Testing the Boundaries

Testing the Boundaries: Self, Faith, Interpretation and Changing Trends in Religious Studies

Edited by

Patricia ‘Iolana and Samuel Tongue

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2669-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2669-3

To all those who test the boundaries,
keep up the struggle to communicate and
have the courage to tread in the liminal space,
we dedicate this work.

Your current safe boundaries
were once unknown frontiers.

~Unknown~

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PREFACE

The essays collected in this volume began as papers read at the 2009 annual conference of the Graduate School for Arts and Humanities in the University of Glasgow, Scotland. Diverse though they are in subject, together they develop a common theme which expresses the universal question of the future of spiritual consciousness and articulation at a time when old theological certainties and their guardian institutions in the West are almost all declining or even irrevocably past, and when we all live in multicultural societies which present us with broad perspectives and challenges, not least in questions of religious faith and commitment, that are entirely new in human experience. As never before we have come to realize that we are all members of one human family, and are thus called to be united in our humanity despite ancient cultural barriers and prejudices. In the biblical tradition theological articulation begins close to the dawn of human time within nomadic societies who were called to wander far from their homes and places of origin. One of the earliest creedal statements known to us begins with the admission that "a wandering Aramean was my father." Perhaps only now, as Chloe Erdmann suggests, we are relearning that theology itself is not fixed and prescriptive but of its very nature nomadic and restless, complex in its affiliations with and freedoms from established traditions of faith and belief. Only when we have begun to absorb this lesson can we start again to take fully seriously the complexity of theology's languages in exchange and translation, and thus to own it as both and at once particular and specific, and global and universal. Only then will we begin to appreciate the mystery of divine residence *within* language and the different yet ultimately familiar resonances of diverse linguistic families. As we grow closer in this realization we can begin to become more responsible towards the claims of different communities of faith that exist within our society, as well as dare to imagine the divine within diverse families of metaphors once separated by seemingly unbridgeable barriers of gender, race and creed.

The new demands of interdisciplinarity invite us to inhabit the symbolic universe through fresh forms of discourse drawn from psychoanalysis, studies of myth and ritual, sociology – the list continues to grow - enabling us to *re-imagine* that which was once constrained by rigid systems of faith and order, making new connections and releasing for us different forms of

spirituality and thus new pathways to the divine. Such acts of re-imagining, these essays suggest, can offer us new ways of perceiving and inhabiting the fragile world which is our home and for which we have the responsibility of care. We may also begin once again to appreciate the realm of the spiritual as central to the support given to us through the caring professions, not as peripheral and optional but utterly crucial to our understanding of health, integrity and human well-being.

Samuel Tongue's image of dancing between the disciplines is delightful and liberating, opening up spaces where before there has too often only been repression and the imposition of authority. Nowhere is this more the case for many of us than in the reception and reading of the Bible, a collection of ancient texts with enormous traditional authority, now waning, but which may yet offer genuine and freely humane ways forward, without the heavy hand of conclusion and definition, in the crises which beset our culture on every side. One common theme which runs through all these essays, overtly or covertly, is the promise of hope. We can share the hope that it is precisely *in* otherness and religious complexity that the human future may be celebrated without violence or suspicion. In such a hope we may rejoice that the other remains different from ourselves, but is not therefore excluded from our most profound concerns and affiliations. Indeed, quite to the contrary.

We have much to learn from these essays, offered to the reader by a new generation of scholars of religious studies who are at once deeply committed to the spirituality and faith of the past, but embedded in a wholly realistic sense of the present, and daring to anticipate imaginatively a shared future for self and the other in our global societies. There words are on the boundaries and yet at the very heart of life lived humanely in the presence of the Divine.

