

- Oh, here we go, and, so if you could just say your names please.

- Susan Cole.

- Hal Taussig.

- Thank you, and I kind of know the answer to this, but I'll ask anyway, are you lay or clergy?

- Clergy, United Methodist. Retired.

- Retired, yes. When and where were you born?

- Denver Colorado, May 18th 1947.

- East Cleveland Ohio, September seventh 1945.

- Oh okay, thank you. And where did you go to school, graduate school, divinity school?

- See I went to Ohio Westland. And then I went to Union Theological Center.

- I went to Antioch College, Methodist Theological School in Ohio for the M Div, and then the Union Institute for Aging.

- Okay, okay. And is Union Institute affiliated with Union Theo--

Susan And Al: No.

- I never was a (mumbles). But, no, that's a school that is in Cincinnati Ohio, and I went through the program when there were no interdisciplinary PhDs, and they were, and so they're not a theological institution but they did do theology, because we were looking at, because some of us theologically interested in poems, were interested in interdisciplinary material.

- So what was your--

- So I'm basically a New Testament scholar. And, I did my dissertation for instance was a three hour dramaturgy of the Revelation to John. So it was interdisciplinary, had to do with the media and New Testament.

- Oh, fascinating, wow. Why don't I start with you, Susan, how did you first become interested in feminist theology in general, and then we can talk about Sophia in particular. We'll start with feminist theology in general, I guess.

- I think that was the impetus to go to seminary, actually. It was a feminist impetus to go to seminary. And when I, and that came out of my experience in church. Yeah boy, that's a really interesting question, I'm not sure if I could even pinpoint it exactly. But, here's what I can remember going back, that's stretching things back, that's going (laughing).

- But do the long version of this, this is really wonderful stuff.

- Yes! I wanna hear.

- Well... I was a Methodist all my life, Methodist. And when I came to Philadelphia I had a directive by a religion professor at Ohio Westland to the United Methodist Church here in Germantown, which is pretty close, which is a pretty progressive church. And so I got hooked up there, and, in the course of that, became involved with one of the pastors in a small community, we met weekly, we were pretty intensely doing a program and things at the church and elsewhere, and I found that I was really being dissed a lot. A lot.

- Could you say a little bit more about what that was, what that looked like?

- Well, the guys, these were couples, so there were several couples, and the man in the couples were constantly paid attention to. (mumbles) Like kind of typical stuff. And also during that period, so that was kind of grumble, grumble, kind of going on on one side, and then the other was, I was, the church got a woman about my age, maybe a year or two younger, but very close to my age, as an associate, and so for the very first time I saw a woman preaching. And so very quickly, within six months, it became clear that I had a call to ministry, that I hadn't been able to articulate, I was incredibly involved obviously, had always been. But it was at that point, like, oh, and I knew that, I guess part of the grumble grumble, and then seeing something that was real and female in the pulpit, it was a feminist era, do you know?

- This was in the early 70's? Be early 70's.

- Early 70's. And so, there was a lot of feminist stuff going on. And so when I looked for seminaries, I specifically looked for one that I thought would support that impulse in me. And I remember, one of the things that happened, right before I left for Union, was the ordination, the regular ordination of the 11 women. And I had two of those women priests were teachers of mine at Union, which was really fun. It just kind of continued that--

- So this is the Episcopal women--

- Yes. Oh yeah, it was certainly possible for me to be ordained in the Methodist church, but to have that, such exciting gathering right here in Philly, sort of go from that to Union, and just kind of continue the work and

the, just checking things out and finding, I got involved with the Bible there. That was my major, my major focus was with the Bible, and trying to find women in it. Trying to find women in it, trying to find feminine anything in it.

- Is that when you first started finding Sophia?

- No, did not find that at Union at all. I did my thesis there on feminine imagery in the crossing of the sea, in Exodus.

- Miriam. Or no, no--

- Not just Miriam. More than just Miriam. The sea itself.

- Say a little bit more about that, that's intriguing.

- Well, I mean, the sea became womb, womb to 'em the whole, and baptism, and the time that into baptism. Yeah. And looking at some of the other... Stories that were, that were, I don't know whether they preceded the Hebrew story or whether they, I can't remember anymore, that information, but, it was all of these God and Goddess stories that had similar kinds of, similar movements. So it was more the movement, it was like a, feminine movement through the female.

- So was it at Union you were first introduced formally to feminist theology?

- Yeah, that's when I was formally introduced to feminist theology, it was there.

- And how did you discover Sophia?

- That was later. I was, can't remember if I was still in school, I think it was after school. It was after school, I worked at a Calvinite Methodist Church in West Philadelphia, and Hal was there, and there was a bunch of really angry disgruntled women there (laughs), and another woman, a clergywoman in Caldig and I, Sandy Forrester-Dufrain, met with this group of mostly young women, mostly at Penn, but some were older, called a feminist study group. And they were really pushing for some shifts in the liturgy and God language and all of that. And Hal was trying, Hal's on the staff, and he was trying to, I don't know what you were trying to do, whatever you were trying to do, you were at least trying to make some kinds of coming round, and he introduced a study of Sophia in Proverbs. So it wasn't really until I got, I never heard word one about it at Union, not word one, no. It was really in these Bible studies at Calvary, and I thought, oh boy, she's just not good enough. That was my reaction.

- What do you mean, she's not good enough?

- She was just too peripheral, too--

- Oh.

- It wasn't a big enough character to carry what needed to be carried.

- So what changed?

- When I had a vision. So it was really a personal experience that shifted that for me.

- I've read a little bit about the vision, could you say a little bit more about that?

- It's actually in one of my sermons. I pretty much put a lot of it in there.

- Yes, that's where I read about it, yes.

- It's been years, so let me see if I can remember, this was, it was a very significant date however. It was Epiphany.

- Perfect.

