Altruism and Sacrifice: Anglican Priests Managing 'Intensive' Priesthood and Motherhood

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Abstract

Motherhood and Priesthood are two roles that carry with them particular expectations and demands; both are premised on the notion of altruism and sacrifice, constant availability, and putting the needs of others before one's own. This has also been gendered; sacrifice and altruism have traditionally been connected with women. This article will examine what happens when clergy mothers simultaneously enact the roles of priesthood and motherhood, and how this is managed in the context of 'intensive' motherhood and priesthood. Based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 17 clergy mothers in the Anglican Church, it will highlight the contradictions, negotiations and interweaving which occurs for both roles to be concurrently enacted, offering a contextual insight into the management of motherhood vis-à-vis professional life.

Keywords

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Introduction

In January 2015, motherhood and religion became a news event when Pope Francis used his general address to praise mothers for their sacrifice and dedication, something he argued was not only devalued by society in general, but also

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by the Christian community specifically (Catholic Herald 2015). He argued that maternal sacrifice was often taken advantage of and marginalised because of mothers' willingness to see their role in dutiful terms. Indeed, traditional Catholic understandings of motherhood have been used to justify women's exclusion from roles such as priesthood, with such thinking also having historically influenced those opposed to women's priesthood in the Church of England (Beattie 2002; Furlong 1988). Whilst acknowledging their lack of status in society, the Pope heralded mothers as an important corrective to an individualised and self-centred society. Indeed, feminist research has long articulated the sacrificial and unacknowledged role mothers play. As Crittenden states, '[t]he very definition of a mother is selfless service to another' (2001: 1); a form of altruism that is taken for granted and 'utterly disregarded' (2001: 5). The expectations placed on mothers are high (Forna 1998; Garey 1999; Hays 1996; Lawler 2000). She is expected to be fully devoted and committed to her children, being 'capable of enormous sacrifice' (Forna 1998: 3). Indeed, aligned with Pope Francis' comments, feminists have argued that these forms of altruism contrast with competitive capitalism (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996; Hochschild 2003). Capitalism depends on mothers' altruism – on mothers' willingness to produce capable, well-educated workers (Crittenden 2001; Hays 1996). In recent years, mothers' engagement with the capitalist economy has increased, due to the greater numbers of mothers in paid employment. But this has not meant that the expectations around motherhood have decreased – instead, the opposite has occurred. Hays's (1996) work has shown how *intensive* and altruistic mothering dominates in a society built on capitalist profit. In this harsh competitive environment, children come to have 'special sacred status' (1996: 125), and this status has implications for how motherhood is perceived. As everything is invested in the child, the mother becomes *more* responsible for the outcomes of the child, leading to what Hays describes as *intensive motherhood*. There are three principles to intensive motherhood: firstly, the mother is the main caregiver – if she is not available, a mother-substitute is brought in (usually not the father). Secondly, the child's needs and desires come first. Thirdly, children are to be bracketed out of materialistic and capitalist culture and elevated above it as special persons. Vast resources of time, money and energy are needed to fulfil these requirements, with mothers themselves facilitating most of the work.

Meanwhile, priesthood has been deemed a sacred duty (Russell 1980), bound up with the act of ordination – a transformative moment bestowing upon the clergyperson a new status, conferred until death (Jamieson 1997; Peyton and Gatrell 2013; Russell 1980). As Peyton and Gatrell argue, this 'life-changing [moment]… require[s] life-long and whole-hearted personal embodied obedience in God's service' (2013: 53), which becomes manifest in their concept of the sacrificial embrace – where priests subordinate their own needs to God's needs. Because on ordination the person is ontologically changed, the priest's role is defined as much by who they are, rather than the substance of the tasks they engage in (Percy 2006). But this status of 'being' priest, combined with the sacrificial embrace, can lead to priests fulfilling their role in a 24/7 capacity (Peyton and Gatrell 2013). Whilst the term 'intensive motherhood' is useful shorthand for the way in which motherhood is constructed in contemporary society, I argue that developing a corollary term such as 'intensive priesthood' captures the demands of Anglican ministry, especially due to the necessity of constant availability. Indeed, the parallels between motherhood and priesthood

are numerous, with motherhood also being understood as a changed ontological status, and where the role is as much about 'being there' (Garey 1999; Reay 1998). One does not stop being a priest on one's day off and if a crisis looms, priests are likely to see it as their duty to intervene (Carroll et al. 1983). Likewise, a mother does not stop being a mother once her children are asleep. Meanwhile, the functions of priesthood and motherhood are very similar. While Kitzinger (1978) discusses motherhood as being concerned with tenderness, compassion, generosity, selflessness, love and harmony, Jamieson (1997) sees priesthood as being defined through altruism, care and service.

