many stories to tell about the violence and senseless tragedies in Northern Ireland. I have chosen to place her in the centre of the bundle to help her feel secure and surrounded by the love of those around her.

One of the patients at the hospital who has had a particular interest in my work gave me the hair that I used for this person. (He is a native Indian.) The straight coarse hair actually came from the tail of a horse named "Spirit". To make it functional for the purpose of adorning the Irish woman, I trimmed the hair to a consistent length, and wrapped it with black thread. The strands of hair were very thick and it was very difficult to get them to come together and lay flat. There's a very sweet and pungent aroma to the horse hair if one cares to get close to it!

### The Oriental Woman

What a challenge this person was to create! I had only stitched one face (the face of the Creator in my first liturgical quilt) prior to making the faces of people in the bundle. I began by choosing a soft yellow colour of fabric because mythically, oriental people were said to have yellow skin<sup>52</sup>. When it came time to make an oriental face, I didn't know how I was going to achieve a far eastern look other than to modify the structure of the eyes. My plan worked well, although the face of the quilt-person seems to be more of a caricature than an actual "person's" face. The up-slant that I gave the eyes is quite pronounced and I think the person looks a little cross-eyed. However, this was not my intent. I have dressed this woman in traditional Chinese garments (Coolie hat and kimono) that I created from taking apart a clutch purse that I purchased in Hong Kong. The long black braids remind me of the children who played in the dramatic productions of *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song* that I saw when I was a young girl.

### The Slavic Woman

A remnant of red, yellow and white table-runner fabric helped to make a fashion statement for this woman. Because of the loose weave, the material frayed easily and was very difficult with which to work. The delicate lace headdress and camisole that this woman is wearing complete a typical traditional costume that a Slavic woman would wear for special occasions. When I toured Russia last summer, I took photographs of young women in their traditional garb and I created this outfit from my pictures.

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<sup>52</sup> Please refer to my second quilt story "O What a Tangled Web we Weave" and the explanation of the creation of humanity. Spider Woman created four colours of people: red, black yellow and white.

### The Latin American Man

From the onset, I loved the batik pattern of the fabric I found to make a casual shirt for this person. It seemed to uniquely represent the lifestyle and artwork of his culture in colours of rich burgundy, white and black. And, the hair and mustachio he is sporting come from a left-over long-haired sparse mohair piece of fabric that I used to make the spider in a former liturgical quilt (O What a Tangled Web We Weave). I find his vibrant emerald green eyes to be very compelling and he seems to have an aura of kindness and gentleness about him. I'd like to hear all of his stories!

### The American Woman

There is quite a story to tell about this particular person. I think she was the last one to be made for the bundle and she almost didn't make it! She has been difficult! Where to begin?

Perhaps I could begin by saying that she was my least favourite character: I didn't like her. Was it the colour of her skin or the colour of her hair? Was it her facial expression? Were the clothes she was wearing "wrong"? I changed her costume, added more hair, and did some millenary embellishments that seemed to help. Yet there was still something that didn't seem right.

I began to examine myself. What was it about this "person" that touched a raw nerve in me? As I reflected upon the predicament, I began to think about the possibility that this woman might not want to be there. Could it be that she was rejecting what was being offered to her? It seems that she is perched at the edge of the bundle, wanting to stay and wanting to flee. She seems conflicted because she can imagine how life-giving and energizing being in

the bundle can be for others, but she feels too bound in her own life to be comfortable with the idea of being bound in anything else, *even* the bundle of life. Perhaps, in the past she has found that nurturing has not always been safe. Strings may have been attached ... impossible expectations, too little opportunity to say “no” even when they were grossly inappropriate ... and some of these that she carries from childhood still bind her soul. Perhaps too she learned early in life that it was far safer to nurture than to be nurtured.

There are important issues of trust and safety that accompany the activity of nurturing and I’m glad that this woman brought this to my attention. Again she reminds me that without responsible nurturing, one’s capacity to care may be compromised. I began my work in this project with the assumption that being in God’s bundle of life was a desirable place to be. For me it is. I believe that it can be for others as well. When we work together as men and women with a common goal of tolerance, mutuality and respect for each other regardless of race, gender and religious persuasion, then the bundle will be a safe and secure place for all.

## Chapter III : Results

### People's Responses to Bound in the Bundle of the Living

What follows is a sampling that represents the quality and variety of stories that were told to me at the three public occasions at which I have offered people an opportunity to engage with the quilt.

The first occasion of presenting my quilt for reaction was at a meeting of hospital chaplains. At the conclusion of our regular, formal business meeting, a group of five of my colleagues agreed to participate in a focus group. We were gathered in the parlour of a Presbyterian Church about ten kilometres from my hometown of Ancaster. The group consisted of three men and two women. All were clergy of various denominations (United, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Roman Catholic). To display the quilt I laid the top against the upright plump pillows of an overstuffed sofa, and the bottom of the quilt spilled down upon the floor into the middle of the room. After the initial oohs and aahs of exclamation, I briefly gave the context of the Abigail and David story, I highlighted Abigail's words of blessing to David, and I referred to my deliberate linkage with the text in the gospel of John, "in God's house are many mansions". Then I asked the group if they could comment on what the quilt meant to them in the realm of their own personal journey.

The first comment was about "quilts", as one person said that seeing this quilt took him back to his childhood, and the summers he spent visiting his grandmother in Winnipeg. He said that by the end of August, it was beginning to get very cold in the evenings, and he fondly remembered the warmth of his grandmother's quilts upon his bed. Another person spoke about making quilts, and that to do so was a labour of love. She spoke lovingly of the two quilts that she had in her possession, one that had been made with great care by her own

mother, and one that she had purchased with great respect, knowing how much work had been involved in its making. Both indeed were very special treasures for her!

While these were “nice” comments that people were giving me because they were speaking fondly of the meaning that quilts had for them in general, the responses about “story” that I had hoped would come to mind from seeing and hearing the stories of the quilt, were not coming. I thought that I needed to probe at a deeper level so I asked the question, “What does the story of the quilt mean in the context of your personal faith journey?” What happened next was beyond anything I had anticipated. One of the members of the group declared that the quilt was an icon, and in that capacity, the meaning of the quilt was therefore a dialogue between God and the beholder. He declared that the quilt was to be observed with reverence and in silence. Conversation would be irreverent. Someone else affirmed this proclamation and added that indeed, it was to be observed in silence. So, we observed, and we were quiet. Despite my asking several more gently probing questions, one man’s prolific pronouncement was enough to silence the group. There was simply no discussion.

In reflection, I think that I was somewhat overcome by the direction that the group process took. I wasn’t prepared for this to happen. In my opinion, we had reached an impasse, or a dead end, because no one seemed to want to talk about their thoughts or “stories”. I wanted to hear words. Later, when I thought more about what had happened, I was able to acknowledge that a) the potential for emotional intensity and the subsequent sharing of people’s story had been cut off by a very controlling statement that one person had made, and b) that perhaps an important “communication” had taken place between the observers and their God. I did not get what I felt I wanted from the group because I had data

to collect, and a set goal and a process in my mind. I did not allow for the transcendence or serendipity of the event.

Looking back on this experience, I learned several things. One was that I was pretty hard on myself; I felt frustrated and disappointed that the group didn't unfold and develop the way that I had anticipated it would. Despite many years of facilitating groups in my work as a hospital chaplain, I could not move this group into discussion on this occasion. I questioned my group leading skills. It was not until sometime later that I was able to see the power that had been exerted by one of the group members. And rather than honouring and accepting the possibility that people might indeed be celebrating the sacred in their own way and resting in this ritual, I kept thinking that I was missing the mark.

The second thing that I learned from this group experience was that I needed to be a little bit more specific in formulating and asking my question about "story". Perhaps I assumed that because the group with whom I was interacting was composed of clergy, they would be reflective and conversant in matters of faith and story. Therefore, before my next presentation of "Bound in the Bundle", I reworked the question, and even the format of presentation so that there would be less room for loose interpretation.

My second presentation took place at West Park Hospital where I am employed. I sent an e-mail message to staff informing them that I would be in the hospital's Meditation Room with my quilt "on Thursday", inviting people to come by when they had a few moments to reflect with me upon my work (Please see Appendix B). Because the hospital is a long-term care facility with a "family-like" atmosphere among the staff and residents, my stitching is well known among our community. Staff, residents and families have been keenly

interested in the work I have been doing for my project and dissertation and have supported me throughout with their prayers and good wishes.

I was able to fasten the quilt to one of the walls in the chapel with pushpins. Most of the quilt “hung” on the wall, and the bottom part of the quilt softly cascaded onto the floor. Generally speaking, the lighting in the chapel is fairly subdued, so I made an effort to place the quilt where it could best be seen. There was gentle down-lighting from two spotlights in the ceiling overhead, and there was an up-light from a small spotlight that I brought from home and placed on the chapel floor.

During the day that I presented my quilt, people visited both individually and in small groups. I think I had the best of both worlds because sometimes a gathering would happen, and the discussion would be spontaneous. People openly shared their thoughts and feelings. Sometimes when I was sitting alone in the chapel, someone would drop in to sit and chat quietly with me. I prepared an information sheet ahead of time that I gave to people to read as they came into the room (Please see Appendix C). I invited people to read it before they engaged in the process of reflecting upon the quilt. Learning from my previous experience, I did this so that people would have a common place with which to begin their reflection. Because people from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds would be coming to see the project, I felt that an information sheet might help to establish a fairly consistent level of departure. I wanted to provide a common starting place for people to begin to connect their experiences and share their stories, yet still allow room for dreaming and reminiscing.

