

Marie Elizabeth Robinson (nee Taubman) (1925–2014): Extraordinary in the Ordinary

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Many thanks to the Robinson family, the Judd family, Anita Barnett, Anne South, Margo Watson, Jan Livingston, Bishop Donald Cameron, Laura Rademaker, and to Kaitlyn MacDonnell for transcribing Marie's many handwritten sermons.

To many, Marie Elizabeth Robinson (1925–2014), lived her life as a mother and wife in the shadow of her husband Donald William Bradley Robinson (born 1922). Donald’s various offices, including Vice-Principal of Moore Theological College (1952–1972), Bishop of Parramatta (1973–1982), and Archbishop of the Sydney Anglican Diocese (1982–1993), allowed him extraordinary formal ecclesial influence in Sydney and Australia, and significant influence in seminaries and churches worldwide through his academic contributions to the field of theology, in particular, the doctrine of the church. For Anita Barnett, however, Marie ‘carved out for herself a role of far greater influence than Don had’.¹ It is beyond the scope of this essay to assess this claim, and indeed to do so might be impossible as Donald and Marie served God in such different ways. Yet what can be said is that in those ‘ordinary’ arenas in which Marie focused her energies, leadership abilities, and her first-class mind—namely, in raising her children, supporting her husband, teaching God’s Word, and the edification of other Christians—an extraordinary influence was had.

Marie Elizabeth Robinson was born on June 10, 1925. Her mother was Mary Taubman; her siblings were Elsie, Claude and Ken. Marie was baptised as an infant by Archdeacon Wade at St James Anglican Church in Croydon, Sydney where she was later confirmed.² Claude was the Rector’s Warden at St James, directed Sunday School and, according to Marie, had ‘very badly wanted to be a Clergyman himself when he was growing up, but he felt responsible for his parents, and so he stayed in the firm... to support his mother, his father had died quite young’.³ He did, however, ‘do a lot of preaching’ as a Lay Reader, according to Marie.⁴

Whilst Marie’s early life was a happy one, it was affected by significant grief. When Marie was ten, her mother died unexpectedly whilst serving as a ‘house parent’ at an Evangelical Union house party. In one of Marie’s sermons she wrote about her experience at the time:

I had to face the reality of death—separation from the most significant person in my life at that time. Death and sorrow are as real for a person who believes in God as to anyone. I knew I would see her again in heaven. But that would be at the end of my life! How could I possibly live the rest of my life without her? My father, my grandmother, and my sister became increasingly important. But, most of all, Jesus was present with me—closer than anyone else, wherever I went, and whomever I was with, He was there.⁵

Marie told her eldest son Martin that at her mother’s funeral, ‘her grandmother solemnly admonished her: “Now, Marie, you are not to cry!”’. ‘Mum explained to me’, said Martin, ‘that this was so deeply embedded in her that she always found it impossible to weep at funerals’.⁶

Recalling her conversion to Christianity, Marie remembered as a young child having a consciousness of sin, and asking her sister Elsie, who was ten years her senior, ‘how I could be good like her’. Elsie answered: ‘Ask the Lord Jesus to come into your heart’. Marie believed this to be ‘a wonderful answer’ because Elsie had pointed her to Christ, rather than urging Marie to place confidence in her deeds.⁷ In her early years as a Christian, a mission was conducted by the Irish missionary Monica Farrell who was brought out to Australia by T. C. Hammond, and she came to St James, Croydon—the church that Marie and her family were attending. Marie stated that Monica had ‘made a big impression’ on her at a young age. Marie described Monica as ‘very forceful and interesting’; ‘a very good teacher of the faith’.

Marie received her schooling at Meriden in Strathfield, Sydney where she was appointed Head Girl in her final year.⁸ Following her schooling years, Marie spent a year studying Latin and Music at

¹ Anita Barnett, Personal Interview, May 3, 2016.

² Marie Robinson, Personal Interview, interview by Marcia Cameron, March 11, 2008.

³ Robinson, Personal Interview.

⁴ Robinson, Personal Interview.

⁵ Marie Robinson, ‘Maroubra Ladies Fellowship’, in *Marie Robinson Talks*, vol. 2, 1989, 154.