- Yeah. And, I was actually preparing, I had been preparing a sermon that I was gonna be offering at a women's group, here in Philly. We had a feminist, we had a feminist organization that put on monthly worship services that were specifically feminist in everything. And I have thought, well, I'll do a Sophia sermon. It wasn't that I wasn't interested in Sophia, she just seemed too small. And so I was working on it, that evening, that was an evening. And I was playing some music. And... There she was. I mean really, it was just there she was. (laughs) There she was. And she, she was a dark-haired woman, laughing, with sparkly, really sparkly eyes, and she was, standing at a doorway, but the door was one of those half-doors, you know, have an upper half and a lower half, and she was standing, if I could see the top part of her, then she was laughing and she was calling to me. And I can't remember, there was something, there was another part of this, and this was the part that I'm kind of losing, what my state was at that moment. But, I know that I was in some bit of, despair would be too strong a word, but I know I was kind of in a slump, and she calls out, and she says, "Come on, I've known you forever, "I've known you since before you were born." When I say that, that makes me teary. And... "And you've always been faithful." There was something about my always having been faithful that was really important, and that's the part that I can't remember anymore, what the struggle was that I was concerned about my faithfulness. I honestly don't remember that anymore. I might have to go back to my journal and see if I can recall that, but I don't right now. But, "You've always been faithful, and come on, "we've got lots to do, let's..." So that was it, it was just pretty short, but it was really powerful, and I was just in tears, I was just like whoa, so overwhelmed with that. And I remember that the next day we were meeting for Bible study. We had this little group of clergy and lay folks, who did the weekly Bible study. And they were coming in the next day and say, well, why are we even talking about call, like it came up in the Bible study. Something about call, and I said, well I just had one (laughs). I just had one. So I was able to just talk about it, right there, right after--

- And how did people respond, do you remember?

- A little... (laughs) Well I remember having that reaction too. I remember it was being teary and overwhelmed, but also thinking, this is a little weird. Am I losing it? So I had all those thoughts. And I can't recall again, maybe I've written it in my journal somewhere, I hope so. But I later did a meditation, within a week or two afterwards, I did some meditating. And in that, in the meditation, was able to meet her again. And the setting, in my meditation, was I was in a big, oh I know what the situation was, I was really worried about whether I could stay in the church. It just felt so big, all of a sudden she became very big. Really big! Really big. And I felt really connected, like right here, really connected. So she was in me, she was all over, big. And I wasn't sure I could stay in the church, as a clergyperson, with that kind of, what was happening in me. And so that was what the impetus for this prayer meditation was, and so I found myself, in the meditation, being in a big, big big gothic church. And she stood in the doorway at the far end. And there was outside, usually gothic churches don't have doors at that end, but this one did. And it was a doorway, and outside was outside. And she was calling me out, and I thought, oh shit. I'm gonna have to leave the church. And outside, and, outside there was this great big humongous airy dome, over the church, and over everything. Over everything! Nature, people, it was wonderful, it was so, I mean even now, that's my church, was that. But the church was in it, so I didn't have to leave the church to be part of something larger.

- So in both cases she was at a doorway.

- She was.

- And why do you think, do you have any thoughts about that?

- I've thought about that. I mean, it's thresholds, right?

- And how about laughing?

- Yeah, laughing was really wonderful. Laughing was really wonderful, it was.

- And I'm gonna, one other quick question. I think I understand but just to be sure, why did you feel as if initially, your connection to Sophia meant that you would leave the church?

- Well because she said, come on, we've got work to do.

- I see. So you saw it as calling out.

- Yeah.

- Okay, yeah. That's wonderful, thank you. Hal? How about your, first became aware of feminist theology?

- And can I ask Susan another, give her a reminder?

- Absolutely, this is great about being together, yes.

- So, I like the way you talk about your childhood and adolescence, and what you had then later in high school and college, how you started noticing the implicit call, there.

- Oh, my call to the ministry, that stuff? In my childhood.

- Well, whenever...

- No, I think it was more a high school. Yeah, I was really really always, a church kid, you know, I was really active. Active in the youth group, head of the worship community in high school youth group. So I got to write the prayers and lead the (laughs). I remember doing that, it was really fun, I liked doing that. And, all the guys that I was dating, up until I met that guy that I married, were going into either the ministry, or, one of them, after we were dating for a year, decided to go into the Roman Catholic priesthood. And so for a while I got interested in Catholicism, and I thought really seriously about it, it was during Vatican two, it was really exciting, and I thought seriously about converting and becoming a nun. Yeah, yeah, so there was all of these, clearly trying to, yeah.

- Did you think about being a Methodist pastor at that point?

- No, never. A minister's wife, maybe. Yeah, but it just never, no. Not until, not until the woman at my church.

- And obviously no one encouraged you in that.

- No. No, there was not on the radar screen.

- And say a little bit about, how many visions you'd had before this one.

- None.

- Really?

- Nor any after.

- And say, how would you describe yourself, outside of that vision, in terms of your, being drawn to visionary stuff?

- Well I mean, I was spiritual director now, so it's really important to me to be able to affirm and pay attention to and take seriously everything that a person experiences.

- So when you had the vision, one of the things you kept saying was, I don't have visions. (laughing)

- Yes.

- This is just outside.

- Yes! Fascinating! It really came out of the blue and--

- It really came out of the blue.

- Knocked your socks off. (laughing)

- Or it came out of really interesting difficulties and pains and possibilities, so it seems to me like you were at, and you learned how to take in some of the ways of addressing the pain and the possibilities.

- You know, I'm wondering, I'm sorry I didn't prepare better--

- No, this is wonderful! This is great.

- I think maybe the struggle I was having was staying in the ministry. I think that's what it was, I think I had been--

- No, you said that explicitly.