—Professor David Jasper

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Honoured by the task of editing an interdisciplinary anthology that tests the boundaries of traditional theological discourse and religious reflection, the editors would like to acknowledge our deepest gratitude for the generous assistance of a number of significant individuals. Their contributions were integral to the creation and subsequent publication of this work, and we are sincerely indebted to: Dr. Fiona Darroch and Professor David Jasper, both of the University of Glasgow, who were instrumental in every phase of the conference; the University of Glasgow Graduate School of Arts & Humanities for funding the three day event; Professor Jasper for generously writing the "Preface" to this text; the conference planning committee and our outstanding guest speakers Carol P. Christ, Dr. Maureen Sier and Dr. Julia Sallabank who graciously joined us in Glasgow and not only sparked but also engaged in provocative dialogues throughout the weekend; the international scholars and faculty in attendance of the 7th Annual Conference of the Graduate School of Arts and Humanities entitled "Communicating Change: Weaving the Web into the Future" for their participation, thought-provoking questions, and contributions which not only made the conference a great success but also provided the impetus for this text; our colleagues Rasa Lutyze, Jakob Wirén, Erol Firtin, Daniel Sungho Ahn, Wynter Miller, Dr. Beth Seymour, Elizabeth Chloe Erdmann, and Dr. Maureen Sier for their brilliant work, patience and diligence over the past eighteen months; Dr. Heather Walton, Professor Yvonne Sherwood, and Professor Werner Jeanrond (from Theology and Religious Studies) for providing us with a supportive academic environment in which to work; *e-Sharp* Editor Dorian Grieve and his peer review team who provided critical assistance during the initial phase of double-blind review, Laura Jeacock for her fabulous painting "Light Creates Shadow" the centre of which generously graces our cover, and, finally, Amanda Millar and Carol Koulikourdi of Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their advice, patience and the opportunity to publish this important collection of works.

On a more personal note, I am eternally grateful to my co-editor Samuel Tongue not only for collaborating with me on this text, but also on the *e-Sharp* Special Edition *Communicating Change: Representing Self and Community in a Technological World* – the first product of this

conference. He has been a joy to work with and has proved himself an admirable academic partner. These publications would not exist without him.

—Patricia ‘Iolana
University of Glasgow
11 August 2010

INTRODUCTION

PATRICIA ʻIOLANA

It is change, continuing change, inevitable change
that is the dominant factor in society today.
No sensible decision can be made any longer
without taking into account not only the world as it is,
but the world as it will be.
—Isaac Asimov

For millennia, human beings have been contemplating the cosmogony of the known world. Where did life come from? What is our place in this world? Do we have a purpose on this small blue planet? Is there a God? If so, what is our relationship with the Great Creator? Moreover, where is God? Is God transcendent and separate from humanity, or is God immanent and part of humanity and of the earth? Can God be both? These questions have been postulated philosophically, theologically, artistically and scientifically. Yet, despite a transitory Western culture that is witnessing the rise of secular societies and neo-atheist writers, a decrease in church attendance, and an increase in multi-religious identities we continue to ponder these age-old and deeply-personal questions which come from the very core of our being. We may struggle with belief especially in times that test our strength, and in some instances, we can lose our faith completely or, conversely, (re)discover it suddenly through an unexpected Divine experience. As humans we have a long, well-documented history filled with Asimov's "inevitable change", and the various ways societies have imaged God or the Divine changes as well over time.

The human process of learning and growing is, after all, grounded in the ability to test the boundaries which contain us. Moreover, the best way to challenge an idea, paradigm, belief, or understanding is to examine it with an open mind from a new perspective—an unconventional view through an alternate lens. As individuals, we use a variety of lenses in our daily life. These lenses (or paradigms) establish and control how we perceive and manage ideas, events, simple and complex groups, processes, etc. They are, in essence, the way we see the world, others, and ourselves.

It is important to remember that lenses have limitations although these limitations vary from lens to lens. They also vary from individual to individual. To further complicate matters, individuality manipulates and transforms those lenses with personal conceptions and borders. Lenses that are exclusive to other perspectives pose a particular threat to the potential of change in what Thomas Kuhn refers to as a *paradigm shift* or a radical amendment in the world view. Elizabeth Johnson applies Kuhn's scientific model to theology when she calls for "…not simply the solution to one problem, but an entire shift of world view away from patterns of dominance toward mutually enhancing relationships." (1993, 28) As such, our visions of the Divine, God, the Ultimate Reality, Allah, Goddess, the Creator, must shift and change as well. As individual members of various faith traditions within contemporary society we have the ability (although not always the opportunity) to create our own paradigmatic image of the Divine. As a society we can alter, transform, or even replace those paradigms. Progressive movements exist in nearly every faith tradition—moving towards the future of our world and our belief systems; these movements include both radical and reformist thinkers, and they are challenging the lenses that we employ to image, worship, connect with and understand the Divine.