⁶ Martin Robinson, ‘Eulogy for Marie Elizabeth Robinson (nee Taubman)’ (St Swithuns, Pymble, January 11, 2014), 3.

⁷ Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Marcia Cameron.

⁸ Robinson, ‘Eulogy for Marie Elizabeth Robinson (nee Taubman)’, 1-2; Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Marcia Cameron.

a private college in Mosman where she focused primarily on improving her skills as a pianist, and then begun studies in Arts, majoring in Psychology at the University of Sydney in 1944. After one year of Psychology, through the encouragement of her friend Pat Mason, Marie then transferred her studies to the field of Anthropology under Professor A. P. Elkin, otherwise known as ‘the father of Australian anthropology’.⁹ Marie was awarded First Class Honours degree for her studies at the university.¹⁰

During her time at Sydney University, Marie was also thoroughly involved in the life of the Evangelical Union and became the female Vice-President in 1946 (her future husband Donald Robinson was the President that same year).¹¹ It was Marie’s involvement in the Evangelical Union, as well as her study of English, that afforded Marie the opportunity to get to know Donald William Bradley Robinson well. Though Donald had commenced his studies two years earlier than Marie, they had been interrupted by World War II in which Donald had ‘enlisted in the A.I.F., first as a private, then as a commissioned officer while a member of the Intelligence Corps in New Guinea’.¹² On his return from the war Donald and Marie found themselves in the same year at Sydney University, studying English together and serving together in the Evangelical Union. They became engaged in October 1946, and announced their engagement in November that same year. Seven months later, on June 2, 1947, Donald left for England in order to undergo further studies at Cambridge. Marie recalled him leaving by ship on a very wet day, and throwing paper ribbons from the deck as the ship departed from the dock. Donald completed a Bachelor of Arts at Queens’ College, Cambridge, where he sat his theological Tripos.¹³

As Donald continued his studies in Cambridge, Marie—having graduated in January 1948—travelled to the Northern Territory with her father in May that year. Her father was, at the time, the ‘Secretary for the Aboriginals’ for the Church Missionary Society, and Marie saw Claude’s invitation to join him in the Northern Territory as an opportunity for her, with her anthropological training, to learn about Aboriginal culture and their family structures. Marie travelled with her father to three different mission stations: Groote Eylandt, Roper River, and Angurugu. Professor A. P. Elkin had advised Marie to note down some of the family relationships of those whom she interviewed, which she did, building family trees of those whom she met.¹⁴

Intending only to stay for a matter of weeks and to return back to Sydney with her father, Marie ended up staying beyond her father’s visit because the wife of J. B. Montgomery who was involved in running the mission house at Roper River became ill and had to leave. Marie stayed for five months, cooking meals for the missionaries and members of the Aboriginal community, and assisting the missionaries as they taught various skills to the indigenous peoples such as sewing for the women, and cattle raising for the men.¹⁵ Whilst only five months long, Marie’s experience in the Northern Territory provided her with an enduring care and concern for the needs of indigenous Australians. Her daughter Anne recalls Marie showing her pictures of her time in the Northern Territory when she was a young child, educating Anne on the culture of the Aboriginal people.¹⁶

By 1949, Marie had informed Donald (via his mother) that she would return her engagement ring to him should he decide to stay additional years in Cambridge to continue his studies. Thus Donald returned to Sydney to marry Marie. According to Bishop Donald Cameron, ‘two strong minds and winning personalities created a home which was both a model and a place of welcome for many’.¹⁷

Anne South remarked that Marie was ‘absolutely devoted to Robbie’ as his wife.¹⁸ In one of

⁹ Marie Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Tom Judd and Anne Robinson, 2007.

¹⁰ Robinson, ‘Eulogy for Marie Elizabeth Robinson (nee Taubman)’, 2; Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Marcia Cameron, 4.

¹¹ Robinson, ‘Eulogy for Marie Elizabeth Robinson (nee Taubman)’, 2.

¹² Sherlock Charles, ‘A True Son of Sydney Diocese Retires’, *Church Scene* 648/5 (January 29, 1993): 9

¹³ Marie Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Tom Judd and Anne Robinson, 2007.

¹⁴ Marie Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Tom Judd and Anne Robinson, 2007.

¹⁵ Marie Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Tom Judd and Anne Robinson, 2007.

¹⁶ Marie Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Tom Judd and Anne Robinson, 2013.