- Okay, I think so, okay. Now it's starting to come back. Okay. I had been in the ministry for a while and I was at this wonderful church, that really had, they had feminists in the congregation, they were like, you know, I had pretty good colleagues. Perhaps a good colleague, they weren't all great, but it was a mix of colleagues. But really, I had a clergywoman, we had some funny staff. It was a bunch of us on the staff, on this little mission church. So I think there's a clergywoman that got on the staff, and was openly working on the whole issue. And this one guy who wasn't so much, but he talked the dog, didn't walk it very well. But even so, I found myself really in a situation where I just wasn't sure I could do it anymore. It was too constraining. And that's right, there was an incident that happened at worship, and it happened at Eucharist, it happened at the community service. And, if I was leading worship, I believe I was leading the communion that day, and the words just left me, I couldn't... I thought, oh my God, I am doing this, we're all getting together around a man, this doesn't feel good. And I remember stumbling, I stumbled over the liturgy some, and all the way through that service I was talking to myself, saying, this is larger than just a man. This is a man who became God, this is the community, we're all part of the body of Christ, we're all part of the body. I was talking to myself, in my head, the entire time I led that worship service, and I thought, and afterwards, I thought, oh my God, what's happening to me? I might not be able to do this any longer. Yeah.

- So that's why those words, "You've always been faithful," were what you needed--

- I knew that was important, but I couldn't (mumbles)--

- This is good! And thank you, keep it up, this is helpful. Yeah.

- That's it, that was it, yeah. And it's also why, having the church inside this larger airy dome was also important, I didn't have to leave, cos I was really struggling with it. I do remember getting together with some of my clergywomen friends, and I don't know if I shared that particular moment with them, but I remember, being in the middle of struggle. In talking with them, sharing with them.

- So is it safe to say your initial reaction was you thought your experience of Sophia would lead you outside the church, but it's what enabled you to stay in the church?

- Absolutely, yeah. She's what enabled me to stay. I have said that many times. That she's what enabled me to stay.

- And you wanna say now, a little bit more about that longer journey with her, and your journey as a woman in ministry with her?

- It got messed up pretty quickly. But, the initial, aside from obviously, this whole discernment with the lever, that got decided pretty quickly, but the other thing that really happened was that, was having this connection with her. Just, it affirmed my body, as a woman. Totally.

- Could you say more about that?

- It really transformed the way I felt in my body, from the very moment of that vision. I really felt, there's some lovely passages in scripture about being God is love, and we're in God, but it was always, and I loved them, I remember there was a priest, a Catholic priest during the Vatican two time who had this wonderful psalm, eucharistic liturgy, and there was this lovely song that he had written to go with this Johannine passage. And I would sing that a lot. But then it really fit.

- Do you remember what the words were, that meant--

- God is love, God is love, and... And we who abide in God abide in love, or abide in love abide in God, that's it. God is love and we who abide in love abide in God. And there was, and God in us. I loved that! I still do. But it just, when Sophia arrived, it was clear that she was in me and I was in her, and there was no tension at all. That tension, that whatever little bits of tension that were around that, disappeared.

- And to make sure I understand, is it because she was female?

- Yeah, absolutely. It was her femaleness.

- So it affirmed your female body. Yeah. Well to pick up on your question, how did that evolve for you?



- Well how it evolved was, I started spreading the good news! So I talked to, we had, back in those days there weren't that many of us clergywomen in the Methodist church, and we got together, I don't know how often, monthly maybe. And so fairly soon thereafter, within the next couple of months, I remember sharing this with them. And I wrote letters to people who I thought might be interested, sharing it with them, what my, the woman who was my New Testament tutor at Union, Sharon Ringey. I remember sharing it with her. And a woman who was a part of the larger Calvary committee who's a Roman Catholic nun, I sent a letter to her. And just, a few, I can't remember, those are the two that I remember specifically, but there were people I thought, I want to let them know. I really thought I was sharing the good news.

- How did people respond, do you recall?

- I remember that the nun wrote back to me and said, "well yeah, sure, that's God." Looks like she was pretty matter of fact! (laughing) It's exciting! Now I understand that perfectly. (laughing) I don't know if I heard anything from Sharon, maybe, I don't know if I heard anything from, I can't remember if I did.

- How about the other clergywomen, do you remember?

- Yeah, most of them were really excited, and a couple of them said, this is gonna get you, get us in trouble.

- Really, right away.

- Right away. They knew that. And that was like, I was still too much in euphoria to even notice that my (mumbles). And I thought I can preach about it! I preached about it at Calvary almost immediately! Within a week or two.

- And then you continued to preach about the Sophia texts.

- Yeah, and then I organized a group. It was made up of a lot of the feminist study group, but other people, it was women. And we met, I don't know, every week, every two weeks, and we looked at the texts, and we did all manner of spiritual exercises with the texts, the Sophia texts. And I started finding more of them, because it wasn't just Proverbs, there were other things I found, actually one of them had almost exact words that she said to me, and I about fell over.

- Really?

- Yeah.

- Do you remember where that's from, by any chance?

- Oh, let me see (mumbles). (laughing) The thing about being before I was born, and wisdom is with the faithful, in their mother's wombs.

- Okay.

- I thought, oh well.

- Yes, yes.

- That's impressive!

- So, the sermons and some of the study materials in here are from that. And what kind of reaction did you get from people in the church?

- Well, our church was a really funky, lovely little church, but it was a real mix of people. There were these feminists, and then there were working class African-American folks from the neighborhood, and there were other students, Penn students mostly, and there were people from an organization called Movement for a New Society. They lived communally, and they were really out there activist types, social activist types, so there were those folks. And then there were folks who lived in group homes because they were mentally ill. So it was a mix, a real mix of people. And so, some people were really interested and excited, some people were kind of scratching their heads, and the African-American folks kind of thought I'd probably gone off the deep end. They were polite, they were polite.

- Now, were the feminists mostly the Penn students? What was the demographics?

- Great majority were the Penn students, but not all. There were, there's an older woman in the congregation, who was very very active, and in looking back, looking back, do you know, I think she was a closeted lesbian. It gave her a place to be that she'd never been before.

- If I'm hearing you right though, you said, some African-Americans members of the community, they might have thought you were a little, gone off the deep end, was there any strong resistance?