This article examines what happens when these similar roles are brought together and concurrently enacted by clergy mothers, with a specific focus on the extent to which mothers accommodate or reject intensive priesthood and intensive motherhood. It will be highlighted that clergy mothers approach their roles in one of four ways: for those who subscribed to both intensive priesthood and intensive motherhood, it was very difficult for them to manage these roles without work overload ensuing. Therefore, two strategies were deployed: waiting until children were almost adults before embarking on priesthood (thus allowing participants to shift from being intensive mothers to intensive priests) or vastly containing their role as priest. Meanwhile, the remaining mothers were critical of either intensive priesthood or intensive motherhood, and were therefore able to weave together demanding roles successfully. For those who critiqued intensive priesthood (but who remained subscribed to performing intensive motherhood), they used the notion of professional autonomy (Aldridge 1989) in this endeavour. It was much rarer for participants to critique intensive motherhood (Lawler 2000), but a minority did, and again, this enabled them to manage both roles concurrently. Before examining these data in further detail and offering concluding remarks, the article will start by explaining the specific relationship between motherhood and priesthood, and will orient the project in relation to the methodological approach taken.

The Relationship between Priesthood and Motherhood

The introduction highlighted the ways in which motherhood and priesthood are similarly constructed. But when considered in relation to each other, they have a complicated, entwined trajectory. Across Christianity (but particularly within Catholicism) motherhood itself has been used as a reason as to why women should not become priests; whilst priesthood has been deemed the vocation of men, motherhood has been deemed the complementary vocation of women (Beattie 2002; Moore 2008; Warner 1978). This is premised on a careful splitting of the motherhood role, so that parts of it are reappropriated into the role of priest. As Beattie (2002: 77) articulates,

> Only one sex – the male – is necessary for the performance of the story of Christ with all its masculine and feminine personae. This is achieved through an asymmetrical essentialism, which on the one hand detaches femininity and motherhood from any necessary relationship to the female body because all the Church's maternal and feminine roles can be performed by men, while at the same time insisting that the female body precludes women from performing any role associated with the essential unmediated functions of the female body when it relates to men. This reduces the woman as female body to her biological role of reproduction.

Although Beattie (2002) is specifically discussing the Catholic Church's position, such sentiments were mirrored by some opponents in the debates leading up to women's ordination in the Church of England (Furlong 1988), and this negative positioning of motherhood has resonance across Christianity as a whole. Key elements that define motherhood, such as care, altruism and sacrifice, become valorised in the sacred role of priests but are not similarly valued when these traits are enacted by mothers. Indeed, rather than these characteristics being a way of facilitating sacrality, the tasks of motherhood are instead commonly understood as a hindrance to the sacred path (Anderson and Hopkins 1992; Miller-McLemore 1994, 2007). By reducing women to the biological, they are associated with bodily matter and nature, creating a sacred-profane hierarchy with men symbolically placed at the top (Anderson and Hopkins 1992; Dinnerstein 1976; Northup 1997; Raphael 1996). Women's activities (e.g. the 'mundane' elements of motherhood – feeding, washing, changing nappies) become labelled as profaning tasks that are far removed from the elevated activities deemed sacred. Despite these 'mundane' tasks being premised on sacredly-defined traits such as altruism and sacrifice, when associated with motherhood, these sacred associations are lost. The sacred has been deliberately defined in exclusivist terms (Dinnerstein 1976), allowing men's bodies, in isolation, to symbolise Christian sacrifice (Beattie 2002).

Women's links to the profane have militated against their inclusion into Anglican priesthood. An Anglican Archbishops' Commission as late as 1936 decreed that 'it would appear to be a simple matter of fact that in the thoughts and desires of that sex [woman] the natural is more easily made subordinate to the supernatural, the carnal to the spiritual, than is the case with men' (Furlong 1984: 2), clear evidence of the sacred-profane splitting noted above. The way women were connected to carnality and nature in such debates was bound up with the negative connotations attributed to menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. Dowell and Williams, discussing the furore around Anglican women's ordination, argues that there exists a 'residual belief that women priests would automatically become sexual symbols in Christianity in a way that male priests apparently are not. It is as though women can function, symbolically, only in their biological aspect, whereas male action can function symbolically in other fields as well' (1994: 25).

Even the language of priesthood militates against mothers' inclusion: the tradition of calling priest 'father' in Catholic as well as some Anglican traditions bestows a kind of authority that is not invoked when using the term 'mother' (Moore 2008). Because God has been more readily defined in terms of masculine roles rather than feminine ones (including terms such as father, lord and husband), it reasserts men's association with God (Johnson 1992). This has provided a powerful symbolic to exclude women (and mothers) from priesthood (Jamieson 1997).

