Daughters of Zion and Mothers in Israel: the writings of separatist and particular Baptist women, 1632-1675

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Daughters of Zion and Mothers in Israel:
The Writings of Separatist and Particular Baptist Women, 1632-1675

A Doctoral Thesis

by

Rachel Clare Adcock

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University
February 2011

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Acknowledgments

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This project is dedicated to my grandfather, Tony Roberts: always remembered.

Or as I said, if any pious friend
Will once vouchsafe to read them to the end:
Let such conceive if error here they find,
Twas want of Art, not true intent of mind.

~ An Collins, ‘The Discourse’, *Divine Songs and Meditacions*, p. 2
Abstract

During the 1630s, congregations began to separate from the established Anglican Church forming new autonomous groups. This study examines separatist and Baptist women’s writings from this period, as they struggled under the persecution of the religious authorities and under the increasingly strict rules of their congregations. These women’s writings could not have been imagined without the proliferation of these new congregations, but, as well as providing a platform for women to publish, these groups imposed their own rules on what women could express in public.

Considering separatist and Baptist women as part of their congregations is integral to an understanding of their work, and it is on this that this study focuses. Although their writings relate and analyse their own relationship with God, this is always presented as a sign of the progress of God’s people as a whole. Through an analysis organised along doctrinal and congregational lines, this study draws attention to women who have received little or no literary critical (or indeed historical) attention, by considering the genres they utilised as part of their membership. Women writers of conversion narratives, in particular, have not received as much critical attention as more ‘remarkable’ women who prophesied or who were associated with male writers. The voices of little-studied women like An Collins, Sarah Davy, Deborah Huish, Sara Jones, Susanna Parr, Katherine Sutton, Jane Turner, Anne Venn, the anonymous speaker of Conversion Exemplified and the contributors to the collections of John Rogers and Henry Walker deserve to be heard alongside the reported words of Mary Allein, Anne Harriman, Dorothy Hazzard, and Elizabeth Milbourne, and better known writers such as Anna Trapnel and Agnes Beaumont. The study will also draw on works that are not currently widely available, which have therefore received very little critical attention.

Often compared to Deborah, the biblical ‘Mother in Israel’ (Judges 5:7), women in these gathered churches were instrumental in ‘bringing forth’ joy to their metaphorical children of Israel, by prophesying ways in which enemies of their congregations would face retribution and by continually strengthening church practices in time for the second coming of Christ. This study explores the various ways in which these mid-seventeenth-century women worked to strengthen their congregations through their writings, believing that they had been divinely inspired to edify those whose practice was wanting, and vindicate rightful walking in his name.

Keywords: Baptists, separatists, seventeenth-century, women, autobiography, Bunyan, Trapnel, prophecy
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2. Figure 2: Woodcut for John Bunyan’s *The Holy War* (London: Printed for Dorman Newman, 1682), attributed to Robert White.
Abbreviations

CSPD  Calendar of State Papers, Domestic
Introduction

‘This is but a tast[e] now of what shall be’¹

The time is coming, Are you fit?
Companions, what do you say?
Can you sing praises unto him
For this approaching day?
Companions are you strengthened
For the King to appear?
That you may engage for the King,
And own his latter year.
Companions dear, no matter though
Others it delusion call:
Yet O do you esteem of that
Which brings the all of all.²

On 5 November 1657, Anna Trapnel lay prophesying, singing the verses above to her audience. Although there are no other records of these prophecies apart from an anonymous 990-page folio, it seems likely that they were addressed to various radical followers including separatists, Baptists, and Fifth Monarchists.³ Parts of several of these prophecies, which in all ran in clusters from 11 October 1657 to 7 August 1658, seem to be directed to both male and female listeners or readers, and one prophecy (12 November 1657) records the presence of Quakers as she lay prophesying against them. She asked her companions in Christ if they were spiritually fit to receive King Jesus into their midst. Could they ‘sing praises’ by writing and speaking, spreading the good news? Were they ‘strengthened’ in belief and resolve as a congregation of saints unified by scriptural doctrine? Could they be answerable for Christ and accept his second coming by admitting him into their hearts? Even if their persecutors (variously Cromwell, his men, ‘formal professors’, corrupt clergy, Quakers, followers of the antichrist) called their gathering together to admit Christ ‘delusion’, they should ‘esteem’ and value it as the means to ‘bring’ forth ‘the all of all’. By implication, Trapnel shows how congregations gathered together, according to Matthew 18:20 (‘For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’), would labour to admit Christ among them, whereas a drooping, failing, unbelieving congregation would not. She shows how, as a prophetess, the spirit has spoken through her to urge congregations into action,

² Anna Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies held by the Bodleian Library (1658), p. 45.
³ Trapnel’s first prophecies from the folio are also recorded in A Lively Voice for the King of Saints and Nations (London: n. pub., 1657/8).
uniting against the antichrist, simultaneously evangelising, strengthening, teaching, and edifying. Trapnel’s verse suggests that the saints were in need of speeches to unite them against their persecutors and become strengthened in preparation for the coming of Christ, and that her prophecies were heeded, or at least drew the attention of someone wealthy enough to have her 990 pages of transcribed verse printed. The words and actions of women were evidently important to both separatist and Baptist congregations, and the Fifth Monarchists they harboured within them.

Trapnel’s prophecies are a good example of how women could identify and address problems they saw in their congregations, and be examples for others to follow. This introduction will now go on to discuss the example of Sarah Wight to those ‘companions’ who visited her during what was believed to have been a life-threatening illness and how her experiences resemble those of a new ‘mother in Israel’, bringing forth both her own conversion and the good news of Christ. I will then go on to explain why this project concentrates on women’s writings and how they were affected by what was going on within their congregations. Their writings could not have been imagined without the proliferation of these new congregations, but, as well as providing a platform for women to publish, these groups imposed their own rules on what women could express in public. A study of these writings would not be complete without considering how this work makes reference to congregational politics. This brief introduction will then go on to outlining some contemporary attitudes to separatists and Baptists, particularly how the threat of Anabaptist heresy and promiscuity, also affected what women published and the survival of their work.

Ten years earlier than Trapnel declared her verse prophecies, in April to July 1647, separatists and Baptists had also gathered around the bedside of Sarah Wight, then aged between fifteen and sixteen, whose trance-like illness had stopped her from eating or drinking, caused her to have visions, and had made her expound from scriptures. According to the account, published as *The Exceeding Riches of Grace* (1647), Wight appears to have experienced extreme spiritual melancholy in the years before she became bedridden, often attempting ‘wickedly to destroy her selfe’, as the compiler of her experiences, Henry Jessey, recounted, ‘by drowning, strangling, stabbing; seeking to beat out her eyes and braines; wretchedly bruising, and wounding her selfe: (The chiefe cause of such weaknesse since)’.\(^4\) Such despair and misery seem not to have been uncommon amongst separatist and Baptist

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\(^4\) Wight and Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace*, p. 7. Extant editions were published twice in 1647, twice in 1648, 1652, twice in 1658, and again in 1666.
believers before they experienced, what they themselves called, ‘the new birth’. These experiences stemmed from a belief, originating with John Calvin, that the fate of each person had been decided (or predestined) before their creation. God could have decreed that the person was one of the reprobates, along with the larger, damned portion of mankind, or they could have been destined for salvation as one of God’s elect. This doctrine did not allow for free will, and so believers could do nothing except interpret the signs they were offered to work out what would happen to them on their death. As a result, men and women often believed, at least for a time, that they were irrecoverably damned as sinners, which led some of them to consider ending their sufferings on earth. Through a combination of meditating on the scriptures, talking to friends or members of congregations (communities of the elect), or listening to ministers and preachers, believers came to trust that they had received God’s grace, and that they could join with the elect as a kind of spiritual rebirth. This is the overarching narrative of Wight’s published experiences which recounted her despair, illness, and recovery as an example for its readers.

Although Wight’s text is a curious mixture of her own reported words, the observations of other visitors, and the writings of Henry Jessey, the minister of an open-communion separatist and Particular Baptist congregation, it also shows how she was instrumental in advising her visitors using her own life-endangering experience as a guide. One maid ‘that was not born in England’, identified by various commentators as ‘Dinah the Blackmore’ mentioned in the list of Wight’s visitors, came to receive comfort from the young girl.5 The maid was being subjected to temptations and afflictions by Satan, and Wight told her not to ‘question the willingnesse of Christ[:] He is your King, & he will save you (Isaiah 33:22)’ (p. 122). Dinah also admitted to Wight that she was as ‘a dry barren ground’ (p. 124) reflecting the deadness and dullness of her spiritual state and also alluding to spiritual barrenness and an inability to be born anew. Wight replied:

\[\text{Christ will pour water on the dry and thirsty land (Isaiah 44:3). He satisfies the hungry soul with good things (Luke 1:53). Its (John 19:30; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 2:13-15) all done by Christ already, for poor barren souls: there is nothing now to do, but to manifest it by the spirit to you (1 Corinthians 2:11). You know God hath made you, and he bare you up all this while. (p. 124)}\]

Comforting the woman, Wight shows how Christ’s crucifixion was to relieve those barren souls, full of sin, and that he would comfort her by pouring water to cure her barrenness. She would have to wait until the grace of God was manifested and revealed by his spirit, but the evidence of his bearing her up under temptation, Wright thought, was evidence of his love. After her visit, Dinah was asked if she was helped by Wright’s advice and she told the ‘Relater’ that ‘the Lord had given some support and refreshing to her, since that conference’ (p. 125). Both Jessey and the writer of the prefatory epistle praising the work, John Saltmarsh, draw attention to the exemplary quality of Wight’s experience for both advice and example to the saints (as the elect called themselves). Saltmarsh wrote that whenever he met with ‘such precious manifestations of the Lord, methinkes I taste those waters of life, those rivers of living water which shall flow out of the bellies of those, who beleive in Christ, (John 7:38)’ (a2). Wight’s published experiences were a sign of the workings of the divine spirit in those that believed in him, and these evidences were likened by Saltmarsh unto the cleansing and life-giving waters described in John. Her experience was instrumental in strengthening and edifying both ‘afflicted maids’ and learned ministers.

Wight’s experiences also show the progression believers made in being spiritually born anew as they felt their sins being removed by a remembrance of Christ’s death. Carola Scott-Luckens has highlighted aspects of Wight’s experience that resemble sixteenth and seventeenth-century birthing rituals, calling her text a kind of ‘birth-narrative, modelled on the ritual ceremonies conventionally surrounding maternity during this period’.  

The aspects to which she refers include that only close female friends and relatives are permitted to see her ‘from onset of her illness’, a limitation resembling the permitted visitors to a mother-to-be ‘who from early labour was attended only by closest female relatives and friends until her recovery from her travails’. In addition, her room is shut up because of the light affecting her damaged eyes, and after she began to take food again she had to wash off the ‘encrusted blood’ from her injured head before she began a ‘lying in’ period where she received visitors, like Dinah, advising them on their spiritual troubles. After this came ‘larger and mixed groups of visitors’ and celebrations, where Wight is ‘veiled at this event of thanksgiving’ rather like a woman being churched after giving birth. The allusions to giving birth, as well as being reborn, are explicit in the presentation of this experience. Wight’s own labour to

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7 Scott-Luckens, ‘Propaganda or Marks of Grace?’; 222.
8 Scott-Luckens, ‘Propaganda or Marks of Grace?’; 223.
bring forth joy in her new spiritual condition is presented to encourage hope even in the depths of affliction. Her first words after her recovery are to communicate a ‘thirst for the water of life’ (p. 15) to strengthen herself in her new, pure state. After this she is ready to help quench the thirst of Dinah who could not bring forth a new birth because she was convinced that she was spiritually barren. After she has laboured herself, in her lying-in she acts as a midwife helping other women to receive Christ’s water of life and labour in their own new births. She, in her labouring as an example to others, becomes a ‘Mother in Israel’ at her young age. Like the title of this study, which comes from a similarly labouring experience by Jane Turner, Wight moved from a ‘Daughter of Zion’ to a ‘Mother in Israel’, nurturing other men and women in their ‘new births’.9

As well as offering her as an example to other believers by her recovery and ‘new birth’, Wight’s experiences were also interpreted by Jessey as a sign of what God would do for his people if they had faith in him. A common aspect of such works was the conflating of the individual with the congregation; the biblical people of Israel, and the elect gathered together against persecution. Wight uses the example of the Israelites being freed from out of Egypt and led through the wilderness to show Dinah that the same would happen to her if she would wait (p. 124). Jessey also took Wight’s experience as a sign of what was to come, a foreshadowing of how God would reward his saints on earth, where he had ‘promised to his [people], to powre out of his Spirit in the last dayes, upon them, and upon their children, their sons and daughters (Acts 2:17-33, 38-39)’ (a1v). In the last days, according to Acts 2, women would prophesy, various signs would appear, and whoever called on the name of God would be saved. The verses 2:38-39, urging believers to ‘Repent, and be baptized’, also show that Jessey had a particular idea of what the saints should be doing in the last days in order to be saved. As Catharine Gray writes, Jessey ‘presents Wight’s trance as a sign of the fast approach of an apocalyptic overturning: Jessey refers to Christ, “who shortly will bring down every high thing” (A7)’.10 Gray continues by quoting directly from Wight, who also presents the reversal of the positions of poor, low things with those on high in a reading of Psalms 107: ‘He poureth contempt upon the princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way. Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction’ (pp. 40-1). Wight, a


poor low thing and the ‘empty nothing creature’ of Jessey’s title, was endowed with the experience of the ‘new birth’ and, because of her spiritual credentials, was raised higher than those who sought to criticise her and the saints. As separatist and Baptist women’s experiences often were, the relation of Wight’s narrative is both a vindication of their doctrine and practice, but also a sign to be interpreted: if the Holy Spirit could recover such a creature as Wight, then he would do so for all the saints in bondage.

As well as a sign, the publishing of Wight’s experience, like Trapnel’s prophecies, was also an attempt to unite, strengthen, and rouse up the saints who came to visit. Gray writes that these women ‘became central figures around which private communities united and through which these communities were publicized’.11 Jessey names ‘some seventy people’, which Barbara Ritter Dailey has suggested makes ‘his book a kind of petition’.12 The inclusion of the conversations and sermons visitors made in the book also makes it more than just Jessey and Wight’s endeavour. Most of the visitors, Gray asserts, are ‘drawn from the Independent and sectarian section of London forced into coalition by the Presbyterian counterrevolution’ and Jessey mentions ‘such prominent Independent and Baptist ministers as Thomas Goodwin, Nicholas Lockyer, John Simpson, Walter Cradock, Mathew Barker, and Robert Bragge’.13 Wight’s bedside acted as a place for leading Independents and Baptists to meet and listen to the wonders that God was working in his believers cementing their resolve to oppose the Presbyterians in their agreements with the king. Men and women gathered to listen to words and advice of one whose recovered, ‘new born’ state was God-given and inspired them to unite against their common enemy. It is significant that Jessey became the compiler of such an experience, as he had been the minister of an open-communion congregation made up of separatists and re-baptised members from the early 1640s. Although re-baptised himself, Jessey did not make the ordinance of baptism a condition of membership, and the uniting of Independents (separatists from the established church in their own congregations) and Particular Baptists (separatists who were re-baptised on profession of faith) at both a congregational and city-wide level was likely to have been an effect of Wight’s experience that he particularly wanted to record.