Growth and change are a necessity in the academy as well. Current events such as the Islamophobia and violence rampant in the States sparked by the plans to build Park51 (an Islamic Interfaith Centre near the site of the World Trade Centre attack); the tragedy and violence between Israeli and Palestinian over territory, resources and human rights; or the wars between religious factions in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey indicate the need for alternate perspectives about the world and our Selves. Consequently, there is a need for the academy to embrace and pursue progressive lenses in our quest for knowledge and understanding. The ten scholars who contributed to this text all provide an alternate, innovative lens for examining pertinent individual or societal issues within their greater social paradigm. They explore the praxis of faith including our image of Self in relation to the Divine, our relation to the Other, our struggle for identity in new locales, the limitations and challenges of language and translations, our responsibility to nature, our nomadic and transitory tendencies, traditions in academy, and our interreligious relationships. These scholars are testing the boundaries of traditional theology and their interdisciplinary fields—many dancing in the liminal space where possibilities gather. They add an important dimension to the present conversations and provide rich alternatives to our contemporary paradigms.

The task of editing a volume such as this includes, amongst the various other duties, sorting through contributions in search of common themes; fortunately this was not necessary with the essays in this text. Natural and significant themes appeared from the conference at which these ideas were first presented. The overall themes, or lenses, in which their focused ideas are presented allow the reader to explore various alternate paradigms as they examine the relationship between Self and the Divine.

The text begins with the foundation of all these queries—the Self. In Part I, Self-Image: Reimaging the Self and the Divine, two thealogians invite the reader to consider the relationship between the Self and the Divine. This relationship is crucial as the foundation to belief and both authors echo Johnson’s “...loss of self-identity is also a loss of the experience of God.” (1993, 65) Moreover, both contemplate an alternate perspective on how that relationship is established, defined, and changed over time. By questioning the ways in which one’s relationship with the Divine helps one to define oneself and one’s Self-image provides the reader with an opportunity to examine her or his own relationship with the Divine and the Self. Both authors also ask what happens when women image God. What shift in Self-image occurs when the Divine is seen as not only feminine, but also immanent? These questions are explored in Part I, and the essays consider radical lenses with which to see the feminine Self and the Divine.

Part II, Faith Hope and Religious “Otherness” explores another important series of questions about the Self. The authors, each from a different Abrahamic tradition – one Christian and one Muslim, examine the Self in relation to the “Religious Other”. These authors challenge the way we perceive, communicate and interact with the Religious Other in our communities. They ask vital questions about how one maintains a sense of religious Self when outside home communities or within a single, but divisive, faith tradition. Is it possible to live in today’s electronic, constantly changing, secular and multi-cultural society and still maintain a grounded faith or spirituality, sense of Self, and have a relationship with the Divine on one’s own terms? These may be questions that many of us have asked as of late; there is no one particular answer to these questions as faith and adhering to a faith tradition is a deeply individual and personal matter—one in which broad generalised statements cannot be made. They pose questions that offer the reader a chance to ponder these issues and decide for oneself about their paradigmatic validity and application to life – in essence an opportunity to shift or alter her or his view of Self, Other, and the greater society in which they both exist.

Communicating one's paradigm of Self or Other in relation to the Divine is often both complex and precarious, and in Part III, Interpretation: Struggles to Communicate three authors examine the various struggles we encounter when attempting to communicate the Divine to Other cultures and societies through Sacred texts, the Divine in Nature and our responsibility to care and protect it, and the struggle to preserve the Bible as a relative and authoritative text in today's ever-changing society. They ask us to consider how we attempt to interpret a new ideology and language for a culture vastly different than our own. What difficulties arise and are lost in translation? How do we envision our responsibility to or our dominion over the earth? Fundamentally, we are asked in this part to consider the broader relationship between Self and Nature as well as our level of responsibility, contribution, and care. Or how do we give contemporary interpretation to sacred text? More particularly, can the Bible retain a sense of authority in our society? Are multiple readings possible? What happens if we examine these issues with an alternate lens?

Imagine the possibilities if paradigms were shifted. What potentials await if we step out of our seemingly safe and traditional paradigms of Self, the Other, and of the Divine? Part IV, Changing Trends: Moving Beyond Traditional Boundaries attempts to engage in the potentials of change. Johnson once stated that

> …the goal is the flourishing of all beings in their uniqueness and interrelation—both sexes, all races and social groups, all creatures in the universe. This calls for a new model of relationship, neither a hierarchical one that requires an over-under structure, nor a univocal one that reduces all to a given norm. (1993, 32)

Three authors ask us to contemplate issues outside the traditional boundaries. Readers are encouraged, as is the academy, to seriously consider how the Self can work with the Other in relation to the spirit (or soul). Moreover, these essays propose alternate ways of identifying Self as Self and in relation to the Other. In today's multi-religious, multi-cultural, yet increasingly secular society how do we function as Self in relation to the Divine and the Religious Other? What possibilities are there in new lenses and perhaps paradigms for those identities and relations?