Priesthood in the Church of England has not only traditionally been premised on an altruistic *ministry*, which Robson defines as encompassing characteristics such as '*service; self-giving; being available; sacrifice*' (1988: 111, emphasis in original). Rather, it was also deemed to be a middle-class *profession* (the professions being another sphere from which women have traditionally been excluded – see Evetts 2000; Whittock 2000; Witz 1990). This professionalisation of the clergy occurred alongside the emergence of other professions such as law and medicine (Nesbitt 2007), where knowledge, education, self-regulation

and autonomy were prioritised (Robson 1988). But utilising professions-speak allows priests to talk in terms of networking, careers, promotion, salaries, and holiday entitlements (Aldridge 1992; Robson 1988) rather than service and sacrifice, leading Robson (1988) to observe that these two spheres (the ministry side of priesthood and the professions side of priesthood) come into conflict with each other.

When women started to be ordained to the Church of England priesthood in 1994, they were configured to ministry and profession in a different way to male priests. Women have traditionally been seen to be 'naturally' good at the attributes associated with ministry, such as 'service, sacrifice, selflessness, humility, relative poverty and unconcern for material rewards' (Aldridge 1992: 53); when men display these characteristics (e.g. in their role as priest) it is seen as an extraordinary endeavour, rather than a natural one, and they are duly praised for this aptitude (Calasanti 2003). Meanwhile, women's actual and symbolic exclusion from the professions means they are not constructed as being as competent as men in professional life (Acker 1990, 1992; Bagilhole 2002; Gatrell 2007; 2008; Page 2014). Instead, because their inclusion in clerical roles is based on competence garnered in their supposed proficiency in ministry-based tasks, rather than their professional attributes (in which women are assumed to be lacking) their private sphere responsibilities then come to be seen as conflictual with the role of priest, in a way that a man's private sphere responsibilities are not (Robson 1988). Thorne has taken this further to argue specifically that it is priests' role *as mothers* that becomes the major contention, because the ministerial side of priesthood is so similar to the way motherhood is constructed:

> For men, their role as a father has clearer boundaries and, more often than not, is supported by the unconditional availability of a wife… The time demands of priesthood, which are erratic and often based around the leisure time of the congregation, mean that it is hard to combine priesthood with family life… Ministry and motherhood are seen as conflicting vocations, each demanding women to be self-giving, available and concerned for others well-being – a situation in which women can only lose. (Thorne 2000: 71)

This is evidenced in the assumption that allowing mothers to be clergy will result in the neglect of their children (Dyer 2004; see also Francis-Dehqani 2002). The construction of fatherhood has enabled male priests to create separate spheres (Thorne 2000); meanwhile, the construction of motherhood, and women's relationship to priesthood, has meant that it is much harder for women to do this.

Studying Clergy Mothers

This study is based on in-depth interviews undertaken with seventeen Anglican clergy mothers living in England. All had experience of being a mother to a dependent child (defined here as still being at secondary school or younger) whilst being in ordained ministry. Most were currently mothers to dependent children, although one mother's children were now adults, and she reflected on her experiences as a priest and a mother from the recent past. The relationship between being ordained and becoming a mother were varied. Some had embarked on clerical training after their children had been born. Others had become priests before they had children. Women's priesthood was made

possible in the Church of England in 1992; women started to be ordained as priests in 1994. The majority of this first cohort did not have dependent children (Thorne 2000). In this study, some were part of this first generation; others were ordained much later. Therefore, the participants were at various levels within the Church, ranging from two interviewees who were on the first rungs of the ordination ladder, having been ordained as deacons, and awaiting ordination to priesthood (clergy are first ordained as deacons; priesthood ordinarily occurs after one year), to others who were in senior posts (at the time the interviews took place, women were barred from becoming bishops; this legislation was changed in 2014). Due to the few women in senior posts at the time of the interviews, their exact roles will not be stated, but could refer to posts such as archdeacon, cathedral dean, residential canon, or having a leadership role on the bishop's staff. Meanwhile, the vast majority of interviewees were some-where in the middle, and included those who were curates (a training period after priesthood, where the priest works under the supervision of a more senior priest), associate ministers (who assist another priest but not as part of ongo-ing training), parish priests (who are in charge of a parish), chaplains (working outside of the Church in another organisational setting, e.g. a hospital, prison or university) and area deans (responsible for the pastoral wellbeing of other priests in a geographical area).