The publishing of Wight’s experiences in The Exceeding Riches of Grace shows that women’s experiences could unite, strengthen, and edify those of differing religious persuasions. The network of visitors she attracted reappears throughout the rest of this study.

as they struggled to further the cause of gathered congregations separated from the established church, some having gone the extra step towards re-baptising adults. It was, for instance, Sara Jones, whose work is considered in chapters one and two of this study, who drew Jessey’s attention to Wight’s illness. She had been a member of what is generally accepted to have been the first separatist congregation in London before Jessey took over its ministry, and she objected to his preference for mixed communion. Nevertheless she visited Wight with her husband Thomas, perhaps as a female deacon for the church as she was evidently still a member (A5v; pp. 9, 40). Other visitors included Anna Trapnel herself, who was also prophesying at this time (these prophecies are recorded in *The Cry of a Stone*); Isaac Knight, the minister of the Fulham congregation of which Anne Venn was a member; John Simpson, the minister of Trapnel’s Allhallows later mixed-communion congregation, and also a Fifth Monarchist; Praisegod Barbone, who led the other half of the separatist Jessey church when it split in 1640 because of its size, and his wife, Sara Barbone, who was questioned with Sara Jones in the High Commission court in the 1630s when they were both members of the same congregation; Mistress Duppa, wife of John Duppa, who led a cessation away from the Jessey church in 1630 when John Lathrop was minister; Mistress Fiennes, the wife of Sir James Fiennes, and the cousin of Anna Temple, mentioned in chapter one; Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh, a relation of Sara Jones’s husband who wrote to the Earl of Clarendon, after speaking with the Particular Baptist William Kiffin, to request the release of twelve male and female Baptists arrested at Aylesbury and condemned to death; 14 Hannah Allen, the printer, who went on to publish Deborah Huish’s conversion narrative for the Fifth Monarchists William Allen and John Vernon; and Lady Darcy and Lady Vermuyden, who would later visit Trapnel while she prophesied in Whitehall. 15 The bedside of Sarah Wight became the meeting place of a community, showing that women and their experiences could aid the forwarding of the saints on earth.

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14 Sara Jones’s husband, Thomas, was a cousin of Sir Roger Jones, First Viscount Ranelagh, the father-in-law of Lady Katherine Jones, Second Viscountess Ranelagh. Her letter addressed to Clarendon at the request of William Kiffin is held at the Cushing/Whitney Medical Historical Library, Yale University, MS 1236, John Farquhar Fulton Papers, ‘Autograph Letter from Lady Ranelagh to the Earl of Clarendon’ (n.d. [1670]). Ranelagh recounted that ‘Mr Kiffin has binn with me & told me a sad story of a sentence of death & confiscation passed upon a dowsen persons of both sexes, for but the suspition of <their> haveing mett at a Conventicle’. He had begged her to acquaint Clarendon with the case. The Baptists were subsequently released. My thanks go to Ruth Connolly for sending me a transcript of this letter which suggests further ways in which women were instrumental in dissent. For Lady Ranelagh see Ruth Connolly, ‘A Proselytising Protestant Commonwealth: The Religious and Political Ideals of Katherine Jones, Viscountess Ranelagh (1614-1691)’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 23 (2008), 244-64; Connolly, “A Wise and Godly Sybilla”: Viscountess Ranelagh and the Politics of International Protestantism”, in *Women, Gender, and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Sylvia Brown (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 285-306.

Approaching Israel

The texts of Anna Trapnel and Sarah Wight emphasise the importance of women’s experiences in bringing the people of Israel together, unifying and evangelising those that had ears to hear. Their words and actions were treasured by their contemporaries as part of a body of remarkable writings that they believed had come directly from God, and these writings often refer specifically to issues that their congregations were experiencing. This highlights the importance of considering separatist and Baptist women’s experiences as part of the debates occurring in and between different congregations that believed they were part of an early modern Israel. This study explores the various ways in which these mid-seventeenth-century women worked to strengthen their congregations through their writings, believing that they had been divinely inspired to edify those whose practice was wanting, and vindicate rightful walking in his name.

Often compared to Deborah, the biblical ‘Mother in Israel’ (Judges 5:7), women in these gathered churches were instrumental in ‘bringing forth’ joy to their metaphorical children of Israel, by prophesying ways in which enemies of their congregations would face retribution and by continually strengthening church practices in time for the second coming of Christ. Deborah’s story, recorded in Judges 4 and 5, shows how the ‘children of Israel came up to her for judgment’ (4:5), because they were being oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan, for doing ‘evil in the sight of the Lord’ (4:1). As a Judge and prophetess, she sent for Barak, her military leader, and told him that the Lord had commanded him to take an army against his enemies and that the Lord would deliver Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army ‘into thine hand’ (4:7). Barak agreed, but only if Deborah would join him on the journey, and she ‘arose and went with Barak’ (4:9) to victory against the Israelites’ tyrannical oppressors. The prophetess Deborah was a significant figure for separatist and Baptist women because of her power and leadership, but also because of her ability to prophesy and hence directly advise male leaders to go into battle. During the period of this study, 1632-1675, the new children of Israel saw themselves as coming under the oppression of a succession of governing factions that sought to restrict their religious liberty, and some women were welcomed as new ‘Deborahs’, vessels for God’s directions to the male congregational leaders to lead the saints towards victory against the forces of the antichrist. Women, through their known ability to prophesy, could play their part in delivering their people from captivity. This study will examine how these women negotiated ways to speak and write as advisers and teachers to
their congregations, and how they responded to doctrinal arguments, attacks on their conduct, and the ‘deadness’ and ‘dullness’ of what they perceived to be their congregations’ inaction. God had spoken to them, and it was their duty to pass his message to others.

Considering separatist and Baptist women as part of their congregations is integral to an understanding of their work, and it is on this that this study focuses. Although their writings relate and analyse their own relationship with God, this is always presented as a sign of the progress of God’s people as a whole. Their own experiences and actions reflect (and are validated by) biblical events, but were also thought to foreshadow God’s dealings with the children of Israel in times to come. Through an analysis organised along doctrinal and congregational lines, this study draws attention to women who have received little or no literary critical (or indeed historical) attention, by considering the genres they utilised as part of their membership. Women writers of conversion narratives, in particular, have not received as much critical attention as more ‘remarkable’ women who prophesied or who were associated with male writers. This might explain the significant number of pages that have been devoted to the young prophetess Sarah Wight; to the ardent defender of Independent congregations, Katherine Chidley; to the prophetess, Elizabeth Poole, who spoke in front of the court trying Charles I in 1649; to Anna Trapnel, the Fifth Monarchist who prophesied at Whitehall at the trial of her friend; and to Agnes Beaumont, whose unusual experiences with John Bunyan would appear to have caused him to add paragraphs of vindication to his Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.16 While of course these women are important to such a

study as this, they will not form the main focus which is to analyse little-known women’s experiences in relation to their more familiar co-religionists. Rather than considering the texts chronologically, then, it will unite the more familiar and the more obscure women writers in chapters which are organised by the forms and genres in which they participated, asserting their position within their congregations, vindications, conversion experiences (as meditation, example, and evangelising work), and prophecies. The voices of little-studied women like An Collins, Sarah Davy, Deborah Huish, Sara Jones, Susanna Parr, Katherine Sutton, Jane Turner, Anne Venn, the anonymous speaker of *Conversion Exemplified* and the contributors to the collections of John Rogers and Henry Walker deserve to be heard alongside the reported words of Mary Allein, Anne Harriman, Dorothy Hazzard, and Elizabeth Milbourne. The study will also draw on works that are not currently widely available, which have therefore received very little critical attention. Anna Trapnel’s 990-page folio of prophecies, accessible only at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, has received attention from a handful of studies, none of which consider her lengthy verses praising her own baptism which are considered in three of the following five chapters.\(^{17}\) Sara Jones’s book, *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* (1642), has only been examined by one historical study probably because the only extant copy is held by the Alexander Turnbull Library, New Zealand. (The Bodleian Library holds only a microfilm copy of the work.) Considering these writings as part of their separatist and Baptist context draws together these writings, often considered as disparate works, to gain a fuller appreciation of what these women were engaging with, and how far-reaching their writings were.

Indeed, there has been little literary critical work completed on Baptists during the period of this study. The studies that do exist have usually been histories of the growth of congregations, and, useful as those may be, they have not often considered the role of women in building and strengthening these congregations, and especially not how their writings

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18 Where women’s writing is considered is in the excellent collections of Bunyan scholarship, but this often post-dates the writings discussed in this study, or concentrates (deservedly) on the experiences of Agnes Beaumont. This study discusses writings published during the growth of Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist churches out of their separatist roots from the late 1630s and early 1640s as well as those published during the less prescriptive 1650s. It analyses how the women’s writings produced, and responded to these changes, which studies of single writers are not in a position to do. The project does not include the work of General (Arminian) Baptists because, although they practiced re-baptism, they did not believe in Calvinist predestination and so differ from Particular Baptists in major ways. While undertaking the research for this project I realized that the line between separatists and Particular Baptists was so fine and congregational divides so fluid that one group could not be considered without the other. It also became clear that General Baptist women either did not produce these kinds of texts or that they had not survived. The date-limits of the project are not arbitrary, but have been dictated by the women’s works. 1632 was the year of Sara Jones’s first recorded imprisonment by the Laudian High Commission Court and the year in which she wrote the first half of her Relation, outlining how a separatist church could fight against persecution by uniting in order. That Relation is also a rare extant example of a female-authored sermon. The end-date, 1675, was likely to have been the year in which Agnes Beaumont’s experiences around the death of her father were first circulated, and also the year when Anne Wentworth was excommunicated from her Baptist church


20 This could have been because General Baptists did not subject themselves to the introspection of Calvinist predestination, believing instead in free will. Believers would not have felt the need to examine the evidence of God’s grace to see if they were part of the elect or reprobate.
where her abusive husband remained. These dates also allow for a discussion of women’s writings that were undertaken despite various strictures, not just those applied by their male co-members’ adherence to scripture, but also by the ecclesiastical authorities of various monarchs and Parliaments. This study examines how writings altered in their content and frequency, reflecting these changes. Congregations were always concerned with the state of the nation, and women wrote in various ways to urge higher powers to undertake both religious and political change.

Because many of the women discussed in this project are so little known, it has been necessary to include biographical information in order to further contextualise their work. Most of the writings considered are to some extent autobiographical, and the religious decisions recorded in these works permeated their lives at the deepest level. Where (and even if) parents decided to baptise their children had profound implications for how they were viewed by their friends, traders, and the church they chose to frequent. The records for where Mary Allein’s children were baptised, for example, show when she and her husband separated from the established church and began to walk with the separatist congregation that met in one half of St Peter’s Cathedral, Exeter. Where to baptise one of her children after they had separated gave Mary cause enough to travel a great distance whilst heavily pregnant which caused her minister at the time to question her conduct. It is clear that concern for the salvation of their children often led believers to go to great lengths to decide which congregation was scripturally and doctrinally sound. This study would be impossible without the inclusion of such historical detail, as well as the wider historical context of women’s position within the gathered churches. Without this information, included in this study, their stories would be obscured and even biased. If we do not know how women could communicate within their congregations, which certainly affected what they went on to write, how can we know how the women, as Longfellow writes, ‘negotiated gender and authority in religious discourse’?21 The genres in which women published roughly map onto where they were able to speak officially within their congregations and include defence strategies which apply simultaneously to both their speaking and writing. Without this historical detail, it would be impossible to know how women were engaging with conventions (both in their gender and with their writing), where they subverted them, and where, most often, they did both.

Studies of women and their writings and the part they played in the formation and growth of the gathered churches have often focussed on the role of Quaker women who would seem to have had comparatively more liberty to speak within their congregations.22 Because Quakers did not follow the scriptures to the letter, as separatists and Baptists did, women were not obliged to keep silent in church meetings, and could speak whenever they felt the urge. It is likely that for this reason, among others, many women joined Quaker groups after becoming members of gathered churches to find further liberty for their voices. This study, then, engages with the various arguments women used to give themselves authority to speak in a constrained environment. There are certainly fewer extant works by Baptist women than there are by Quaker women, and so assertions about the influence of their works have to be more tentative, but this study shows that there are links between their works and the way in which they expressed their ideas, even if that link is the congregations they belonged to. It is certainly likely that some of the women knew each other. Sarah Wight was visited by both Anna Trapnel and Sara Jones, and Jones would probably have known Katherine Chidley as they were members of the same church. Sarah Davy might have bumped into some of the owners of experiences included in the collection of Henry Walker, all having attended sermons given at Westminster during the early 1650s. Writings that are formed by being part of such a community face the danger of being dismissed as formulaic and constrained, as not being the work of individuals because they obscure the identity and individual views of the writer. These are value judgements made in our own time, and if we look more closely at such works and consider them as part of a community of writings we are in a position to see how women negotiated between the patterns that had gone before and their own ideas of what needed to be said and in what way. The ways in which these women responded to such patterns and conventions show that they were actively seeking to change how their faith was represented to the wider world. This study makes clear that the conversion narrative, which most extant separatist and Baptist women’s work are examples of, cannot be dismissed as materials that merely conform to an ‘orthodox’ pattern. These works are very clearly of the time they were given and written, responding both to wider religio-political events (for example Deborah Huish’s The Captive Taken from the Strong)

and more local doctrinal disputes (Jane Turner’s testimony against the north-eastern Quakers). This study seeks to foreground the nuances of these testimonies to show how through them, women were working as part of their congregations to strengthen their fellow-members and to debate with others using a genre that they were permitted to use.

This work explores the ways in which separatist and Baptist women gained their place to speak and write within (and sometimes for) a community that often simultaneously both celebrated their experiences, and often denied them the freedom to express them. By using more acceptable writing genres that corresponded to the situations in which they could speak in their congregations, women negotiated these conventions and made their voices heard. There is much evidence to suggest that these works were valued highly by their congregational communities, especially as women were perceived to be closer to the divine. As reborn Deborahs these women could urge their fellow members to approach Israel as a strong, unified congregation (agreeing on accurate doctrines taken from scripture). Their religion, while restraining their output, also gave them voices that they might never have otherwise had.

‘An old evil spirit of mis-construing’: The Ghosts of the Anabaptists

The vehemence with which opponents of the Baptists attacked them and their female members is testament to how much their new practices were seen as resembling old heresies brought forth in a new guise, but much closer to home. Baptist women’s writings and the ways in which they were presented were undoubtedly produced with these attacks in mind, as a reaction to the ways in which they were presented by their enemies. Their contemporaries were mindful of the rebellious continental Anabaptists led by Jan Bockelson (John of Leiden) who had attempted to establish a theocracy in Münster a century before in the 1530s. This group of millenarians had attempted violently to establish a ‘New Jerusalem’ and advocated adult baptism, abolished private ownership, and practised polygamy. What seventeenth-century studies of the Anabaptists often failed to explore was that this violent faction was part of a wider group, who were, J. F. McGregor writes, ‘pacifist in principle’ which is why they ‘regarded civil authority, dependent on the power of the sword, as irredeemably corrupt’. Instead, the histories of the Anabaptists that circulated in the early 1640s tended to

concentrate on the events of Münster, devoting much of their texts to how the group had gained control of the city, hoping to provoke their readers to see parallels with events in their own times. *A Warning for England [...] in the Famous History of the Frantick Anabaptists* (1642), for instance, stressed that their ministers pretended ‘a wonderfull and more then ordinary zeale, having with great passion preached against the Popish Errors’, and that they claimed to have ‘some divine revelations, that god by dreames & Visions did reveal unto his saints his will’. The pamphlet also tells its readers that the people ‘dayly flocked after [one of the ministers] & admired him as a man divinely inspired’ and listened to his prophecies, the most disturbing of which was that ‘he had received a command from god to kill & root up all wicked Princes & Magistrates, & to chuse better in their places’ (A2'). He was also reported as having commanded ‘all Churches to be defaced’ (B3). Elsewhere in the pamphlet are recorded a Prince’s words to his soldiers before he attempted to quell their rebellious ideas, which had greatly affected the ‘base people’ who had then ‘risen in a tumult’ (A2''): ‘these Revells did but cover with the name of the Gospell their owne impious and bloudy designes: that their true ayme was, to take away all Government, to bring in confusion into the state, Atheisme, and Barbarisme into the Church’ (A4). Readers in the early 1640s would have seen a connection to the flourishing of ‘zealous ministers’ after their persecution under Archbishop Laud and how people ‘flocked’ to hear their divinely inspired sermons. Defending the monarchy against potential seditio n, the pamphlet presented its readers with images of what would happen if these ministers (not always Baptist) were allowed to prevail. It was as if London was one step away from the Anabaptists of Münster shouting in the streets: ‘all who were not rebaptized; were to be accompted Pagans and Infidells, and to be kild’ ([B]1').