- No, there was no strong resistance. And the other, every time that I preached, after that first one, the first one was kind of, (high pitched wail), that first one, I always couched it in, I always kind of went through, Sophia is basically the Greek word for wisdom, and wisdom's in the Old Testament, and Jesus is called Wisdom in the new, I would just produce mini little things, almost every time I preached. I would couch it in some kind of little teaching. So they, they were at least, folks just came along, mostly. But, there was one, I can't remember, I remember Hal, you and I, finally decided, we have stretched this congregation too far in terms of what they could handle anymore. We were just finding out more things, and it was just getting a little bit too much to do in sermon form. And I think that's when we formed that group.

- How did you know that was the case? That you'd stretched them too far?

- Do you remember?

- I don't.

- Do you remember the conversation?

- I think it was just that the, even the politeness would fray a little bit, and you could see the lack of attention, and so forth.

- Do you think it was that they thought you weren't orthodox anymore, or it was just, they didn't resonate with it? Or do you have any sense of what was going on?

- I honestly don't. I remember one woman, this was an African-American woman and she, she was a lesbian. Anyway, we had a little food co-op at the church, it was really more of a buying club. And I'd picked her up and we were doing some stuff around that, and I said something about, being kind of out of it, and she says, well yeah, well I can tell that from your sermons. And I can't remember what exactly I said, something about, there's a clue there.

- Do you have an idea about why it was African-Americans who acted that way?

- Trying to think if there were other people besides African-Americans, because I just remember that she most certainly was. Jesus is just so important. Jesus is so important in the African-American--

- Absolutely, yeah.

- And another way to think of saying similar things is, is that, so the marginal character of one's place in the world as African-Americans, means that signals that you can give, that you actually are in the same world, are important. So this did not seem like worth the risk.

- Yes.

- There were some African-American women who were part of this feminist study group. They were lesbians, so their feminist identity was very important to them. And they were fully engaged.

- One of the things I noticed in the book, which is making a lot of sense to me, is how pastorally concerned that you were, that you said, you're constantly saying, if your audience is this, I don't know if audience is the right word, but--

- You came out of that, it came out our own experience that it was really important to be pastoral. I mean, pastoral first, as far as I'm concerned. And there was actually, when I went to my next church, and one of the congregants there read the book and said, so we'll see, she just set it up, it's all part of a plot. I thought, no (laughs).

- And that was the person who made it public.

- Right, and started all the hoo-haa.

- This is so wonderful, there's a lot here, I tell ya! I do wanna continue getting back to the evolution, where things went, but could I go to you now, and talk about your, first became aware of that as theology, and then Sophia in particular?

- Yeah, I... I think that there was, so my undergraduate at, what work was doing at a very left wing institution, Antioch College, and so I had a, I wouldn't say that I had any prompts there explicitly, but sort of, interest in the ways that, I mean, there was mainly issues, I mean that's the late 60's, that was mainly poverty and race that our society's, but I'm sure that there was feminist dimensions of that college. But I don't remember myself as being particularly sensitive or interested in that. But it seems to me that just being there, sort of modeled the ways of women and men being together, that were new to me. So I suspect that was all subliminal.

- Did you choose Antioch because it was progressive?

- I can't remember.

- Flip of the coin, wasn't it?

- I mean yeah, I was considering it at the same time as I was considering going to Wheaton. (laughing) I was still, in many ways, somewhat of an evangelical Christian, and I never, that was never a problem or never broke in me, it was simply just kind of a gentle goodbye over decades, I think.

- Were you brought up United Methodist?

- No.

- No, okay, okay. Yeah.

- In fact, I was just recruited by the Methodists after I left college. Because I did, and I won't go into this, but, in my year abroad I ended up accidentally changing my program and going to seminary for a year in France, and, that happened to be the time in which French theologians were at Vatican two, writing the documents. So I ended up having a year of study with those Jesuits mainly. So there was a little bit of, so that's, somewhat implicit. So I would say that really, I didn't find myself very sensitive at all to feminist thought, until I pastored in this church. And there, I think I was relatively insensitive, to the needs of the women that I was a pastor. And, I mean that was a steep, and wonderfully generous pastor, was almost my first, not quite my first pastor, I was one year someplace else. But, so for African-Americans and feminists to, sort of claim me as one of their pastors was, was generally, I mean it taught me a lot. But I would say, it would be a stretch to call me a feminist at the beginning part. But learning to, learning to be, a pastor to these women

meant taking them seriously. So I think that, generally, thinking it most with, the African-American dimension of the congregation and the feminists, is trying to be a good pastor, and tending, I mean, the feminist study group was happily less patient with me than the African-Americans were. So that generally helped me learn how to be a pastor, and then I think secondarily begin to have that included in both my own spiritual journey and my own theological journey. Because I already had a PhD at that point. But nothing in my PhD in New Testament, made me particularly interested, so I knew about Sophia, not because I thought she was relevant, but I just had to read her cos that was what my advisor had done work in, not relevant to feminism at all.

- Who was your advisor?

- Bertan Matt, and so he was, he was really interested in Sophia, but had really no interest in feminism. So it was just a slightly awake, defensive, gesture that I told the feminist study group, well why don't you try her? And so--

- I remember feeling that way. I remember feeling that.

- No no, I think that's exactly the way it--

- Feeling what way, sorry?

- Like it was, well, here's something.

- Okay, okay, yes. Because what were they saying to you, what were they asking that prompted you to--

- Well I mean people were just asking, the feminists were just asking to, make us recognize them as full members of the body of God, and of the congregation. And so, there was all kinds of really lovely, in retrospect, difficult in the moment, pressure. That ended up, it taught me a lot.

- You know, I remember that there was actually, this group was there before I got there.

- I wondered, okay.

- And before I got there.

- And before you got there, I was wondering, yes.

- And I was asked to preach my very first sermon at that church. It was my home church, that I started out, and so my home church, I was a seminarian, and I was told that the week before, the feminist study group had charge of the sermon part of the service, and they'd done a panel. And they had done it on Mary Daly.