Generally speaking, priests who are mothers are more likely to be in unpaid (non-stipendiary) positions within the church (Robbins and Fowler 2008), but in this research, priests who were in paid (stipendiary) posts were purposefully targeted (of the resulting sample, all but one were stipendiary clergy), in order to capture the dynamics of motherhood within the context of demanding min-istry roles. The women were aged between 31 and 54 at the time of interview; most had two children; three mothers had three children and two mothers had one child. The sample is fairly small-scale (including 17 women), and has cap-tured women on certain axes of privilege (e.g. most were middle-class and all were white). This is typical of the Anglican clergy demographic (Thorne 2000; Walsh 2001), but it must be recognised that these experiences of motherhood occur at a specific moment in time and in a particular social location, medi-ated through various dynamics such as class and ethnicity. This study does not capture all the possible ways of being a mother, and is framed by the context investigated.

England is divided into 42 geographical dioceses, and participants were included from nine of them. This geographical diversity was necessary in order to ensure that the practices in a handful of dioceses did not over-determine the findings; indeed, different dioceses have different practices and cultures, and to only include women who were located in just one or two of them may not allow for diversity in practices to be mapped. Participants were contacted through diocesan officials. Interviews usually took place in a participant's home and were semi-structured in nature, not only to allow for participants to go into detail about their experiences, but also to allow them to frame their responses in a way that was meaningful to them, allowing scope for fresh directions and topics to emerge. Each interview lasted, on average, an hour and a half. Some were much longer, and due to the long distances I had travelled, I often spent a protracted amount of time with the participants, for example, having lunch with them after an interview had taken place. This allowed me to engage more deeply with the participants and their lives.

I started the interviews with a general question – 'Tell me how you came to be a priest'. This allowed for a free-flowing exchange as priests recounted their journey to priesthood in their own words; subsequent questions were built on this account. Interviews mapped various issues, but centred around two key themes: experiences of working within the Church and experiences of motherhood and family life, and how these related to each other. These interviews were not viewed as direct windows on participants' worlds. Rather, interviews are understood as situated events that are affected by various dynamics, such as the moods of the interviewer and interviewee on the day. In short, the data produced are situated accounts, providing a lens through which to understand the participants' lives, but they do not offer an undisputed and direct mirror of those lives (Acker et al. 1991; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Lawler 2002; May 2001; Silverman 1993). As a feminist project, ethical issues were taken extremely seriously, with a commitment for no harm to come to participants through their engagement with the project. Participants were fully informed about the processes of research, and how the data would be used. Identifiable features were removed from the accounts, and pseudonyms were used. The set-up of the interviews was such that the participants were given a space to talk and discuss issues of pertinence to them, in their own words, and attempts were made for this to be a free-flowing conversation rather than a hierarchical interview (Hesse-Biber 2007; Wolf 1996). However, researchers must be mindful that, despite their best efforts, participants could inadvertently be harmed in the production of research. The researcher ultimately analyses and represents the participant (Gudmundsdottir 1996; Wolf 1996), posing burdens on the researcher and disempowering the participant (Murphy and Dingwall 2001). Wolf notes that this does not mean we should abandon feminist research, but we should be critically mindful of the 'imperfections' (1996: 4) of the research process.

Managing Intensive Motherhood and Intensive Priesthood

The clergy in this sample undertook one of four strategies in managing intensive motherhood and intensive priesthood. For two groups, intensive motherhood and intensive priesthood were maintained – one group through delaying priesthood until their children became independent, allowing the priests to move from being intensive mothers to intensive priests, and the second group through taking on contained roles within the Church (for example, part-time roles or ministry roles outside of the Church). The other two groups attempted to rework the meanings attributed to priesthood and motherhood. The majority challenged intensive priesthood, achieved through challenging the expectations bound up in the *ministry* side of priesthood, and utilising *professions-speak* to enable this redefinition (Robson 1988). Meanwhile, a minority were challenging the expectations around intensive motherhood. This critique was rarer because it could result in charges of 'bad' mothering. As Lawler argues, the current constructions of motherhood are so powerful, that it gives mothers themselves 'extraordinarily little space for manoeuvre' (2000: 171) in critiquing its logic.

Envisioning Intensive Priesthood: The Waiting Game

For some participants, priesthood was considered so intensive an endeavour, that it was delayed until children were older and more independent. Julie envisaged that the demands placed on her family would have been too much had she been ordained any sooner:

> Both boys were doing sports and I knew at some point soon they would stop... I spent the year going to as many [sports] meetings as I possibly could... I wouldn't have been able to do that if I had gone into the priesthood earlier... It does touch the whole family in more ways than [another] job. (Julie, mother of two, curate)

This account highlights Julie's commitment to both intensive motherhood and intensive priesthood. She wanted to support her sons' sporting interests in the year prior to being priested to compensate for the lack of time she would have when her clerical role started. She emphasised that her sons' sporting lives were coming to an end (they were older teenagers) so Julie could engage in the last stages of intensive mothering, with their disengagement from sports being seen as the end of their childhood. Once Julie had fulfilled these intensive mothering obligations, she could go on to pursue her vocation to (intensive) priesthood.