Seventeenth-century English Baptists were called ‘Anabaptists’ by their opponents because they shared with their predecessors the practice of believers’ baptism, which allowed into their congregations only those who were old enough to examine their own consciences. However, the name was enough to taint their doctrine and practice with the old ‘heresies’ of a century before. Anne Dunan-Page identifies five extreme charges that were levelled against groups of Baptists because of these similarities: ‘heresy, political rebellion, murder, sexual

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licence, and madness’. The rumours of murderous intent seem to have sprung from Leiden’s reported practice of executing ‘infidels’ in the marketplace, including one of his wives who disagreed with his causing of many to die from famine under his rule. ‘Hearing of her speeches’, A Warning for England recorded he brought ‘her into the open Market-place with her fellowes, and commanding her to kneele down, strikes off her head’ (C4). He then ‘brand[ed] her with lightnesse, and playing the whore’ (C4). The taint of the Anabaptist’s crimes of murder and sexual licence reappeared in the criticisms of their opponents. Many regarded the Baptist practice of ‘dipping’, or completely immersing people in water in order to baptise them, as a way of indirectly murdering their followers. Dunan-Page refers to Richard Baxter’s vindication of infant baptism which shows his concern for participants, particularly women:

In Cities like London, and among Gentlewomen that have been tenderly brought up, and ancient people, and shop-keepers, especially women that take but little of the cold ayr, the dipping them in the cold weather, in cold water, in the course of nature, would kill hundreds and thousands of them, either suddenly, or by casting them into some chronicall Disease.

For believers, baptism by immersion was the ultimate ‘cure’ for their ills, not the cause, as opponents of the Baptists, like Baxter, testified. Not only did opponents to baptism present it as a danger to women’s health, they also insisted that its practice would endanger female virtue and disrupt social hierarchies. Thomas Edwards, author of the encyclopaedic Gangraena which sought to ‘catalogue and discover’ the ‘pernicious practices of the sectaries’, showed particular concern at these disruptions. He drew his concerned readers’ attentions to ‘anabaptists’ baptising ‘young maids, Citizens daughters, about one and two a clock in the morning, tempting them out of their fathers houses at midnight to be baptized[,] the parents being asleep and knowing nothing’; ‘their Husbands and Masters could not keep them in their houses’. Edwards expresses the fear that the Baptists who lured the women to the rivers and enthralled them were trying to re-populate the world with their (ill-formed) heretical offspring, ignoring the rights of their husbands and fathers. Edwards was drawing

27 Edwards, The First and Second Part of Gangraena, pp. 58; 121. See also The Tub-preachers Overtur’d or Independenty to be abandon’d and abhor’d (London: Printed for George Lindsey, 1647), pp. 5-6.
28 In published sensationalist pamphlets the offspring produced by sectaries (or indeed any objects of public derision) were usually presented as monstrous or ill-formed. These monstrous births were said to be the result of
on popular perceptions that Anabaptists, like their fifteenth-century counterparts, held both possessions and women in common, and, following 2 Timothy 3:6, led ‘captive silly women laden with sins, […] away with divers lusts’. Sarah Davy, a separatist, records being accused of having ‘itching ears [2 Timothy 4:3], ever learning [2 Timothy 3:7]’ because her ‘heart desired much to hear good men’ which she did ‘with convenience’ while at boarding school. 29 Women who listened to ministers and were subsequently baptised were characterised by their lustfulness for new doctrines and effective ministry (lust for the minister was implied by extension), and an ignorance of doctrine that the ministers preyed upon. A later pamphlet asserted that ‘these English Crocodiles leave no politick ways untried to work upon Weak Proselites, they prevale most upon the femall Sex, as knowing the Woman was first seduced, and then seduced the man’. 30

As commentators have often concluded, one of the main threats that the Baptists were thought to pose was in their undermining of the ‘sanctity of the family’. 31 One particular case where accusations of this kind were made, and which is relatively well-documented by recent work, was that of Elizabeth Poole, who joined the congregation of William Kiffin in the mid-1640s. 32 Her father, Robert Poole, had suggested that Kiffin had drawn away both his daughter, and his servants, to join with his congregation of Baptists, and either at his own request, or that of his daughter, he and Kiffin met to discuss the lawfulness of his doctrine and practices. Kiffin wrote later in his A Briefe Remonstrance of the Reasons and Grounds of those People commonly called Anabaptists (1645), that Poole had brought with him men that Kiffin had ‘cause to fear, their hearts as full of hatred against those, that in this thing are contrary minded to them’. 33 Robert Poole’s replies to Kiffin’s letters, also published with the work, showed that the latter had ‘done me the Injurie, in seducing my Children and servants into your errours’ (B2). Kiffin had undermined Poole’s authority in his own home by captivating his household into disobedience. As Gillespie writes, opponents often ‘represented the act of baptism as one of the most pernicious means of invading the

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29 Sarah Davy, Heaven Realiz’d or the Holy Pleasure of Daily Intimate Communion with God (London: Published by A. P., 1670), C2’. Davy went to a school run by a ‘Mrs W.’, probably between 1650 and 1657.
32 See footnote 15.
Figure 1: Title page from Daniel Featley’s *The Dippers Dipt. Or, the Anabaptists Duck’d and Plung’d Over Head and Eares* (London: For Nicholas Bourne, 1645).
sacrosanct space of the home and usurping the father’s authority’. If Baptists could undermine fathers in their own homes, then it was conceivable that they could also undermine the state: their potential for political rebellion was notorious. What Kiffin does in his pamphlet is to vindicate the Baptists from accusations against the validity of their practices (and by extension their conduct). Although Kiffin answered all his enemy’s queries about his right to separate from the establish church and preach, his own questions to Poole about the unlawfulness of infant baptism and its origins go unanswered, suggesting that the latter could not refute the ‘truth’ of the Baptists’ doctrine.

The new practice of dipping a believer in a river, in public and supposedly completely naked, further inflamed popular opinion against the Baptists, especially when the believers were women. Daniel Featley’s anti-Baptist tract, The Dippers Dipt, published in 1645 and a sixth time in 1660, was one of the more popular ‘heresiographies’ which sought to disprove the ‘dipping’ of believers in order to baptise. He writes: ‘the resort of great multitudes of men and women together in the evening, […] going naked into rivers, there to be plunged and Dipt, cannot be done without scandal, especially where the State giveth no allowance to any such practise’. The tract’s frontal woodcut, by William Marshall (see figure 1), shows naked men and women immersed in the river, but most prominent are the bare-breasted female Baptists labelled ‘Virgins of Sion’. The male baptisers are shown removing the shawl about the women’s shoulders in order to push their naked bodies under the water. Featley wrote later that the believers’ practice was to

strip themselves stark naked […]: and when they are questioned for it, they shelter this their shamelesse act, with the proverb Veritas nuda est, the truth is naked, and desires no vail, masque, or guise; which reason if it were good, would hinder them from holding private Conventicles as they do.

His work brought the errors of the sectaries, in his case the Baptists, to public view. Featley criticises the Baptists’ secret meetings, which were thought seditious due to their cloak of secrecy, and indicates that his work was undertaken to ‘lay open’ the workings and heresies of the congregations which they held secret. Edwards’s Gangraena also included its fair share of criticism of the Baptists, citing their practices among his ‘Errours of the Sectaries’,

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34 Gillespie, Domesticity and Dissent, p. 136.
35 Daniel Featley, The Dippers Dipt. Or, the Anabaptists Duck’d and Plung’d Over Head and Eares (London: For Nicholas Bourne, 1645), p. 36.
36 Featley, The Dippers Dipt, p. 203.
and included a letter which aligned the practice of immersion with further scandal, showing how ministers used it as an excuse to see their female adherents naked:

Another woman having a desire to be Re-baptized, and having pulled off all her cloaths to the naked skin, ready to go into the Water, but forbearing during the time the Dipper prayed, she covered her secret parts with both her hands, the which the Dipper espying, told the woman that it was an unseemly sight to see her hold her hands downward, it being an Ordinance of Jesus Christ, her hands with her heart should be lifted upward towards heaven (as he shew’d her how he did) but she refusing for modesties sake could not be Re-baptized.37

This account stresses not only the potential for lustful actions in the practice of immersion (earlier in the letter it is recorded that the same man baptised five daughters and chose the one he liked best for his wife), but also criticises the Baptists’ strict adherence to formal practices. A refusal to undertake the practice with anything less than full conformity was not permitted, and the woman was faced with the decision of being baptised and ignoring her modesty, or being excluded from the ordinance. The letter writer suggests that the Baptist ministers were using salvation in order to entrap and ogle the female members they attracted. In order to be a ‘Virgin of Sion’, opponents thought women risked their reputations and modesty.

As if in reply to allegations of this kind, the Baptist churches in London issued The Confession of Faith, of those Churches which are Commonly (though Falsly) Called Anabaptists, published a year earlier than Featley’s tract, in 1644. Signed by William Kiffin, Thomas Patient, John Spilsbury, and Paul Hobson, among others of the seven Particular Baptist churches of London, the Confession vindicates the practices of their Baptist congregations by taking ‘off those aspersions which are frequently both in Pulpit and Print, (although unjustly) cast upon them’.38 The writers sought to justify their practices with scripture in order to confirm the faith of God’s chosen people, but also to defend themselves against accusations of scandal. Article XL outlines the ‘way and manner’ of dispensing baptism, proven by scripture to be by ‘dipping or plunging the whole body under water: it being a signe’. Aware of opinions like Featley’s, the congregations appear to have debated how to make this ordinance appear less scandalous, and in the margin, above the scriptural references, is written: ‘the word Baptize, signifying to dip under the water, yet so as with convenient garments both upon the administrator and subject, with all modestie’.39 The

37 Thomas Edwards, Gangraena, or, a Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errours (London: Printed for Ralph Smith, 1646), p. 87.
38 William Kiffin and others, The Confession of Faith, of those Churches which are Commonly (though Falsly) Called Anabaptists (London: Printed by Matthew Simmons, 1644), A1. Featley originally argued his work in the pulpit so his accusations would have been in circulation.
Confession also includes articles on the lawfulness of the ‘civill Magistracie’ as ‘an ordinance of God set up by God for the punishment of evill doers’, and shows that the Baptists should submit to their rule and ‘make supplication and prayer for Kings, and all that are in authority’ (C3). Unlike their Anabaptist predecessors, the Baptists showed themselves to be obedient subjects and upholders of the government and monarchy, as well as being exempt from charges of scandal in the ordinance of immersion. The only exception to their submission was their commitment to liberty of conscience and their conscientious refusal to submit to ecclesiastical authority. They prayed that they might be allowed liberty to worship as they pleased, and in return they should submit their bodies and estates to the rule of government. If they did not receive the ‘Magistrates allowance and furtherance’ then they would ‘proceed together in Christian communion, not daring to give place to suspend our practise, but to walk in obedience to Christ [...]': remembering always we ought to obey God rather then men’ (C3v).

In the subsequent chapters of this thesis I will examine how separatist and Baptist women’s writings responded to the demands of their congregations, ‘proceeding together’ with their male co-members, and also how they tried to ‘obey God’ despite the accusations and persecutions of the authorities. In chapter one I discuss women’s position within their gathered churches, as formers of their congregations and the offices they were permitted to hold according to scripture. Using the writings of various women, but particularly Sara Jones and Susanna Parr, I try to present a fuller picture of when women were allowed to speak within their congregations and question if this altered during the period of this study. In the last section of the chapter I explore the arguments women were using for and against the ordinance of believers’ baptism which was gradually being introduced to the gathered churches. Presenting the arguments made by Sara Jones and Anna Trapnel, both members of separatist congregations of open communion Baptists, I examine how their writings helped their fellow believers decide how best to obey the words of God and vindicate their practices to those outside. From my discussion of women’s position in the gathered churches, I move in chapter two to exploring how women’s writings emerged out of the persecution of the gathered churches. I look at how these writings were preoccupied with recording events from the perspective of the godly and not the authorities who sought to erase their words from the record. In the second section I discuss Sara Jones’s The Relation of a Gentlewoman (1642) and how she challenges the episcopal authorities that imprisoned her congregation, while simultaneously urging the group to stay strong and obey the Lord’s ordinances. The last
section of chapter two compares the use of prophecies and dreams in Anna Trapnel’s *Report and Plea* (1654) and Agnes Beaumont’s manuscript experience. I argue that both women use visions and dreams to vindicate their behaviour, thought in both cases to be at fault. In chapter three I look at the language that women (and also men) used to talk of their experiences of God’s grace during periods of despair, and moments of conversion and baptism. Such language is often bodily in its concentration, as believers sought ways to describe what was happening in their spiritual lives, and the chapter also discusses whether spiritual melancholy was considered a physical or spiritual problem by the way believers attempted to ‘cure’ themselves. Chapter four broadens the discussions of chapter three by considering how those published women’s conversion narratives were used both in the homes of the godly (in the second section), and by the women’s congregations (in the third). It considers the likely readership of such works as well as discussing the religio-political implications of such narratives as Deborah Huish’s *The Captive Taken from the Strong* (1658), used to cement relations between the West Country and Irish congregations, and Jane Turner’s *Choice Experiences* (1653), a personal account of her temptation to Quaker tenets which was intended to strengthen her Baptist congregation’s beliefs and practices. The final chapter focuses on women’s attempts, through experience and prophecy, to be a force for change in their worlds. The first section considers how conversion narratives could predict and foreshadow events though a discussion of an anonymous gentlewoman’s text, *Conversion Exemplified* (1663), where the speaker urges change in her episcopal relatives by writing from her death-bed. The second section discusses three Baptist women’s works published, or written, in 1658, but focuses on Anna Trapnel’s untitled folio of verse prophecies. I discuss how these works advised on preparations from the second coming of Christ and how Trapnel’s prophecies use images of water and baptism to show how God had, and would still, separate the godly from the reprobate.
Chapter One

‘I thought to have been silent, but this is a time of warre’: The Position of Women in the Gathered Churches

As obedient ‘daughters of Zion’, women played various roles in the formation and growth of the gathered churches, and their writings express an anxiousness to help establish a community godly enough to receive the Son of God. On 16 January 1640 Anna Temple wrote to her grown daughter Anne Busbridge updating her with the latest family news. As well as urging her daughter to send her grandchildren to visit so that they could attend church ‘wch they cannot do w th y”, especially in winter”, she rejoiced in observing that the churches she frequented had begun to remove the ‘Popish’ influences introduced and maintained by Archbishop William Laud and his bishops:

God is exceeding good to us everie way, both to bodys & soules; & hath done wonderfull things among us already; & gives us hope of more, & that wee shall see Idolatry & Superstition rooted out; and gods ordinances sett up in the parishe & power of them; Altars begin to goe downe apace & railes in many places, & y” must follow if it bee not downe already, let us labor to be thankfull & continue our prayers; hould up our hands y† Israel may prevaile.1