- Really, really?! Wow.

- Yes, they'd done Mary Daly and just blasted away. And so, I was warned--

- I wasn't there yet.

- Oh, okay, okay. Yeah, yeah.

- So that was just my coming in, it was like students--

- And you say warned.

- Well, that people are gonna be upset.

- Somewhat upset about--

- I don't remember if the details, but yes, they had to have been very upsetting, had to have been. Can you imagine? I can't even imagine, I can't! Mary Daly, so, well anyway, that's what they did.

- Wow.

- That's something about just being folks, you don't have to think pastorally, you can just go ahead and blast away whatever's bothering ya. And they did. So no, I preached a sermon that was basically a sermon that was on my heart at the moment. It was, yeah, didn't have anything to do with anything except, yeah, it wasn't all that stuff at all.

- So I'm sorry that I'm going in kind of slow motion about your question about feminism. I mean, I was, really educated by this congregation, and then started reading and paying attention. And then, these things happened to Susan. As my congregant.

- No, I was, I wasn't a congregant.

- Right, by that time you were a (mumbles). And so, by that time I had understood a bunch of what this meant to her. And what that was doing in such powerful and integrative fashion to who she was and to her own call. And so, therefore, me being able to, help folks who were learning about Sophia, that was easy and I got to also see how that affected them in a positive way. And so, and then I took a two year leave, of the pastorate because my wife, at that time, was Swiss, and we wanted our children to know her country, so we moved to Switzerland for two years. And I asked for a two year leave. And at that point I was just saying, I was, house husband, and a father at home. And I was doing a lot of work in my field, just cos I had enough time. But I also decided that for my own, spiritual life that I would simply pray all of the Sophia texts. And so I spent really two years, basically living within the Sophia texts, and came out of that time, deeply, deepened as a person. And then of course, by that time, society was having us all think about who we were as men and women, together. And so, it began to be clear to me that, my spiritual growth in that regard

belonged, and so that became really the heart of my own spiritual life, was my relationship to the Sophia texts. And so that also taught, because I knew how to teach texts, and how to pray texts. That also became my own spiritual journey in that regard. Became a, another resource in ministry and, theology, to help other people pray the Sophia texts. Became just a skill, out of my own, my own two year monastic relationship to her.

- May I ask, how did the Sophia texts, praying them, affect you spiritually?

- All kinds of ways. I mean it's a really big corpus. So there's just lots of stuff. So I would say, the way Scripture generally invades one's psyche and spirit, through metaphor and the like. But through me, and therefore who I am as a man. Who I am as a pastor, as a father, all those things, this was helpful material. And then, it also simply, and more or less replaced, any sense of loyalty I might have had. I mean, by and large I wasn't very interested in whether things were orthodox or not, but because I had a really deep relationship spiritually with texts, and my own belonging to God, I think more to God than to Jesus, but just spending those two years with those texts gave me a functional, deep, deeply emotional belonging to part of larger Christian belonging, that really replaced any, authority that might have existed orthodoxly. So it made me into a different kind of person and it made me belong to God at deeper levels. And here I think I would say, I think just what we would now talk about, the character of gender in our own self-understanding and belonging, came to the fore because, I was inside of a larger, set of texts that had really, genderful, imagery. And kind of, affective, emotional connection. And so I was just, and by that time I was, I'd been praying for quite a while, kind of Catholically with a lot of meditation and the like and stuff, just to live in that world, gave me nurture of, and challenge, but mostly nurture. So I would write poems as, as a part of my prayers, so I would meditate on a text, and then I would write poetry about it, not for anybody else, but just, for my claiming of it. Is that close to you--

- Yeah, that's very helpful, that's very helpful. I'm not remembering the exact wording, but you said something about, did you say something about the larger Christian belonging? What did you mean by that? There seems to be that sense of expansiveness that you were talking about too, and I wondered what you meant.

- So I, I think that's, you seem more profound at the end of the day. For me, what I meant about that stage is, so I had a kind of a ragged set of connections to Christianity. I was somewhat still evangelical, in a kind of, feeling-filled dimension, but by that time I was a Methodist clergyperson, and so the character of Methodist belonging had imposed itself on me, and seemed relatively open-ended. And not primarily doctrinal, but a lot of straight-up kind of Protestantism in mainline Protestantism, that I had, that I was pastoring people who were in that larger belonging. And then I'd been the mentee of a Roman Catholic cardinal. So, so, it was a kind of a haphazard set of belongings and had not a particular wholeness to it. So that's what I mean is, the larger Christian mass, that I was attached to.

- And Sophia helped to integrate that?

- Or replaced it.

- Or replaced it. Could you say more about that?

- I think, I mean the coherence of those texts, as prayer, gave me a spiritual center, rather than a diffuse set of connections to Christian-ness.

- Yeah, that is helpful, yeah. So how did the book evolve, out of all this?

- Actually, I think that two years of prayer, was, for me, one of the things I brought back, so it started really after Wheaton became--

- I don't, you know, was it after? We had this group going. We had this group that was not the church anymore. We gathered folks from the church, we gathered some who were interested and we gathered some other clergyfolks and some friends into a group that--

- Meeting every Sunday night.

- We met on Sunday evenings and we did--

- Was this when you were still at Calvary?

- Yeah.

- And after. We continued after too, for a couple of years.

- Between five and 20 people.

- And they came from a variety of places, it wasn't just, a few Calvary folks. Because by that time we'd done some workshops around and about, and in the larger Methodist arena, so we had some Methodists from other churches, were part of it, and clergy, and friends.

- We went to Grailville, shortly thereafter. That we can for them.

- And that's where the other--

- That's where we met--

- Marian Ronan.

- No, we didn't meet Mary in there.

- No, we didn't--



- Maybe Mary and Goddess there, or something like that.

- Mary and Goddess there. We'd done some kind of workshop there somewhere, and don't remember where anymore, but even invited Marian to come and respond to our stuff. And Marian said--

- This is a book.