How privileged I have been to hear the stories that were and continue to be told to me in connection with the “Bound in the Bundle” quilt (Please see Appendix D). What follows are a number of these stories. Sometimes I have added personal reflections as to how the

comments of those who came to engage with my quilt impinged upon my own thoughts and upon my life experience. I can say with a great deal of certainty that most people were able to enter into the world of the quilt as though it was a real place, and were able to engage with the people in the bundle.

### Rose

Let me begin with Rose's story. Rose talked about being raised comfortably in a middle class Canadian home where the whole family was active in the United Church. She spoke fondly of the church youth group to which she belonged as a teenager and about travelling the city to visit a variety of religious institutions unlike her own. Rose said that seeing the quilt with the different people in the bundle, and seeing different places of worship in the background reminded her of the valuable lessons she learned in the formative years of her life. She said that tolerance and an acceptance of diversity were always highly regarded in her family and faith group. Little did Rose know as a teenager that the principles of tolerance and acceptance were to be tested within the confines of her own family in the years to come. One of Rose's cousins, a blue-eyed, fair skinned Scottish man married a Muslim woman. They have recently had their first baby. This was indeed a joyful event, however the family has had to learn and respect a protocol unlike anything they have ever known. For example, Rose said that her aunt is not welcome to spontaneously drop in and visit her grandchild because the child's mother must be dressed appropriately. The daughter-in-law must be garbed in her hijab to receive visitors. Grandma must carefully plan and announce her visits in order to respect the formality that is important in her daughter-in-law's culture and faith tradition.

Another cousin in Rose's family is a gay man. She said that whole family has learned over time to accept and to adapt to the choices this person has made for himself. "The bottom line," she says, "is that we love him. That's all there is to it."

Rose's stories took me back to my own recollection of United Church youth groups, and the wonderful times I had. We too visited a variety of churches that were different from our own. I especially remember visiting the Korean Christian Church in Toronto. I can still smell the sweet incense that was being burned and I can hear the big shiny brass gong being struck. I can also remember visiting Holy Blossom Synagogue on Spadina Avenue in Toronto, and being totally in awe of the huge Torah scrolls that were kept in an elaborately decorated case at the front of the temple. Our youth group was welcomed by the Rabbi whose name was Gunther Plaut. Why I remember these specifics, I am not certain. What is important to reflect upon for myself is that I too had rich teaching as a child in the areas of diversity, respect, and tolerance for people who were different than I was. I grew up believing in the unconditional love of God for all people. I believed that diversity was the norm. While none of these principles have really changed for me, my understanding of God certainly has! Does this have an impact upon the principles? I would say that it does in a very positive way that enhances and enlarges the foundation that has already been put into place.

### Bart

Bart's spontaneous outburst was exhilarating! He was completely enraptured with the female figure in the quilt. "Who is she? Mother Earth? Mother Nature? Is she The Creator? Who is she?" he implored with great enthusiasm. "She is whoever you need or want her to be," I assured him. "Look at her head dress!" he continued. "It is a living aura. It represents

freedom. It represents birds in flight that are soaring! Where are they going? What do they know? What eternal secrets do they hold?" Bart paused, and then he continued, "The answers are not found in those buildings, oh no, the answers are found in the people in the bundle. People are greater than buildings." I thanked Bart for his stirring comments. They were uplifting and refreshing, and I was delighted with his excitement. Bart excused himself, saying he had to get back to work. About five minutes passed, and Bart was back again. This time he blurted, "And another thing. Do you see the braids on the woman in the top corner?" "Yes," I said, "what about them?" "Well it occurs to me that the woman's braids are in front of her on her chest. That means the wind is blowing from behind her. She is blessed. She is favoured. She is strong. She is not fighting against the wind; the wind is her friend. We should all be as lucky as she is!" I must admit, I hadn't given a lot of thought to the details of the women in the log cabin patterns at the side of the quilt. I chose to use them in the quilt to celebrate native women generally, and to honour their daily struggle for freedom from adversity. When I look at them I am reminded of the Chilean women who stitch arpillaras, or story cloths to tell the tales of their lives through the symbols that they appliqu  into their pictures.

Bart's comments gave me reason to hope. Here was a visionary ... a man who was able to see beyond the concrete. He was easily transported by his own volition past the images that the picture represented in its tangible state, into another dimension. Bart's serendipitous approach to the quilt was an inspiration to me. Choosing to travel with me beyond the norm of a gendered male creator illustrates the capacity that we have as women and men to choose for ourselves the values and beliefs that are life giving and life sustaining rather than those that might be life denying and keep us limited.

## Tanya

Tanya's experience with church and God was articulated in the following way: She said that she was sent to Sunday school at the local Anglican church by her mum. Her mother rarely (if ever) accompanied her. Tanya recalls being a very shy child, one who was not inclined to ask questions, express an opinion, or admit that she didn't understand something. She remembered being told stories of Jesus in Sunday school, and having the distinct impression that they were just more fairy stories of her childhood. They didn't seem real to her or to have any relevance to her life. Jesus and God didn't seem real to her either.

At one point, the Sunday school invited any children who were interested to audition for the junior church choir. Tanya remembers shaking in her shoes but managing to get through a few lines of a hymn and being accepted to the choir. On Sundays, being in the choir brought her into close proximity to the minister because the choir sat at the front of the church where he stood to preach. Tanya said, "There he stood, looking very large and unapproachable dressed in his long, black robe. And, as he greeted his exciting flock, he was an imposing paternal-looking figure, indeed. I remember feeling small and powerless."

Tanya did not last long as a church-goer or choir member. She "rebelled" refusing to go, or she played hooky instead using the 50 cents her mother gave her each week for the collection plate to buy treats for herself.

Through the many years that have followed, Tanya says she has spent a lot of time searching for answers to spiritual questions and trying different religions and belief systems along the way. She says that she is not sure she is any further ahead than she was when she was 10 years old when she wondered what all the God-stuff was about. "I still don't know

how I believe in God, or *if* I believe in God,” she says. “I do know that I believe in good, and in love, empathy and trying to be the best person I can be. And I *do know* that I’m a lot more comfortable not having all the answers. These days I don’t know if I care to define my spirituality more than that. For me, the experience and wonder of life are enough; the ability to ask questions is enough. Answers are absolute, and cut and dried. Life is not. That is why answers will always elude me.”

### Annie

Referring to the buildings pictured in the background of the quilt, Annie said, “Those places have no meaning for me. I can remember being forced to go to church when I was a little girl. I can remember the one time we walked for two hours through the pouring rain, only to get to the church when the service was over. I don’t want anything to do with the institution of church...” She paused for a moment and then continued, “It’s a funny thing, but as I hear myself saying the word *institution*, I have the same feelings about the institution of marriage. It’s like a building ... it’s a place. Relationships happen outside of the building, outside of the place, outside of the institution ... like in the bundle that you’ve made.” Annie continued, “Look at the people in the bundle. Some are happy, some are sad with everyday stuff. However, if we all bundle it together, we can overcome the hardships that we face everyday as women.” I stopped Annie to ask if I had heard her correctly when she said ‘we, as women.’ “Yes, absolutely. This is our commonality. We are the mothers and the nurturers. And this has been my experience in nursing for the last twenty years. Giving care has been women’s shared experience.”

I was able to hear my own voices through Annie’s description of the bundle. We have

shared some of the same feelings about care giving despite our different past experiences. I was a little taken aback with the clarification and linkages she had made with the word and concept of “institution”. There was obvious pain in Annie’s past relations with church, and because this was not a counselling occasion, I did not pursue the issue further. As children, we have very little control over the religious choices our parents make for us, and unfortunately Annie grew up being scarred along the way. I appreciate Annie’s optimism and faith in humanity that (like Bart) believes in the interdependency of men and women working together to solve their problems and to make the world a better place in which to live.

#### Yvonne

Yvonne told of an incident that happened eight years ago yet is still very fresh in her remembrance. In September 1991 at the age of 30, Yvonne was searching for God. She was attracted to the Catholic Church because she had a number of friends who attended there. She started to go to services with them. She loved the music and she experienced the warmth of a closely-knit community. All was well until she began taking a course called RCIA (Roman Catholic Initiation of Adults). In one of the first sessions, she said that her class was asked the question, “What is your vision of God? What is He like?” Yvonne declared that she wasn’t sure what God looked like; in fact, she wasn’t even sure that God was male. She was told that she needed to reflect on this before she could go on with the course. Yvonne said, “Even though I didn’t believe what I was saying, I found myself having to lie to get what I needed. I really wanted to belong but isn’t religion about telling the truth?”

Being forced to lie in order to get what she desired really changed her perspective on religion. Since completing the course eight years ago, Yvonne no longer attends any church.

She still believes in a “higher power” but because she does not have a clear picture of her God, she says she is unable to pray. “How does one pray...to whom...for what?” are the questions she asked me.

### Zandra

Zandra was also a woman of the Roman Catholic faith, in the old Eastern European tradition. For 12 years, she prepared classes of children for their “first communion”. Zandra liked to hold her classes right up at the front of the church although ordinary people weren’t supposed to be there. She told the story of the day that the priest visited the class to teach the children about his calling and role. One particularly bright and eager nine-year-old girl in her tutelage, the daughter of a wrestling promoter, told the priest at the conclusion of his discourse that she would like to be a priest when she grew up. “Oh no, you can’t do that”, replied the priest. “Why not?” asked the little girl. “Being a priest is a job for men. Women’s job is to bake bread for the Eucharist, embroider the altar cloths and clean the church”.