Temple was hopeful that her family’s continued prayers would help the accomplishment of God’s work; the true reformation of his church on earth; and the ‘prevailing’ of ‘Israell’. Her wishes were not isolated. Godly men and women around the country rejoiced to see the rails that kept the east-end altars from out of the reach of the people removed, and the ‘sacramentalism’, favoured by the Arminian party under Laud and Charles I, labelled as false and Popish by their Calvinist opponents.2 Katherine Sutton, more radically Calvinist than Temple, went a stage further in her criticism of the Arminian practices her parish church had introduced and decided to separate completely from what she perceived as unscriptural, false, and antichristian worship. Although she was a governess, and moved from family to family, she wrote that she had always ‘endeavour[ed] to keep close to the best teaching ministery I

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1 East Sussex Record Office, MS DUN 51/54. Anna Temple née Tomlins (bap. c. 1575) married John Temple c. 1595 and the church alterations Temple refers to probably occurred near where they lived at Frankton, Warwickshire. They had four children: Anne (baptismal date unknown), Susanah (baptismal date unknown), Mary (bap. 15 September 1616), and Thomas (bap. 25 August 1622). The two latter children were baptised at Frankton, Warwickshire. Anne later married John Busbridge on 29 September 1629 and had several children. Those mentioned in the letters are Anne (‘Little Nan’, bap. 28 October 1630), and Mary (5 May 1633). John Temple was the brother-in-law of William Fiennes (Lord Saye) and uncle to the regicide James Temple and Nathaniel Fiennes, politician and army officer.

could find’ even though she often dwelt in places where there were ‘many Papists’. After her marriage, and the death of one of her children, occurring in the late 1620s, Sutton was convinced of ‘the falsness’ of the worship in the parish church she frequented: ‘I could not kneell as the rest did, but sat down as if I had kneeled’ (A3v). Her dislike of kneeling at communion because she believed it had no scriptural foundation made her realise that a minister could easily go further and ‘command thee to kneel at an Altar, (although at that time there was nothing known of setting up of Altars’ (A3v). Confronting the minister, she wrote that she

\[\text{did warn him that if Altars should be set up, that he would not (for filthy lucre [gain’s sake]) kneell at them himself, nor compel others so to do: But he told mee he could not believe any such thing should be: but if it should bee so he promised mee he would not conform to them. But in a short time after he found it too true, for Altars were reared up, and he poor man (contrary to his promise) did conform himself in that thing, and compelled others so to do: but the first time he did so, it pleased the Lord to smite him with a sore languishing disease, that he went out no more. (A3v-A4)}\]

While also setting up her position as a prophetess, warning her minister to adhere to the ways of God in the turbulent times ahead, Sutton exposes ministers like hers who would adopt unscriptural practices for their own gain, for a quiet life. She, like the other women discussed in this chapter, took it upon themselves to try to understand what a scriptural and pure worship of God should consist of, often facing persecution at familial, local, and national levels. Whether they quietly prayed for change like Temple, or actively joined congregations of saints gathered together to worship according to the ways of the New Testament churches like Sutton, women found their voices in discussing the practices and doctrines of their new churches.

Believers who were dissatisfied by the established church often listed unscriptural kneeling to false and idolatrous altars as one of the reasons for their non-attendance there. After Sutton had realised the inappropriateness of this practice she began to observe other faults, particularly the ‘Christening of a child (as they call it) at which time God was pleased to convince mee of the evil and falseness of that piece of Worship’, and of a ‘form of prayer made and appointed to be read in every assembly’ by ‘man’s invention’, not from the word of

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4 Crawford records the story of a gentlewoman who in 1630 sat quietly while others stood to sing the Nicene creed and was made to stand by Bishop Cosin, who called her a ‘lazie sow’ and tore her sleeve in the process. See Crawford, *Women and Religion*, p. 57, citing *The Correspondence of John Cosin, D. D. Lord Bishop of Durham*, Surtees Society, 52 (1868), p. 174.
God (A4). Earlier she had accounted casting ‘away her prayer-book, for it did not reach my necessities’ and asked the Lord to ‘teach mee to pray’ (A1r-v). Finding no scriptural evidence for baptising a child, or for ‘inventing’ prayers with no scriptural basis, drove her to resolve to separate from, and come no more to join in such a way of worship, as it is written in his blessed word; and in order there unto I made use of the best books I could get, that were then published to that purpose, and also called in the help of many Godly Ministers of several judgment. (A4)

After searching the scriptures she fasted and prayed with some others of the same opinion and as a group decided whether they should join ‘in the way of his pure worship’ with others of the same persuasion. This involved Sutton using some of her goods to pay off the lease her husband had on their house, which the ‘Lord was pleased in a short time to make him willing that I should remove’ (A4v). In their new habitation, the group enjoyed a ‘good man preaching’, and had the sweet benefit of some private meetings’ (A4v) before the increased persecution of such groups caused her to travel ‘over the Sea, where I did enjoy further and fuller communion with [God] in his ordinances’ (B1v). At the end of Sutton’s spiritual autobiography she advised her readers, as she had been advised: ‘who ever would not be eternally seperated from God, let them in time separate from all sin’ (E3v).

The part women played in separating and forming new congregations in this period has been discussed briefly by Claire Cross in her “‘He-Goats before the Flocks’”, the title of which is taken from a description of Dorothy Hazzard by the writer of the church record book for what became the Broadmead Church, Bristol. Edward Terrill wrote that after her first husband Anthony Kelly’s death, Hazzard became known in the city for being ‘a virtuous

5 Sutton’s syntax is confused at this point, but it appears that her husband had agreed for them to remove from the house if she could gather enough goods to pay it off for him, which he must have thought unlikely. After she obtained such goods he was obliged to move to a place where she could receive profitable ministry. Although Sutton continually uses ‘I’ (‘I was made free’, A4v), her husband is mentioned as being with her on her travels.

woman: she was like a he-goat before the flock [Jeremiah 50:8]. Although Terrill’s description might not at first appear a flattering one, he places Hazzard as the leader of Jeremiah’s ‘children of Israel’ who sought their Lord, ‘weeping’ (50:4), asking the ‘way to Zion’ (50:5): the Lord’s heaven on earth. Referring to Hazzard’s practice of opening her shop in Bristol High Street on Christmas day where she sat and sewed ‘as a witness for God in the midst of the city, in the face of the sun’, Terrill gives an account of how,

like a Deborah she arose, with strength of holy resolution in her soul from God, even a mother in Israel [Judges 5:7], and so she proved: because 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. (p. 11)

Just as John Bunyan would long to ‘sit in the sun’ with the godly women of the Bedford Church as they sat talking ‘of the things of God’ on the steps, Hazzard is praised by Terrill as a lone witness, or lone mother, of the children of Israel which she went on to lead in separation. Around 1640 she gathered with ‘others of the professors in this city, to separate from the world’ (p. 11), and they kept days of prayer together where they repeated sermon notes to each other, fasted, and sought to hear ‘the best men’ preach. The group was made up of four men and one woman, Hazzard, who ‘went out’ according to the command of 2 Corinthians 6:17: ‘Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you’. This they did for twenty years and drew many, including ‘many good women’ to their assemblies. After Hazzard married the minister, Matthew Hazzard, he took a living in a neighbouring parish which gave her and her fellow separatists some protection from the church authorities in Bristol. Their house became a haven for families bound for New England to escape persecution, and for ‘several good women […] to bed there at their time of lying-in […], to avoid the ceremonies of their churching’ (p. 15). The ‘thanksgiving’ purification ritual of churching was believed by many who chose to separate as a Popish practice preserved from the days of Catholicism. John Canne, an Independent minister who visited the Broadmead Church in order to advise on practice and order, listed churching among ‘seventy principal errors of the Church of England’, as ‘a horrible mocking of God’, and Katherine Chidley, who also formed her own Independent church, condemned the practice as an excuse for ministers to demand fees:

they will yet have another patrimony for the birth of that childe, for before the mother dare goe abroade, shee must have their blessing, that the Sun shall not smite her by day nor the Moone by night [Psalms 121:6],8 for which blessing of theirs, they must have an offering, and the like they require for all the children that be borne into this world, though there live not one of sixe to be men or women.9

To escape the charges of a clergy that did not abide by scriptural practices, both Hazzard and Chidley refused to be churched, Hazzard by moving to a parish controlled by her husband, and Chidley by flatly refusing.10 Both actively spoke against the established church and formed their own pure churches free from vile popishness.

Gathered congregations like the Broadmead Church were characterised by their rigorous adherence to scripture, particularly those ordinances carried out by the Apostles in the New Testament. Terrill lists the congregation’s new practices and beliefs that they had gained from ‘the marvellous light of the gospel’ (p. 23) and the influence of John Canne, returned from Amsterdam, whom Hazzard saw as being a ‘step beyond her light’ as a ‘baptized man’, an adherent of believers’ baptism.11 ‘Showing them how they should join together, and take in members’ (p. 19), Canne showed the newly gathered congregation how to cast off the ‘body of false doctrines of the church of Rome’, including the doctrines of transubstantiation and Arminianism (‘that man’s works merit salvation’ (p. 23)). This included rejecting ‘the nest of idolaters’ consisting of the clergy, but also the advocacy of saints’ days and praying for the deceased. ‘The Holy One’, Terrill wrote, ‘by pouring forth into the hearts of those that should be saved a more sanctified spirit, he made them cast off and leave the common road’ (p. 24). The group was made up only of members that believed

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10 Katherine and her husband Daniel Chidley were active in a Shrewsbury conventicle in the 1620s and quarrelled with the rector of St Chad’s, Shrewsbury, Peter Studley. By 1626 the couple were among twenty people presented to the consistory court for non-attendance at church. Katherine was reported for refusing ‘to come to be churched after childbirth’ (Lichfield Joint RO, B/C/1, B/C/5, B/C/2, Lichfield Diocesan Records). The Chidleys, including their son, Samuel, moved to London and joined John Duppa’s Independent congregation sometime in the late 1620s. As Katherine recorded in her A New-Yeares-Gift (London: n. pub., 1645), ‘Both I, and my faithfull yoakefellow have jointly tasted of the pressures of the Hyrarchy above these twenty yeares, and the Bishop-Priests have driven us out of our place of abode 16. yeares agoe’ (A2). See Ian Gentles, ‘London Levellers in the English Revolution: The Chidleys and their Circle’, Journal of Ecclesiastical History, 29 (1978), 281-309.
11 Roger Hayden’s entry for John Canne in ODNB asserts that ‘a claim that in 1642 Canne, as an Anabaptist, founded the first Baptist church in Bristol on the basis of principles outlined in A Necessitie of Separation is without foundation’. If he did not help form the congregation, his advice was certainly heeded.
they had received evidences of God’s grace and that they would be one of his elect apart from the common, Popish people who worshipped in Babylon. They would no longer bow at the altars, pray at pictures or images, hear the Book of Common Prayer, nor ‘kneel at the sacrament, because the example in holy scriptures was sitting at the Lord’s Supper’ (p. 25). The other reformation in the church was in its practice of infant baptism, for which the group cast off any ceremonious aspects as well as the practice of making the sign of the cross. Although, Terrill writes, the group could not reform the act of ‘sprinkling’ infants, which they later came to believe was the ‘mere invention of men three hundred years after Christ’, they did practice adult baptism for when members entered the church. At first this was done in a river, then in what he calls a ‘vaunt’ or font ‘placed [...] in their public places, near some great door; in all such places signifying or resembling the entrance into the [place called a] church’ (p. 25). From a font, the receptacle changed to a ‘basin’, and from being at the meeting place, this moved to a house where ‘they allowed women to do it, in case of necessity, as they called it, to seal their wills’ (p. 25). Terrill also indicates that the practice changed to asking for a ‘party’s profession or confession’ or evidence of their good ‘conversation’ before their being admitted to the ordinance of baptism, but in the early 1640s it was administered to all members entering the church (p. 25). Only when Bristol fell to the Royalist forces causing the church to flee to London did they receive believers’ baptism according to the London churches’ Confession of Faith under the ministry of William Kiffin. Neither Kiffin, nor any other Baptist church whose records are extant, allowed women to baptise like the Broadmead church, and it appears that the practice was soon abolished. This points to ways in which women’s liberties in the gathered churches were gradually diminished after the congregations had become established.

One office that the Broadmead church did allow women to occupy was that of a deacon (or ‘deaconesses’ or ‘widows’ as churches tended to call them). This was not such a rare occurrence as women baptising, as there are records of at least three more seventeenth-century churches that practised the same: there could easily be more for which we have no

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12 ‘Vaunt’ or ‘Vont’ is Middle-Dutch for ‘font’ (OED). The record book accounts that the practices of the church were influenced by John Canne, who resided in Amsterdam for most of his life from which the term could have been appropriated. Although the records do not call the practice ‘adult’ baptism, rather calling it ‘baptizing souls’ which, although could mean solely infant baptism, more likely refers to the baptism of all those entering the church. The reference to baptism in the river that precedes this implies that both adults as well as children were baptised, as well as the vindication of believers’ baptism which precedes the list of reformations the church made.

record at all. As early as 1611, Thomas Helwys, although minister of a General Baptist church, recorded that the officers of his congregation were ‘either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their soules, [...] or Deacons Men, and Women who by their office releave the necessities off the poore and impotent brethren concerning their bodies’. The implication is that while the elders would be made up of brethren who were gifted in their ability to preach and look after the spirits of the congregation, the deacons would look after the members’ bodily needs, tending the sick and needy. Another example is from the Independent church at Great Yarmouth led by William Bridge, who ‘felt also the desirableness of having “Deaconesses” or “Widows”’, and chose two sisters to fulfil the office on 11 June 1650, having proved ‘their helpfulness and needfulness from 1 Tim 5 and Rom 16’. Romans 16 accounted a sister, ‘Phebe’, as a ‘servant of the church’ (16:1) and a ‘succourer of many’ (16:2), as well as the helpfulness of Priscilla and Mary ‘who bestowed much labour on us’ (16:6), and 1 Timothy 5 recorded that ‘widow[s]’ were not given office until they were over ‘threescore years old’ (5:9), if they ‘washed the saints’ feet’, and ‘received the afflicted’ (5:10). Women deacons were to do ‘good works’ prescribed in 1 Timothy 5:10 by caring and comforting, serving the bodies of the church, but spiritual health was clearly left in the care of the male elders.

The women deacons of the Broadmead church were left in no doubt that it was this material and practical contribution that the church desired, and it was this physical aspect that the church paradoxically found problematic. On 18 March 1679, three women were chosen ‘that were widows, each of above sixty years of age, to be deaconesses for the congregations to look after the sick sisters’ (p. 397). The women were told that they could only be chosen if they ‘were willing to bring themselves under an obligation, in themselves, not to marry’ (p. 397), unlike the ‘younger widows’ of 1 Timothy 5:11 who ‘wax wanton against Christ’ and then marry, to which the women agreed by their silence. The list of duties compiled by the church reveals why the women were required to be over sixty years of age. As well as tending to the congregation’s ‘sick sisters’ which would ‘not be so proper for men’, the women would also have to visit ‘sick brethren’ which ‘some conceive may be the reason why they must be sixty years of age, that none occasion may be given; and as 1 Tim. v. 14 [‘give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully’]’ (p. 398). The congregation, taking

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their example from scripture, believed that appointing celibate widows over the age of sixty to tend on sick brethren would limit the accusations of scandal from enemies of the church. It would also surely have limited their enemies’ ability to produce evidence of sexual liaisons if the women were above child-bearing age. Although the emphasis was on the bodily aspects of the women deacons’ office, the women were also told it was ‘their duty [...] 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’ (p. 398). Whilst not being able to teach or preach to members, the women were required to comfort and strengthen the sick, an important role if the sick person was near death and so in need of spiritual support.

