

SHE-PREACHERS, WIDOWS AND OTHER WOMEN

The Feminine Dimension in Baptist Life since 1600

The role of women in the ministry of the church was one of those difficult questions that the radical questioning mind of the early Baptists compelled them to face. Before adopting Baptist views, John Smyth wrote his *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church*, published in 1607. He distinguished between two sorts of church member: 'prophets' and 'private persons': 'Prophets are men... Private persons are 1. men, 2. women'. The distinction was emphasised by the categorical prohibition against women speaking in the church in time of prophecy. If they have a query, they should ask their husbands' privately at home or, if unmarried, other male members. Smyth further asked 'whether women, servants, and children admitted into full communion, yet under age may not give voice in elections, excommunications, and other public affairs of the church' but without giving us his answer. Women deacons (otherwise defined as widows at least 60 years of age) were appointed, 'to visit and relieve the widows, the fatherless, sick, lame, blind, impotent, women with child and diseased members of the church'.(1)

By the time they had become General Baptists, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys both confirmed women as eligible for the diaconate. Paragraph 16 of Smyth's *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articlès* of 1609 reads 'That the ministers of the church are not only bishops ('episcopos') to whom power is given of dispensing both the word and sacraments, but also deacons, men and women, who attend to the affairs of the poor and rich brethren'.(2) Two years later, Helwys' *A Declaration of Faith of the English People remaining at Amsterdam in Holland* states: 'That the officers of every Church or congregation are either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls..., or Deacons, men and women, who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren concerning their bodies'.(3) There the matter ends as far as confessions are concerned: women are not specifically identified in any of the later confessions of faith of either General or Particular Baptists in the seventeenth century.

The role of women in the church was, however, an issue much debated amongst Particular Baptists at the mid-century. The Midlands Association considered it in 1656, and the West Country Association in 1654 and again in 1658, when:

it was also considered (the state of one of the churches requiring it) how far a woman may speak in the church and how far not...

Answer. We answer: that women in some cases may speak in the church and in some cases again may not.

1. That in some cases they may not speak manifestly appears in I Cor.14.34f. and I Tim.2.11f. They may not so speak as that their speaking shall shew a not acknowledging of the inferiority of their sex and so be an usurping authority over the man, more particularly,

i. A woman may not publicly teach in the church. This appears to have been much in the apostle's eye in I Co.14.

ii. She may not stand up as a ruler in the church and so

Speak upon that account.

iii. She may not speak in the church by way of passing sentence upon doctrines or cases in the church.

iv. She may not speak in prayer as the mouth of the church. This is very clear in I Tim. 2.

2. Yet in the cases that follow and possibly in some other like cases a woman may speak in the church and not be found to offend against the rules of the apostle.

i. If she desire to make confession of her faith and to express her desire of baptism and communion with the church.

ii. If she be a witness concerning the admonition of one that the church is to deal with or must herself tell a matter to the church according to the rule in Mat. 18. 17.

iii. If a woman hath sinned and be cast out of the church and God hath given her repentance undoubtedly she may manifest it in the church.

To these cases the messengers now met at Tetsworth added as followeth: Query. Whether when a person propounds to a church for communion and some sister knows something concerning this person which she judgeth doth render this person unfit for the same and which she conceives the church is ignorant of, it be not her liberty to signify to the church [by] her own mouth her not being satisfied.

Answer. We judge it is her liberty. (4)

In practice there is evidence of women exercising considerable gifts of leadership in the churches. Among the Particular Baptists, this is clearly illustrated in the *Broadmead Records* by, among others, the formidable Dorothy Hazzard (died 1674), not a lady ever to conceal her opinions. Formerly Mrs Anthony Kelly, she secures this testimony in the record:

... Mr Kelly being some years deceased, his Widow persevered in godliness; and it might be said of her as of Ruth, iii. 11. (*all the City did know her to be a virtuous woman*). She was like a he-goat before the flock; for in those days Mrs Kelly was very famous for Piety and reformation, well known to all, bearing a living testimony against the superstitions and traditions of those days, and she would not observe their invented times and feasts, called Holy days. At which time she kept a Grocer's shop in High-street, between the Guilders Inn and High Cross, where she would keep open her shop on the time they call Christmas day, and sit sewing in her shop, as a witness for God in the midst of the City, in the face of the Sun, and in the sight of all men; even in those very days of Darkness, when, as it were, all sorts of People had a reverence of that particular day above all others... She was the first woman in this City of Bristol that practised that truth of the Lord (which was then hated and odious), namely *Separation*.

Once when a preacher spoke of the devotional use of pictures and images as legitimate, Mrs Hazzard walked out of the church there and then. When her second husband became vicar of St Ewin's they used the parsonage as 'an hospital for their people in their peregrination' (as a hostel for families waiting for sailings to the New World). It was also used for lying-in for women wanting to avoid the offensive

churching ceremonies compulsory in many parishes. Dorothy Hazzard eventually decided it was wrong to attend the service of Common Prayer, even when read by her puritan husband. She and her fellow proto-separatists used to enter during the final psalm in time to hear Mr Hazzard's sermon. In the defence of the city against Prince Rupert, she, with some two hundred women and girls, held the Frome Gate against repeated royalist assaults, losing all her goods when the latter was surrendered.(5) A hostile source bemoaned the endeavours of her husband, 'Matthew Hazzard, who though I name last yet deserves to have the precedence of all the rest, as being a main Incendiary in this Rebellion violently egged on by his wife, whose disciple the silly man is'.(6) Mrs Hazzard was 'the first woman member' of the Broadmead congregation, but that congregation only slowly became Baptist. In the early 1650s baptism became an issue; by 1688 the church had adopted the full Particular Baptist position. By then Mrs Hazzard had departed to 'her eternal sabbath of rest', 14 March 1674, 'a shook of corn fully ripe'.(7)