It is therefore important to employ as many various lenses as possible when examining the issues of Self, the Other and the Divine. With so many possible interpretations and paradigms competing for social acceptance and support, the choice must be made carefully and wisely bearing in mind the inevitability of change whilst remaining open to

pluralities of thought and practice. This is especially important when it comes to the future of theology and religious studies—in particular to the relations between the various global faith traditions. Interfaith dialogue and relations are a significant way forward towards that potential – towards the potential that awaits in that liminal space outside traditional boundaries—towards Asimov’s “inevitable change”.

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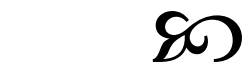
PART I



SELF-IMAGE:
RE-IMAGING THE SELF
AND THE DIVINE

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RE-IMAGING THE SELF AND THE DIVINE

PATRICIA ‘IOLANA

One of the most intriguing things about the changing face of theology, thealogy, and religious studies can be found in the variety of ways in which scholars and practitioners image the Divine and define (or redefine) their relation to the Divine. In our ever-changing, highly technological world which seems to grow smaller with each passing day, we have the opportunity to learn about other faith traditions and to share our own with, quite literally, the entire world. Progressive movements are apparent in all of the major world religions, and we eagerly experiment and appraise the rigidity of existing boundaries by pushing, prodding, or leaping right over them. For some, these boundaries are scrutinised from within one’s own faith tradition (reformers), but for others, these boundaries are tested and stretched from outside an original faith tradition (radicals) and, in some cases, outside accepted ideas and norms which stretch existing boundaries to new limits and new heights. The following essays may test the reader’s own theological boundaries, and, perhaps provide the reader with alternate perspectives to traditional images of the Divine and the Self.

In “Radical Images of the Feminine Divine: Women’s Spiritual Memoirs Disclose a Thealogical Shift” I seek to briefly examine an intriguing trend in contemporary literature (women’s spiritual memoirs). These texts individually chronicle the author’s path away from a faith or logic tradition she feels has on some level let her down spiritually or personally and toward one of the various forms of Goddess Spirituality that are gaining popularity and practitioners in the West. What is fascinating is that, collectively, these memoirs are espousing an innovative thealogical discourse, praxis, and spirituality based on the Feminine Divine. Changing the way women image God isn’t necessarily a novel idea; feminist theologians Carol P Christ, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Naomi R Goldenberg, and the late Mary Daly and Valerie Saiving (among others) have been challenging patriarchal and androcentric images of the Divine for decades now. What is truly captivating and innovative about

these spiritual memoirs is that these women are documenting shared experiences, and communal thealogies, and their words and stories are reaching and affecting readers worldwide. These women are giving voice not only to how they image their selves and their personal relationship with the Divine and by extension their connection to nature and the web of life, but also espousing a way for others to seek their true self in what Carl Gustav Jung would called the path of Individuation. Through these works, authors and readers alike are creating new images of the Self and of the Divine. Consequently these works of literature are having a tremendous impact on theological reflection, belief, and praxis, and, the Goddess Spirituality movement (in all its various and multitudinous forms) is perhaps the fastest growing faith tradition in the West. Therefore I briefly ponder what impact these experiences with an immanent Feminine Divine might have on traditional theological enquiry and praxis. How do they disrupt the existing Western Abrahamic image of God the Father and therefore women's image of Self within those faith traditions?

Rasa Luzyte also challenges traditional images of the sacred when she examines alternate possibilities of Mary in her essay "The myth of Mary as a space for an individual connection to the divine (Self)." Also utilising the theories of Carl Jung, Rasa Luzyte challenges the patriarchal and Abrahamic vision of God echoing the complaint eloquently voiced by Mary Daly, "If God is male, then male is God." In this article Rasa questions the theologically-static Catholic symbol of the Virgin Mary as pure, motherly, and sacred (although not necessarily Divine). She contemplates how this half image, half understanding of a lesser Mary skews women's sense of self and personal connection to the Mother of God. In calling for imaging Mary as whole, with a shadow/dark side that mirrors the whole woman (and as seen in the Black Madonna as complementary to the White Madonna), she envisions a Divine that all women can connect to and relate with outside of the Christian tradition. She also takes her re-imaging a step further: for what if Mary's holy child was a daughter and not a son? How would this new, radical image of the Mother of God alter religious traditions and our sense of self? What if the traditionally male trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit were replaced with Mother, Daughter, and Holy Spirit? By taking Mary out of the static role dependent and forced between the male God and the male Son, Mary becomes the Divinity herself that is liberated to bear forth divine in her own sex which ultimately leads to the question: how will these new images not only change a faith tradition but also how women view themselves and their relationship to the Divine?