Zandra said it was a crushing moment for her. She felt very badly that the little girl, so keen and bright, was slotted to do “women’s work”. The irony in this situation was that the women’s work of making the hard, heavy bread for the Eucharist demanded that women have exceedingly strong and muscular arms to kneed the dough for hours upon end!

Zandra told another story of her Ukrainian past. It was the time of the Green Holidays during which a particular Sunday in May was designated as the time to go to the ancestral graves to clean and bless them. At the cemetery, Zandra’s Uncle Pete the cantor, asked her father to read the Epistle. Because English was not his first language, Zandra’s father was not comfortable to do the reading aloud in public. He asked Zandra (who was completing a

Master's degree in Divinity at the time) to do it instead. Zandra was standing back to back with the priest. When she began to read, he turned around and announced that this was an unspeakable sacrilege: a woman had never before read the Epistle. He turned on his heel, leaving the astonished people at the graveside. He didn't even finish the Mass or bless the graves of the ancestors.

Zandra said that the quilt brought to memory these unhappy stories of excluding women that were typical in her strict Eastern European faith background. The image of inclusion that the woman in the quilt portrayed was for her a direct contrast to the rigid, inflexible dogma of her tradition. The irony in the second story is that the cemetery was located at a place called "Ladywood" Manitoba. We laughed together at the play on words implying that *no lady would* read the Epistle at Ladywood with that particular priest on hand!

Zandra's stories of exclusion brought to my remembrance one of my own stories. The incident happened during the early days of my faith journey in the Evangelical tradition in 1984. I had completed a year of daily Bible School studies that my church offered, and I had completed an evening course at the Toronto School of Theology in Christian Counselling. I was very dedicated and committed, I was a fervent believer and I strongly felt the call of God on my life to minister to others. I asked the pastor if I could become an elder. He said he would consider it and take it to the board of elders already in existence.

About a week later, he came to me with his response. "Catherine, I am sorry to tell you this, but it says in 1 Timothy 3:2 that an elder must be a husband who has only one wife." He handed me a piece of paper on which a type written passage of Scripture verified his spoken words. I didn't fit the literal description of what an elder was supposed to be therefore that door to ministry was closed to me. Through no fault of my own other than the

fact that I was a woman, an opportunity of serving God was denied to me. I remember thinking at the time that if the pastor and elders were to examine the additional qualities of personality that an elder was supposed to have (as described further on in the passage of Timothy “temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to too much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money”), they would see that these qualities might even be considered to be “feminine”. I think this was the beginning of the end for me in that particular worship setting.

### Harry

Harry was Bar Mitzvah’ed at the age of 13. He looked back upon this event as a mere formality: already at that stage in his religious life, Judaism had lost much of its meaning and appeal. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish home, something had happened to Harry the year before his Bar Mitzvah that had taken away any possibility of joy or celebration that such a day would normally hold. Harry described his Bar Mitzvah as merely going through the motions. “Besides”, he said, “we were merely taught to memorize the passages of text in Hebrew without having a clue as to what they meant in English. It was tradition.”

Harry described the incident that forever changed his life and deterred him from following in the footsteps of the generations that had gone before him. One day he was at the synagogue with his father for evening prayers. (He was almost twelve years old at the time.) A minyan was present, and the cantor was singing the prayers. At the end of the service, his father left for a few minutes, and Harry thought he would impress the cantor with his enthusiasm and some small talk. In all seriousness, he said to the cantor, “That must be *holy smoke* coming from those candles”. The cantor thought Harry was being a smarty-pants and castigated him out

loud in front of all the men gathered for his flippant, “derogatory” remark. Harry was demoralized.

Seeing the synagogue in the quilt prompted Harry to tell this story. He said that this incident is branded upon his soul. Although he still considers himself a Jew, Harry hasn’t been in a synagogue for years. I asked him if he could see himself included in God’s bundle, and he replied that he could not. Forty-five years later, the old wounds are still very deep for Harry.

### Faith

For Faith, the message of the quilt was one of hope. Faith told the story of being raised in a Jewish family, and always being a little bit embarrassed at being different because she was Jewish. For this reason, she said she remembers circulating and socializing primarily with people of her own cultural and faith group. “We always kept to ourselves,” she said.

Her family was shocked and filled with abhorrence when Faith announced wedding plans with the Italian Catholic man with whom she was in relationship. “We tried to plan our wedding service with both a rabbi and a priest, but we ended up being married in a civil ceremony. I would not agree to sign over any children that I might have to be raised in the Catholic Church, so the priest would not marry us. My future husband’s family was not comfortable with us being married under the chuppa, so a rabbi was out of the question,” Faith told me.

Seven years down the road, Faith’s marriage has not survived the test of two very diverse cultures and the pressure of two very different families. She says there were too many compromises on her part: “I realized I had to compromise my whole self to fit, and there came a point in time that I felt I was no longer able to do this.”

Faith saw the message of the quilt as one that supported her ideal. For people to live in harmony and balance without one person having to lose his or her identity in order to survive would be the ultimate. "We have a four year old little boy that is being raised with the richness of both traditions in which he has been taught to celebrate both Christmas and Channukah. I think that differences in culture and in faith need to be viewed as positives, not negatives", was the way Faith summed up her impression of the quilt. "This can only work in an environment of mutuality, respect and co-operation."

### Michelle

For Michelle, the message of the quilt too was one of hope. She said that when she looked at the people in the bundle, she felt very much at peace with the world. God was caring for all the people in the bundle. Michelle is a person who is plagued at times with terrible depression. One of the contributing factors to her sadness is the reality that a daughter in her late teen years has moved thousands of miles away to live with her boyfriend (of another race) in another country and another culture. Michelle grieves her loss on a daily basis and hopes for a time when her daughter will "come to her senses and come home". In the meantime, Michelle survives through her strong faith in God. Her God protects and cares for her daughter as the Parent she is not able to be. Michelle telephones a "hope line" every day for an inspirational message to keep her going.

What touched me deeply about Michelle was her complete need to trust God to care for her daughter. I was in awe by this story of child-like faith that challenged my own concept of God. Sometimes, I want God to be the parent who will make things better, and soothe the hurts of my soul. Yet to create this picture of God is too close to the male imagery

that has been such a derogatory part of my story. It is a figure of authority that is offensive in its power; it creates a parental image of “father knows best”. It is an image in which personal responsibility is abdicated. There is little room for co-operation.

What am I doing then in presenting a female figure as the focus of the quilt? Have I merely replaced a male representation of God with that of a female one? I am completely at peace with the assurance that I have not. This is not an issue of replacement or substitution. As I explained previously when I was describing the quilt, the woman holding the bundle is an extension of God through myself. My action symbolizes what might perhaps come to be. For me it is the expression of God’s unconditional love through the image of supportive arms. This is the ultimate message of hope.

### Edna

Edna’s reaction to the quilt is a bit of a contrast to the one above. I mentioned earlier that the quilt was on display in the Meditation Room at the hospital. I didn’t go into detail to describe the room per se, because when I chose it, I was thinking primarily about the room in terms of its generous size and convenient location. There was room for people to mix and mingle, and there was a free wall with decent spot lighting on which I could hang the quilt. In terms of availability this room is always open, and is seldom booked by others. The Meditation Room has a peculiar shape; over the years, space has been taken from it to create offices on the perimeter so there are walls and an alcove consistent with those structural changes. When I displayed the quilt, I hung it on the left-hand wall of the alcove. Opposite, on a forty-five degree angle and perhaps twenty-five feet away, there is a wall of stained glass with an artist’s rendition of The Good Shepherd.

Edna reacted to the quilt by saying that there wasn't room for both the Woman holding the bundle and the Good Shepherd in the same room. "When I shut my eyes, they are competing for space," she said, "and they need different space." When I asked Edna to tell me more about her visual perception, she went on to describe how she interpreted the shepherd's face to be cross and sad at the same time. "It is not a comforting picture; it is not a comforting saviour. The face of the shepherd is very harsh." She described the woman in the quilt to be in direct contrast to the shepherd. "Her expression is very gentle, in fact, she overwhelms me with her gentleness."

Edna's story is one of struggle with patriarchy in the church and in her marital relationship as well. I am privy to this knowledge (of which the details are confidential) through previous conversations with her. Suffice it to say that Edna felt warmly welcomed by the gentle hospitality of the woman holding the bundle, and severely distanced by the harshness of the man's facial expression. However, the dissonance was too much for her. She described her inner space as being conflicted because "the patriarchal God has brought me this far." The thought of abandoning this God (especially with a face of anger and sadness) is too shaky for Edna at this point in her spiritual journey.

I can resonate with Edna. For many years the stirrings in my soul were quiet ones that merely said that *something* was very wrong. This *something* was the adversity of patriarchy. I believe that Edna is beginning to say no to the things with which she cannot agree. The image of the stained-glass shepherd God is not welcoming or comforting to Edna. By coming to terms with the realization that this is not where she wants to be, she opens doors to new possibilities and is free to move towards something she can embrace.

## Mary

The following is a story of exclusion, but of a slightly different sort. Mary is a person who depends upon a wheelchair for her mobility. Paralyzed from the sternum down, in a car accident more than 25 years ago, Mary told of going to a funeral home in the city of Toronto last year to pay her respects to a friend who had died. To her dismay, there were several concrete steps of ascendancy into the building. Had Mary not loudly voiced displeasure at the physical impediment disallowing her entry, she would have been denied the right and privilege to offer her sympathies to her friend's family. Ultimately, several men carried Mary in her wheelchair up to the level where the visitation was taking place. "Unfortunately, I am reminded of my disability more often than I would care to comment, as I face obstacles not unlike this everyday," said Mary.