¹⁷ Charles, ‘A True Son of Sydney Diocese Retires’, 9.

¹⁸ Anne South, Personal Interview, May 1, 2016.

Marie's sermons she reflected: 'I believe that my sense of life-long commitment to follow the Lord Jesus helped a great deal when [Donald and I] married with the expectation that after his studies he would be a minister'.¹⁹ The first year of their married life saw them travel to Cambridge so that Donald could complete his study before taking up a curacy at St Matthew's, Manly, after being ordained Deacon in 1950, followed by a second curacy at St Philip's Church Street after being ordained Presbyterian in 1951. Donald was then appointed to a full-time senior lecturing position at Moore Theological College before becoming Vice Principal in 1954.

Moore College became the environment in which Marie lived out her role as mother to four young children: Martin, Peter, Anne, and Mark. Marie had a very strong sense of her responsibility as a mother under God and viewed the role as primary teacher of her children as a noble task. This can be seen in a sermon on 'the role of women at home' that Marie presented to a women's Bible study at St Matthias, Paddington, in 1986. Referring to Paul's exhortation to Titus that he encourage older women to 'teach what is good', she writes:

Since Paul previously has forbidden public teaching (1 Tim 2:12), this must mean private teaching and example and refers to ministering in the house. Within this sphere, experienced Christian women have throughout the history of the church performed invaluable service in the cause of Christ by their example and teaching.²⁰

Marie's concern as a mother was that her children might not only grow up to be mature members of society, but most of all, that they would grow to know and serve the Lord Jesus. In a speech presented to the parental body at Trinity School on February 25, 1988 she wrote:

We as mothers have vital role in providing the security, care and support for our sons to grow and mature into useful, balanced and confident citizens of our great country... More importantly we pray that they will become citizens of heaven, and participate in the life of God, creator, redeemer, sanctifier.²¹

Marie's understanding of the centrality of family life, and the importance of harmonious family and societal relationships was grounded in her theology of the Trinity. In the same speech she goes on to state:

...the fellowship that constitutes the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the basis of the fellowship within the family, within the home, within society. Where God is truly honoured and worshipped, where we live as forgiven sinners able to forgive each other, relationships can be constantly healed and strengthened.²²

Marie's fierce commitment to the needs of her children was very evident to those around her, especially in her care for her son Mark, who was born with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a rare genetic disorder, and who also developed severe degenerative scoliosis. He required regular visits to hospital as a child and into his adult life. Marie writes about her struggle over Mark's illness in one of her sermons:

Many of you may know the shock of having a child who is not physically normal. The shock to one's pride. You know the prayers for healing that aren't answered in the way you would like. You know the guilt that attacks such mothers—this is my fault—fortunately I came to see that this was fake guilt. You know the physical and mental strain of rearing such a child. And do you know also the thanksgiving for the privilege of knowing and being with such a wonderful person and through that experience being taught by God invaluable lessons?²³

¹⁹ Robinson, 'Maroubra Ladies Fellowship', 156.

²⁰ Marie Robinson, 'St Matthias Paddington Women's Bible Study. Titus 2:3-5.', in *Marie Robinson Talks*, vol. 2, 25-26.

²¹ Marie Robinson, 'Trinity Grammar School', in *Marie Robinson Talks*, vol. 2, 1988, 120.

²² Marie Robinson, 'Trinity Grammar School', 121-22.

²³ Marie Robinson, 'My Life as Wife, Mother & Bishop's Wife', in *Marie Robinson Talks*, vol. 3, 1991, 22.

Mark's various health needs took up a significant amount of Marie's time, and shaped her decisions concerning what other commitments she could accept. When asked later in life whether she ever wanted to engage in academia, Marie replied: 'I don't think I had any time for it... looking after the children, especially with Mark needing a lot of attention'.²⁴ Despite the close attention and care that Mark's disability demanded of Marie, Anne South noted that Marie was able to balance her care for Mark with her care for all of her four children, and was 'very concerned about each of them', recognising their individuality and catering for their individual personalities, interests, and needs.²⁵