Amanda too had not pursued priesthood until her children were teenagers, saying 'For me, this is the right time to be ordained with teenage children. I really don't think I could have done it when they were little. It wouldn't have been right for me'. Again, the demands of priesthood and motherhood were considered so great, that Amanda could not envisage living them out together. Intensive motherhood was experienced by both mothers as a perpetual feature of their lives, at least until their children became adults, emphasising the unrelenting demands of the ideology of intensive motherhood, and its long-lasting impact.

Radical Readjustments

The second group were concurrently priests and mothers to dependent children, but due to a commitment to intensiveness in both roles, work overload resulted, and working commitments were rearranged so that intensive priesthood and motherhood could be maintained. These participants engaged in non-stipendiary (unpaid) ministry, part-time ministry, ministry roles outside of the Church or ministry roles which were more contained. However, these readjustments never resulted in the women working in the Church in a full time, stipendiary (paid) post. Rachel is a typical example of someone committed to intensive priesthood and motherhood, saying 'I think my understanding of priesthood is that I'm a priest 24/7, 365 days a year, just kind of what I was born to be' and:

> [My husband] would feel that it was fine if [my daughter] went to after-school club four days a week … [but it] is quite important to me that… we're flexible, that I can turn up, pick her up from school... and she says 'Oh can Lucy come and play' and I can say 'Yes that's fine' and Lucy comes and plays. Whereas if she's kind of in a childcare system every day... that limits those possibilities and I suppose I'm more committed to making that possible. (Rachel, mother of one, chaplain)

Therefore in these two statements Rachel is endorsing both intensive priesthood and intensive motherhood. Rachel was already a parish priest before having her child. But pressures emerged in these roles:

> In the parish purely in terms of timing – you were at something and somebody desperately needed to talk to you but actually what you need to do is go home and give your daughter tea. Which way do you go? As a priest you're sort of seen to be constantly available.

Rachel resigned from her post and embarked upon a part-time chaplaincy role outside of the Church, describing it as 'so much more contained'. Now she 'can pick [my daughter] up from school more days than I don't… I can take her to swimming lessons; I can have her friends over to play'.

The way Rachel's work was previously constructed did not allow her to put her daughter at the centre of things. Intensive mothering (Hays 1996) became too hard to ignore, thus priesthood was reworked to be more contained. This containment allowed her to be an intensive priest when she was on call, so that Rachel gave '150% of myself' whilst at work, but concurrently allowing her to ring-fence this work in a much more successful way. However, because of this commitment to concurrently living out intensive priesthood and intensive motherhood, conflict could still result:

> I was going out to dinner last night… I walked into the chapel to do something practical but somebody was sat in there, clearly distressed… I ended up having to go straight to the restaurant from work, not come home, so I didn't get to kiss [my daughter] goodnight... And that's hard. There's a real conflict there. But it's only one day a week.

Rachel experienced such conflicts between priesthood and motherhood because she views both as statuses of *being* and understands both roles in intensive terms, with little prospect that this intensity will reduce in the future. Even containing her official role as priest to one day a week could cause her anxiety in managing both roles.

Natalie had been a full-time stipendiary priest with three children for many years but the pressures of this became too intense: 'I was working 48 hours a week. It was also pretty obvious that that was more than I could manage'. Natalie was about to announce to her parish that she was leaving, but she was ambivalent about what message this sent:

> It's very hard work...I don't think it's inherently a bad combination… I think it's a terribly important combination. But… I think it's simply to do with the enormous pressures of the job – I don't think it's a good fit. What I don't think works is to try and run conventional Church with a church building in a parish, with the needs of children at home as a mum. I think it just forever pushes you toward breaking point… However, I don't think that women with children should give up on it, because if we do, then there's no chance that the model's going to change. One of the things we bring is [to say] that our families matter. (Natalie, mother of three, team vicar)

Natalie was starting to critique the conventional understandings of priesthood, but did not see a way forward in challenging its norms from the inside. Instead, going non-stipendiary gave her more freedom to pursue her own goals on her own terms where she could create home-based ministries, saying, '[m]y idea would be that we would have a service at five o' clock on a Sunday afternoon and that everybody brought some food and… we did something that all the children could engage with as well as something that was sufficiently thought-provoking for the adults'. Therefore, Natalie was leaving all-consuming parish

ministry to endorse new ministry formulations where her motherhood and priesthood would not be compartmentalised. Her vision was for intensive mothering and intensive priesthood to be lived out together at the same time. But to fulfil this vision meant taking on an unpaid role.