While this last entry is a story of exclusion because of a physical disability, I think it can be included in this bundle of stories. It addresses the issue of how a person feels when it is obvious that they are different from the prescribed norm or what is assumed to be the custom. As has been discussed earlier in this paper, for many years women were excluded from many "privileges" in Western society because they were different and viewed as being inferior to men. One's disqualifying feature while visible to some may be invisible to others.

The third occasion of which I have chosen to write was a focus group held at Etobicoke General Hospital with six hospital chaplains (not including myself). These people (2 Baptists, 1 Roman Catholic, 2 Anglicans, and 1 Seventh Day Adventist) had followed my project with interest, and were very keen to participate in this group process. After a wonderful lunch together, I introduced the quilt by briefly telling the story of Abigail and

David and explaining the linkage with the passage in the gospel of John. I gave them a walking tour of the quilt introducing the various places of worship and introducing the woman and her bundle. I shared my dream of a world where inclusion is the norm, and exclusion is a thing of the past.

We had a lively exchange from the beginning. People told their individual stories and shared their feelings. Steven said that he had never experienced being excluded from anything as a man in ministry. In fact, he rarely gave it much thought; he didn't have to because it wasn't an issue for him. Sexism and feminism did not impinge upon his life of service to his church and his work at the hospital. His actual words were, "It's hard for me as a man to relate to this; rebuffs don't happen to me."

Judy on the other hand remarked upon the huge distinction between how she was perceived to be capable to do ministry at the hospital where she had been employed for eleven years, and incapable at the church she attended. Her church recognized and endorsed her mandate for ministry as a hospital chaplain, but when it came to doing actual ministry at her own church, there was no place for her. "They don't bother me as long as I just do my work at the hospital." Judy was quite convinced that the reason for this was because of the traditional role women and men were typecast in her parish. Judy is actually now in the process of searching for a new church in which she can become involved as an equal in a community of worshippers and where she can make a contribution with the gifts God has given her.

#### Donna

The first person to actually tell a story in the group was Donna. She told of an experience that she had when she was working in the East End of Toronto, six or seven years

ago. An ordained Anglican clergy person, she never wore a clerical collar to work. She often ate lunch at a restaurant on Danforth Avenue, not far from her parish with a colleague who always wore his collar. One particular afternoon she was to conduct a funeral service, and she went to the usual restaurant for a quick bite to eat at lunchtime without her friend. That particular day, she was wearing her clerical collar. She waited and waited for someone to take her order, but no one did. Time was getting scarce, so finally she asked one of the wait staff if she could please place her order. In a few moments, the manager of the restaurant came to her table and said to her, "Your kind is not welcome here." She was dumbfounded. "What do you mean?" she asked. "Get out," she was told, "We don't want your kind in here."

This was a very hurtful experience for Donna. The collar stigmatized her as unacceptable because she was a woman in ministry, and for many Old World people (this happened to be a Greek restaurant) women can't be ministers. For Donna, this was not the end of the incident. This act of exclusion that day, provoked her into some serious reflection in her own life. "Who do I exclude," she asked herself, "and who do I include by the way I minister?" What started out to be a hurtful and negative situation turned out to be a positive turning point in her life.

### Gary

Gary told the story of travelling to Detroit to perform a wedding ceremony for some friends several years ago. Having just having crossed over the bridge from Windsor to the American side, Gary and his family found themselves completely lost and disoriented. Dressed in his black suit and clerical collar for the service, Gary went with one of his daughters into a Pub to ask directions to the church. Immediately they were told to "get out."

They didn't hang around to ask "why?" as to whether it was because they were white, or because Gary was wearing the collar. It didn't matter. They felt the bitter sting of rejection. They were excluded from that setting, and knew that flight was far better than fight!

Gary told another story of exclusion. One time the family was doing mission work in Korea. They went into a restaurant for a meal one evening, and were told to leave. When they asked the manager why they had been told to leave, he explained that they could come back in the company of Korean people. As Caucasians eating alone, they were not welcome in that contextual cultural setting.

Stories of exclusion can really get a person feeling down! We know that story begets story, and the group process bears out this supposition. One particular story that was not about exclusion, but was instead about inclusion is one that I would like to offer to finish this section of responses. It is life giving, encouraging and humorous from my perspective. Listen to Phil's heart-warming story.

Phil

"The woman in your quilt takes me back to Pershing Square, Los Angeles in the late '60's when I was a young seminary student. The L.A. City Mission used to have a flat bed truck that they would bring into Pershing Square on Saturday evenings. And on the truck they would have a choir of sorts, a preacher and someone playing an old ragtime style piano. I remember there was a fleshy, heavily made-up woman with red hair in her seventies on the truck, belting out the old familiar hymns. It was such an incredible scene. Out of the pain and the tragedy of people's broken lives, these down and outers were all singing the old gospel

tunes at the top of their lungs. They had something unique to offer to us: everyone was invited to participate. There was a special beauty to be found in those who were marginalized by the rest of society. Bystanders couldn't help but be drawn in by their genuine warmth and sincerity."

## Chapter IV : Discussion

I have been rewarded with the gift of being told many interesting stories. Putting them to use seems very similar to the activity of making a quilt. Sorting the fabrics I have chosen to use in a quilt according to similarity or contrast in colour, design and intensity is a very significant task. Sorting the stories I have been told according to similarities and contrasting themes is also a very important responsibility. I have been given very precious bits and pieces of people's stories; I will attempt to piece them together to produce a cohesive collection that has meaning just as I would a quilt. Different voices, different experiences and different vocabularies all contribute to the construction of it. When reflecting upon the totality of stories that were told me, three themes emerged to be dominant. These themes were power, interdependence and hope.

### Power

Power masqueraded itself in a variety of different venues in the collection of stories and experiences that have been offered. Most significantly, power was heard in the voices of authority that said, "The quilt is an icon and is to be observed with reverence and in silence" (a chaplain), "Being a priest is a job for men. Women's job is to bake bread for the Eucharist, embroider the altar cloths and clean the church" (Zandra), and "An elder must be the husband or one's wife" (myself). It was communicated by a cantor to a young boy wanting to show his enthusiasm and zeal (Harry). It was heard in the voices of the restaurateurs who told their clients in several different circumstances that they were not welcome (Donna and Gary). Power was enacted by the priest who turned on his heel and left the cemetery without finishing the Mass or blessing the graves when a woman read the Epistle (Zandra) and by the minister in

the Anglican church who dressed in a black robe and stood looking large and unapproachable to a small child in the junior choir (Tanya). It was used by the instructor in the Roman Catholic Initiation of Adults class to get a student to conform to an accepted belief (Yvonne). It was used by parents who forced their children to walk a long distance in the pouring rain to go to church (Annie). Power was projected from the face of the stained-glass Good Shepherd who displayed emotions of anger and sadness so much that the observer felt guilt at the mere thought of abandoning the God and Saviour that she had known since her childhood (Edna).

### Interdependence and Hope

Interdependence and hope are themes that emerged in couplets; one usually accompanied the other in the stories that people told. One of the comments about the people in the bundle was “Some are happy, some are sad with everyday stuff, however, if we all bundle it together, we can overcome the hardships that we face everyday...” (Annie). Another comment was “I think that differences in culture and in faith need to be viewed as positives, not negatives. This can only work in an environment of mutuality, respect and co-operation” (Faith). In the story of the new grandchild born to the Muslim mother and Protestant father, the grandmother respected the diversity of her daughter-in-law’s religious tradition and they have been able to harmoniously arrange their visits (Rose).

As has been observed, actions of power have resulted in acts of exclusion. Many of the people who shared their stories told me that they no longer attend a place of worship. Yes, they still believe in “God” or a higher power, but for a variety of reasons do not go to church or temple. Several times, people affirmed their belief in relationships and in humanity. Statements like “The answers are not found in those buildings, oh no, the answers are found in the people

in the bundle” (Bart) and, “Relationships happen outside of the building, outside of the place, outside of the institution” (Annie). These are strong assertions grounded in people’s life experiences. They articulate the importance of interdependency among human beings; they affirm the importance of being included. Statements like the above reinforced my belief in the sacredness of ordinary, everyday life occurrences. And, these statements intensified for me the importance of telling and hearing the story of the occurrences of everyday life. When we tell our story and know that it has been heard we feel valued. When our story is not heard, we feel devalued, or undervalued. When we are not valued, we feel the pain of exclusion.

When I began the project of making the quilt, I hoped that those who would come to see it would be able to dialogue with my story. I hoped that people would hear their own stories in such a way that, if need be, they would find new meanings in them. I hoped that people could resonate with my stories and my dreams as I portrayed them through my artwork. As can be observed in the responses of this report, much success was achieved in this regard. Story does beget story!

I found the following on a calendar that I bought for our Jewish residents at the hospital. It contains an image from the Old Testament (Leviticus 23:40) that captures the essence of “bundling together” all of humanity. “On the first day you are to take for yourselves the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of a date palm, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows, and you are to rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.” This is the prescription given by God to Moses for the Feast of Tabernacles, the celebration of ingathering (or thanksgiving for the harvest) traditionally held in month of Tishrei (October). The Midrash offers a beautiful explanation for the symbolism of the four species of trees mentioned above.

The fruit of a citron tree has both taste and fragrance. The branches of a date palm

yield dates, and the date has taste but no fragrance. Twigs of a plaited tree are myrtle twigs; the myrtle has fragrance but no taste. Brook willows have neither taste nor fragrance.