Marie also spent her time at Moore College extending care and fellowship to faculty wives and student wives. Anita Barnett met Marie when her then fiancé Paul Barnett was a student at Moore College, and became more acquainted with Marie once Paul became a member of the faculty. Anita, who was staying at the Moore College residence 'But-Har-Gra' at Croydon Park, recalled feeling quite isolated. She remarked: 'I was the only [faculty wife] out there with twelve of the youngest students [who] were out there. And it was very lonely, because Paul would come home and have dinner with the students and then be with the students until night.' Anita noted that Marie was 'very sensitive' to this situation, and would often have her visit her home in Newtown and would visit Anita in Croydon Park. Anita remarked that she 'always came away from [Marie] feeling uplifted, and if ever she ever came to visit, it was just such a treat. She came to visit and pray with you and care about you.'²⁶

After twenty years at Moore College, a new season of ministry life began for Marie and Donald when Donald was consecrated Bishop in Parramatta 1973. The transition from Moore College to being a bishop's wife was an extremely difficult one for Marie. Not only did Marie leave behind the community where she and Donald had conducted family and ministry life for over twenty years, but a division among Moore College staff over the divorce of one faculty member resulted in Marie and Donald being ostracised by many whom they had called friends shortly before they left college. This had come as a result of their decision to visit the wife of the faculty member who had left her husband. Marie was deeply hurt by this response, and her daughter Anne recalls Marie informing her later in life that she was quite depressed in this time.²⁷ Years later Marie was, however, able to identify good things the Lord had brought to her in this time. In a sermon to ministry wives at post-ordination training at Caringbah on September 7, 1989, Marie wrote:

Leaving college after my husband had been on staff for twenty years was strange. It was more traumatic than I had anticipated. I lost family, friends, role, way of life all in one hit. With many supports gone you have to find new ones. It brought my husband and me closer together. With only one child left we went from six to three. I shared more in his work. Telephone calls with praying friends were very valuable.²⁸

One of these praying friends was Anne South, whose husband Jim was Area Dean of Emu Plains. Recognising that Marie's role as bishop's wife was 'totally new for her' and seeking to encourage Marie in this role, Anne 'got a group of girls together to encourage her'. Within this group, Marie began to discuss different options for women's ministry in their region.²⁹ Marie soon settled into her new pattern of ministry life, and Marie and Anne organised yearly regional lunches at St John's, Parramatta, for all the ministers' wives in the region, which later moved to an evening meeting at Baulkham Hills to cater for working women. Marie also became a confidant to many women who were struggling in ministry life, or personally. Her discretion became known among ministry wives, and this enabled many to come to Marie knowing that she could be trusted with what would be disclosed. Anne South remembers one occasion where a minister's wife was 'sobbing and sobbing on our back veranda at Emu Plains' because of her husband's unfaithfulness. Anne recalled: 'I asked

²⁴ Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Marcia Cameron, 6.

²⁵ South, Personal Interview.

²⁶ Barnett, Personal Interview.

²⁷ Anne Robinson, Personal Interview, April 26, 2016.

²⁸ Marie Robinson, 'Post Ordination Training - Wives Caringbah', in *Marie Robinson Talks*, vol. 2, 2016, 164.

²⁹ South, Personal Interview.

[the woman] if I could share it with Marie and I told her that if I shared it with Marie that that's as far as it would go... but there had to be some sort of a confrontation'. Anne remarked that on such occasions Marie's support 'was received very warmly because of her genuine humility and concern. And she never ever came across as being a busy-body... She would just gently talk with folk.' Similarly, Anita Barnett remarked that Marie 'was very loyal—to Don and to you. She didn't talk about what you shared with her.'³⁰

Over the following nine years, in addition to her discretion, Marie also became known among ministry wives in the region of Parramatta for her approachability and pastoral care for those wives who were struggling. Margo Watson, whose husband Peter was a minister in the region at the time Donald was Bishop of Parramatta, and who would also later become Bishop of Parramatta in 1989, Bishop of South Sydney in 1993 and Archbishop of Melbourne from 2000–2005, recalled a time when the wife of a newly ordained deacon who was serving 'in an outlying Western Parish' called Marie 'in desperation' over 'an insurmountable problem in the Parish'. On receiving the call, Marie replied: 'Come over for lunch and let's talk and pray about it'.³¹