- This is a book.

- Okay, okay, I see.

- And she hardly knew anything about Sophia at that time, but started work.

- And she'd already done a book, on liturgy and feminist literature, and we needed to do some.

- If I could switch to some of the questions about Re-Imagining. Well, this is important background. This is definitely related. So you didn't really have any connection, and Re-Imagining, could you say a little bit more about what yours was, a little bit of what Hal is, alright?

- Yeah, and I don't think I can remember my contact. But someone called or wrote me, and said, we know your work about Sophia, and we need somebody to write a description of her for the program. And, and so I wrote that, sent it to the person, whoever they were, whoever she was, and I never even, I never saw the program. So, all I know is that I wrote a couple of pages I think, for, introducing who Sophia was, that was represented as going in the program. Person thanked me, but, I don't even know whether it was in any program, and what was the program on. What program was, a liturgy program, or maybe the program was a larger program book, for the conference. That's, and so I wrote about Sophia, because, and I do remember, a little bit about, it must have been a phone conversation, because it was clear to me, this person did not know jack, about Sophia.

- Ah, really.

- And I thought, you better have somebody say something. And so, I said, and then she said, by the time that conversation was halfway over, she said, what is your itinerary?

- So she didn't initially call you to write something?

- No, she, it was about Sophia. I'm not sure whether she, I think it was a kind of inexact request, when it started.

- Like maybe she just wanted to know a little bit about Sophia.

- And it was that character of that conversation, that, as I sent it off to her, I thought, I don't know if this is gonna go anywhere.

- Yeah? Well, what do you, I assume you heard some about the 1993 conference. Do you know--

- Almost immediately after.

- What was your reaction to what you heard?

- It was reported in the Methodist Reporter. It was a national newspaper, reported very badly, very negatively, was Susan Morrison's picture in it, was like anything they could do to just slam us, they did. So it was a real nasty period in that newspaper's life. And, I had known about the conference, and I knew I couldn't go, cos it was November! Like the biggest time of the year, both programmatically and financial, I mean there's all kinds of ways, there's no way I can go on out there. And I remember thinking, oh, it's really too bad, I would really love to be there, but can't. And then, I think the next thing I heard was, seeing this picture, I think. And then people's response, because people of course got the newspaper. So, I said, you know, I wasn't there, I don't know much.

- And she was your bishop at that point.

- Yeah, she'd already been through stuff with us.

- And I saw it in the secular media. And, I remember, that, 11:30 PM news show--

- Nightline?

- Nightline, yeah, I remember seeing that. And, I remember thinking, oh, well finally some more people will get to know about Sophia. I mean, I remember being excited about the fact, I mean we, by that time, knew, how Sophia upset people. And so I remember being, happy that she was on the national scene. And we knew how she was powerful for people.

- I think, again, it's hard to remember exactly, but I think the first I heard, which is already negative, already attacking, and I thought, oh boy, Susan's in (drowned out by sniff) on the bishops. Got her hands full now, again. But more personally for her. And I remember thinking, and I'm not in it this time. So I had this very selfish thought. Oh, it's not me this time.

- Oh, but that is. But that is very interesting too, because, by that time, at least one of the books was out.

- At least? Oh heavens.

- Probably both.

- Not that one, but the first edition was out when I was still in Roxborough, in the 1990's.

- I think it was 1986, maybe?

- Something like that, yeah. 1890's.

- And the conference itself was--

- 1993.

- So, that was actually right in the middle of what I think of as the four or five year long heresy.

- It was actually at the waning, and it was the-- (everyone talking at once) It was the waning end of it though at that point. We'd already gone through all kind of crap, we'd already been through the charges, at that point.

- But, the next, see, there was a period of I think five years in which, our annual conference meeting, which is a regional meeting of Methodist, that every Methodist regional group has this as a meeting in the late spring. And every year, we would be, targeted in the motions, of our regional meeting, about, can we come out--

- Call this heresy.

- In other words, they were just the regional body of maybe 1000 people, who met for three days, and we were in the middle of it, cos we had to be there. So there were about a five year period in which, we, going to our annual conference, was knowing, that this was gonna be another round of a kind of a war against us. And that, after, and every year, the motions against us did not pass, but the year that, Re-Imagining happened, it did pass.

- Did it? Oh...

- Ain't that funny, I blocked that out.

- The motion was, to forbid any pastor from preaching Sophia in the worship.

- And that did pass.

- That did pass.

- Wow.

- But it was after, what Re-Imagining did, which was really wonderful, it made it national instead of this little, annual (mumble) was fighting. So that did pass, but then, what Re-Imagining did, which was a

wonderful, wonderful, wonderful thing, was that it got the bishops in the Methodist church to take it on. Because up til now they just kinda, didn't want it, poor Susan had been dragged through it. But other than she, the bishops as a whole hadn't had to take it on, and they did, and they wrote a--

- What did you think of the report?

- I thought it was pretty good. It wasn't perfect, it wasn't perfect by any means, but boy, it was like, okay, this is a legitimate Christian thought. This is not outside of Christianity, which was the basic thing it said.

- I felt like it was, better than any official response we'd had to that so far.

- Is that right, yeah.

- I mean I think the one thing that I didn't diddle with them about is, they said, well, Sophia or wisdom or whatever they called, I can't remember how they talked about her, it, was, this is not a Goddess. And they, very explicit. And you know, I never used Goddess language either, because I was too good of a pastor. But, I remember thinking, oh, come on, guys. It was mostly guys, it wasn't all guys, obviously. Susan was there, and there were other women. But I think that was the only place left on myself, saying, come on, you could have done a little bit better, but mostly it was good. This is Christian.

- They spent a year studying it.

- And it was clearly a response to Re-Imagining. I don't think it would have happened as long as it was just this little tempest in a teapot with us.

- So, on the one hand you had that resolution passed against you, but then there was, would you say overall that the effect was positive from Re-Imagining?