Laura too contained her role by undertaking a chaplaincy post outside of the Church where there was clearer working hours (Peyton and Gatrell 2013). But like Rachel, her techniques to keep home and work separate did not always go smoothly. She experienced the ultimate contradiction when she was called away just as her children were about to open presents on Christmas morning. She reflects:

> On Christmas morning as the children were waking up to open their stockings, there was a very, very urgent call and I had to leave them. I rarely think I wish I didn't do what I do, but I did at that moment. And then I felt awful about it… but that kind of conflict is extremely rare. And that was awful (Laura, mother of two, chaplain).

Here, altruistic priesthood and motherhood come into sharp contradiction, when fulfilling one obligation will mean another obligation is not met. This resulted in Laura not only feeling guilty for leaving her children on Christmas morning, but also guilt in feeling that she wished she did not have to go. The idea that priests should feel moments of antipathy is adverse to the idea of priesthood being about altruism and sacrifice. The contradiction is manifestly brought into focus at this moment, but as Laura acknowledged, this is a rare conflict and would be unsustainable if such conflicts were regularly experienced.

For all of the participants mentioned thus far, they understood priesthood and motherhood as intensive endeavours. Vocational, self-sacrificial priesthood was endorsed alongside all-consuming motherhood. Therefore, both roles had to be compartmentalised in some way in order to be manageable. Chaplaincy was a popular option, where hours were more fixed – the majority of chaplaincy posts are in schools, hospitals, universities and prisons so priests encounter a working environment similar to that experienced by any other professional mother. Although altruism and vocation are part and parcel of the way they approach their role, with set hours of work, the priests do not have to embody constant availability, enabling them to be both intensive in their role as priest *and* mother.

Holding Church Roles: Redefining Priesthood

The aforementioned participants did not challenge the dominant constructions of priesthood and motherhood in any significant way. The last two groups of participants, meanwhile, did radically challenge the premise upon which priesthood or motherhood was based. The first group remained committed to intensive motherhood. But they critiqued the notion of *being* and the idea that priesthood was a 24/7 endeavour. Instead, these priests strove to put boundaries around their home life. Whilst maintaining intensive mothering as an ideal, they sought to implement a different understanding of priesthood, in the process redefining it so that the ministry side of priesthood, although never absent, was not foregrounded.

Rebecca was someone who perhaps most explicitly in the sample endorsed protectionism of family life, through redefining priesthood. A parish priest and mother of two, she argued that '[My husband and I are] both very good at putting the boundaries around what we do and around family life'. She recalled that she was very clear at her job interview, saying: 'if you appoint me, this is what you get. My children are incredibly important to me and there will be times when I will say "no" because I'm doing something for the children or with family'.

Rebecca clearly specified that her clerical role does not carry on regardless of the consequences; family comes first. An example of enacting this in parish ministry was literally not letting the parish intrude on her home life, saying, 'I don't have that phone line into any other part of the house… I definitely am not available 24 hours a day and if there is an emergency, somebody will find their way to the house and get me if needed… I guess we are quite strict about it'.

Instead, Rebecca was able to emphasise the flexibility that came from her role as a parish priest, because of the amount of autonomy she was given. Because her role as a parish priest (where, in effect, she was in charge, with spatial distancing from her immediate boss – see Page 2012) allowed her to organise her own timetable, she was able to draw upon the professional concept of autonomy (Aldridge 1989). This was evidenced when she said, 'Although the hours we do are, I guess, longer than quite a lot of other professions, we do have quite a lot of control over our diaries and… things that are happening in the day-time at the school, I can work my way round them'. This enabled Rebecca to collect her children from school and attend events like the school play. But it was at those moments when Rebecca lost professional autonomy that this management of priesthood and motherhood came under strain. Rebecca recalled needing to attend a parents' evening when she was attending a non-negotiable training course away from home, saying 'I had to be away on a conference… And in the middle of it was [my son's] parents' evening and so I actually travelled back for the evening... But it meant I then had to go up and down the motorway [laugh] for a parents' evening'. This resulted in a one-hundred-and-thirty-mile round trip, but shows the extraordinary effort Rebecca would go to, to ensure that neither her priesthood nor motherhood was seen as lacking. It was the constraints of the Church hierarchy that meant that she could not, on this occasion, redefine her clerical role, for she 'didn't have any choice' about attending the conference. At this moment, the usual autonomy of the parish priest was revoked by Church systems.

Isobel became a priest before she became a mother, but her sense of vocation had altered, arguing 'I would now say my prime vocation is my motherhood'. This was manifested through some of the boundary techniques engaged in by Rebecca above. On being asked how priesthood had changed since being a mother, Isobel, a team vicar and mother of two argued 'It's changed in the sense of how I do the role, particularly with regard to time boundaries… Ten years ago, if somebody phoned at whatever time of the day or the night, I would go, whereas now… I do have a much stricter time boundary'.