Prayer was always priority for Marie. Marie would meet and pray with Lady Patricia Loane, wife of Sir Marcus Loane who was Archbishop of Sydney (1966–1982) and Primate of Australia, every Friday when Donald became Archbishop. Anita Barnett and Anne South both noted that prayer was what one always did with Marie when one met with her.³² Her commitment to prayer was also evident in her home. Marie's daughter Anne recalls family morning prayers that took place every morning as Donald would pray through the collects of the day.³³ Marie was not only prayerful herself, but in her sermons she would regularly exhort others to prayer with a clear vision of the importance of one's submission to God's will, whatever the cost. When speaking at St John's, Parramatta, on the occasion of the Women's World Day of Prayer on March 3, 1989, Marie stated:

The answer to prayer is not always as desirable as it might seem. We may pray for patience and find that God answers by giving us suffering. We may pray for the world to be saved and find ourselves in [ministry] to lepers. We may pray for God's will to be done, and find ourselves on a cross. The answers of God to prayer do not always come in the way we expect; sometimes they cost the one, who receives God's blessing, what may seem a terrible price. This need not surprise us. The virtues of Christ can be given only to those who want them sincerely enough to receive them at any cost.³⁴

On April 1, 1982, Donald was elected Archbishop of the Sydney Anglican Diocese following the retirement of Archbishop Marcus Loane. Donald would serve in this role for eleven years until his retirement in 1993. Marie's role as wife of the Archbishop opened up opportunities for her to speak at the speech nights of Anglican schools such as Trinity, Barker, and St Luke's Grammar, bishops' wives conferences, the National Council of Women, the National Board of Education, the Lambeth (Wives) Conference, Student Representative Council supporters meetings, post-ordination training events for ministers' wives in the Sydney Diocese, the Women's Pioneer Society, parish women societies, and an Anglican Board of Mission annual auxiliary meeting.

Despite never undergoing any formal theological training, Marie's first-class inquiring mind, deep love of God's Word, strong Christian convictions, learnedness, and her ability to speak appropriately into a variety of settings are evident in the content of her 74 sermons which she handwrote in notebooks between the years 1975–92. Marie presented the majority of these sermons at Mothers' Union meetings as Diocesan President of Mothers' Union in Sydney in the years 1975–1980 and again in 1986–1989, in addition to the speaking opportunities that her role as Mrs Archbishop afforded her. Whilst never having studied biblical languages formally, Marie would often expound on how the original meaning of a word or the grammar of the Hebrew or Greek

³⁰ Barnett, 'Personal Interview'.

³¹ Margo Watson, 'Retirement Farewell Speech for Marie Robinson', January 19, 1993, 1.

³² South, Personal Interview; Barnett, 'Personal Interview'.

³³ Anne Robinson, Personal Interview.

³⁴ Marie Robinson, 'Women's World Day of Prayer', in *Marie Robinson Talks*, vol. 2, 1986, 146.

contributed to an understanding of a biblical concept or text. Also present in her sermons was a sophisticated doctrine of Christ, the church, union with Christ, the sacraments, soteriology, and the Trinity. In a sermon given at Mothers' Union's 51st Birthday Luncheon on June 19, 1986 on the topic of 'fellowship', Marie's doctrine of the believer's union with Christ and its implications for the doctrine of the church and its sacraments is evident:

The ways in which the Christian shares in Christ can be seen in Paul's epistles in these terms: to die with Christ; to live with Christ; be crucified with Christ; suffer with Christ; be glorified with Christ; buried with; be made to sit with; a joint heir with; raised with; quickened with; to reign with... Christian fellowship then is primarily an upward link. But because we are identified with Christ, because we have this upward link, we are united with everyone else who is in the same bond. We demonstrate this when we come to the Holy Communion and share in the one loaf and one cup. The togetherness of Christians who come together in this way is much deeper than any mere camaraderie (1 Cor 10:16, 17).³⁵

In partnership with Marie's first-class mind, a number of factors contributed to the sophistication of Marie's theology. First, the teaching that she received from many Moore College faculty members who would preach at St Barnabas, Broadway, when Marie and Donald were parishioners provided Marie with a clear and developed theology.³⁶ Secondly, when Mark was old enough to go to pre-school and later when Marie had more evenings alone after Donald had become bishop, Marie likely utilised her time to read and develop her own theological understandings and competencies in biblical languages. Marie's grandson Andrew Judd recalls her using any spare time she had to read.³⁷ Thirdly, Marie's theology developed through her discussions with Donald. According to Marie's son-in-law, Stephen Judd, 'Don and Marie were talkers' and 'it was most certainly not discussing the kids' schooling and real estate prices'.³⁸