There were other women leaders in this congregation: for a time it met at the house of Sister Griffen and sometimes at the house of Mrs Nethway, a Bristol brewer's wife. She went to Wales to hear Thomas Ewins preach and then helped persuade the Broadmead church in 1651 to call him to be pastor. She is described as 'a woman who in her day was very eminent for godliness', and as having 'a good and great understanding in the fear of the Lord'.(8)

When the Broadmead Church re-organized independently in June 1662 it appointed two ruling elders, two deacons, and one deaconess, Widow Mary West. On her death in 1673 Widow Murry was elected to replace her. In 1679 the church appointed four deaconesses. Its theology for the office (also called widow: minimum age 60) derived from I Timothy 5 and those admitted to it had to accept the 'tie or bar' of not seeking further marriage. The office was primarily defined in terms of caring for sick members but also embraced the following:

1. To visit the Sick, to have their Eye and Ear open to hearken and enquire who is sick, and to visit the sick sisters in an Especial manner, to see what they Need, Because it may not be so proper for men in several cases.
2. To visit not only sick Sisters, but sick Brethren also; and therefore some conceive may be the Reason why they must be 60 years of age, that none occasion may be given; and as 1 Tim.v.14.
3. Not only to take care of their sick bodies, of the Brethren and Sisters, But that their wants may be supplied; and therefore to make reports back of their condition, to the Elders and Deacons of the Congregation.
4. It is their duty also to *speak* a word to their souls, as occasion requires, for support or consolation, to build them up in a spiritual lively faith in Jesus Christ; for, as some observe, there is not an office of Christ *in his Church but it is dipt* in the blood of our Lord Jesus.
5. Some think it is their duty to attend the sick; and if so, then they are to be maintained by the Church.(9)

Among General Baptists, women not only exercised informal leadership but some actually became preachers, much to the consternation of conservative presbyterian detractors, like the gossipy Thomas Edwards, author of *Gangraena*, and that seeker after reformed discipline, Robert Baillie. Edwards' complaint against women preachers

is uttered in the same breath that he bemoans 'tailors, shoemakers, pedlars, weavers etc.' in the pulpit. He tells of a woman in Lincolnshire 'who preaches (it's certain) and 'tis reported also she baptizeth, but that's not so certain'. Women of unspecified denomination are reported preaching in the Isle of Ely, Hertfordshire and London. Edwards particularly recorded the activities of an Anabaptist woman, 'one at least if not more', who preached and broke bread in Brasted and in Westerham, principally in a congregation exclusively female. The most notorious case, was Mrs Attaway, a lace-maker and a member of Thomas Lambe's Bell Alley Church in London. She first confined her preaching to women but then opened the meeting to anybody who wanted to come. Edwards describes how she invoked Joel's prophecy that a time would come when, God's spirit being poured out on all mankind, 'your sons and your daughters shall prophesy' (chapter 2 v.28). Although the devotions were lengthy (prayers lasted half an hour, the sermon three quarters, plus further comment and prayer), Edwards reports that 'there came a world of people to the number of a thousand'. Bell Alley was too small for such numbers, so they later preached in the Old Bailey and in a house near the French Church to much smaller numbers. The doctrine appeared to be universalist. Mrs Attaway justified her action in terms of exercising a God-given gift, citing I Peter 4.10, 11. Hebrews 10.24, 25, Malachi 3.16, Titus 23.4, as justification of her action. But she seems to have been something of an aberration, acting without congregational authority, and eventually running off with another woman's husband to Jerusalem, the two justifying this because their existing partners were unbelievers. (10)

Other women in the seventeenth century clearly played an influential role in the developing life of the churches. Anna Trapnel, baptised in 1643, although described as a 'prophetess, preacher and poet' in Whitley's *Bibliography*, is, best considered a Fifth Monarchist. Whitley also lists Jane Turner, wife of Captain Turner of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. (11) In 1663 Katherine Sutton, almost certainly a member of Hanserd Knollys's congregation, penned *A Christian Woman's Experiences of the Glorious Working of God's Free Grace*, finding scriptural justification in the text 'And they found it even so, as the women had said'. This spiritual testimony is supported by a collection of primitive hymns or religious poems. (12)

Baptist women took their full share of the persecution of dissent. In 1664, under an obsolete Elizabethan Act, twelve of the Aylesbury congregation were arrested and condemned to death. Two were women: Mary Jackman, a widow with six children, and Ann Turner, spinster. The excessive punishment and implied threat to other dissenters in Aylesbury led to William Kiffin using his good offices to secure a speedy royal reprieve. (13) Katherine Peck, a staunch member of the Abingdon congregation, which used her house, listed in the indulgence of 1672 and licensed for worship in 1704, for teaching and preaching over thirty years, suffered with other leaders of that church when taken prisoner to London in 1684. (14)

The Monmouth rebellion also reveals something of the importance of women in Baptist church life. Elizabeth Gaunt, keeper of a tallow chandler's shop in Whitechapel, was described by Macaulay as 'an ancient matron of the Baptist persuasion'. On 23rd October 1685 by 'the foulest judicial murder' she became the last woman burned alive in

England for treason. On Bishop Burnet's testimony she 'spent a great part of her life in acts of charity, visiting jails and looking after the poor of what persuasion soever they were'. The author of *A Display of Tyranny* adds that she undertook a special ministry 'to a multitude of the Scottish nation, ministers and others, who for conscience sake were thrust into exile from prelatic rage... she outstripped every individual if not the whole body of protestants in this city'. James Burton, who had been involved in the Rye House Plot of 1682, was sheltered by Mrs Gaunt. After the battle of Sedgemoor in 1685 Burton secured a pardon by basely informing on her.(15) The Hewling family also suffered for involvement with the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion. William Hewling was executed at Lyme, but Hannah Hewling, later to marry Major Henry Cromwell, petitioned the king in person on behalf of her second brother, Benjamin - to no avail, for he was executed at Taunton.(16)