- No. I think, I think, our experience, topped off with Re-Imagining, basically quashed any chance of Sophia being a part of liturgy, in the church for a long, long time.

- Yeah, I would say, yeah. I felt like the combination of our, of the process against us, and all of the, and I mean, the Good News folks, that was a national, really, campaign against it. And then, Re-Imagining, it felt like, okay, now we are sort of officially blocked from a creative relationship with the mainstream church. I mean not because of us or because of them, but the result was that, I mean, so what did they call it, the IRD?

Both Women: IRD, yep.

- So they got in and they sort of won that battle.

- Yeah, I'm a lot more cursing, you know really well just what happened to the United Methodist women, and

so for our denomination, they really got slammed, and they fought back beautifully.

- Say some more about how they fought back, what you remember about that or what you thought of that?

- Well, I mean, it's all kind of, my overall impression now, years later, they fought back really well. They were strong, they were united, as an organization--

- Which I bet the United Methodists women.

- Yeah, and they, they published some stuff, and I think they even put out a video, it's my vague recollection, that they did that. But they really came back fighting. They, they were, as an organization, it's partly the United Methodist Church, and yeah.

- Did you ever hear about the Re-Imagining community being formed, or was it--

- I remember hearing about it. But it was only hearing about it, it was pretty vague.

- But I think, I think we were interested in a relationship, but, that was just kind of an idle thought.

- Yeah, sure, sure. How do you, because you experienced the backlash about Sophia, even before Re-Imagining did. And there was also the communion service that drew--

- That was part of it.

- Yeah, so how do you, looking at this now, account for what was going on, why this backlash?

- Women. Women's power. We talk about it.

- So this, addition, of (mumbles) that a little bit frankly, I think that piece, the authorship of Marian, is strong there. So I think we all three have different takes on that. But one of the things we say in that is that, well, as I said, maybe you said it first. So, in our region, first of all there was, we got, for the first time, a bishop who was a woman. Then Susan was, appointed as co-pastor at the, basically the cathedral church downtown of Methodism in Philadelphia.

- And what is that called again?

- Arch Street.

- Arch Street, okay--

- It's right by City Hall, it's like, very central.

- And in both of those cases, our regional body was, was having the, men, the men of all kinds, both lay and clergy felt, I mean, so that was terribly offensive to them, that both, now they have a basically, the main church that was representing the congress in many ways, and the bishop, were both women. And, and then, then, they voted on Sophia.

- I think that's where I'd like to jump in. Because the book had been published. Not the little lavender cover--

- The Future of Feminist Spirituality.

- That had been published years before that. When I arrived at my little congregation in Roxborough, white working class congregation, right, that book was already published, that was already out there.

- And they were happy to have your author.

- And it was part of my introduction. I mean, in the introductions, I was the author of this book. And I can remember meeting with this young man who was the lay leader, he'd written a book, a little history of that church, that congregation, something like that, and we actually talked a little bit about the fact, you know, so that was at the very, that was before I even got to that church in 1890, I don't do that, I think I must be older than I thought. 1987, would that have been? I don't know, I think 1987, yes, because, our former colleague wrote a, a book review of this book! So for the first one, Sophia, the Future of Feminist Spirituality, the whole thing, wrote a review of it for the United Methodist Reporter for our edition of the United Methodist Reporter, our local newspaper. Because we would get the first page, I think of the United Methodist Report, was our own region. And he wrote a book review of it! We had a book signing party. We invited the bishop and the cabinet and lots of our Methodist colleagues to come to that. It was well-received, people, it was fine, no problem, and, that was in 1987. I was a pastor in this little diddly-doodly church that nobody cared about! Fast forward. Then Susan Morrison was elected bishop in 1988. I was there, I actually helped getting her, I mean I was one of the people there, which was really exciting. I was selected, yes.

- She was an elected delegate, which means, one of the leaders of the congress.

- Right, so I was there. As a matter of fact I had at that point gotten into this elite organization, the very first woman elected into this organization because I'd written a book!

- And which organization are you talking about?

- This stupid little organization that now Hal's part of that he thinks is wonderful. (laughing) There's a whole story there, I can tell ya. We've got a lot later, I dropped out after a long time. But, anyway, I don't know if that's so much very important, except to say that at that point I think that they helped get me elected to the judicial--

- These are all the inside leading male pastors.

- Yeah, they were all the big shots.

- And they chose her to be in their secret organization.

- I got calls from different people saying, you gotta say yes because you're the first woman, we've had fights about it, blah blah blah, and I gotta do it. So, okay, so I get in that. And then I'm elected to the jurisdictional conference, I'm sure because they all said, well, gotta get her in, gotta have one woman. All this good Methodist, make sure we've got one of everybody. You know, (laughs). To this day that's still a pattern. So I was, and so she was elected, this was 1988, okay. And then a year or so later, I started having trouble with this lay leader in my congregation. He actually reads the book.

- And, one of the prompts of his is that we were on the front page of the Enquirer.

- Oh right, that's right. There was that!

- And you were on the front page because--

- Because it's a Sunday, a Sunday in choir--

- A Sophia group.

- I see, I see.

- The religion reporter of the, or one of these reporters of the choir called to ask about, he was doing a piece on, Wicca, or small, women's groups. But part was Wicca, part of it was Wicca.

- Yeah, it was basically, women's religious groups.

- Yeah, and so anyway, I was talking about how important it was to women to be together, and the kind of the, try to explain a little bit, some of the rhythms of a group like that, and the church, liturgy would look, and finally I said, why don't you just come? You could see. And he came, he brought a little reporter, I mean, like a photographer, and we ended up, we landed, this was in February, I remember now, it's all coming back. We landed on the front page of the Sunday Enquirer.

- And that's what--

- That's when the shit hit the fan.

- Yes, because he wasn't experiencing this in the church, it was yeah. And then there was a Good News article about this?