The rabbis explain that taste represents Torah knowledge and fragrance represents good deeds. Symbolically, the four species of tree represent four kinds of Jews. Some know the Torah and do good deeds; some have Torah knowledge but lack good deeds; some do good deeds, but are ignorant of Torah; and some have neither Torah knowledge nor good deeds. “What does God do?” ask the rabbis. “God binds them all together in one bundle so that they make up for each other’s failings. The bundle signifies the unity of the Jewish people, that all Jews, even those who are deficient in knowledge and good deeds, are needed to complete the Jewish community.”<sup>53</sup>

Storytelling is at the heart of life; storytelling validates our existence. I think that it is important that everyone tell their own story and *listen* to their own story because it is in the telling and the listening that we learn to realize that what we understand and imagine about ourselves *is* a story. I believe that there are many different ways of telling one’s story. Quilting my story has been amazingly revelatory for me: I have been giving flesh to ideas through the medium of fabric. Through my project and dissertation, I have come to realize that stitching my story has been an incarnational event.

Listening to the stories of the people who shared with me has reaffirmed my belief in the importance of trying to understand each other’s lifestyles, traditions and spiritual practices. We are all people with limitations and imperfections, yet if we work together to find and promote the best in each other, the world will be a much richer place. As with the citron, date,

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<sup>53</sup> Yalkut Shimoni, Emor, 1998\*1999 (5759) Jewish Calendar (Toronto: Jewish Russian Community Centre Publication).

myrtle and willow trees, on their own they have limitation; collectively they complement each other and there is reason “to rejoice before the Lord” when they are put together. By using the techniques of joining, piecing, space filling and layering as one does in quilting to include all people, there would indeed be a very plentiful bundle of life.

The very last step in finishing a quilt is to attach the *binding*. The binding secures the top fabric, the batting in the middle and the bottom layer of fabric together. When the binding is attached, the quilt is said to be *bound*. I cannot help but reflect upon the similarity of words used in the activity of finishing and binding a quilt, and being bound in God’s bundle of the living. Being bound in the bundle is the finishing act: all is complete. The process, like making the quilt is detailed and arduous. The end result? Well worth the effort! Lasts for generations! And the stories to be told...

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## **Appendixes**





Details of the Loom and the Bundle



**Catherine Cornutt**

**From:** Catherine Cornutt  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 16, 1999 9:08 AM  
**To:** Alan Diplock; Amanda Chronis; Andrea Dyrkacz; Angelo Katradis; Anna Carney; Anne Paconik; Barbara Smith; Besi Manzo; Cathy Prain; Charlyn Atyeo; Cheryl Gilmour; Communications; Dana C. Dawson; Desiree DeWaal; Desreen Boothe; Donna Rawlinson; Donna Renzetti; Dr. Terri Sands; Edi Antonini; Emily West; Fran MacLeod; Frances Grunwald; Gail Thompson; Geoffrey Purdell-Lewis; Georgina Veldhorst; Gloria Stoll; Hortensia Puentes; Jane Turner; Janet Campbell; Janet Fraser; Zorka Marin; Janet Vercillo; Janie Sanderson; Joan Donovan; Jean McKay; Joanne Daniel; Jon Clark; Josie Munro; Judith de Swaaf; Karen Czovek; Kathi Colwell; Lili Cordeiro; Lily Chan; Linda Holland; Linda Norton; Lisa Compton; Lynda Woon; Lynn Buchan; Lynn Whitman; Lynne Wilkins; Madge Mackinley; Marcia Frank; Margaret McKenzie; Marion Haugen; Marta Yurcan; Michael Bonnah; Michele Weidman; Michelle Hawryluk; Mike Quinn; Nadine Lee; Nancy McNaim; Pat Hartnett; Peggy Allin; Philip Brown; Phyllis Stevens; Rena Postoff; Sandra Fawcett; Sandy Lomaszewycz; Sharon Bieck-Shangrow; Sharon Jankey; Sharon Miron; Sharon Stewart; Sherrill Meeks; Shirley George; Shirley Scott; Stacey Holloway; Stuart Oakley; Sylvia Kovich; Tara Frankel; Terri Toffen; Terri Bonnah; Wendy Gauthier; Heather Alley  
**Subject:** Catherine's Visit

As you know, I have been away from West Park on an educational leave of absence for the past six weeks. During this time I have worked at completing a project that is part of the requirement for the doctoral program in ministry at St. Stephen's college, University of Alberta, in which I am enrolled. My particular work is comprised of two parts: there is a written dissertation and there is a practical project of work of art. My interest of study has been in the area of Feminism and Theology. The creation of a wall quilt or tapestry that visually describes my written work has been the object of the practical work.

On Thursday of this week, ( February 18, 1999) I would like to bring the quilt to West Park, and listen to your reflections about it. I will have it in the Meditation Room from 11:30 Am to 1:30 PM, and again from 3:00 PM to 4:30PM. I am sending this e-mail to friends who have supported me and have expressed interest in my work in the past. Please come and if you would like , bring someone along with you. I don't want to overlook anyone, and I certainly don't want to impose upon anyone either. However, if you can free yourself for fifteen minutes or so to share your thoughts with me, I would really appreciate it.

I look forward to seeing you on Thursday.

Catherine Cornutt



When we come face to face with a piece of art, sometimes a very special event takes place. Understanding, assigning meaning and interpreting are the challenges and opportunities of the person who silently dialogues with the work of art. *Communion* is established between the artwork and those who stand before it. It is even said that there may occur a mystery or crossover between the Divine and the human in the observation of a work of art. 101

Welcome, and thank you for coming today to reflect upon my quilt.

I have named this quilt "**Bound in the Bundle**." The title comes from a passage in an Old Testament story (from 1 Samuel, 25) wherein a woman by the name of Abigail blesses the soon to be King David with the following words: *Surely the soul of my lord will be securely bound in God's bundle of life.* The word "bundle" in this context is used to mean a very special place where valuable things are kept. The woven basket in my quilt is meant to portray the bundle. Its valuable contents are the men and women who typify the world's global community in a variety of races and religious/spiritual persuasions. In the background of the quilt there is a cathedral, a mosque, a synagogue, a Jain temple and a Shinto temple, representing a variety of places that people could choose to go to worship their God. For people of the Christian tradition, a verse from the gospel of John might suffice to describe this background picture, "In God's house are many mansions..."

The quilt is an attempt to provide a picture of the inclusivity of God, or in other words, I want to say that there is room for everyone and every style of worship with the Divine. Each one of us pictures God in a different way that is unique to our own life experience and our own religious imagination. I am convinced that there is a common thread linking us all together. I think that it is extremely important that people try to understand and appreciate the diversity between races, cultures and faith traditions, because in so doing, we have a greater opportunity for peace, tolerance, dignity and mutual respect in our world.

Therefore, I invite you to enter into the imaginary world of this quilt. What does seeing the quilt mean to you? Does the quilt bring to mind any stories of your life experience, or faith experience about which you would be able to speak? If so, I would like very much to hear your stories, and hope you will share them with me, either now or at a time to come in the near future. No story is too small or insignificant to be heard.

I can be reached at [ccornutt@westpark.org](mailto:ccornutt@westpark.org), or at extension 2168, beginning March 1, 1999. Thank you for your ongoing support, and your continued interest in my work. Blessings always,

Catherine Cornutt, February 18, 1999.



**Catherine Cornutt**

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**From:** Terri Bonnah  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 09, 1999 6:12 PM  
**To:** Catherine Cornutt  
**Subject:** Catherine's Bound In The Bundle

Hi Catherine,

I hope I'm not too late. I'm very sorry I didn't write sooner.

I think you know I enjoyed your beautiful piece of art very much, even though I'm not a person who is used to "appreciating" art. My thoughts come, not from an artistic eye, but from a reflective heart.

The image of the Bundle will remain in my visual memory as a word of comfort throughout my days, I think. For this I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to share in your audience.

I have always believed that "all are precious in the sight of God". We are all his children. I sometimes think about the relationship of the whole world to God to be very similar to that of human parents and children. Perhaps that's why God made families – to show us how to experience his love at this level. In a healthy human family, parents accept the diversity of their children. They celebrate the diversity and encourage it to emerge. A healthy parent loves each child as an individual and never stops loving the child no matter what the child does. (I can't even begin to understand these mechanics in a dysfunctional family, even though I am a child of one such family – but that's another story for another day)

God made us as we are. Just as "the clay cannot say to the potter – why did you make me this way?" we are comforted to accept the wonderful way God made each of us for His own purpose. Even though that purpose is not always clear. He has counted the hairs on every head, he collects our tears in a bottle and he knows our every care. This means ALL of us. He seeks to bind us in his presence and carry our burdens. He wants to give us his own burden which is light and easy. Just as his eye is on the sparrow, he watches us too.

As I reflect on bundling my own three children as tiny infants, I think there is no more endearing, nurturing act than to BUNDLE. I remember times watching fireworks with my children under a common blanket all bundled together. This bundling brought extra warmth and a special closeness that certainly made the even memorable for me. I have a picture of my two older children bundled under a large beach towel drying off after taking a swim. This is one of my favourite pictures.

The image of God's precious children from all over the world bound together in his bundle of life is portrayed beautifully in your quilt. Thank you for sharing it with me (us). Also, thank you for bringing forward that very special verse in 1 Samuel 25.

Terri

Dear Catherine:

I wanted to share a message to you **THAT QUILT WAS TRULY AMAZING**. I've been thinking about it all weekend and what it means to me.

I could see pieces of me in this quilt and share a little of my story . This is the way that I've always thought the world should be. I have always fought in my life to have these values that everyone is the same. The only difference is learning to fight for me instead of everyone else

I think we are all a little piece of each other and that we have just gone down different paths in life. And god ( or our interpretation of what god is) does hold us all together in his/her arms and sends us down different paths to experience life as we know it , so that we gain knowledge and a little understanding of life's process.