Women constantly encountered the problem of the Pauline prohibition - but against this were cited 'legitimising' scriptures such as Joel 2.28-9, John 8.36, and Galatians 3.28, a textual battle that still rumbles on. More fundamental than arguments from proof-texts was the conviction that any autonomy granted to women must jeopardise the unity of the family under its paternal head.(17) Even here there is ambiguity: for that family unity could be as much threatened by traditional discipline as by acceptance of women into full participating membership. Jane Adams of the Fenstanton church, explaining her absence from service because her husband forbade her, was told there were limits to husbandly authority and she must attend unless restrained by force. More tangled was a 1654 case. A Jew, Eleazar bar Ishay, accepted Baptist beliefs in order to marry Rebecca Hounsell, a member of Peter Chamberlen's congregation. Not narrow in religious affection, he had their first born 'sprinkled' by the Presbyterians. His wife defended herself by urging wifely obedience, but Chamberlen retorted 'that it was a great sin for her to put her duty to her husband before her duty to her church'. Add now, to the tangle of attitudes and practices, this congregation's untypical decision that 'a woman (maid, wife or widow) being a prophetess (I Cor.11) may speak, prophesy, pray with a veil. Others may not', a liberty that produced further contention. Sister Anne Harriman threatened to withdraw because Brother Naudin had said 'he would not walk with such as gave liberty to women to speak in church, whilst she, for her part, would not walk where she had not this right'.(18) By contrast the Particular Baptist church in Fleur de Lys Yard, Southwark, allowed women members 'being equally with the brethren members of the mystical body of Christ' to vote at church meetings, though still prohibited them from 'prayers, prophesying and giving of thanks and from all church offices'.(19)

Some congregations, like Benjamin Keach's, resolved the issue by allowing separate women's prayer meetings: a practice considered by Bunyan in 1683 in his *A case of conscience resolved* 'viz. whether when a church of Christ is situate, it is the duty of the women of that congregation ordinarily and by appointment to separate themselves from the brethren and so to assemble together to perform some parts of divine worship, as prayer etc., without their men: and the arguments made use of for that practice'. Bunyan judged categorically that women 'are not the image and glory of God as the men are', that if a woman 'worships in assemblies, her part is to hold her tongue, to learn in

silence', observing that 'when Miriam began to perk it before Moses, God covered her face with a leprous scab'.(20)

The opportunities for women to participate in church life seem to have shrunk by the early eighteenth century, with some chapels even seating men and women separately. At Horsleydown in Southwark there was contention over the call of John Gill because the large majority in his favour represented not a 'majority of the voters of the brethren in membership'. The complaint was of 'Mr Gill's friends pretending they had the majority by allowing the Women's Votes as good'. Although not in keeping with the church's constitution, it was argued that this had become the church's general practice in recent years. Appeal to the London ministers led to a judgment against validating the women's votes. By 1807, however, a correspondent to the *Baptist Magazine* posed the now perennial query: 'Should female members of a church vote in the election of deacons?' The reply was 'yes', citing John Williams' manual on church government which argued that the logic of women's position generally in church life must require a limitation of the Pauline prohibition to a particular circumstance. However, women's full participation in voting was not general practice, for a number of trust deeds from this period specifically confine voting on important issues to men.(21)

Silent, or silenced, in church, they waxed eloquent with their pens. Even here Ann Williams (Dutton) (1692-1765) felt compelled to attach to her autobiography of 1743-50 a letter defending her right to write notwithstanding the apostolic sanction against female speech. That done, out poured the torrent, in some twenty-five printed volumes of rather harsh and censorious Calvinism, through which she attacked both Wesley and Whitfield. Earlier she had published some 61 hymns, and thereafter hymnwriting became a major legitimate activity for Baptist women: Alice Flowerdew (1759-1801), Marianne Hearn (Farningham)(1834-1909), Mary Leslie (d.1834), Sarah Medley, Maria Saffery (1773-1858), Elizabeth Trestrail (b.1813), and her sister Caroline Dent (b.1815), together with the princess among them all, Ann Steele (1717-78) of Broughton.(22)

Next to the poetic women stand the educational women: some like Marianne Hearn, a staff member of the *Christian World* and editor of the *Sunday School Times*, operated in both spheres, but others were more pedagogic, like Henrietta Neale, the prolific Luton schoolmistress, and Martha Trinder (d.1794), Northampton school proprietor and author of school books. Many women opened proprietary schools, and thousands flocked into devoted Sunday School teaching. Others like Esther Copley of Oxford (1786-1851) and Elizabeth Dawbarn of Wisbech made their name in educating women in domesticity.(23)

Education could be a business undertaking or a charitable enterprise. Philanthropy was practically liberating: 'the temperance and social purity movements took women to the brink of public affairs (and occasionally over it) and missionary support work, the YWCA, Christian Endeavour and the Student Volunteer Missionary Union, all springing from Evangelical soil, contributed to what one writer called the 'Epiphany of Women' in the Victorian era'.(24) Such enterprises not only engaged the energies of prominent Evangelical wives and daughters but also began to employ paid female agents of a lower social order as Bible women, scripture readers, district visitors, and mission superintendents. Some who 'lived by faith' were not strictly

'paid', though full-time in charitable engagement. The denominational allegiance of such women is difficult to determine, but undoubtedly Baptist women played their part in the great evangelical charities.