- Well he then, wrote, he wrote a piece, for the United Methodist Reporter that was an ad hominem attack, accusing me of heresy.

- And then a lot of people started attacking us, including Good News.

- But that finally, even that didn't go very far until I was appointed to Arch Street. And then the clergy, the white male clergy got on board. But up until that point they'd been kinda, but when that happened, there was change. That's when they started having, that's when the Jesus Christ is Lord taskforce came on board, that's when they began having, Sunday evening, it was kind of like witch hunts, they would give, they had this big--

- Rallies.

- They had big big rallies, anti-Sophia rallies.

- Who would have them, and where?

- Jesus Christ is Lord taskforce.

- But it was the more conservative, the conservative white men clergy that really powered it.

- Now, just want to clear the chronology, how about this book? Did this book come under, had that caused controversy when it came out, or it was--

- That one?

- The Wisdom Speaks book.

- Well the Wisdom Speaks came out in the middle of it, actually. Wisdom Speaks came out when I was still in my little church in Roxborough, I remember holding it up. I just got it and I said, I wasn't gonna, I actually weathered the storm at that church pretty well.

- Because that, lay leader, did most damage after you left.

- Well, he was doing what he could do while I was there, but, I could talk to people, and I could show them the Bible, I was a good pastor! I was able to do some teaching and--

- This was at the Roxborough church. Okay, yeah, yeah.

- We were able to weather it, and so, when it came out, I held it up and said, look at the book! No, I don't think, I don't remember, but maybe it did. I mean it was at that point that there were liturgies. It wasn't just



theology, which that book was.

- That's what I'm wondering, do you think it, makes a difference that as long as it's an academic book it's okay, and then when it starts to be in liturgy and ritual that's when people get upset?

- That's what they said. I mean they literally said to us, oh, this is an academic book, and that's okay, but--

- But you can't be messing with the people--

- You can't mess with the church.

- You can't mess with people! As long as you just think about 'em on yourselves.

- Literally, I mean some of the most, vicious attacks would always say, you can think it. But you can't do it. Don't tell us about sermons and worships and (trails off).

- This is a little foggy, I don't remember when I went to Drew.

- Was it 1990?

- Arch Street, or whether I was still--

- Was that 1991, does that sound right?

- I think it's in here...

- I just read it and I don't, but I'm not positive--

- I lived in Arch Street then, so that would've been after I had moved.

- So, so you were invited as a guest preacher to do the communion service?

- Yeah, they had the Nell Morton lectures. I did a lecture there.

- I see.

- What I did, was I did the lecture, the Nell Morton lecture, and I did, a Sophia lecture I think, one evening, and then the next day was chapel service, and Heather, invited me to preach at that service, and I preached a Sophia sermon, because she wanted me to. And she then put the liturgy together, so a Sophia liturgy that she put together, that was hers.

- In the middle of the grievance process in March 1993, Susan presented the Nell Morton lecture.

- Oh it was '93, okay, I was wrong. Good for you!

- And the annual lecture at Drew Theological School.

- Okay, thank you.

- Yeah, and it's a shame, it's really a shame what happened, then did, it was so nasty.

- Tom Soden. Did you have any idea that that was gonna happen?

- He was so perverted, it was so perverted, now that's the one where things got totally perverted. He did not listen to that sermon at all. Took it, it was not what I said even. But, I didn't know him, and I guess he--

- We had--

- He was in the back of the chapel, they told him--

- He have one, I think when you went, we knew about him.

- Anyway, but I remember that the other women on the faculty were really pleased with what I'd done because I had done such a nice, a nice pastoral way! And they were like, Korean students who were really excited, I remember the response from the students! They were really excited. Because I pulled it together! And it wasn't just out there somewhere, it was really pulled together. And he just blasted.

- So was your first clue when it came out, the article came out in Christianity Today, that's the first time that you knew? Yeah. And then what did that lead to for you?

- I was already in the middle of stuff. It didn't change anything. I remember going to this, the phi beta meeting, I had a phi beta, this group of--

- Phi beta kappa? No no no. Phi beta.

- This was pretentious--

- Just pretentious, anyway. But, I remember going to that meeting which happened, a day or two after that article came out, and just grumbling to people about it. It's totally untrue! But that's when Susan Morrison got in trouble, and I remember being asked to go defend, Sophia theology in the neighboring annual conference. She is bishop, was bishop over two annual conferences. And she said she couldn't do it, she simply couldn't do it, there were people there were still vicious, so I did it for her.

- This is for, four months before the conference--

- Yes, yes.

- Was that close? It felt like, by the time that came, it was like, the forest was on fire (laughing). I guess because, we must have, the charges must have been dropped by that point, and Susan was taking them on.

- So it sounds like she was supportive of you?

- She was, she was, yeah.

- And you were supportive of her too.

- Yeah.

- She was getting attacked as well.

- Well, and then she was brought up on charges.

- When she dropped the charges against us, then she was brought up on charges.

- And that process lasted about three times as long as ours.

- Really.

- And frankly, she let us know that she needed to take some distance from us. She was, at three crucial points, she knew where she stood. But she told us, she had to protect herself somewhat. We were glad for that.

- Sure, yes. And who decides, who decides the charges that were brought against her?

- Well this is all, this is against her. The charges against her were because, were for not fulfilling her obligation as the teacher. Teaching, allowing folks teaching. Now that was the charge, and there's a larger body in the jurisdiction, I was gonna go judicial, and jurisdictional mixed up. We have--

- It's basically the entire northeast.

- It's the northeast part of the United States, including West Virginia, so Western Virginia kind of little hanging on there, to the northeast. And they had a body that, decided charges that came, I guess, I don't know, Hal is it just bishops or what? But anyway, the body there that reviewed the case. And this was the...

- I wanna, be respectful of time here too, I don't wanna take too long, but yeah, I wondered if we could just move quickly to the future, where do you, the evolution of Sophia? One question I had is, do you think--

- I'm gonna go to the bathroom--

- Sure, of course! Should I stop it now?