The commands of 1 Timothy 5 were also declared by Sara Jones in *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* (1642) where she urges her congregation not to ‘forsake’ the ‘assembling of your selves together, but do it in order, according to Gods ordinance’. To the elders of her congregation, she urged, ‘walke worthy of double honour [1 Timothy 5:17], with all fellow-feeling, pray with the sicke, as tender Nurses drop into the mouths of the weak-hearted’ (B3v), emphasising their nursing of the souls rather than the bodies of the sick members. Male deacons were to ‘tend on the Table’ and ‘provide things usefull for the well-being of the Ordinances’, but ‘mourning women [widows] or Deaconesses’ were urged to ‘be as handmaids to wash the Disciples feet [1 Timot hy 5:10], be not wanton [5:11], nor refuse to doe any servile offices [5:11], but carefully tend upon the sicke [5:10]’ (B4rv). Women, according to the offices set out in the Bible, were to nurse the body, and not the spirit. And yet that did not stop Jones, who might have been a woman deacon, from urging her congregation to knit together in order, giving what appears to be a sermon in front of the church. The effect of her words on her church, she wrote, would be to ‘endue’ it

with power and order, as the Armie of the drie bones in *Ezechiel*, that lay scattered without breath or life, but being knit together by joints and sinewes made up in a body, were breathed on, and power given from above, as the Spirit giveth for the edifying of the body. (B2v)

Jones uses the image of Ezekiel prophesying (*Ezekiel* 37), raising up ‘an exceeding great army’ of the Lord’s people that he would bring to ‘the land of Israel’ (37:12), as an image of herself prophesying over her congregation, urging it to knit together and come out of its

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17 Jones could have been a women deacon by this time. She was born c. 1580 which would have made her over sixty years of age by the time she published *The Relation* in 1642, and certainly by 1647 where she alerts her minister Henry Jessey to the illness of Sarah Wight (see Introduction). However, internal dating suggests that this part of her sermon was written in 1632, and it is unclear whether she would have been a widow by this time.
deadness. The ‘joints and sinewes’ of order and office would unite the congregation as part of the army of Israel and her voice, the voice of the Lord, would ‘edify’ their bodies. By using such bodily imagery, Jones protects herself from accusations of teaching the spirit, the job of elders, rather than the body, which was scripturally the concern of women deacons. Like other separatist and Baptist women writers, Jones utilised gaps in scriptural precedents in order to carve a place for herself to both write and speak to raise her drooping congregation out of dry bones, and establish Israel at a time when nothing looked further from fruition. As seventeenth-century Deborahs, women in congregations wrote and published encouragements to their fellow strivers for glory, like Katherine Sutton and Sara Jones, as well as acting as role models by actively creating reformed congregations in the manner of Dorothy Hazzard. Silence was not an option when the Lord had called, and many Deborahs rose up and answered.

‘I say to you’: The Problem with Women Speaking

A major difficulty for newly formed separatist churches was how they dealt with women speaking in their congregations, forbidden in most cases by scripture. This produced an interesting dialogue between women and their congregations as female writers recorded doctrinal arguments and vindications to justify their speaking. Sara Jones’s *The Relation of a Gentlewoman long under the persecution of the Bishops*, was ‘printed at the cost of S. J. for her owne use and her private friends’ and is an example of a woman utilising her power to speak for the good of her congregation. It consists of a relation of her and her London congregation’s sufferings under the Court of High Commission (‘the persecution of the Bishops’), which appears to be intertwined into a kind of sermon. Jones introduces the *Relation* by writing:

I spake and writ this writing, being a sufferer with the fortie [congregation members]; we being blamed, and counted not able (through ignorance) to defend the way we walked in, I strained my self to declare my judgement thus farre, as time would permit me. (A2v)

Her spirit had apparently been ‘stirred’ by the appearance of separatist preachers, including ‘M’. Rowbarie and M’. Simpson’ on 29 November 1632 (A2), as well as the arrest, appearance, and imprisonment of herself and forty other members of her congregation for

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18 Jones, *The Relation of a Gentlewoman*, title page. The only extant printing of this text is the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand, but there is a microfilm of this edition in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
meeting in a conventicle in the house of Humphrey Barnett, a brewer.\(^{19}\) Proving the bishops’ assertions about the congregation members’ ignorance wrong, Jones proceeds to speak in front of her fellow members in order to encourage them during the time of their persecution. After urging different members to continue in their faith by strengthening the bonds of the group, she directly addresses the whole congregation: ‘And to you, I say, dearly beloved brethren, that are gathered together in the name of the Lord, [...] that walke in the way and order of the Gospell’ (B2\(^{r-v}\)).\(^{20}\) She advises the ‘Elders’ of her church, ‘to you, I say, that are as guides to goe before others in all well-doing’ (B3\(^{r-v}\)) and proceeds to advise pastors and teachers, deacons, ‘deaconesses’, and ordinary church members on the proper practice of those in each office. Remarkably, after this moment of powerful articulation, Jones then excuses her speaking, writing ‘though I said unadvisedly sometime before, I say to you, which I desire may be passed by, yet I thinke I have the minde of the Lord, and that this cometh of him’ (B6). The phrase ‘I say to you’ (formulated in various ways by Jones) echoes Christ in the Gospels when his audience were to take away a particular point or message from his sermons and allegories, and hence is reminiscent also of the practices of contemporary preachers when giving sermons. What her small apology shows though is that using such formulae, and the position they invoked, was problematic for women in gathered congregations. However, that Jones was able to speak aloud to her congregation at all is remarkable, and her published works express a desire to allow more women liberty to speak in order to knit together her congregation. The discovery of Jones’s text as a rare example of a surviving female-authored sermon raises important questions for the study of women’s contribution to the rise of the gathered churches, and this is what this section will discuss.

The problems encountered by women speaking in the gathered churches have been an important part of scholarly discussions examining women’s activities in separatist congregations. Most recent contributors to this analysis, especially historians, have tended to assume that women had limited roles within their congregations, and were only allowed to speak only on well-defined occasions.\(^{21}\) This indeed seems to have been the intention of later


\(^{20}\) ‘Brethren’ here refers to both ‘brothers’ (men) and ‘sisters’ (women) of the congregation in this case, and was a common expression. It would not, however, be used to describe a group solely made up ‘sisters’. Jones is not speaking at a women-only meeting.

congregations of the 1650s, at least from the information we have. The 1658 Baptist Records of the Abingdon Association, for instance, discuss and set down their approved rules on ‘how far women may speake in the church and how far not?’ taking their reference, as all separatist congregations did, from 1 Corinthians 14:34 (‘Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law’) and 1 Timothy 2:11 (‘Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection’).

Their answers outlined four occasions where women may not speak where ‘their speaking shall shew a not acknowledging of the inferioritie of their sexe and so be an usurping authoritie over the man’: a woman could not ‘publikely teach in the church’, she ‘may not stand up as a ruler in the church’, she could not decide on ‘doctrines of cases in the church’, and she could not ‘speak in prayer as the mouth of the church’. Women were allowed only to confess their faith, express desire for baptism, as witnesses to others’ admissions, and to defend themselves against excommunication, although as shall be shown later, none of these was unproblematic. Earlier, in 1653, John Rogers had written in *Ohel or Bethshemesh: A Tabernacle for the Sun*, which included a collection of men and women’s spiritual experiences, that ‘women are forbid to speak by way of Teaching, or Ruling in the Church, but they are not forbid to speak, when it is in obedience, and subjection to the Church’. He went on to instruct women to ‘be not too forward, and yet not too backward, but hold fast your liberty’, but next to this in the margin he reminds them, ‘be not too full of words’ (p. 476). That Rogers’s rules were less defined than the Baptist Association’s may well be because he was the minister of an Independent church, whereas the Baptists’ rules were more wide-ranging and were applied to manifold cases by a variety of ministers.

Women’s experiences from this period give few insights into the practice of their speaking in congregations, although there are more references than have previously been noted in the studies mentioned above. This indicates that the recovery of such works is ongoing and there may be more explicit information yet to be discovered. A key example showing how the practice was enacted is that of Katherine Sutton’s, whose conversion...
narrative depicts her reservations about baptism as well as the discovery of her ‘guift of singing’, and interpreted a sickness of hers, occurring around 1658, as being imposed on her by the Lord, ‘because I did not declare to the Church with whom I walked; those things he had made known unto mee’.26 Afterwards, she writes that she was

so moved in my spirit, that I could not tell how to keep in these things any longer, and therefore went to the Church to that end, but I then could not find him that I would have spoken of it unto, for him to declare unto the rest, so I returned, and did it not. (C2’)

Here, Sutton recalls the congregational practice of women conveying their opinions to delegated men (sometimes elders) so that they could lay them out in front of the church. A similar system is recorded by Anne Venn, whose *A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning* was published in 1658 out of papers her stepfather found after her death four years earlier. Her Independent congregation in Fulham seemed to require that ordinary members, perhaps women and men, write their difficulties, prayer intentions, and experiences of the Lord, on papers to be read and preached upon by the minister, in front of the church. The first time Venn did this, before she was admitted as a church member, she wrote that she craved ‘the prayers of his people in that meeting in the behalf of my troubled soul, and accordingly, (though with much repulse in my self) I wrote a paper’.27 Such declared reluctance on the part of both women could be understood as part of the godly woman ‘image’ that they and their publishers and prefatory writers wanted to create, but it does show some of the practices that were in place.

The congregational environment that enabled Sara Jones to speak in front of the members of her church, and that of the four different congregations that practised during the 1650s seem to be at odds. It does not seem likely that Jones’s congregation was particularly lenient towards women speaking in the church compared with other contemporary churches, as she does not at any time excuse the act of speaking itself: her only excuse is that she strayed into sermon-like language. Directed, as her text seems to be, to both her congregation and the wider community of ‘saints’ in order to strengthen and uphold them in the time of their persecutions, it would seem unlikely that she would put herself in the position of alienating other, more conservative, gathered churches. A more likely explanation is that earlier congregations, in the 1630s and early 1640s, were more tolerant of women speaking to

the group, and altered their stance as the congregations became more popular, and began to be criticised by opponents. One of the richest record books of the seventeenth-century Baptists, the church meeting in Broadmead, Bristol, shows that a woman, Dorothy Hazzard, ‘separated from the world’ in the early 1630s with some others ‘as a company of good people’ to repeat sermon notes and ‘hear the best men preach’. Edward Terrill, the church’s recorder, wrote that

the world and wicked men vilified them, [...], as that they had women preachers among them, because there were many good women, that frequented their assembling, who, when they should upon occasion be speaking with the world about the things thereof, in their buying and selling, they would speak very heavenly.28

That women would speak of God in the public realm, outside the protection of the meeting-house, seems to have angered those who remained dedicated to the established church: Katharine Gillespie, in her Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century, mentions an emerging ‘equation of religious toleration with the awful spectacle of women preachers’ because of ‘deeply entrenched prohibitions against the exercise of female religious authority’.29 Whether as a reaction to these criticisms of women preachers or because of a greater adherence to scripture, by the mid-1640s the Broadmead congregation were abiding by the practice of having a sister of the church speaking by way of a brother if they had any doctrinal doubts.30 A similar case was that of Susanna Parr, a member of Lewis Stucley’s separatist congregation which met in Exeter Cathedral. Her narrative charts how women’s participation and autonomy within her congregation changed after she and eight or nine other men had founded it at Stucley’s advice. She writes that this new congregation first allowed women to speak on all occasions:

As for women speaking, it was usually practiced among us by the rest of my sex. And it is well known that the power was pretended at first to be in the body of the people, in the multitude, so that everyone had the liberty of assenting or dissenting, of arguing and debating any matter proposed, whether men or women.31

As the congregation was established, male officers were appointed to oversee the running of the church, and Parr was then told her speaking was ‘disrelish; unless a question was proposed and [she] was desired to give [her] answer unto it’ (p. 13). As membership grew,
practices seem to have become more rigid and, as Jones’s work was published early in the growth of the gathered churches, she may have experienced more freedom to argue and debate ‘any matter proposed’, like Parr.32

From accounts like this it might be assumed that the accusations that women preached to congregations were used to tarnish the reputation of the newly-formed separatist churches, but, for these accusations to have any weight, some women preachers must have gained a certain notoriety. John Collinges, a minister who published Mary Simpson’s death-bed conversion narrative in 1649, was anxious that she was not accused of being a woman preacher by telling others her experiences on her death-bed. He wrote: ‘I meane not that she was a Pulpit-preacher, No, God had taught her to be wise to sobriety, [...] as Priscilla & Aquila, by privately instructing others in the wayes of God [Acts 18:26].’ 33 The quickness of Collinges’ denial that Simpson behaved in any way like a preacher, a male role, would seem to point to the attempts of other women to occupy this position. Rumours abounded of women preachers in accounts by heresiographers, although as Dorothy Ludlow writes, apart from the example of Anne Hutchinson, ‘there is very little concrete evidence to support the numerous accounts of women preaching in private or public – accounts which are invariably emotional, hostile, inexact, banal, and polemical’. 34 Ludlow outlines the hostile response of Thomas Edwards to the female preacher, Mrs Attaway, in his Gangraena of 1645, where he claims that her preaching was ineffective and that she subsequently ran off with another woman’s husband. 35 At this time there were petitions presented to the House of Commons against groups of women preachers that were said to cause ‘great Rents and Divisions in divers and sundry Families in and about the City’ (possibly through lascivious behaviour as Edwards had hinted), and some women were questioned ‘in relation to the women Preachers who stand committed to custody’. 36 These sorts of accounts indicate that women were

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32 Crawford outlines the practice of women speaking in one of the earliest Baptist churches in Amsterdam led by Henry Robinson where they could ‘profess their faith, confess their sins, say Amen to prayers and sing Psalms. They could share also in church discipline by accusing or defending a brother who was accused of sin’. Women were also allowed to speak as Prophetesses. See Crawford, Women and Religion in England, p. 122, citing Henry Robinson, A Just and Necessary Apology of Certain Christians ([Amsterdam: Successors of G. Thorp], 1625), pp. 39; 52.
33 Mary Simpson and John Collinges, Faith & Experience: Or, a Short Narration of the Holy Life and Death of Mary Simpson (London: Printed for Richard Tomlins, 1649), 15.
34 Ludlow, ‘Shaking Patriarchy’s Foundations’, p. 95.
preaching, even if responses to the practice were mostly derogatory, but more ‘concrete’ records, such as surviving printed female-authored accounts and sermons, are few.

The discovery of Sara Jones’s address to her congregation, then, is further proof that some women were speaking in front of their congregations (in public), and that such behaviour was not always condemned. It is also an indication that women might have been given more power in earlier gathered churches before the mid-1640s, before practices became more prescribed. There is evidence for this in Jones’s text: the second part, directed ‘To all the Scattered Saints’, can be internally dated to between 1640 and 1642, whereas she explains that most of the first part dated from November 1632. In this second part, Jones seems more aware of criticisms she might face as a woman speaking, writing, and publishing, and takes more care to justify the reasons she is doing so. She writes that she had

thought to be silent, but believing the Lord will do well to Sion, I therefore speak, and for Sions sake I dare not hold my peace. Now though women may not speak in Church, I believe they may speak for edification to the Church. (C4v)

Referring to 1 Corinthians 14:3 (‘But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men for edification, and exhortation, and comfort’), Jones implies that if she speaks by way of prophesying, she could edify and comfort her church, despite other scriptural evidence that she should be silent. A very similar justification is recorded in the lightly satirical pamphlet, *A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers*, published in 1641. Its author shows that

their onely reason or cause of preaching was, that there was a deficiency of good men, wherefore it was but fit, that vertuous women should supply their places, they were (men they did mean) good for nothing, but to make their texts good by expounding the language of the Beast, but they themselves would preach nothing, but such things as the spirit should move them.37

The women preachers are recorded as saying that they, unlike the ministers in the established church, would speak having been moved by the Holy Spirit, not using the unscriptural ‘language of the Beast’. The language with which the author of the pamphlet presents these stories might invite our scepticism at the truthfulness of his exaggerated reports, but the passage above expresses similar ideas to those Jones explored in the second section of her work. She urged those among her audience that had ‘the witnesse of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy, speake one by one [1 Corinthians 14:31], for Sions sake be not silent’ (C10v).