**Catherine Cornutt**

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**From:** Karen Czovek  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 18, 1999 3:01 PM  
**To:** Catherine Cornutt  
**Subject:** QUILT

Hi Catherine:

Once again you have out done yourself! The quilt was absolutely wonderful. That doesn't even really describe it properly.

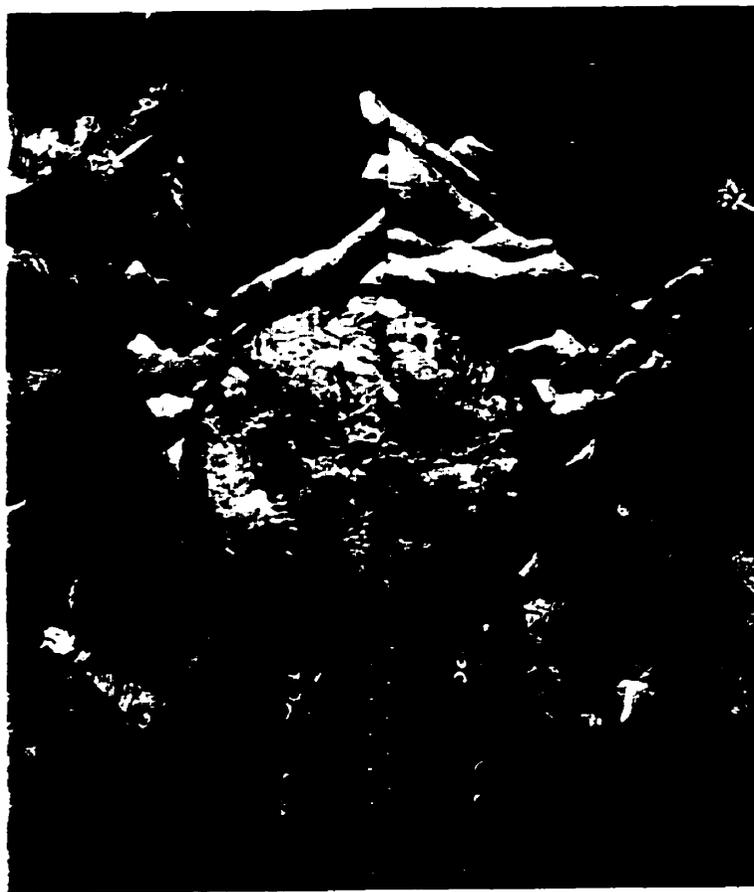
What it represented for me was that no matter what colour your skin is, what gender you are, where you live, whether you are big or small, your sexual orientation, **we are all equal!** Your quilt represents what I truly believe would make the world a better place to live if we could all think in this way. (I just hope I am as successful in what I teach my children).