In South London two Baptists ran orphanages: Mrs T. H. Montague was founder and superintendent of the Brixton Girls' Orphanage for some 300 'fatherless children', while Miss Charlotte Sharman's Homes, half-way between the Metropolitan Tabernacle and Upton Chapel, were supported by evangelicals generally. To run an orphanage for 300 orphaned girls, including their placement in service, the construction of purpose-built accommodation, and diversification from South London to Kent and Sussex, was no mean achievement. Other such examples could be given, an important story worthy of further research. (25)

Hymns, schools, charities and lastly missions overseas, perhaps the most important factor, all played their part in giving women new importance in the work of the kingdom. The formidable Mrs Hannah Marshman was 'the only missionary wife who took a constantly active part in the (Serampore) Mission's work', where the Form of Agreement included a hope that work in female education might be undertaken, for 'a European sister may do much for the cause by promoting the tidiness and stirring up the zeal of the native female converts'. Marianne Lewis, baptised in 1839, sister to George Gould of Norwich, married C. B. Lewis who went from Bristol College to Ceylon. In 1847 the couple transferred to Calcutta and Mrs Lewis threw herself into educating Indian women. Elizabeth Sale, born in the south of France in 1818, came to Baptist convictions after an Anglican education. Baptised at the church in Blandford Street, Marylebone, she secured some instruction in medicine and surgery, helped by Sir David Davis, personal physician to Queen Adelaide. In 1848 she married John Sale, bound for mission work in Barisal, India, where she was soon engaged in young people's and medical work. The couple moved to Jessore, where Mrs Sale first penetrated a Hindu Zenana (1854). Hitherto the missionaries' wives had confined their activities to children and Christianised women, but Mrs Sale continued her work in zenanas when she and her husband moved back to Calcutta. In 1866 Mrs Lewis popularised Mrs Sale's initiative in a tract, *A Plea for Zenanas*, suggesting the gratuitous service of missionary wives and daughters was insufficient: dedicated agents for this special work were needed. In 1867 the Baptist Zenana Mission (this title was adopted later) was founded. Initially two British agents, Miss Page and Miss Robinson, were recruited with six local Bible women. Four years later the Mission had six centres, eight lady missionaries and fourteen Indian helpers. When Mrs Sale died in 1898 the BZM employed 67 lady missionaries, all but nine being single. Two were qualified doctors, and work was being undertaken in India, Italy, Ceylon, Congo and China, which produced its zenana martyrs (Miss Renant and Miss Timmis) during the Boxer Rising. Women missionaries were withdrawn from China until 1902. Essential changes in social relationships were created by such activity as the Reverend T. Moscrop perceived: 'India's future is bound up with the regeneration of her women... not until woman everywhere has the status and opportunity which Christ would give her and which are her right in Him, will His purposes be accomplished. Without her perfecting and endeavour, His Kingdom cannot fully appear'. At home the enterprise called for administrative talents from Baptist women: Mrs Angus, Miss Isobel Angus, Miss Jessie Taylor, Miss Rooke, Miss

Ella Lockhart, Miss H. Bowser and Miss Marion Horsfall all contributed to the leadership. Before the First World War full integration of the BZM into the BMS was spoken of, but all that happened was a change of name to the society's Women's Missionary Association. Thus until 1927 women missionaries were listed under BZM/WMA rather than with the BMS men. Only in 1926 was the WMA finally integrated into the BMS, and women were first elected to the BMS General Committee, Lady Pearce Gould becoming first female chairman that year. Although for sixty years men and women worked in separate organizations, Baptists, like others, were readier to employ women overseas than at home. Eventually the inconsistency of one rule abroad and another at home began to be felt, especially as ecumenical thinking also made its impact. The Edinburgh Conference of 1910 reflected on women's role in world mission: A vast proportion of any population would have to be left without the message if there were no women to present it... The Christian Church, the Christian nation, might indeed be organized but could not be built up apart from the education and training of the womanhood of each community into Christian ideals of wifehood, motherhood, leadership, and this only Christian women can supply'. (26)

Speaking of women's activity in the post-1859 world of care and witness, Olive Anderson affirms: 'Undoubtedly female participation in such religious activities played a significant part in bringing both lower and upper middle-class women out of their homes (the former to church and chapel gatherings, the latter to mission work of all kinds) and in winning such a state of affairs from their menfolk, just as the beginning of paid religious work by women made a small contribution to that expansion of their occupational opportunities which was so important in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless such developments did not explicitly challenge either the social convention that respectable women played no public role in mixed society, or Christian teaching that women should be silent in the church'. These principles were challenged by the decorous and intellectually well-founded preaching of the well-connected women of the Second Evangelical Revival. They dealt with the Biblical record either by arguing that their call from God was exceptional, overriding apostolic prohibitions, or that those prohibitions were never intended to be universal but were limited to specific locations at a specific time, the general trend of Pauline teaching being towards freedom and equality for women. They also argued that prophesying in Acts 21.9 could easily have been translated as preaching, whilst Romans 16.1 referred to the office of deacon rather than service in general. One of the principles of William Booth's Christian Mission of 1870 was 'that women have an equal standing with men as publishers of salvation to the world', a rule incorporated eight years later in the so-called 'Women's Charter' of the Salvation Army. Salvation Army practice was critical in helping evangelical Christendom, Baptists included, to accept women's ministry: 'it was the Army's Major Barbaras and Hallelujah lasses who gave the most sensational stimulus to popular recognition in the late nineteenth century of women's capacity to teach, organize, and command, and they owed their existence not to any feminism on the part of Catherine Booth but to her ardent response to those religious influences of the 'sixties which together produced the crowd of female preachers... of whom she was one'. (27)

After the Second Evangelical Awakening, Joseph Angus turned once more to the Biblical texts in his exposition of the nature of *Christian Churches*, 1862. Taking Phoebe in the church of Cencrea as precedent, Angus argued that deacons could be of either sex. Phoebe rendered services to Paul himself, and it is from such service that the word deacon derives. Although Paul suggested that for women to teach within the church was inconsistent with the divine order of nature (I Cor.14.34, I Tim.2.12), Angus argued that I Cor.11.5 (cf. Acts 2.17 and 21.9) legitimised women praying and prophesying in public.(28)

Anderson claims that in the writings of William Landels, Scottish pastor of Regent's Park Chapel from 1855, the changing social attitude to women's involvement in church life can be traced. In 1859 his *Women's Sphere and Work considered in the light of scripture* argued that man was created for public life but woman for fulfilment in 'the sacred privacy of home'. *Lessons for Maidens, Wives and Mothers from some of the representative women of Scripture* (1864) fortified that position. In 1870 *Woman, her position, and power* (republished in 1880 as *The True Glory of Women*) retains many of the old reservations, but questions whether the office of deaconess in the apostolic age might not argue for women's ministry in Victorian times.(29) By then, although the battle of the texts continued to rage, an essential pragmatism was at work in the evangelical mind: God's blessing of the fruits of women's labours in every disputed sphere gave a kind of *post facto* justification to those initiatives.