37 Anon., *A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers* (London: n. pub., 1641), A2. See chapter two for Jones making a similar accusation of her minister Henry Jessey.
any words given by God, from whomsoever chosen, were given in front of the congregation. 1 Corinthians 14:31 was also less specific in its identification of who could prophesy, saying ‘ye may all prophesy one by one’: if the person had received the Holy Spirit, male or female they should be allowed to speak so that ‘all may learn, and all may be comforted’.

1 Corinthians 14 proved to be a source of disagreement in another gathered church in London where Anne Harriman, a member of the congregation, objected to their denying women the right to speak in meetings. The records of the unknown church account that in January 1653/4 the congregation had gathered to discuss ‘1 Cor. 14:34’ in order to reach a decision regarding the behaviour of their female members: ‘1. Whether Woemen may speak in ye Church? 2. What [which] Woemen may speak? 3. What they may speak?’ The catalyst had been Sister Anne Harriman’s declaration that she

was not free to come to the meeting because that Bro: [Theodore] Naudin He would not well wth such as gave libertie to woemen to speak in ye Church ffor she would not walk where she had not libertie to speak. And therefore rather than Brother Naudin should withdraw, shee would withdraw. And this was but one of her Reasons for her Absence.

It can be deduced from these events that women, like Harriman, had not always been denied their liberty to speak in the congregation. It seems unlikely that Harriman would have joined a congregation so removed from her own principles, and it would appear to have been at Brother Naudin’s request that the group had reconsidered their position. The next three manuscript pages record the discussions of the congregation’s brothers and their particular concern with 1 Corinthians 14:35 (‘And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church’). By first excluding wives from speaking, requiring them to ask their husbands privately unless they showed ‘before all their infirmitie of the Tongue’, the brothers then interpreted the scripture as including ‘All Widdowes & Maydes that are not Prophetesses becaus the Male hath naturally Dominion over the Female. & yᵉ Femal hath naturally Weaknes & Subjection to yᵉ Male’. St Paul’s lessons in 2 Timothy were addressed to all women, and not just wives. Where the congregation did allow women liberty to speak was by prophesying, because, as Erica Longfellow writes in her own work on the manuscript, ‘the “Weaknes & Subjection” of a woman’s speech were subsumed in the (male) authority of the spirit speaking through her’.

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38 Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D828 fol. 28. The debate is recorded on fols 28-32.
39 MS D828 fol. 28.
40 MS D828 fol. 31.
Women had the opportunity to speak if their words were from God: the congregation concluded that ‘a Woeman (Mayd, Wife, or Widdow) being a Prophetess (1 Cor: 11[)] may speake, Prophesie, Pray, w[ith] a Vayl. Others may not’. Referring to 1 Corinthians 11:5 (‘But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven’), the congregation decide that a withholding of the woman prophetess from public view was still necessary, even though she was speaking with the Holy Spirit. The notes on a later verse (11:10) in the Geneva version of the New Testament gloss the cover on the woman’s head as ‘something to cover her head in signe of subjection’, showing that even if a woman were to prophesy, she should do so covered with a sign of her subjection and humility to the men of the church. This isolated incident is further evidence to suggest that congregations tightened up their procedures in the churches when it came to allowing women liberty to speak, and perhaps explains why women often turned to prophesying to communicate in textual as well as verbal form.

The Abingdon Association’s records of 1658 clearly outline the few occasions on which ‘a woman may speak in the church and not be found to offend against the rules of the apostle’. She could ‘make a confession of her faith and to express her desire of baptism and communion with the church’, ‘be a witness concerning the admonition of that the church is to deal with or must herself tell a matter to the church according to the rule in Mat. 18:17’, and ‘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’. The three reasons were concerned with a woman testifying to her own virtue and election, or that of others, and there was no room for her to debate doctrinal matters with the rest of the brothers. When women published their

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42 Rawlinson MS D828 fol. 32.
43 No other woman in my study refers to the use of a veil in order to speak or prophesy in their congregation, except the allusions in Anna Trapnel’s folio works to which Longfellow refers in her *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* which will be discussed in chapter five. It might be the case, although unlikely, that the practice of prophesying with a veil was so common that it was hardly mentioned in women’s accounts of their speaking (or attempting to speak) in their congregations. However, the wearing of veils may have been too reminiscent of the churching practices of the established church, with which many women who joined and formed separatist congregations disagreed with as popish traditions, or even as whorish. In 1641 Anne Hempstall of St Andrew’s, Holborn preached to a meeting of women on the subject ‘That woman’s haire was an adorning to her, but for a man to have long haire, it was a shame unto him’, *A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers*, p. 2.
45 Matthew 18:17 ‘And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican’.
46 ‘The Abingdon Association’, *Association Records*, ed. by B. R. White, 3: p. 185. They could also comment on when a person propounded themselves to the ‘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’.
work, they consciously or unconsciously kept to genres that corresponded with these opportunities they had to speak, but often using them to express their views on doctrines and practices of their gathered churches. Prophecies, conversion narratives, and vindications from aspersions cast on their virtue were all derived from accepted occasions for women to speak within their congregations, and, despite restrictions, women often found ways to comment on their congregation’s doctrine and practices through these works. An example of this subversion, of two women who saw the problems and limitations of the few speaking liberties they were allowed, were Susanna Parr and Mary Allein who published defences of themselves against their excommunication from Lewis Stucley’s Independent congregation that met in one half of St Peter’s Cathedral, Exeter. Thomas Mall, a fellow minister of the congregation, published, in early 1658, *[A] True Account of what was done by a Church of Christ in Exon [...] the eighth day of March, 1657. when two members thereof were Excommunicated.*47 Appended to this were the procedures the congregation had followed in excommunicating the two women. Both Parr and Allein published pamphlets vindicating themselves from the scandalous aspersions Mall had cast upon their characters, and highlighted faults in the church’s dealing with women in their procedures, including speaking on admission, voting in the church, and defending themselves from excommunication and associated scandal. Mall’s *Account* produced a small flurry of five other pamphlets arguing about the women’s treatment, which bore testimony to the difficulty congregations found in dealing with women in their churches.48

Excommunication as practised by the gathered churches was based on the process described in 1 Corinthians 5 where the incestuous behaviour of the Gentiles who had their ‘father’s wives’ (5:1) caused them to be delivered to ‘unto Satan’ (5:5) so they would not pollute the rest of God’s people by their sin. The established church had used the practice as a disciplinary measure, withholding burial in consecrated ground, communion, and, because of the stigma, the company of their contemporaries. Such a punishment carried out by a small gathered church might not have the power to restrain the excommunicant from joining

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47 Thomas Mall, *True Account of what was done by a Church of Christ in Exon* (London: R. W. for Matthew Keinton, 1658), title page.
48 The texts in the order they appeared were Thomas Mall, *True Account*; Tobie Allein, *Truths Manifest: Or a Full and Faithfull Narrative* (London: For F. E., 1658); Lewis Stucley, *Manifest Truth: Or an Inversion of Truths Manifest* (London: Printed by D. M., 1658); E.T., *Diotrephes Detected, Corrected, and Rejected, and Archippus Admonished* (London: Printed by M. S. for Henry Cripps, 1658); Tobie Allein, *Truths Manifest Revived* (London: Printed by R. D. for Francis Eglesfield, 1659); Parr, *Susanna’s Apologie against the Elders* (1659). Because of the various opinions it is impossible to gain an impartial view of the agendas of the ministers in their excommunicating of the women.
another congregation, but it could potentially have the effect of withdrawing friendship and business from those accused, and, in the case of Susanna Parr and Mary Allein, heaping upon them scandal and rebuke.\textsuperscript{49} The prayer uttered at their excommunication seemed to have lost none of its horror for those present: Mary’s husband Tobie Allein recounted that after the excommunication had been declared against the women (neither of whom were present) ‘the Church made a hideous howling cry, that did even astonish divers then present’.\textsuperscript{50} As Patricia Crawford notes in her detailed study of the disagreement, the congregation, led by Stucley and Mall, needed to uphold its reputation for discipline to protect itself from any scandal. As she writes, ‘the Devon ministers were not prepared to admit to their assembly any congregation which lacked the power to discipline’, and so the ministers were obliged to make sure that they kept their church free from all reproach.\textsuperscript{51} This is the context for Mall’s \textit{True Account} in which, in order to show that the congregation was following scripture in its pure ordinances, he aligns the women’s sins with the Gentiles’ incestuous crimes; in fact he goes as far as to say that he perceived Parr’s crimes of ‘lying more then three times’ were worse even than incest.\textsuperscript{52} ‘It is safer in some sence’, he wrote, ‘to tolerate an incestuous person, then a liar in a Church: especially such an one as soweth discord, a discontented liar, as this woman was’ (p. 19). Whereas lies, he thought, affected and drew more members into sinning, incest was a containable sin that was less liable to infect the group. Mall also stressed the public nature of the sins accounted for in 1 Corinthians 5:1 in the words ‘it is reported commonly’ which highlighted for him the need to purge and discipline the congregation so that this should not be an obstacle to the growth of the church. This he draws out in his accusation of Mary Allein who had been accused for neglecting fellowship with the people of God, and in that for Covenant-breaking; but chiefly hath been dealt with, for that scandalous carriage of hers in running away from her husband. [...] The Scripture saith, \textit{Let the wife see that she fears her husband}, Eph. 5.33. But to run from a husband, and to take such a vile woman for her companion, that had run before ___ some of you know how, greatneth her sin, and maketh it the more


\textsuperscript{50} Allein, \textit{Truths Manifest}, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{51} Crawford, \textit{Women and Religion in England}, p. 155, n. 68, citing DRO, MS 35420/M1/1, Minutes of the Exeter Assembly, 1655-9. The minutes are published in Appendix III, ‘Puritanism in Devon and the Exeter Assembly’, \textit{Records and Transactions of the Devonshire Association}, 9 (1877), pp. 250-91, and also recorded that the following was voted: ‘That Obstinacy in lesser sins generally knowne to be sins, after due admonition from the Church is a scandall’ (p. 284). See also Allan Brockett, \textit{Nonconformity in Exeter, 1650-1875} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), p. 10.

\textsuperscript{52} Mall, \textit{True Account}, p. 18. He calls Parr ‘Mistress S. E.’.
scandalous. [...] How much the Name of God suffered (you know in part) by her leaving her husband: I am sure I have been hit in the teeth with the scandalousness of the fact. (p. 19)

Mall is anxious to show ‘how much the Name of God suffered’ by the behaviour of Allein who had travelled as far as Honiton without her husband in the company of a midwife because she was great with child. Both Mall and Lewis Stucley include information about the midwife’s scandalous carriage and how Mary would not allow her husband into her chamber when he followed her. Mall reproaches her that ‘she neglected her children, gave an ill president to them they were grown up to be capable of infection by so ill example’ (p. 20).

‘You see’, Mall wrote, ‘the offences of both these [women], are in this like the incestuous persons sin, they are such, as are not named among the Gentiles, and are indeed abominable’ (p. 20). The aligning of the comparatively small sins of lying and travelling without a husband with the incest of the Gentiles was understandably inflammatory, and both women refuted the charges of sinning which they did by meeting Mall in the publishing sphere.

The controversy surrounding Mary Allein’s behaviour seemed to revolve around her asserting the right to look to other gathered churches if she thought that their doctrine was more godly and scriptural than Stucley’s congregation. Crawford asserts that Stucley and Mall ‘alleged that both women were disorderly because they went to hear other ministers’, but, although that would appear to be at the root of their disagreements, Stucley especially is anxious to make it ‘be known [to Tobie Allein] that your wife was not censured for joining in other Congregations beside her own’. He also defends his drawing scandal to Mary’s character, but writes he only brought it to light ‘to satisife and silence them who pretended we had censured her for joining with a congregation of different principles from us’ (p. 4).

Stucley’s words have the appearance of someone who protests too much, and Tobie Allein was convinced that he ‘(being madded at her leaving them) in point of policy or rather revenge conspire to spread and foment this false report, and then call it publick scandal, past her husbands pardon’. The conflating of ‘policy’ and ‘revenge’ highlight Stucley’s potential to use his position as ruling minister to carry out his own prideful designs, and his making a ‘publick scandal’ out of a crime that needed only to be privately rectified showed, in Allein’s opinion, that Stucley was clutching at straws. Allein’s account in Truths Manifest of his wife’s deportment shows her to be only concerned with how godly the congregation was and if it was the Lord’s wish that she be a part of it, which had a bearing on her children’s lives

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too. ‘Shee was persuaded’, he wrote, ‘the Lord had manifested his displeasure against her’ for leaving Mark Down’s congregation at St Petrock’s, Exeter, ‘which shee apprehended by reason of those many visitations on her self, and the death of her children’.\footnote{Allein, \textit{Truths Manifest}, p. 5. Mary Allein née Robins (likely bap. 26 May 1619) had six recorded children with her husband Tobie Allein whom she married on 20 March 1642 at Saint Sidwell’s, Exeter (see DRO 3429 A-99, Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1569-1733). These were Hannah (bap. 17 August 1646), Tobie (bap. 5 December 1647), Susana (bap. 15 November 1657), Hester (bap. 26 December 1658), and Mark (bap. 2 December 1660), all baptised at St Petrock’s (see DRO 2946 A-99/PR1, Baptisms 1539-1812), and Dorcas (bap. 20 June 1654) at St Peter’s Cathedral (see W. Reynell-Upham and H. Tapley-Soper, eds, \textit{The Registers of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials of the City of Exeter, 1594-1813} (Exeter: The Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1910)). The places where the children were baptised indicates that the couple considered where would be best to baptise their children, and under what doctrine they would be brought up. No deaths are recorded. Mark Down was appointed rector of St Petrock’s in 1657. See Walter Harte, ‘Ecclesiastical and Religious Affairs in Exeter, 1640-62’, \textit{Transactions of the Devonshire Association}, 69 (1937), 41-72 (60); Brockett, \textit{Nonconformity in Exeter}, p. 11.}

All of the Allein’s children had been baptised at St Petrock’s until the baptism of a daughter, Dorcas Allein, in the cathedral in 1654. Although Tobie Allein’s \textit{Truths Manifest} does not include the date when his wife began to leave off attending Stucley’s meetings, it does show it to be soon after the first ‘insurrection by the fift-Monarchy-men’ (p. 4), in 1656/7. Soon after this time Mary was pregnant with another child and she decided go back to Down’s ministry, while also listening to Thomas Ford, a Presbyterian who preached in the other half of St Peter’s Cathedral.\footnote{Stucley’s congregation had grown out of the practice of Sunday afternoon sermons preached by visiting ministers in the nation’s cathedrals, which was soon followed by the parish churches. After the Civil War Exeter Cathedral was released from Parliamentary control and Brockett records that ‘by December, 1656, the City Chamber decided, at the instance of Stucley, to divide the great church physically into two parts by building a wall between the Nave and the Choir […] The Presbyterians used the Choir, or East Peter’s, while the Independents used the Nave, or West Peter’s’ (\textit{Nonconformity in Exeter}, p. 12). Another source of contention would seem to have been contributing to the wall that was built to separate the two halves of St Peter’s Cathedral: East Peter’s was used by Thomas Ford and the Presbyterians and West Peter’s was used by Lewis Stucley and his Independent Church. At least 12 out of the 18 men who contributed funds to building the wall put their names to Allein’s work (which bears 28 signatures in all), but Allein did not (See Brockett, \textit{Nonconformity in Exeter}, pp. 12-13). Stucley later accused Mary of advising her husband to ‘separate from us, to save the incident charges of the church, to save the sum of money, that he had subscribed for the erecting of a Gallery in Peters in the West, and to father his trade in vending Serges [woollen cloth]’ (\textit{Manifest Truth}, B3'). In 1660 the House of Lords symbolically ordered that ‘the Chamber of Exeter shall forthwith, at their own Charge, take away the Petition Wall built in the Cathedral, and the newbuilt Seats in the Choir, all the Materials whereof are to be employed towards the making up again the Churches which were defaced, and to that End are to be delivered unto the respective Churchwardens’ (House of Lords Journal, vol. 11: 1 September 1660, pp. 151-2).} Elders of the church began to visit her to admonish her behaviour but she would not be persuaded to return unless she could appoint two Ministers to debate the congregation’s doctrine. Stucley would not allow this as ‘no others were to have to do with the busines of their Church’ (p. 7).\footnote{Lucy Hutchinson and her husband organised just such a debate when they were unsure of the ordinance of infant baptism: see below.} Although her husband tried to convince her to attend the church, Mary would not return unless they could ‘find fit persons for the resolving of this question’ (p. 8), and so they resolved to ride to Taunton to see Tobie’s brother Joseph Alleine...
of Taunton.\textsuperscript{58} When the meeting was delayed, Mary took the journey on her own without her husband’s knowledge, which he chastised her for later, but it was likely that she was anxious that her impending lying-in would prevent her from gaining an answer for her own ears in time for the baptism of her next child. Mary seems to have had her way, as the aptly named Susanna Allein was born on 15 November 1657 and baptised at St Petrock’s, to which her husband’s letter to Stucley alludes when he accuses Stucley of making him a ‘perjured man; [...] Because Mr. Marke Down baptised my child’ (p. 12).\textsuperscript{59}