Both articles challenge the way one might image the Divine, and emphasise how testing those pre-existing, androcentric images of God might offer not only liberating possibilities of the Divine but also alternate images of women for both men and women to consider and emulate. Perhaps, more important, these essays speak about how this active, radical re-imaging can provide compelling personal myths and symbols through which women may re-image their Self, the Divine, and their relation to the God.

℘RADICAL IMAGES OF THE FEMININE DIVINE: WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL MEMOIRS DISCLOSE A THEALOGICAL SHIFT

PATRICIA 'IOLANA

Mighty, majestic, and radiant
You shine brilliantly in the evening,
You brighten the day at dawn,
You stand in the heavens like the sun and the moon,
Your wonders are known both above and below,
To the greatness of the holy priestess of heaven,
To you, Inanna, I sing! (2000 BCE)[1]

In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word Documented Experience

As the Ancient Sumerian stone tablets containing the myth cycle of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth demonstrate, women and men have been writing about their experiences with and impressions of the Divine for millennia. These spiritual narratives are significant to the culture within which they were written as they contain the ability to define a culture; they can also delineate a group, or groups, within a culture. Therefore it is crucial to understand that these stories have enormous cultural and social power; they can confirm and maintain personal and cultural paradigms; they can shift and alter existing traditions, beliefs, schemas and paradigms. Moreover, as a genre within these divine narratives, spiritual memoirs have a theological significance because they possess the ability to offer readers a sense of spiritual community, shared faith, ritual and tradition by creating, sustaining or shifting theological and cosmogonical paradigms. These stories can also convey an important

[1] Wolkstein, Diane and Samuel Noah Kramer. 1983. The Holy Priestess of Heaven. In *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*. New York: Harper & Row, Lines 10-16, 93.

psychological means for both the author and the reader to understand her or his experiential sense of Self, her or his place in the world, and ultimately her or his personal relationship with a Divine Creatrix. Thus, this genre carries with it remarkable social, theological and psychological significance for the individuals and cultures from within which it was written.

A considerable number of contemporary spiritual memoirs, however, are radically different from those of their peers or recent generations. There is some academic debate on whether this particular contemporary trend is autobiographical non-fiction or a derivative of fiction. Perhaps the most accurate description would, in fact, be *fictive narrative;* this term best describes the author's selective use of events and experiences, perhaps with embellishment, to tell, traditionally, non-fictional stories of personal pilgrimage or Divine revelation. Furthermore, the individual, spiritual journey shared in these memoirs portray the author's numinous or spiritual *experience*[2] with the Divine which aligns the focus of this work on the experiences contained in these memoirs and the social, theological and psychological implications of this content. My research centres on the significant and remarkable fact that a considerable amount of Western women are writing their spiritual memoirs, documenting their personal encounters with the Divine and revealing collective experiential similarities.

Interestingly, this specific genre also documents a trend of dissatisfaction with existing patriarchal or humanistic traditions and an attraction towards a Goddess-based religious tradition. What is perhaps far more vital to the theological significance of this genre is that these women are detailing experiences with an immanent Feminine Divine[3] (an inherent God with a feminine face and voice) and documenting a *thea*logy thus creating a new and influential kind of contemporary women's spiritual memoir. These memoirs are the centre of my enquiries.

Upon close evaluation, these exemplary works reveal important experiential, thealogical and psychoanalytic similarities and define syncretistic religious traditions — espousing a thealogy for the future of humanity and our Mother Earth; they contain the potential for interreligious "correlational dialogue" (Knitter) and espouse the "reclamation" of a holistic spirituality that transcends contemporary monotheistic constructs. These works are

[2] By *experience* I am referring to the direct personal contact with, awareness of or knowledge of the Divine as recorded in the works in my case study.