Women began to appear as platform speakers at the Baptist Union Assembly in 1889 when two ministers' wives, Mrs Medley and Mrs Dawson Burns, spoke on Young Women's Guilds and Woman's Work in the Church. In 1891 two single women, Dr Ellen Farrer and Miss Edith Angus, spoke of women's work among the sick poor and their concern for the condition of the neediest in society. It was, however, many years before another woman appeared as an Assembly speaker. The first recorded female delegate to the Assembly was Mrs Stockford, representing Manchester's Moss Side Church in 1894: the Council had to pass a resolution specifically confirming that women were eligible to serve. The suggestion that the first woman deacon of modern times was appointed at Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, in 1912 is unlikely to be true. The *Handbook* first lists Church Secretaries in 1905, when more than 30 were women, all presumably members of local diaconates, suggesting that women deacons had reappeared by the end of the nineteenth century. Size of the church fellowship and availability of men was almost certainly a deciding factor. Bloomsbury, a large church, had been appointing paid Bible women and lady volunteers of respectable social status as district visitors in the slums of St Giles' from the 1850s. But a proposal in 1875 to appoint Lady Church Visitors to visit absentees and the sick failed to find favour. In 1897 H. E. Jones proposed the church should 'consider the need of ladies being appointed to fill any vacancies that may occur in the eldership', but the deacons and elders would only agree to lady visitors for women applying for church membership who expressly sought this.(30)

The 1891 addresses by Dr Farrer and Miss Angus reflected initiatives of the London Baptist Association Extension Committee, led by Dr F. B. Meyer. In 1890 as part of the forward movement they had opened the Baptist Deaconess Home and Mission at 59 Doughty Street with four sisters and a lady superintendent. The work was essentially

medical; in 1893 sisters living outside the home received £60 per annum but had to pay for their own nursing training. In 1919 the Baptist Union Council agreed to take over the training and settlement of deaconesses. Havelock Hall, Hampstead, was purchased by the women of the denomination as a centre for training women for work at home and overseas. The course lasted three years and included theology, social work and nursing. Of the first eleven students, three were preparing to go overseas. Deaconesses, listed in the *Handbook* from 1926, were trained in successive institutions until 1955 when they again joined women candidates for overseas mission trained at Carey Hall, Selly Oak, since 1912. Carey Hall amalgamated with its male counterpart, St Andrew's Hall, in 1966. Thereafter deaconess training was undertaken at Bristol, where a lady tutor was appointed to meet their special needs. In 1935 The Baptist Sisterhood had become the Order of Baptist Deaconesses. By 1945 more radical questions were being asked, focussed by Dr Townley Lord in his pamphlet *What is this but ministry?* reflecting that in addition to social and medical work, and later women's and children's work, deaconesses had become involved in pastoral work, as assistant ministers, and then as pastors of small rural congregations and declining inner-city churches. The process had accelerated during the war. Women chaplains' assistants had also been appointed to provide pastoral care for women of the auxiliary services: Sister Eileen Stevenson from 1943-45 and Sister Margaret Wilmshurst from 1951. After the war deaconesses did heroic work in establishing new causes in the large council estates then developed. In 1948 and 1957 new bye laws provided virtually the same employment conditions for deaconesses as ministers, though deaconesses were until 1967 required to resign on marriage.

By 1967, of 40 deaconesses in active service, 38 were engaged in pastoral work. There was a double injustice in paying these women on a lower salary scale and in denying them full ministerial title, when their work was often indistinguishable from that of ordained ministers. Moreover, the Congregational Union, with no Deaconess Order, ordained all its women ministers. From 1975, therefore, the Baptist Union suspended recruitment to the deaconess order. Unordained service for a limited period by those with careers within social service seemed more appropriate, where churches still required this, than life-long service in a deaconess order. At the same time all deaconesses in active service were transferred to the full ministerial list, greatly increasing the number of women ministers. (31)

Back in 1918 the first woman minister had taken pastoral charge of an English Baptist Church, and Bristol College in 1919 agreed to admit women for training, though none registered until 1937. Regent's Park admitted its first female student in 1923. The first two women were accepted on probation in 1922 but an inquiry into the whole issue was set up and reported in 1925 to the Council, which declared that Baptists saw no objections to women entering the ministry. A separate list of 'Women Pastors' was opened in the *Handbook* to reflect this judgment. The first three to appear were Miss Edith Gates, who qualified through the Baptist Union Examination in 1922 and had one pastorate at Little Tew and Cleveley (1918-50) in Oxfordshire. President of her Association in 1931, she was a founder of the Women's Prayer Circle. Mrs Maria Living-Taylor, B.A., trained in the Universities of London and Dijon, held joint pastorates with her husband at Linton Road, Barking, 1922-4; Sion Jubilee, Bradford,

1924-7; Corporation Road, Newport, 1927-30; Clayton Le Moors and Rishton 1930-7. Miss Violet Hedger trained at Regent's Park College and was enrolled on the ministerial list in 1924. Her pastorates were Littleover, Derby, 1926-9, North Parade, Halifax, 1934-7, Sion Chatham, 1937-44, and Chalk Farm, 1952-6. (32)