Donald's appointment as Archbishop also opened up opportunities for both Marie and Donald to associate with dignitaries. Marie's personal diary of 1992 opens: '1992 is the last year of Don's term as Archbishop of Sydney. The year begun with the visit of the President of USA George Bush. We were invited to have lunch with him and Mrs Bush on board MU John Bradman III on Sydney Harbour.'³⁹ Marie also met Queen Elizabeth II and 'had a couple of meals with her' on board the Britannia.⁴⁰ Marie enjoyed entertaining dignitaries as well as the constant entertaining of guests—especially bishops and their wives—which took place at Bishops court during Donald's term as Archbishop. Marie stated:

I loved the entertainment side, and being able to do as much as I could on personal level in that area. I liked having groups out at Bishops court. Groups of 30 different Deaneries and their wives. I suppose I concentrated on that side rather than getting into any committees or anything apart from Mothers' Union.⁴¹

Marie did not want to be intrusive during bishops' meetings and was often in the background at such occasions as she served food and drink to the bishops. Yet the selflessness of her hospitality in these moments was evident to Margo Watson even when the form of her hospitality may have been at odds with some of the previous traditions which took place in Bishops court:

While I was helping Marie host some promotional Vision for Growth Luncheons at Bishops court some years back, Marie was concerned for the many busy and important business men she felt would prefer something stronger than fruit juice

³⁵ Marie Robinson, 'St Andrew's Lane Cove M.U. 51st Birthday Luncheon', in *Marie Robinson Talks*, vol. 2, 1986, 52-53.

³⁶ Anne Robinson, Personal Interview.

³⁷ Andrew Judd, Personal Correspondence, 2016.

³⁸ Stephen Judd, Personal Correspondence, 2016.

³⁹ Marie Robinson, Personal Diary, 1992, 1.

⁴⁰ Robinson, Interview with Marie Robinson, Interview by Marcia Cameron, 11 March 2008, 8.

⁴¹ Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Marcia Cameron, March 11, 2008, 6.

with their aperitif. I suspect alcohol had been rarely served at Bishops court. She slipped out and bought some sherry which she suggested I should ‘put to the back of the tray’ when serving pre-dinner drinks.⁴²

In her ministry to bishops’ wives as Mrs Archbishop, Marie would host Bishops’ Wives Luncheons at Bishops court once a month, and Marie would often expound on the Bible at those luncheons. Anita Barnett recalls:

She had just a lovely way of opening the Bible... it was part of being so clever that you can show that you are not clever. She would open the Bible and talk about it as if God was just sitting there, and he was so close to her. It was just a real honour to have been there.⁴³

Anne South recalls one occasion where Marie’s graciousness as Mrs Archbishop was expressed during a ‘Clergy Wives Conference’ in Gilbulla. Anne and Marie were in a discussion group together and Anne knew that one of the ministry wives in the group ‘was just fed up with ministry—just hated it’, and ‘knew that this girl would be just jack-blunt about it’. In Marie’s presence the woman proclaimed: ‘College never prepares you for the real world. And I think ministry just gives me the s**ts.’ To this Marie calmly responded: ‘You’re obviously going through some really tough times’.⁴⁴

Marie’s experience as wife of the Archbishop had its difficulties and Marie felt the weight of these personally. In 1990 she wrote: ‘The challenge to follow wherever Jesus led us took us through some wonderful experiences and some difficult times—and still does’. The forthcoming two years, however, was perhaps the most trying period Marie had experienced in her ministry life since their departure from Moore College twenty years earlier. Donald’s involvement in disputes concerning the ordination of women as Presbyters, and the slurs and attacks that Donald received for his position, from the wider Anglican Communion in Australia as well as in the media, was a cause of great emotional strain for Marie. Despite Donald’s strong stance against the ordination of women Presbyters in the Anglican Church in Australia, in November 1992 the General Synod passed a clarification canon which allowed for the ordination of women as Presbyters in certain diocese, although not Sydney.⁴⁵