Stucley did not neglect to mention any of these events when he replied to Allein’s pamphlet, heaping upon Mary all the scandal he could express. In Manifest Truth, Stucley asserted that Mary’s journey to Taunton was in no doubt for scandalous ends, questioning why she travelled halfway to Honiton while she was ‘great bellyed’ on foot ‘so near her time, it seems, [...] she was glad to Carrie her midwife with her. Will any Reader think that she in such a Condition would take such a Journy for such an end’?\textsuperscript{60} He defamed her midwife, ‘Dame’, who he wrote had run ‘to Ireland as her Brother Mongwel confessed after another womans husband’, and words from the landlady of the tavern in which the Alleins stayed who accounted that ‘Mr. T. A. could not be admitted for a while into his wifes Chamber, that she left her husband because of a different way from her’ (pp. 14-15).\textsuperscript{61} Mary had indeed left her husband in part because he sought to bring her back to Stucley’s church, but only for the learned opinion of her more impartial relatives. Because ‘the offence became publick’,

\textsuperscript{58} According to Tobie Allein, Mary ‘went to Honiton in order to go to Taunton to Mr. Newton, and my Brother Allein, Ministers of Taunton for solution of her doubts’ (Truths Manifest Revived, p. 82).
\textsuperscript{59} Although the Taunton episode seems to be the turning point for Tobie Allen’s attending the congregation, he and his wife did not approve of other of the congregation’s actions and clashed with Stucley and Mall. Tobie Allein did not agree with the church sending a petition urging Cromwell not to ‘accept Kingly Office’, and another ‘clause in it, to pray the Lord Protector to dissolve the Parliament’ which was ‘to be signed only by seven of the Church in the name of the whole’ (Truths Manifest, p. 2). Brockett records that at the May 1656 meeting of the Exeter Assembly of churches a ‘Humble Petition’ to Cromwell was drawn up ‘requesting his favour upon their work in Devonshire’ (Nonconformity in Exeter, p.10). Mary Allein attended the next time and the like was discussed which she observed was carried out with ‘a selfish carnal designe’ (p. 4) and she urged her husband to be ‘exceeding warie’ what he did, ‘and have respect’ to himself, her, and their children (p. 3). The testimony of the Alleins’ neighbours at the beginning of his pamphlet depicted Allein as ‘alwayes well-affected to the Common-Wealth, and very active in, and as Captain raised a Company for His Highnesse service’ (A2). According to Stucley, Mary Allein had ‘bewailed the bitterness of the Presbyterians toward her husband, because differing from them in opinion, and perceiving some hazards to his trade (should he abide among us) she hath found out this expedient to alienate her own and husbands affections from us’ (Manifest Truth, B2’). The Cathedral cloisters had been destroyed in 1655 and replaced by a cloth exchange and it is conceivable that Tobie would have had problems selling his cloth to the more numerous Presbyterians. As a result of the argument, Allein records that ‘some of our brethren have every where at their doors; and shops, and tables vilified her’ (p. 14). Mary seems to have played an active role in the family business, so much that Allein wrote that he ‘had often left the whole management of my trade and employment in her head and care, for a whole moneth together, in my absence, when I have kept above 500 people on work’ (C3).
\textsuperscript{60} Stucley, Manifest Truth, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{61} John Mongwell/Manwell seems to have been Mary’s brother-in-law, not the brother of ‘Dame’. 
Stucley wrote, ‘Honnington and Exeter Rang with this scandal, and the Church account themselves obliged to take notice of it’ (p. 15). Mary then did not repent ‘for her opening the mouths of wicked men against religion’ (p. 15) and bringing criticisms on the entire congregation by her behaviour. Tobie Allein and Stucley had different ideas over what was warranted a sin pardonable by a husband, and one that warranted the intervening of the ruling minister: a private matter between husband and wife became a matter for the whole congregation.

Mary Allein was also criticised by Stucley for the manner in which she gave her conversion narrative on entering the congregation with her husband. Applicants to join gathered churches were usually asked to declare before the whole congregation the workings of God upon their hearts, showing particular times in their lives when they had felt his presence. John Rogers described this process as ‘everyone to be admitted, gives out some Experimental Evidences of the work of Grace upon his soul (for the Church to judge of) whereby he (or she) is convinced that he is regenerate, and received of God’. The fitness of the candidate for admission was judged by the whole congregation, who was voted in or out after the testimony was given. As Rogers observes from scripture, ‘[John the] Baptist neither admitted of scandalous persons, nor must wee into Christs-Church, till there appears a repentance, and reformation’ (p. 56). Tobie Allein’s account of their standing in front of the congregation was that they ‘spake their experiences’ but were then ‘dismissed until another time’ (p. 2) when they were eventually admitted ‘almost a year after’. Stucley did not hesitate to attribute the consideration time to the ‘ignorance or scandal’ (p. 7) of Mary’s experience elaborating on what Mall had written in the pamphlet detailing her excommunication:

Mistress A. proposed herself to this society and spake very confidently of her condition. On a sudden she was (as some observed) stopt in her speech; having a little before spoken much of her assurance, yet discovered so much ignorance, that I cannot believe not one person was satisfied with that, which she spake as her experience, therefore she was denied. But a considerable time after the Church was constituted, she desired Church-fellowship; And then came in with so much difficulty, that (as I am credibly informed, for I was them absent) Mr. Stoneham, the then Teacher of this Church, hinted to her to this purpose, that the Church had stretched to the utmost line of Charity in order to her Reception; and therefore advised her that her future demeanour might be such, as might give better satisfaction concerning her for the future, then they had for the present. (p. 22)

62 Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh*, p. 354.
When the church found evidence to suggest that Mary Allein’s demeanour was less than perfect, Mall drew attention to her poor testimony on entry by which she had only been allowed to enter on the charity of the previous minister. He also suggests that it was a mistake of the congregation to allow such a ‘scandalous person’ to be admitted to the church as she had caused others to speak ill of their congregation. Mall’s reaction to Allein’s uncertain, and perhaps unprepared, experience was to dismiss it as not being of God, because if a person had received evidences of God’s grace they should have no problem expressing it. Mary later expressed her disapproval of the admissions of members in front of the church ‘who in making out their experiences at their admissions, spake of such sins as are not to be named, which thing shee bordred too nigh on Auriculer confession’, meaning that of the Catholic church (p. 4). It is just possible that Mary was not prepared for the depth in which she had to explore her private sins in order to gain entrance to the congregation, which was no small concern to women, especially if their ministers were poised to remember their failings for use against them later.64

John Rogers’s procedures for admission specified that the entire congregation should vote on whether the applicant should be admitted, and this was another cause for controversy between the two women and their congregation, particularly for Susanna Parr. Parr had exercised her authority in voting for and against those who gave their experiences, but her choices were evidently not appreciated by the ruling ministers. She was criticised for opposing ‘severall persons in their Admission, who have beene knowne to be of approved godliness and integrity; and those who have beene most lyable to Exception, she hath most contended for’.65 A woman, Agnes Pullen, whom Parr perceived as godly was refused entry to the church for her ‘unwillingnesse to declare her Experiences in a publique meeting’ (p. 72). When the ‘Admission of members began to be in private’ Pullen applied again but was refused a second time because ‘that some had a prejudice against her’ (p. 72). This, along with her sickly disposition, Parr writes, contributed to her death where Stucley neglected to attend on her, grieving both women. Other congregations, like Rogers’s, allowed those who were ‘very unable to speake in publicke […], as some Maids and others that are bashful’ to give ‘in private the account of faith’ to someone the church appointed. Even if the congregation received ‘such broken and imperfect answers as they give; […] they be but words dropping sweetness, and savoring of grace, yet put together, may make weight, and

64 Stucley defends the position of asking potential members to confess their sins using Matthew 3:6 and Psalms 51:2, both references to baptism (Manifest Truth, p. 10).
65 Parr, Susanna’s Apologie, p. 71.
will signify something well-spelled’. Such halting speech was not interpreted in this way by Stucley and Mall, but they were not prepared for Parr’s assertion that ‘if women were denied the liberty of speaking, how could they declare their Experiences: yea A. P. was kept off for refusing this’ (p. 77). Stucley wrote that Parr, like Anne Harriman before her, had for a long time contend[ed] for women’s speaking in the Church, and being admonished for practising accordingly, she did openly professe, that she would not be present at Church meetings, when matters were debated, unless she might have that liberty, and being denied, she ever since contemptuously neglected Church meetings, and slighted the officers of the Church. (D4)

Parr writes that when Stucley told her that her ‘speaking was disrelisht by some’ she was then required to speak ‘by a Brother; for a stander by may see more then he that plaies the game, promising likewise if I did speak by him, to deliver my words in the same manner as I spake them’ (p. 13). At the same time as this practice was brought in, Parr began to have doubts about being a member of a separate church. Straight after this, Parr recorded ‘the death of a dear child’ (p. 13) which was also cause for her to reconsider her place in the congregation, and after this she accounted attending Thomas Ford’s sermons in the Presbyterian half of the cathedral. ‘When I considered the breach that the Lord had made in my family’, she writes, ‘I beheld how terrible it was to make a breach in his family’ by way of separating from the established church (pp. 13-14). Similarly to Mary Allein, Parr was convinced by God’s providence that she was not following him in the right way, and this cannot have been helped by the taking away of her liberty to speak.

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66 Rogers, Ohel or Beth-shemesh, p. 291. The record book of the Broadmead Church in Bristol gives an account of Sister Syms who was with child when the congregation called her to defend her behaviour or else be excommunicated. After being prevailed upon to come to the church on 9 July 1677, she refused to come out of ‘a low room’ in the meeting place where sermons were practised (the Loughwood Church, still extant, has a similar room). Sisters went to prevail with her to come up to face the church, but Syms said she ‘could not come up and speak in the presence of so many’. After the church threatened to withdraw from her she came and vindicated herself from the charges that she had urged her husband to arrest another member of the church, and she was acquitted. Her experience is an example of how congregations could ‘deal tenderly’ with women if they were ‘with child’. See Underhill, ed., The Records of a Church of Christ, pp. 369-70.

67 Susanna Parr née Jordaine/Jorden (bap. 19 May 1616) had seven recorded children with her husband Christopher Parr whom she married on 19 October 1634 at St Kerrian’s, Exeter (see DRO 4780 A-99/PR1, Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1559-1812). These were Susanna (bap. 22 November 1640), Christopher (bap. 7 May 1643), Samuel (bap. 21 December 1645), Sara (bap. 12 December 1647), Lydia (bap. 9 December 1649), all baptised at Saint Olave’s, Exeter (see DRO 2738A-99/PR1, St Olave’s Parish, Exeter, Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials 1601-1700), and Hannah (bap. 1654), and Ruth (bap. 3 April 1659), at St Peter’s Cathedral (see Reynell-Upham and Tapley-Soper, eds, ‘The Registers of Baptisms’. Susanna’s father, George Jordaine had three other children but she was the oldest: Sara (bap. 28 September 1617), John (bap. 1 January 1618), and Lydia (bap. 6 August 1620). It is possible that Susanna was related to Ignatius Jordaine, Alderman of Exeter.
Parr and Allein found an ally in their pamphlet war in the form of an anonymous author known only by the initials ‘E. T’ who published *Diotrephes Detected, Corrected, and Rejected* in 1658. Although this pamphlet does not explicitly reveal whether the writer is male or female, Parr accounts the work as ‘a Brotherly admonition’ given to Stucley by an unknowne author (p. 113) echoing the last page of E. T.’s work where it is signed ‘your Brother and Companion in the Kingdome’, and this is persuasive evidence that the pamphlet was male-authored. The work is concerned with protecting women’s position in gathered congregations by setting out more clearly in which situations they could speak and in which cases they should speak via a brother of the church. It does not advocate women’s speaking in any other way than the Abingdon Association’s rules described above, but defends each case using scripture directly addressing Lewis Stucley. ‘When those Members’, E. T. wrote, ‘did their Duty to Declare their Dissatisfaction with your Irregular Proceedings, you reproved them for speaking in Church, because Women must not speake in the Church’ (p. 4), but then goes on to outline ways in which the women should have been allowed to show their dissatisfaction. Women could ‘take you out of the Church, and shew you your Errour and set you right as Priscilla did [Acts 18:26]’; pray and teach others ‘of their own Sex, amongst themselves in their meetings together [Titus 2:4]’; if they had no husband at home, ‘or none capable to resolve them’, they could ‘ask any of the Brethren PRIVATELY (which is all one as to ask at Home,) who may after (when it is convenient) Speake for them in the Church that they may be satisfied’ although they still could not ‘Teach, or Prophecy, or Conferre, or Dispute PUBLIKELY’; speak at their own admission, and those of others; sing; be sent as messengers or recommended to other churches; speak if they have ‘an Extraordinary Gift of Prayer and Prophecy [1 Corinthians 11:5]’; and speak to clear themselves from any ‘Rash, Sudden, undeserved, unadvised, uncharitable and unjust Censure, Admonition or Reproofe Irregularly given them by the Church-Officer’ (pp. 5-7). E. T. also implied that Stucley, when he taught previously in Cornwall, had become ‘very much ashamed to think how short [he] came of them [the women of Cornwall] in the Gift or Spirit of prayer’ (p. 5) and had experimented with allowing women to speak in his Cathedral

68 Though E. T. concentrates on vindicating the behaviour of Parr he also chastises Stucley for being too proud and accusing Mary Allein of the same: ‘you doe Magnifie your office, [...] and have put your selfe to so great expence and charge (notwithstanding your condemning of women for affecting of Expensive company and meetings) for these Fifteen hundred Books, which (if Reports are True) your Bookseller hath sent you (I suppose) to disperse, for the excusing of this your Miscarriage’ (*Diotrephes Detected*, p. 2).

congregation until he thought better of it. ‘Will you learn’, E. T. asked Stucley, ‘in what cases they may and ought to Speak, and wherein they should Sinne, if they speake not?’ (p. 6).