In 1941 Miss Hedger reflected on her experience in the *Baptist Quarterly*. Encouraged to offer her services by her minister, Dr Charles Brown, and by Dr Pearce Gould, she saw herself in the tradition of Miriam and Deborah, Jael and Esther, and of the women of the gospels and early church. She was encouraged by John Wesley ('God owns women in the conversion of sinners and who am I that I should withstand God'), by Salvation Army practice, and by the fact that 'in practice - if not in theory' all missionary societies open the ministry overseas to women as well as men. She complained that all too often Paul won over Joel, and no churches had taken the Pentecostal prophecy sufficiently seriously. She confessed 'one of my worst enemies is loneliness, especially in those long months hoping for work, with constant disappointments'. Her personal correspondence indicated that contemporary attitudes in Baptist churches had lost a number of well-qualified women to church service 'and the church suffers'. She testified to hostility not only from literalists but also from some ageing liberals. The separate list for Women Pastors meant that she was sometimes told she was not accredited or that her name was not in the *Handbook*. Writing of her understanding of God, she says, 'the very use of the masculine 'Him' limits our thoughts. God is not a man. All life, the masculine and the feminine, is a living expression of His boundless thought and love. May there not be something of that loving God that woman can teach? May not even womanhood itself reveal Him who is our Mother... A woman thinks in terms of people not profits; creation not destruction; a world believing in force destroys itself; it is the Eternal Mother', God, who teaches that the Kingdom must be built by spiritual power; cannot a woman reveal this?' (33)

Although Women Pastors were redesignated Women Ministers in 1957, they were still listed separately in the *Baptist Union Handbook* until 1975. Attitudes were deeply imbedded. *The Women in the Service of the Denomination* Report of 1967 noted that more women felt called to full-time ministry: 'Our difficulty is not that we cannot accept them, but when they are trained and ready, there is grave difficulty in finding a sphere of service'. Double thinking on this issue has beset Baptists for at least two-thirds of a century, probably reinforced by 'Brethren' influence. It shows in the *Free Indeed* documentation, produced by the Mission Department in 1981 when the Baptist Union Council comprised 133 men and 18 women (12%): '*In theory*, we believe in women ministers, women deacons, and women taking their part in leadership according to their gifts. *In practice*, we deny that belief by widespread prejudice against women ministers and leaders'. A retired General Superintendent confessed, 'There are churches who will commend young women from their membership for ministerial training but who will not consider a woman for their own ministry... The suffering we cause to those, called by God, who in their loneliness face this kind of rejection must cease'. A former BMS missionary, who became a deaconess and then secured full ministerial accreditation, spoke of the frustrations of her new position. 'It was then that I realised the freedom one had had working in one of the younger churches overseas. I found that I had been welcomed to

preach in home churches as a missionary on furlough but some of those churches were not prepared to welcome me as a woman minister'. As a deaconess her services had been more acceptable than as a minister: it was that seeking for equality of title for undertaking the one task of ministry that the churches were so slow to accept. (34)

Twenty-two years ago, Dr Champion argued in this journal for a complementarity of male and female ministry in the church, suggesting that the biggest obstacle to women finding adequate opportunity for ministry in Baptist churches was the assumption that 'one man and one congregation' was the norm. He argued for a corporate ministry exercised amongst a group of congregations in a given geographical locality, together forming one church. Within the corporate leadership of such a church the complementarity principle would balance male and female ministers. Today the corporate concept of ministry is more part of churches' thinking, but the emphasis in charismatic teaching on male headship has meant corporate leadership does not necessarily include women. (35)

Although in the nineteenth century some local churches had women's guilds, a national organization was only established in 1908. The first meeting took place in Mrs Russell James' drawing-room, with women from churches at Archway Road, Muswell Hill and Ferme Park. Mrs James confessed she was not as nervous as she might have been, because the previous week she had chaired a larger meeting of Liberal women. The Revd C. S. Rose, Baptist Union missionary, wanted Ladies' Auxiliaries to be established 'for the purposes of securing more systematic help on behalf of the Home Work Fund' and initially the title was the Baptist Women's Home Work Auxiliary. Not all welcomed the initiative: Mrs James remembered chairing a meeting with Mrs Principal Edwards as speaker, when a deacon chided: 'If you two ladies continue to speak in public, you will certainly lose your charm and femininity'. The early aims were functional: development of the Home Work Fund, promotion of evangelism and colportage, welcoming church members migrating from one area to another, and assisting Baptist girls find situations especially in London. With Council's blessing in 1905, Mrs Marnham became Chairman and Mrs C. S. Rose deputation secretary. Six women were appointed to the Baptist Union Home Work Fund Committee. The cumbersome title was changed in 1910 to the Baptist Women's League. In 1911 the first ten women were co-opted to the Baptist Union Council, and British women began to participate in the work of the Baptist World Alliance. In 1924 two women were appointed to the committee charged with finding a successor to Dr Shakespeare.

Other avenues of work were opening up. In 1912 the first Girls' Hostel in Mecklenburgh Square was opened. The war produced a new emphasis on social service: collecting and despatching clothing, equipping canteens, promoting food economy with demonstrations of utility cooking, and raising £4,000 to rehouse French protestants. After the war a nursing guild (1920-30) was established under Mrs Carey Bonner with recreational rooms in Bloomsbury and Cambridge. Help was given to famine relief in Russia (1921) and to the Welsh valleys (1926). A special service for Welsh girls seeking positions in London was established. Support was given to the Percy Illingworth Institute at Aldershot and to the West Ham Central Mission. The idea of a Women's Work Department at Church House was canvassed as early as 1924, but not effected until 1938, Miss Doris Rose, who in 1934

moved from the Girls' Life Brigade Headquarters to succeed Mrs C. S. Rose as BWL Secretary, headed the new department. An increasing number of women joined the Union's staff, serving in Children's Work, Leadership Training, Overseas Relations, and Ministry, as well as the Deaconess Order and Women's Work Department. Post-war initiatives established The Haven, a Home for Unmarried Mothers in 1945, and subsequently the Baptist Union Adoption Society in 1948. Under Miss Lois Chapple, a former China missionary who succeeded Miss Rose in the Women's Office, links were established with women's meetings (Young Wives' Clubs, Business Women's Groups, etc.) other than formal BWL branches, with emphasis on training women for leadership. The social context was changing: The Haven closed in 1970 and the accruing funds were used to pioneer new community ventures, initially led by Miss Enid Richard. The Baptist Union Adoption Society terminated in 1971. When the Girls' Hostel was rebuilt in Stoke Newington at a cost of over £120,000 (of which Sir Herbert Janes contributed £75,000 and the BWL over £25,000), it was found that students began to take up the places once occupied by business girls.