The intensity of the debate concerning the ordination of women as Presbyters in the Anglican Church in Australia at the time—or at least the perceived or presented intensity of this debate—is reflected in an article titled ‘A Hard Man of God’, published on Saturday, December 12, 1992. The article states: ‘[Archbishop Robinson] will leave behind an internal crisis so profound that it compares with the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century’ and, in contrast to the outpour of appreciation of Donald and Marie at Donald’s retirement,⁴⁶ the article accused Donald of being stubborn, lacking in empathy or concern for the individual, a ‘hard man’, power-hungry, and being ‘incapable of genuine debate’.⁴⁷

⁴² Watson, ‘Retirement Farewell Speech for Marie Robinson’, 3.

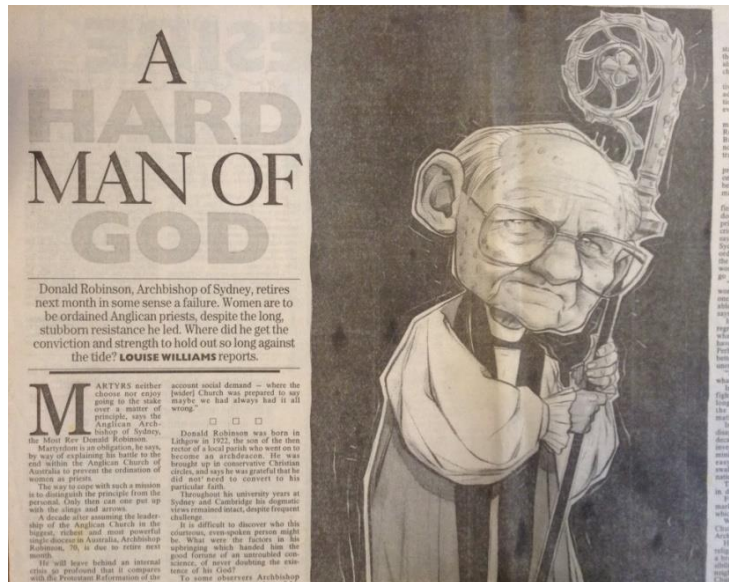
⁴³ Barnett, Personal Interview.

⁴⁴ South, Personal Interview.

⁴⁵ James Morrison, ‘Retiring Archbishop Pines for Harmony in God’s House’, *The Weekend Australian*, 1993, 30–31, 7.

⁴⁶ One article reads: ‘Archbishop Robinson, perhaps the most personally loved bishops of his time, brings a most significant period of ministry to an end in the next few days... his distinctive experience, scholarly ability and “personableness” point to an opportunity for strategic work in addition to the personal... Dr Robinson has the ability to condense issues, and a close knowledge of the biblical text, and Anglican formularies, which is possibly un-matched on the Australian scene.’ Charles, ‘A True Son of Sydney Diocese Retires’, 9.

⁴⁷ Louise Williams, ‘A Hard Man of God’, *Spectrum: The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 12, 1992, 34.



In her personal diaries Marie rarely disclosed her feelings on any personal or ministerial matter whether positive or negative and instead provided descriptive details of her movements. Yet in the year of 1992, her diaries contain unusual glimpses of the extent to which the tensions surrounding the ordination of women as Presbyters affected her personally. Marie reports on January 2, 1992: ‘Don had to meet with his assistant bishop and chancellor because of Dean Dowling announcing he would ordain 11 women to the priesthood in February without waiting for a General Synod Canon’.⁴⁸ A couple of pages later she states: ‘feeling very heavy hearted about the whole women’s ordination issue which hangs like a heavy blanket over us, worse than the Sydney humidity’.⁴⁹ And again: ‘There is constant agro concerning Don’s way over the ordination of women issue... It has all been a bit much’.⁵⁰ Not only did the negative response of the media and of the wider Anglican Communion of Australia impact her, but Anne South recalls moments when ministry wives who disagreed with Donald would approach Marie saying ‘it must be so awful for you being married to a man [who]... you know, [feels] how Robbie feels’. Though, according to Anne, these moments ‘weighed very heavily on her’, Marie ‘wouldn’t talk about it much’, but rather would call to pray about it with Anne when she needed.⁵¹