These priests were challenging the notion that priesthood had to be an all-consuming endeavour. They were much firmer about boundary-management and although this did not mean that the vocational element of priesthood disappeared, prioritising the professional dimension to priesthood did enable congruence in roles.

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Returning to Robson's (1988) theorisation of the professionalisation of clergy, it must be noted that the women were not engaging with this in the same way that Robson described men interacting with it. No clergy mother talked about remuneration and holiday entitlement – it was the foregrounding of their children that was paramount, not the foregrounding of their career. Indeed, men's priesthood has been enacted without the incorporation of childcare issues, so whereas men's professional priesthood has enabled them to focus on progression, women's professional priesthood is enabled through invoking the notion of autonomy. Autonomy – how one is given licence and freedom to undertake their working day in a way of their choosing (Aldridge 1989) – becomes crucial in enabling clergy mothers to enact full-time, stipendiary Church roles.

At this juncture, it is fruitful to question why it is that for these women, autonomy is applied to intensive priesthood rather than intensive motherhood. Indeed, autonomy becomes a far less successful strategy if it is applied to motherhood. If a clergy mother were to articulate a position whereby she seeks autonomy from her children, this revokes the dominant perceptions of motherhood, bound up as it is with prioritising children's needs (Lawler 2000). There is no professional dimension to motherhood that can be drawn upon to rework these priorities. As the child's needs are constructed to come first, the mother's needs and desires are to be suppressed, or recalibrated to harmonise with the needs of the child (Lawler 2000). This focus on the child's needs constructs the relationship between the mother and her child as relational. As Lawler articulates,

> Motherhood… can be seen to represent a rupture in these women's selfhood, a breach of the autonomy which is held to be constitutive of the person. Unlike daughterhood, which is more closely aligned with autonomy, and hence with personhood, motherhood *as motherhood* is relational. Hence, maternity marks a breach in the self-narrative through which lives are understood and constituted as coherent. (Lawler 2000: 158, emphasis in original)

Therefore, for a mother to convey a position of autonomy from her child would be to undermine the dominant meanings ascribed to motherhood. Autonomy was much more readily deployed by participants in relation to priesthood. For example, Harriet said of her parishioners, 'for me it's important that people are not dependent on me for everything… the aim is for people to be independent… and you advise accordingly'. Although Harriet saw some similarities to her motherhood role, in that she was encouraging her own children to be independent, she was able to articulate a sense of autonomy from her parishioners in a way that was not possible when discussing her children. Therefore it was much easier to apply autonomy to priesthood over motherhood.

Redefining 'Good' Motherhood

It was rare for motherhood itself to come under critique; most participants envisioned intensive motherhood, and accommodated this as best they could. Jill, a mother to two teenagers, also gave clear examples of intensive mothering, such as the innumerable number of lifts her children required, again emphasising the point that intensive motherhood continues for these participants long after early childhood. But as a senior post holder, Jill had an incredibly demanding workload, entailing long working days in her home-office:

> We know that it's never going to be 9 until 5, that you don't come in and say "I've finished work for today" because the phone will ring and it all starts up again. But I think also we both recognise that there are times when you just have to say, "That's enough, I'm shutting the door, turning on the answer phone". Which I rarely do, but sometimes I do. … My children were virtually threatening to write to [the diocesan bishop] because my workload was just so, so, so enormous… [They] got to the point of saying, "This is enough". "We don't see you"… sometimes they want me around even if I'm not doing anything and they like me to be accessible; they don't like having to come up to my office... But yes they're not babies. They just have to accept sometimes I will be in there.

Jill's children wanted her to be an intensive mother, someone who was constantly available, and put them first in every decision. And to some extent, Jill complied, evidenced in the part she played in being a taxi service for them. But Jill also resisted. She knew she could put the answerphone on more often. But she refrained. She instead argued her children needed to reassess their idealisation of the intensive mother, especially when she asserted that they had to accept her workload as a given. In her head, Jill would like to put her children first more often. She discusses crossing out half term week so she can spend it with them, only for it to be filled up with meetings that are outside of her control. Being in a senior post, Jill actually had less autonomy than a parish priest; her fellow colleagues and boss were in much closer proximity to her (Page 2012). But Jill was also mindful that soon her children would be grown up; Jill was pondering her next role in the Church and in order for her to facilitate this, she had to challenge the absolute nature of intensive mothering. Instead, she reconceptualised her priesthood and motherhood as being on an equal par, saying, 'I'm called to both of them, not one over the other. And sometimes one has to shift for the other'.