The formal organization of the Baptist Women's League was also proving less appropriate. When the Union constitution was revised in 1970, a women's committee was established, on which BWL representatives served, but whose remit was wider than League concerns. The WCC study *The Community of Women and Men in the Church*, echoed concerns already receiving considerable attention in the Union, where there was uneasiness at the low number of women on Council: 'The denomination claims to give equal place to women but their representation in the structures does not support this claim', confessed the Annual Report for 1977. How to change that was much debated: some argued for education, others for a fixed percentage of places for women. In 1981, following the report *The Role of Women in the Denomination*, Council decided that a nationally organized Baptist Women's League was no longer the best vehicle to stimulate women's participation in the church's mission, so the BWL came to an end, not in any sense of resignation but rather as a sign of the new confidence of Baptist women. In its place the National Baptist Women's Council now acts as a forum for Baptist women to explore their faith together. Its purpose is defined thus: 'to encourage the Christian service of women by equipping them for mission; by linking up work being done; and by promoting a fellowship of prayer and service for the Kingdom of Christ at home and abroad, thus playing their full part in Baptist life and witness'.

Perhaps the Presidency of the Baptist Union reflects movement towards wholly equal participation. Attempts in the late 1930s to see Mrs Rowntree Clifford's work, in partnership with her husband at West Ham, thus recognised were unsuccessful, but Mrs A. Alexander of Cambridge was President of the Union in 1978-9, and the Reverend Margaret Jarman will become the first women minister to hold the presidential office in the year 1987-8. (36)

NOTES

- 1 J. Smyth, *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church*, 1607 in W. T. Whitley, ed., *The Works of John Smyth*, 2 vols, 1915, pp.255-60. M. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1978, does not make it clear

- that this is Smyth writing before he became a Baptist.
- 2 J. Smyth, *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles*, 1609, in W. L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia, 1959, pp.100-1. Paragraph 76 of his 'confession of faith of certain English people living at Amsterdam' (published after Smyth's death in 1612) has a similar emphasis, in W. T. Whitley, ed., *Works*, p.746.
 - 3 Thomas Helwys, *A Declaration of Faith of the English People remaining at Amsterdam in Holland*, 1611, in Lumpkin, *op.cit.*, pp.116-121.
 - 4 B. R. White, ed., *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660*, 1971-4 (Part I, p.11, (S. Wales), 28 (Midlands), part II, p.55 (West Country), part III, p.184-5 (Abingdon).
 - 5 R. Hayden, ed., *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640-1687* (The Broadmead Records), Bristol, 1974, pp.18, 85-91.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, p.18, citing *The Two State Martyrs, or the Murder of Robert Yeomans and George Birch, Citizens of Bristol*, 1643, p.11.
 - 7 *Ibid.*, pp.11-15, 154.
 - 8 *Ibid.*, pp.99-102. C. Cross, 'He-goats Before the Flocks': a Note on the part played by women in the founding of some Civil War churches', *Studies in Church History*, 8, 1972, pp.195-8, and P. Collinson, 'The Role of Women in the English Reformation, illustrated in the Life and Friendships of Anne Locke', *Studies in Church History*, 2, 1965, pp.258-72, both indicate that these women were entering into a tradition of puritan female participation in the life of the churches: 'For years puritan women in practice had frequently showed marked independence, a very different quality from the submissive weakness exhorted by contemporary puritan writers'. (Cross, pp.197-8).
 - 9 *Ibid.*, p.33, 51, 117, 142, 190-1, 212, 236-7, 250-1. The description of the deaconesses' office occurs on pp.208-9. See also B. R. White, ed., *Association Records*, Vol.I, 1971, p.11.
 - 10 The principal source for the activities of Mrs Attaway and other General Baptist she-preachers is Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena*, 1645-6. In the Rota Reprint of 1977 the following pages are relevant I, pp.84-89 and Appendix, II, 24-5, 105-6, III, 113. More recent references will be found in R. M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, 1909, pp.419-423, Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London, 1616-1649*, 1977, p.81. K. Thomas, 'Women and The Civil War Sects', p.329, in T. Aston, ed., *Crisis in Europe, 1560-1680*, p.329. Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*, 1984, pp.275-7, appears to add further names of several Baptist women preachers of the 1640s.
 - 11 L. F. Brown, *The Political Attitudes of the Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men*, 1911, pp.49-50, 101. A. Fraser, *op.cit.*, pp.285-295. L. Thomas, *op.cit.* (though he is wrong in calling Trapnel a Quaker), pp.324, 326-7. Whitley, *Index of Notable Baptists*, *Trans.Bapt.Hist.Society*, vol.7, 1920-21, p.235 and *Baptist Bibliography*, vol.I, where various entries for Anne Trapnel appear. For a Marxist literary critical approach to some of Trapnel's writings see Berg and Berry: 'Spiritual Whoredom: an Essay of Female Prophets in the Seventeenth Century', in F. Barker, J. Bernstein et al., eds., *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century*, 1981, pp.48-53.