[3] The term *Feminine Divine* is interchangeable with Sacred Feminine, Goddess, Great Mother, or Creatrix. My use of this term is merely for consistency and does not imply a preference of one term over the other.

theologically significant for four key reasons: 1) the similar journeys shared by the women/authors in experiencing the Goddess, 2) the Thealogy and the various Goddess personifications present in these works, 3) the disruption to traditional theological categories, and 4) the possibility for interfaith interaction and exchange inherent in the pluralistic and syncretistic nature of these religious traditions.

In my current research, I am examining the similarities and differences in the experiences contained in the spiritual memoirs of five different women: Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen, Phyllis Curott, Christine Downing, Sue Monk Kidd, and Margaret Starbird. For the purposes of brevity in this current context, however, I will limit my examination to two: Sue Monk Kidd's *Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (2002) and Phyllis Curott's *Book of Shadows: A Modern Woman's Journey into the Wisdom of Witchcraft and the Magic of the Goddess* (1998). This paper will focus on two important questions: How is the Feminine Divine imaged in each text? And in what ways does reimaging the Divine as Sacred Feminine disrupt traditional masculine, Abrahamic theological categories?

What is *Thea*logy? – A Brief Definition

The origin of the term *thea*logy is open to debate. According to my research *Thealogy* or *Thealogian* was first used in publications by both Isaac Bonewits ("The Druid Chronicles – Evolved") and Valerie Saiving ("Androcentrism in Religious Studies") in 1976. Naomi Goldenberg continued this new thread by using the term in *The Changing of the Gods* (Goldenberg 1979b, 96). Since then, many have attempted to define "thealogy". Carol Christ, a self-professed Thealogian, first used the term in her *Laughter of Aphrodite* in 1987, and years later succinctly defined it as "the reflection on the meaning of the Goddess" (2002, 79). Rita Nakashima Brock, in her 1989 article "On Mirrors, Mists, and Murmurs: Toward an Asian American Thealogy" specifies her understanding of the term thealogy: "I use the word *thealogy* to describe the work of women reflecting on their experiences of and beliefs about divine reality" (Brock 1989, 236).

Strictly adhering to the definition, the word breaks down into two parts: *Thea (Goddess) + logos (word, discourse, reason)* although I doubt if this properly encapsulates the entire meaning of this term. Angela Hope, Founder of the Institute for Thealogy and Deasophy provides a much more provocative and elucidating definition of the term and field of

thealogy (and by extension deasophy) and shall serve to set the context within which my research and theories are placed:

> Goddess thealogy and deasophy can be considered fields that are concerned with the past and contemporary Goddess community's beliefs, wisdom, embodied practices, questions, and values. Both thealogy and deasophy, or more accurately thealogies and deasophies, constitute newly burgeoning mediums of feminist praxis within the Goddess spirituality and feminist spirituality movements in recent decades. [...]Thealogy and deasophy should not be defined in reference or opposition to another discourse, but the aim of this Institute is to name thealogy and deasophy rooted in a priori experience and thought or to name them on their own terms. [...]Thealogy can be defined as follows: Within the context of various past and contemporary spiritual/religious traditions, thealogy concerns the inquiry into the meaning and nature of the Goddess(es) or Sacred Feminine; the meaning and nature of life forms and the universe in relation to the Divine/Divinities; and/or feminist understandings of the Divine that are post-kyriarchal. Thealogies encompass all orientations including polytheism, monotheism, metatheism, ditheism, pantheism and so on. Thealogy draws attention to various questions including but not limited to the following: What is the nature or essence of Goddess(es)? How do life-forms exist in relationship with the Goddess(es)? Who are we or who are we to become, and where are we going? What is the purpose of my life and how should I live my life? (Hope, 2010)

Differing Perspectives: Sue Monk Kidd and Phyllis Curott

Before considering how the Feminine Divine is imaged in each text, (and I use the term *imaged* specifically to denote a mental or psychic image or symbol as opposed to an *imaginary creation*), it is important to understand the women who are imaging. Therefore, I shall begin with brief background information on each author. Sue Monk Kidd, by her own accounts, grew up deep within the Christian tradition. The wife of a Baptist minister and theologian at a Baptist college, Kidd led a Church-centred family life with contemplation as the cornerstone of her world:

> I had always been very spiritual and very religious, too... I'd pursued a spiritual journey of depth and meaning...within the circle of Christian orthodoxy....I had been raised in the Southern Baptist Church, and I was still a rather exemplary member of one, but beginning in my early thirties I'd become immersed in a journey that was rooted in contemplative spirituality...I was influence by Meister Eckhart and Julian of Norwich. (Kidd 2002, 14)