On considering all four strategies that clergy mothers deployed to manage their priesthood and motherhood roles, it was unusual for them to subscribe to more than one of these strategies concurrently. This may be because actions were premised on a particular philosophical understanding that clergy mothers had of both motherhood and priesthood, and a change in behaviour would be dependent on a shifting of their philosophical orientation towards priesthood and motherhood. Having said that, over the course of time, and as circumstances changed (e.g. children got older and clerical posts changed), participants could reorient themselves. For example, Jill was perhaps more comfortable in challenging intensive motherhood because her children were now teenagers, and they did not cultivate the same kinds of dependency as anticipated with younger children. In order to capture these changes more fully, and to understand more concretely how clergy mothers' orientations may change over time, a longitudinal research design would need to be deployed.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, motherhood remains an idealised and little-critiqued institution, centred on values such as sacrifice, constant availability and selflessness. Although mothers are increasingly likely to be in paid work, the labour intensity of motherhood has paradoxically increased (Hays 1996). Clergy mothers are not immune to these broader trends; indeed, Christianity has historically

contributed to intensive motherhood. Although the Virgin Mary is the most obvious example, being idealised as the perfect mother in some Christian traditions (Warner 1978), this is not the only reference point. For example, in the Victorian period successful Christian femininity was centred upon pious middle-class motherhood, consolidated through the emergence of groups such as the *Mother's Union*, and where motherhood and morality were linked with prayer and religious devotion (Gill 1994; Hays 1996). Since then, theology has idealised motherhood (Percy 2003) without offering a critique of perfect motherhood. As Miller-McLemore argues, both Protestantism and Catholicism have entrenched traditional motherhood ideologies:

> [R]eligious ideology has played a powerful role in formulating ideas about the "right" and "wrong" ways to mother. The absence of the maternal voice in religion more recently has led to an impoverished choice in religious images of mothering… Without alternative religious ideologies, conservative values that encourage wives and mothers to subject their needs to those of their husbands and children continue to fill the vacuum. (Miller-McLemore 1994: 93)

Christian motherhood and intensive motherhood (Hays 1996) therefore complement each other. Indeed, all the clergy mothers in this sample took account of, and accommodated intensive motherhood to some extent. For some, it was the point around which all other roles had to be accommodated. For others, intensive motherhood was prioritised, but through reconfiguring other roles, motherhood and priesthood could be concurrently enacted. Priests were far quicker to critique priesthood than they were to critique motherhood, indicating how it is very hard to dislodge dominant constructions of motherhood.

Meanwhile the accommodation of intensive motherhood did mean that dominant constructions of priesthood were robustly critiqued by a good number of participants. Accommodating motherhood meant that priests had to be more creative in living out both identities, and these priests were able to utilise the language of profession in new ways; principally through using the concept of professional autonomy (Aldridge 1989; Robson 1988). Having control of their working practices allows clergy mothers to control their family time. It also meant that they were able to weave together motherhood (Garey 1999) and priesthood in various ways, such as attending the school play in the middle of the working day – so all at once the priest is visible in the community, and she is there for her child. Peyton and Gatrell (2013) note the intense workloads engaged with by Anglican clergy and the enormous amount of pressure priests put themselves under in order to comply with the demands of intensive priesthood. Indeed, such exhaustive practices were also lived out by clergy mothers in this sample. But because of the way intensive motherhood and intensive priesthood collided, some were able to critique the more unhealthy elements of clerical life.

Intensive motherhood was less likely to be critiqued, and all the clergy mothers were aware of the need to present themselves as the 'good' mother (Lawler 2000; Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2000). As Lawler asserts, 'When [women] become mothers, they cannot be autonomous and free since they inhabit a position which exists only in terms of its relationality to a child' (2000: 172–173). But what has been little-commented on is the length of time intensive motherhood lasts – the data presented here indicates that mothers see intensive motherhood in rather indefinite terms, with intensive motherhood even being evidenced when children are in their late teens. Intensive motherhood is not restricted to

babies or pre-schoolers; indeed, intensive mothering demands can even intensify as children get older. This also raises the question of the extent to which the example of priesthood and motherhood can be applied to other professions with similar vocational elements, such as medicine and academia. How is the vocational and the maternal managed more broadly? Is it usually the case that vocational dimensions to professional identity are redefined before motherhood? Such questions can inform future research agendas.

Lawler calls for a 'radical scrutiny' (2000: 172) of how the good mother ideology has become so entrenched, and to imagine new possibilities. Indeed, theological tools can aid this endeavour, with Miller-McLemore (1994, 2007) offering new theologies for mothers, through critiquing the idealised version of perfect motherhood. Miller-McLemore highlights the negative impact that intensive forms of mothering has on women themselves, and argues that although mothers have been idealised in theology, their voices have not been readily heard at the theological table. She argues for a reincorporation of mothers' voices, allowing for new perspectives to be drawn upon, utilising Christian resources to support this cause. Although religion has contributed to this idealisation of motherhood, it can also be used as a resource to challenge it.

Acknowledgements

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