Faultlessly loyal to Donald, it was unknown to all what Marie’s personal opinions were on the matter of the ordination of women as Presbyters. Other than Marie’s discretion, the differences of opinion within her own family on this matter appeared to be another motive for Marie’s silence. Fifteen years after the dispute, when asked for her views on the ordination of women, Marie responded: ‘I think... I try to steer clear of that really. Don is very strongly against it, Annie [Marie’s daughter] on the other hand is very strongly for it. And I just felt I didn’t want to be in that. I just didn’t think it would help at all if I took any sort of side’.⁵² Despite remaining cautious in her own disclosure on the matter, Marie’s further responses in this same interview suggest that she may well have held an alternate viewpoint to her husband. When asked a general question concerning how she viewed her work in relation to Donald’s, Marie answered:

Supportive, I tried to... when you asked about the ordination of women I tried to back-off from having anything to do with them, and he had his point of view and he had his role to play, and I don’t think it was... I don’t think it’s fair to... well I don’t like to be confrontational, I don’t suppose that’s a personal thing, I just don’t like it, and so I would, I would just keep my mouth shut.⁵³

⁴⁸ Robinson, Personal Diary, 1.

⁴⁹ Robinson, Personal Diary, 5.

⁵⁰ Robinson, Personal Diary, 7.

⁵¹ South, Personal Interview.

⁵² Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Marcia Cameron, 4.

⁵³ Robinson, Personal Interview, Interview by Marcia Cameron, 6.

Donald retired from his office of Archbishop in 1993, and this opened up opportunities for Marie to spend more time with her children and grandchildren, and to continue to care for Donald and her son Mark until her death in January 2014. Barnett believed that Marie ‘was a bit tired at the end’.⁵⁴ However, Marie’s concern for women to continue in their faith in the Lord Jesus never left her. Anne recalled that the last time she visited Marie at her home, Marie held Anne’s hand and said to her: ‘God will give to you the same wisdom that he’s given to me’.⁵⁵

Marie was acutely aware of the future reality of her own death throughout her life. In a sermon given at a retirement village on June 6, 1978, she wrote:

The one thing all of us face in life is death. The last enemy. The menace of death hangs over us all. The Bible talks about people who through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage. And it’s unnecessary. Jesus Christ has opened up the gate to everlasting life. He is the way home to God, for all who take Him at His word. He alone has conquered death.

Margo Watson recalls attending Marie’s funeral and not being able to believe that Marie had gone because, according to Watson, ‘there was no one in the world like Marie’.⁵⁶ Similarly, Anita Barnett remarked that she was ‘really upset when [Marie] died... she was the woman I admired most in ministry and in life’ and, says Barnett: ‘I used to think, “If I could be half the person Marie was in ministry and with my children, I would be doing well”’.⁵⁷

Marie Elizabeth Robinson was a natural leader among women. As Margo Watson noted, ‘From being Head Girl at Meriden in 1942, to becoming wife of our Archbishop in 1982, Marie has had unsought leadership roles entrusted to her’.⁵⁸ What was most remarkable, however, was not Marie’s leadership per se, nor her outstanding intellect, but the character of that leadership, marked by gentleness, personal interest, humility, discretion, utter dependence on the Word of God and prayer, and the way in which she yielded her intellect in the service of others. Had Marie, as Barnett believed, ‘carved out for herself a role of far greater influence that Don had’? It is difficult to say. What is certain, however, is that for those to whom Marie ministered, and those to whom she extended care, Marie was by no means a woman in the shadow of Donald Robinson. Whilst some may view Marie’s primary commitments to family, to the teaching of the Word, prayer, and the encouragement of Christians as ‘ordinary’ in nature, Marie saw every opportunity as an opportunity to serve the Lord. In one of her sermons she writes: ‘for me to be a Christian today... means doing everything for him. Col 3:23-24: “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.”’⁵⁹ In this ‘ordinary’ task of serving the Lord, Marie was truly extraordinary.

⁵⁴ Barnett, Personal Interview.

⁵⁵ South, Personal Interview.

⁵⁶ Watson, Personal Interview, April 20, 2016.

⁵⁷ Barnett, Personal Interview.

⁵⁸ Watson, Personal Interview.

⁵⁹ Robinson, ‘Maroubra Ladies Fellowship’, 157–58.

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