Again, the quilt was beautiful, congratulations on a job very well done. Karen

## **Plates**



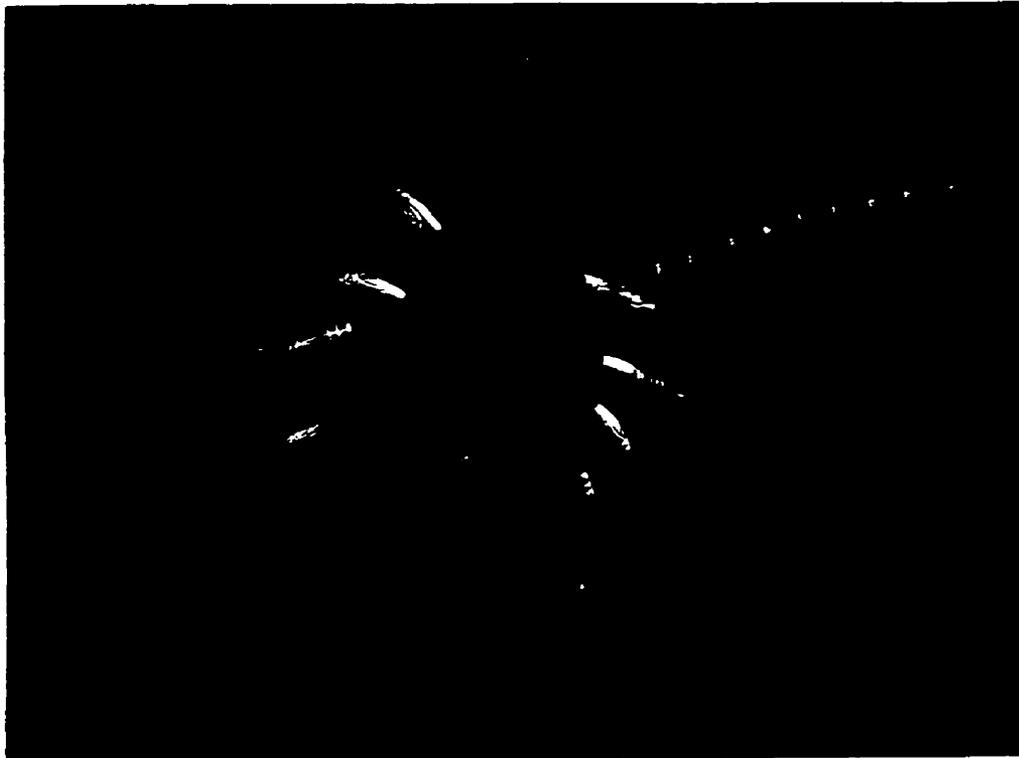
Plate 1 — The Creator



Details of The Creator



Plate 2 — O What a Tangled Web We Weave



Details of  
O What a Tangled Web We Weave

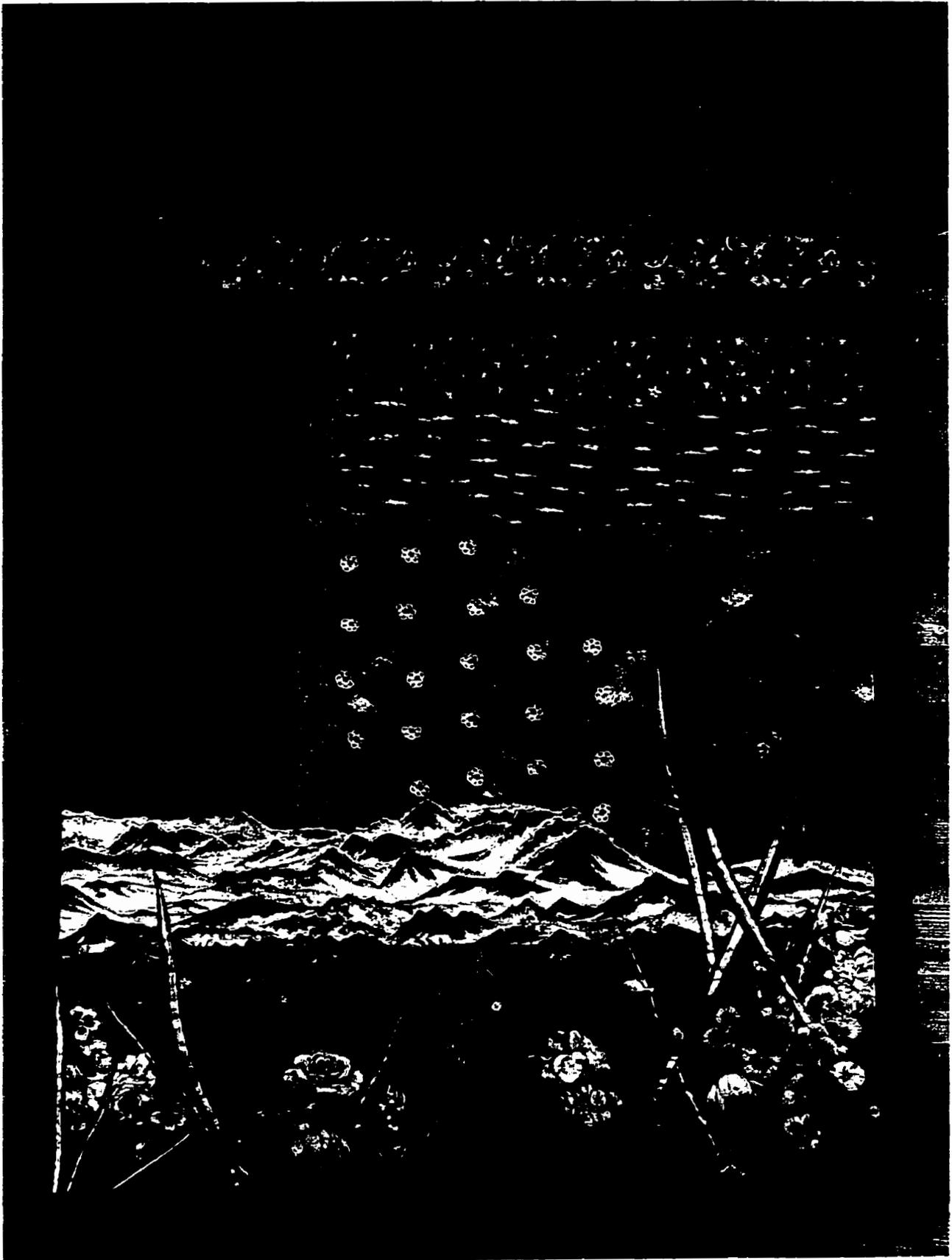


Plate 3 — The Galaxy



Details of The Galaxy