- 12 Author of *Choice experiences of the kind dealings of God, before, in and after conversion*, 1653.
- 13 I. Mallard, 'The Hymn of Katherine Sutton' in *The Baptist Quarterly*, XX, 1963, pp.23-33.
- 14 Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, vol.II, 1739, pp.180-185. E. A. Payne, *Fellowship of Believers*, 1952 edn., p.41. E. A. Payne, *Baptists of Berkshire*, 1951, pp.44-6, 70. *Baptist Quarterly*, vol.III, p.44.
- 15 D.N.B.: Lord Macaulay, *History of England*, vol.I, 1889, pp.326-7. Crosby, *op.cit.*, vol.III, 1740, pp.185-193. J. Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, vol.I, 1811, pp.455-60. The accounts diverge: DNB has Gaunt harbouring Burton in both 1682 and 1685, Macaulay in 1682 only, and the Baptist authors 1685 only. Both give Elizabeth Gaunt's final testimony in full. Benjamin Keach celebrated the whole event in verse.
- 16 Macaulay, *op.cit.*, pp.316-7. Ivimey, *op.cit.*, pp.434-454. Kiffin was maternal grandfather to the three young Hewlings and in his autobiographical memoirs left an account of his grandsons' deaths which he says is based on information supplied by Hannah at the time. Fraser, *op.cit.*, p.410, 442.
- 17 This position is most conspicuously seen in Massachusetts in the 1630s when Hugh Peters scolded Anne Hutchinson, the champion of the women's cause: 'You have stepped out of your place; you have rather been a husband than a wife, and a preacher than a hearer; and a magistrate than a subject, and so you have thought to carry all things in Church and Commonwealth as you would, and have not been humbled for this', cited by Thomas, *op.cit.*, p.327. See also, J. F. McGregor, 'The Baptists: Found of All Heresy', in J. F. McGregor and B. Reay, *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, 1984, pp.46-7.
- 18 K. Thomas, *op.cit.*, pp.333-4; C. Cross, 'The Church in England, 1646-60', in G. E. Aylmer, ed., *The Interregnum*, 1972, pp.116-7.
- 19 Maze Pond Church Book, 1691-1745, p.109, as cited by M. Watts, *op.cit.*, p.320.
- 20 The title is as given in Whitley, *Baptist Bibliography*, 1916. The citations are as given by A. Lloyd, *Quaker Social History*, 1950, pp.107-8.
- 21 *Baptist Quarterly*, XXI, 1965, pp.160-1. *Baptist Magazine*, I, January 1809, p.32, March, pp.103-5.
- 22 H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists*, 1946, pp.50-56. W. T. Whitley, *History of British Baptists*, 1923, p.214. H. Martin, 'The Baptist Contribution to Early English Hymnody', *Baptist Quarterly*, vol.XIX, no.5, pp.196-7. J. Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology* (revised 1907) entries.
- 23 W. T. Whitley, 'Index to Notable Baptists', *T.B.H.S.* VII, pp.182-239, 287.
- 24 Cited by D. Bebbington, 'Evangelicals and the Role of Women', *Christian Arena*, 37/4 1984, pp.19-23. The writer cited is the American, A. T. Pierson, a Presbyterian who supplied the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle during Spurgeon's final illness and after his death from October 1891 to September 1892. He was baptised as a believer by J. A. Spurgeon at West Croydon Tabernacle in 1894.
- 25 F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England*, 1980, p.147. *The Christian*, 22 July 1887, pp.641-2, Miss Sharman's biographer was Marguerite Williams, daughter of Williams

- of Upton Chapel. K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 1962, p.92. *The Christian*, 17 March 1887, p.213.
- 26 E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India*, 1967, pp.17, 21, who also quotes Carey on the need for women missionaries, as early as 1796: 'to communicate the gospel ... in a situation where superstition secludes all women of respectability from hearing the word unless from their own sex'. The only response to this was the sending out with Dr William Johns in 1810-2 of a Miss Chaffin 'to whom apparently belongs the honour of being the first missionary nurse'. But Carey records of her that 'although an excellent woman' she was not 'of any use to the Mission' (pp.38, 65). Anon, *Baptist Zenana Mission Jubilee 1867-1917*, 1917; E. A. Payne, *The Great Succession: Leaders of the B.M.S. during the Nineteenth Century*, 1938, chapter VII.
- 27 O. Anderson, 'Women preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: some reflexions on feminism, popular religion and social change', *The Historical Journal*, 12/3 1969, pp.467-84.
- 28 J. Angus, *Christian Churches*, 1862, pp.54-5.
- 29 Anderson, *op.cit.*, p.481; Bebbington, *op.cit.*, pp.19-21.
- 30 *Baptist Handbook*, 1892. E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History*, 1959, p.150. Information ex Mrs F. Bowers, Bloomsbury Church Books.
- 31 Payne, *Baptist Union*, p.151; D. Rose, *Baptist Deaconesses*, 1954, *Order of Baptist Deaconesses, 1890-1975. Women in the Service of the Denomination*, 1967, pp.6-8. *Fifty years of Carey Hall, 1912-62*. H. Martin, *Annual Reports of the Baptist Union* (from the years indicated). R. W. Thompson, *Ministry to the Forces*, 1964.
- 32 *Women in the Service of the Denomination*, 1967, pp.1-15. N. Moon, *Education for Ministry*, 1979, pp.76, 80, 91. R. E. Cooper, *From Stepney to St Giles*, p.141. *Baptist Handbooks*, 1926ff. Miss Gates' obituary, *Handbook*, 1963, p.362.
- 33 *Baptist Quarterly*, X, 1940-41, pp.243-253.
- 34 *Women in the Service of the Denomination*, 1967; *Free Indeed*, 1981.
- 35 *Baptist Quarterly*, XX, 1964, pp.201-5.
- 36 *Fifty Years Achievement, 1908-58; Baptist Union Annual Reports* for years stated.

JOHN BRIGGS

Editor, The Baptist Quarterly

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BAPTISTS AND AUTHORITY

Full details were published in the *Baptist Quarterly*, April 1986. Essays should reach the Secretary, Baptist Historical Society, Bristol Baptist College, Woodland Road, Bristol, BS8 1UN by 30 September 1987.