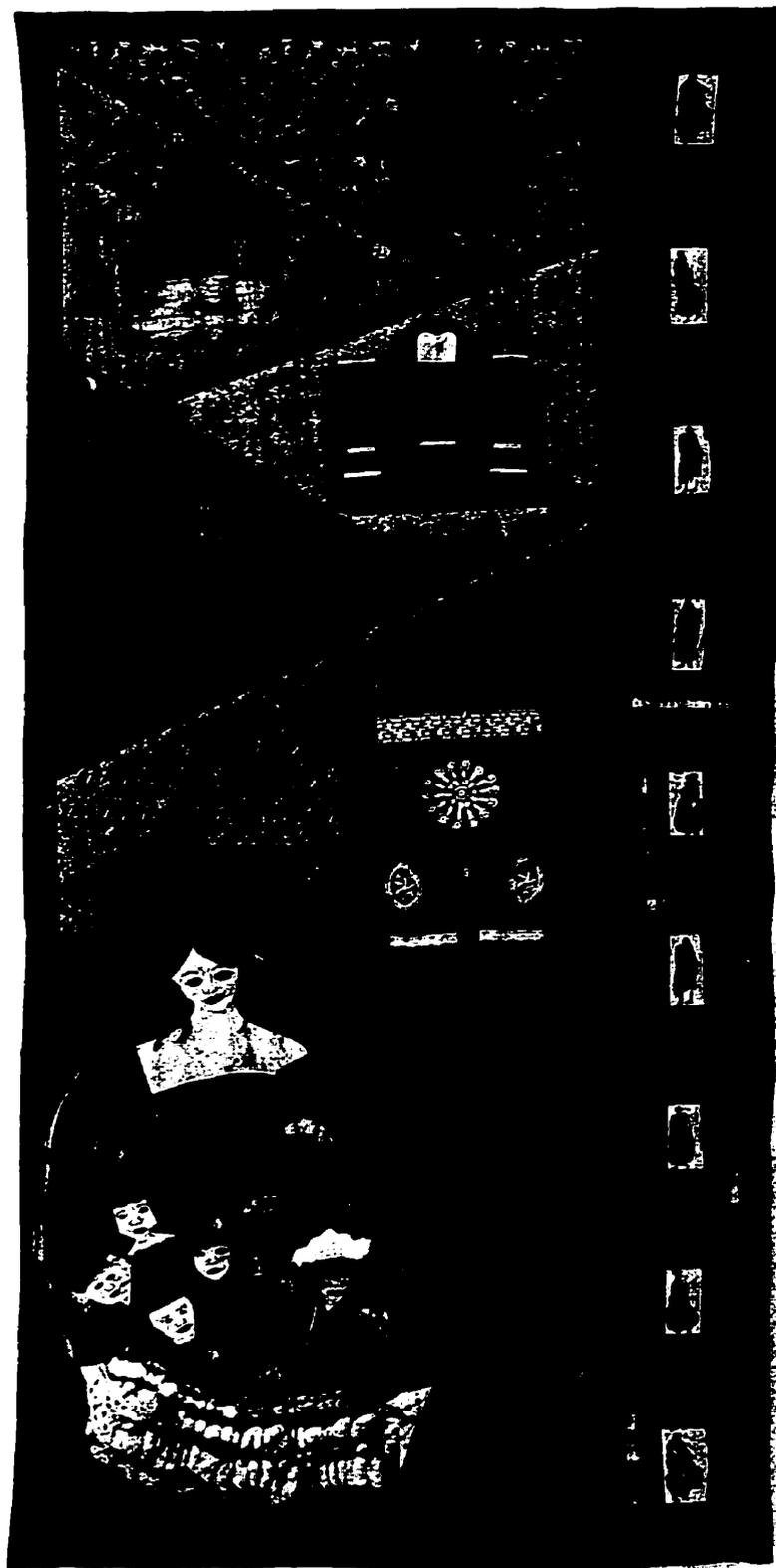


Plate 4 — Bound in the Bundle of Life



Plate 5 — Shinto Temple

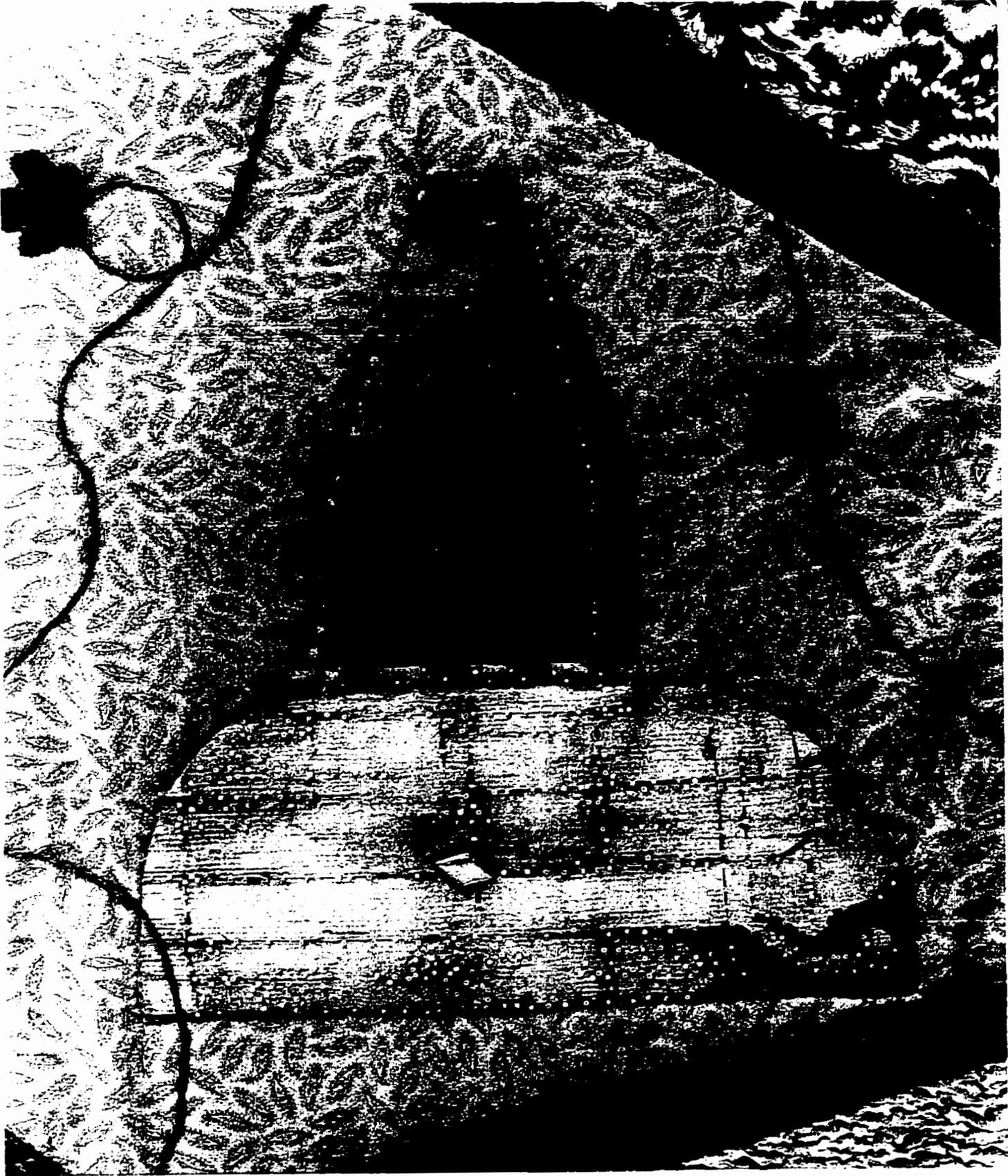


Plate 6 — Jain Temple



Plate 7 — Synagogue

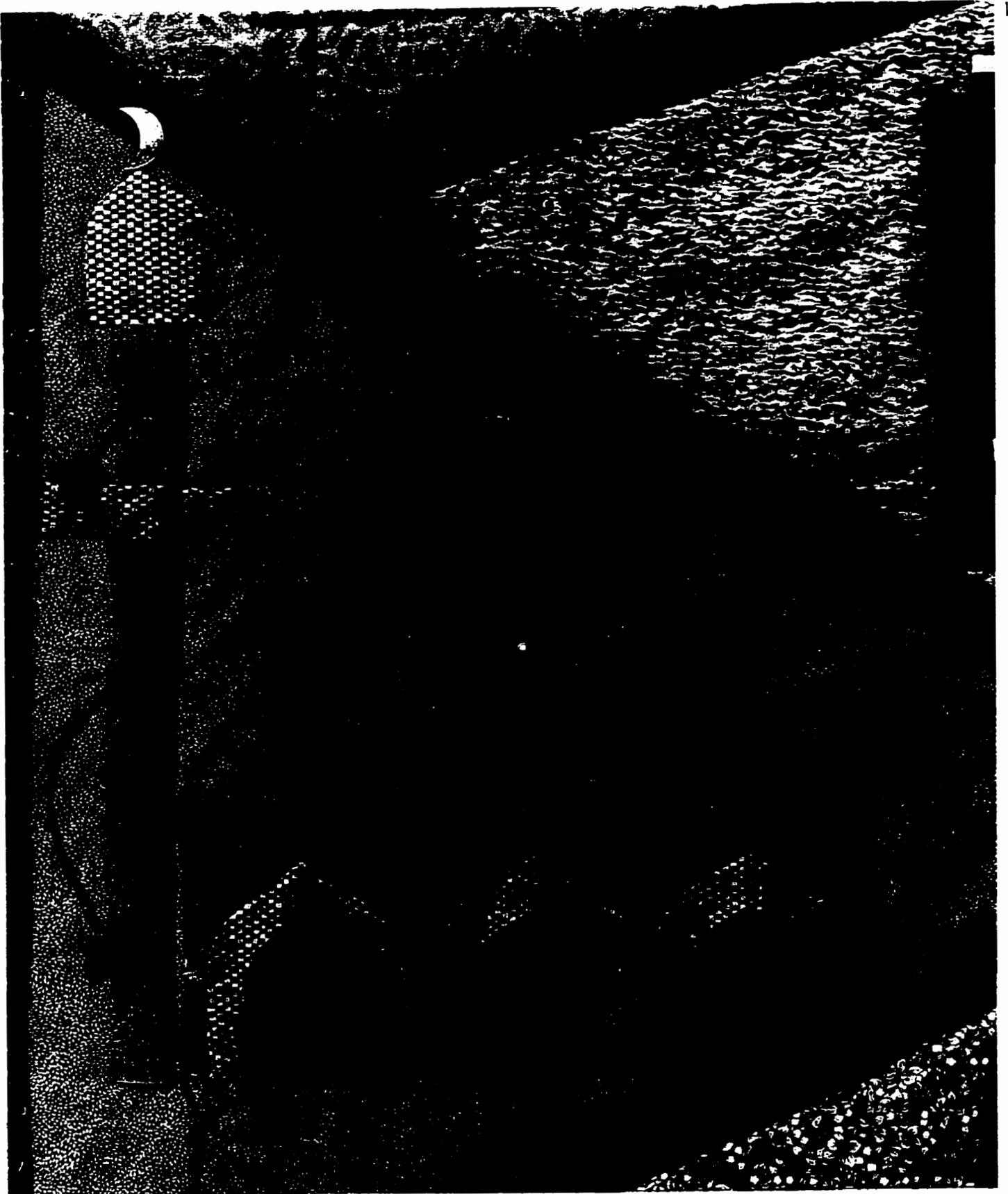


Plate 8 — Mosque

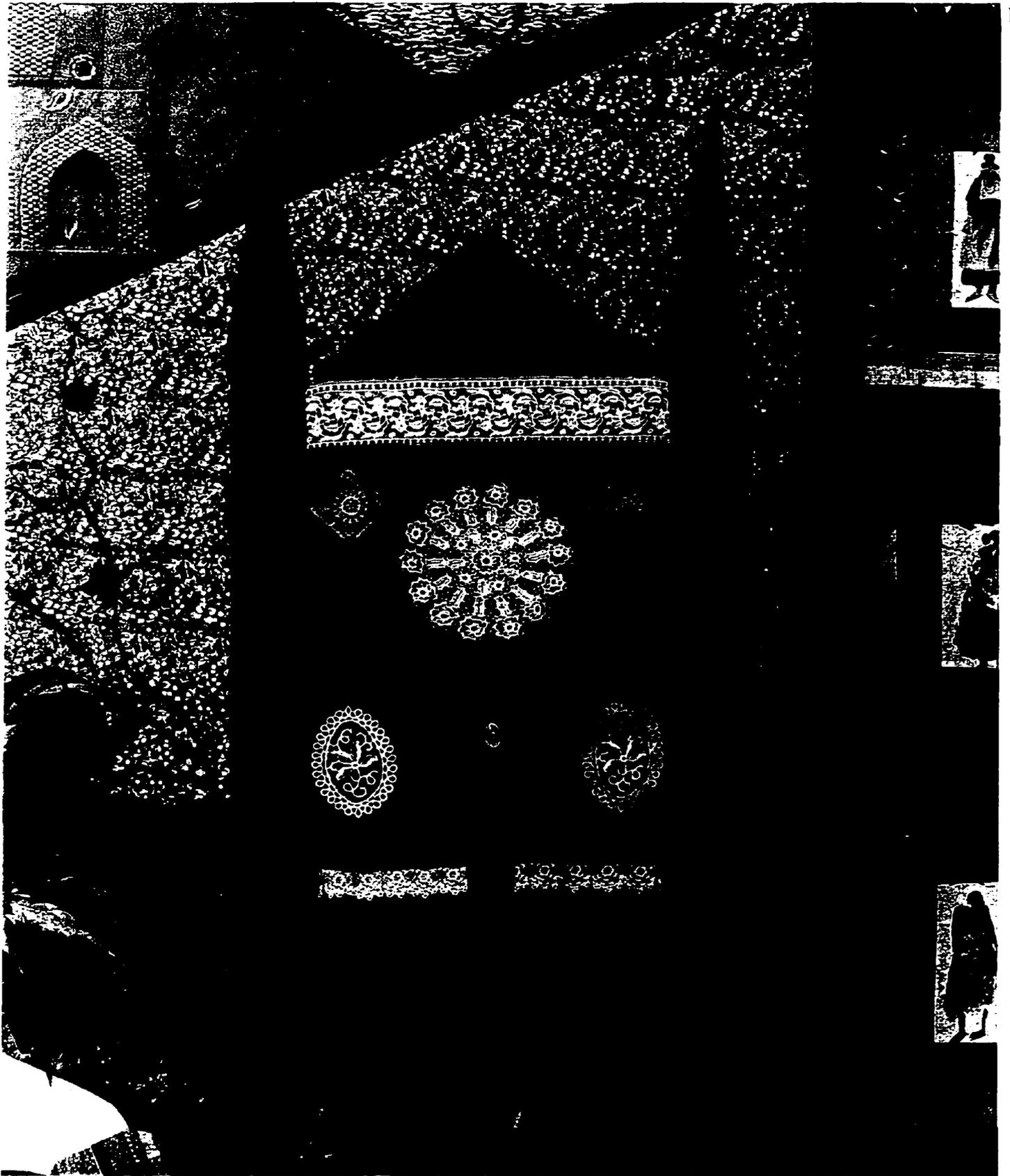


Plate 9 — Cathedral

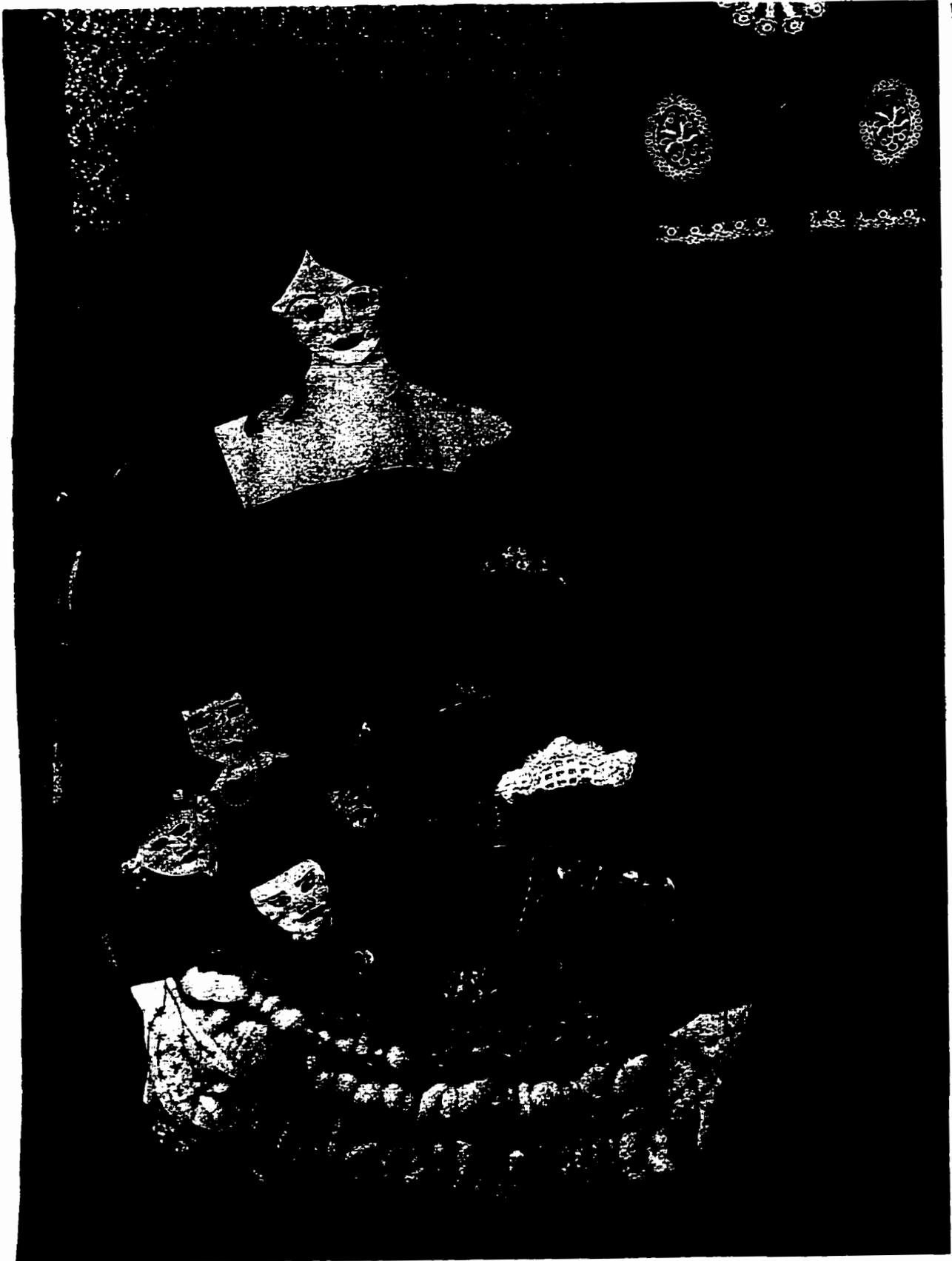


Plate 10 — The Woman