E. T. further defends the ‘Gracious S.[usanna]’ by aligning her with ‘Gracious Hannah’ who did not submit to the censures of Eli the High-Priest, even though he called her a ‘Drunken Woman, Daughter of Belial, [1 Samuel 1:14] &c: even for doing or discharging her Dutie at that time in the House of God’ (p. 7). Just as Eli had wrongly censured and misinterpreted Hannah’s private prayers to the Lord, Stucley wrongly censured Parr for pleading in her congregation for her dissatisfaction to be known. The allusion serves to highlight Stucley’s confusion over whether Parr’s speech was public or private and therefore whether it should be admonished or not. Stucley’s arbitrary ruling of the church is also called into question, where he took the word of only the major part of the congregation and not of those, like Parr and Allein, who were dissatisfied. The point should be discussed until ‘there be in the Dissatisfyed, (if not a concurrence, yet at least) a Submission and yeelding, (manifested and Declared,) that the Church may proceed’ (p. 8). Even though Parr and Allein had registered their concern for the admission of members and petitions to the Lord Protector, their opinions were brushed aside. If they were not satisfied in the church’s practice, E. T. writes that ‘the MINOR PART OUGHT (according to Rule) TO WITHDRAW THEMSELVES (either for a Time, if the Advice of other Churches may after be a means to Reconcile them or if not, for altogether)’ (pp. 8-9). Just as they had originally separated from the established church for its unscriptural practices, those dissatisfied should be able to separate from a congregation that they thought ungodly and who ignored their dissatisfaction. When both Parr and Allein left off from attending the church, E. T. argues, they were exercising their right to separate from all that was ungodly, and the fault lay with Stucley for not adequately considering their views. As God had given ‘every such visible Believer these Keyes’ to the church, E. T. questioned why Stucley ‘came to take away these Keyes from the Minor part of the Brethren, and from the Sisters? Are they not all Believers? Have Women no Soules? or no Faith?’ (p. 12). E. T. contends for all congregation members giving their vote before any practice should be decided upon, and not as Stucley practised where he and the assenting brethren forced an issue through. E. T. compares his advising Stucley to Abigail’s urging

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70 It is clear from both Parr and Toby Allein’s narratives that even though the whole congregation should have voted on new members and changes in administration, this was rarely the case. Of the twenty-four members of the congregation mentioned in the six narratives, there were thirteen men and eleven women, indicating the likelihood that there were more or less equal members of each.
David not to take vengeance on her husband Nabal. By a woman’s instigation, ‘the Lord’, E. T. writes, ‘may peradventure (even by so weake an Instrument) shew you yet a more excellent way [1 Corinthians 12:31]’ (p. 1). While this could be evidence that E. T. was advising Stucley as a woman, it is more likely an example of how the stubborn minister should listen to the women in his congregation, even if they had to make their views known privately by one of the brethren.

Parr’s side of the argument appeared after the five other works and it sparked no reply that is still extant. In it she proves how she could also engage in the language structures that her opponents had used when they deliberately aligned her sins, and those of Mary Allein’s, with incest, or adultery. Parr writes that she went to see Stucley and Mr Stoneham to resolve whether she had the ‘liberty of hearing other ministers’ and that they tried to persuade her not to, ‘alleading that I might aswell delight in another man that was not my husband, because the Image of God shined more in him then in my husbâd’ (p. 21). Parr was horrified at this ‘grosse discourse’, but they continued, saying there ‘was as much reason for a woman to goe after another man because of fruitfulnesse, as to make use of another Ministry because of more benefit’ (p. 25). Here her hearing of other ministers is likened to the sin of adultery, further reinforcing the church’s decision to excommunicate from among them an ‘incestuous person’. Mall also twisted Parr’s sins to resemble the sexual crimes of 1 Corinthians 5 where he explains that the whole congregation would be guilty if she were allowed to remain: ‘it is as if the Apostle had said, it is a great shame and reproach that lieth upon you, that sins of unnatural uncleanness are found among you [e.g. 2 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 5:3]’ (p. 2). Parr’s reply is clever in that it plays both Stucley and Mall at their own game. The title of her work, Susanna’s Apologie against the Elders, while also playing on her name, refers to the apocryphal book, The History of Susanna, which records how the godly married woman of the title inflames the lust of two of the town’s appointed judges or elders. The two men watch her bathing in her garden, and reveal themselves threatening that if she would not lie with them, they would falsely call her an adulterer: ‘if thou wilt not, we will bear witness against thee, that a young man was with thee’ (verse 21). Susanna saw death in both choices but chose not to sin against God, and let the elders ‘bear witness against’ her (21-23). The elders in a public meeting sentenced her to death, but her faith in the Lord caused him to send the prophet Daniel to uncover the elders’ ‘false judgment’ (53). The men were then put to death having tried to pervert the ‘daughter of Juda’ with their ‘wickedness’ (57). Parr invites her readers to align the two elders, whose words considered separately by Daniel in order to
prove their lies, with Mall and Stucley whose pamphlets she implies contradicted each other. Where Stucley and Stoneham tried to persuade Parr that she would be likened to an adulterer if she heard the ministry of any other corresponds with the threats of the biblical elders who tried to lure the godly Susanna into lying with them. When Parr refused to walk with the church she knew, like her namesake, that the ministers would take action against her and scandalise her name in front of her congregation, and also in print, but she chose to follow what God had indicated. She thought the ministers’ behaviour, and the elders’, was to ‘sin in the sight of the Lord’ (23). Mall, like the elders, then tried to defame Parr writing that she ‘was found tripping very much in reference to her tongue, and lying greg[ar]iously: so that the whole Church could bear witness against her’ (p. 20): like the elders, Parr implies that the ministers abused their respected position in order to silence those that truly walked in God’s ways.71

In using the story of Susanna and the elders, Parr does not just style herself as passive, relying on God to reveal the truth of the controversy. The title of her work is significantly an ‘Apologie’ or ‘defence’ against the elders: it is a vindication of her behaviour to the readers in Exeter and beyond. Even though neither Parr nor Allein mention that the ministers are guilty of any sexual crimes, the story effectively aligns their admonishing of her to the sexual misdemeanours of the elders. Just as Parr and Allein’s crimes are aligned with the adulterous, incestuous sins of 1 Corinthians 5, the ministers are scandalised by their association with the salacious ministers. Not only this, but Parr implies that, like the elders, Mall and Stucley would meet a nasty end, not just on earth, but also in heaven. If the ministers tried to protest their innocence of these aspersions they would have to admit that aligning the women’s crimes with those in scripture was also an attack on their behaviour and deportment. Parr effectively condemns the ministers as philanderers and abusers of their power for sexual gain, and the ministers were left with the choice to remain silent and accept the abuse, or highlight their own misdemeanours by replying: the choice was rather like that forced on Susanna as she sat in her bath.

It is clear that the growth of congregations through the 1630s, 40s, and 50s led to women’s position within them being hotly debated. The discovery of Jones’s first extant text shows that the reassessment of women’s roles was ongoing, as well as minor differences in various congregations’ interpretation of scripture. The outrage that women like Anne

71 Karen L. Edwards discusses this story in relation to Parr’s work as a vindication of her deportment rather than playing the ministers at their own game. See ‘Susanna Apologie and the Politics of Privity’, 12-13.
Harriman and Susanna Parr felt when denied liberty to speak must also surely be evidence that they were once permitted and had that right removed. This was likely to have been in part caused by the pressure from outside to be free from any scandal, which women’s speaking was perceived to provoke. What these arguments provoked was a variety of different responses from women, all intent on proving that they should be allowed to participate in congregational issues and in rousing up the saints against their enemies.

‘It being a signe’: The Practice of Believers’ Baptism

Thy Baptism, thy Baptism it is,
It is very choice and rare;
I met with thee in the water, Lord,
I’m sure that thou art there.72

The decision to undertake believers’ baptism often grew from a believer’s doubt of the validity of infant baptism that was required of every child soon after their birth by the established church. Individuals, both those already joined to the gathered churches and those remaining with the established church, searched their bibles to find evidence for the baptism of infants and found them wanting. Believers found references to adult or believers’ baptism (where only the profession of belief and faith would be rewarded with baptism, of which infants were not capable) in Matthew 28:19 (‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’), Mark 16:16 (‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved’), and Acts 2:41 (‘Then they that gladly received his word were baptised: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls’). The Baptists’ opponents sought to justify their doctrine of infant baptism, but those convinced that it was an unscriptural practice were unsatisfied. As Murray Tolmie writes, ‘their contention that believers’ baptism alone was justified by “God’s naked truth” won adherents even outside organized Baptist churches’.73 Lucy Hutchinson, though likely not ever a member of a Baptist congregation, wrote that she had doubts about the practice of baptising infants, which led her and her husband to decide they would not baptise the child she was carrying in the mid-1640s. Hutchinson had obtained some ‘notes [...] concerning paedobaptism [infant baptism]’, namely its ‘misapplication’, after her husband had been ordered by Presbyterian ministers to break up a private meeting in his soldiers’ lodgings,
while he was Governor of Nottingham Castle. She then proceeded, ‘having then more leisure to read than he’, to peruse and ‘[compare] them with the Scriptures’ (p. 210) and found that she agreed with their assertions that there was no support for infant baptism in the scriptures. She held off from disagreeing openly with the church,

being then young and modest, [I] thought it a kind of virtue to submit to the judgment and practice of most churches rather than to defend a singular opinion of her own, she not being then enlightened concerning that great mistake of the national churches. But in this year she, happening to be with child, communicated her doubts to her husband and desired him to endeavour her satisfaction; which while he did, he himself became as unsatisfied, or rather satisfied against it. (p. 210)

Presenting herself as the epitome of womanly virtue, not proud enough to defend her ‘singular opinion’, Hutchinson insists with hindsight that she was the first to communicate the error of the ‘national churches’ to her husband. She was doing what Baptist women often described in their spiritual experiences, examining the scriptures for evidence and resolving to go ahead with what they found. Such private meditation is presented as a lonely, but eventually rewarding, experience.

Colonel John Hutchinson, Lucy’s husband, was then faced with a struggle of his own. She tells us that he ‘dilligently searched the Scriptures alone, and could find in them no ground at all for that practice; then he bought and read all the eminent treatises on both sides which came thick from the presses at that time’ (p. 210). Seeking an answer when Lucy had been ‘brought to bed’ (p. 210), no doubt urged on by her, Hutchinson invited all the ministers to dinner so that they could discuss his doubts that he might satisfy his wife. Lucy’s version of these events was that

none of them could defend their practice with any satisfactory reason but the tradition of the church from the primitive times, and their main buckler of federal holiness, which Tombes and Denne had excellently overthrown. He and his wife then professing themselves unsatisfied in the practice, desired their opinions, what they ought to do. Most answered, to conform to the general practice of other Christians, how dark soever it were to themselves; but Mr Foxcraft, one of the [Westminster] Assembly, said that except they were convinced of the warrant of that practice from the Word, they sinned in doing it: whereupon that infant was not baptised. (p. 211)

The only defences of infant baptism that the ministers came up with were the following of the traditions of the primitive church and their belief in ‘federal holiness’ or the covenant of grace. John Tombes was to ‘excellently overthrow’ this latter doctrine in his ‘Exercitation’

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later published in English in *Two Treatises* (1645).\(^7^5\) The argument made by paedobaptists, based in 1 Corinthians 7:14 (‘For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now they are holy’), was that ‘the Infants of a Believer are holy, with a Covenant-holiness; [...] therefore they may be baptized’.\(^7^6\) Tombes once used this scripture to justify his baptising of infants, but had come to believe it was not a ‘sufficient warrant’ for paedobaptism: \(^7^7\) he subsequently wrote that it did not follow ‘that they are to be baptized, who have not yet yeelded any shewes of divine grace’, and that the scripture did ‘not speak of federall holinesse, but of holinesse, [...], Matrimoniall, so that the sense is, your children are holy, that is legitimate’.\(^7^8\) The difference in interpretation was whether the children of believers were yet worthy of the ordinance, before they had a chance to interpret God’s grace and grow in faith. It is certain that the ‘eminent treatices’ that John and Lucy read would have included some of Tombes’s pamphlets, which, Tolmie asserts, provoked a number of the ‘conservative clergy’ to reply and join the debate on both sides.\(^7^9\) It was evidently of the utmost importance for the Hutchinsons to practise what they believed there was scriptural evidence for, and they decided not to baptise their child.

Deciding to make such a break with tradition and church doctrine was not a simple decision and neither were the consequences easy to bear. Even though the Hutchinsons invited ministers for advice on the matter and gave the matter much care, they were tainted with the name of ‘anabaptist’ because they had neglected to baptise their child. Lucy writes:

> And now the Governor and his wife, notwithstanding that they forsook not their [the Presbyterian] assemblies nor retracted not their benevolences and civilities from them, yet were they reviled by them and called fanatic and Anabaptists, and often glanced at in their public sermons. (p. 211)

Though the Hutchinsons had not stopped attending church or giving money to its upholding, they were looked upon as shameful ‘fanatics’ and ‘Anabaptists’: the ministers tellingly ‘glanced’ at them during the ‘public sermons’. Those who decided not to have their children baptised seemed always to have been accused of heresy by those around them, and regarded with fear and scorn. Praisegod Barebone, Tolmie cites, likened antipaedobaptism to the

\(^7^5\) John Tombes, *Two Treatises and an Appendix to them Concerning Infant-Baptisme* (London: Printed for George Whittington, 15 December 1645).

\(^7^6\) Tombes, *Two Treatises*, p. 10.

\(^7^7\) Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, p. 53.

\(^7^8\) Tombes, *Two Treatises*, p. 10.

\(^7^9\) Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, p. 62.
practice of witchcraft, because ‘witches after conviction say that the Devil persuaded them to
deny their first Baptisme’.\textsuperscript{80} If such outlandish statements had gained popular appeal, Anna
Trapnel’s encounter with the Cornwall witch-trier might have been quite different (see
chapter two). Thomas Edwards, in the first instalment of his \textit{Gangraena}, also drew attention
to the neglecting of infant baptism by printing a letter that he had received from Colchester
detailing a ‘monstrous birth’ where two children were born dead, one of which was not
properly formed, having no head. The implication is that because the father was a separatist
‘frequenting their congregations an enemy to the baptising of his own children’, and because
the mother had resolved before the birth not to baptise her children, that God had visited them
with this tragedy: the poor child’s appearance was interpreted as a sign of her sin.\textsuperscript{81}

Those being re-baptised or undertaking believers’ baptism (disregarding their
previous baptism in the established church) knew that they would also face scorn and
derision, and this made the choice more than a matter of scripture. Katherine Sutton feared
that ‘a death (in all likelyhood and in an eye of reason) would fall upon my livelyhood’ if she
were baptised, but afterwards she wrote that ‘the Lord was pleased to bless mee in my
imployment that following year, with more than ordinary success’.\textsuperscript{82} The Devil, who had
tempted her not to undertake the ordinance was, she thought, ‘proved a lyar’ (B2\textsuperscript{v}). Jane
Turner also considered believers’ baptism for a long time before committing. She had
originally joined an Independent congregation, before which she had been ‘very ignorant of
Baptism, and all other duties and Ordinances relating to the visible practice of Believers’.
\textsuperscript{83} Hearing about believers’ baptism, although having no acquaintance with anyone else that had
undertaken it, she examined the scriptures, especially Matthew 28:19, and wrote:

\begin{quotation}
I was in a great measure convinced that Baptism of Believers was an Ordinance of Christ, and
that there could be no true Church without it, and that Baptizing of Infants is that for which I
could find no ground in Scripture. (H1\textsuperscript{v})
\end{quotation}

This caused her to visit London where she observed some miscarriages of doctrine and
behaviour in the Baptist churches (H2\textsuperscript{v}), although she later dismissed this as the Devil’s
temptation. When she was able to move permanently to London, to marry her husband
Captain John Turner, she ‘resolved to submit to this Ordinance of Christ’ (H3) following

\textsuperscript{80} Praisegod Barebone, \textit{A Defence of the Lawfulnesse of Baptizing Infants} (London: Printed by M. Bell for
\textsuperscript{81} Edwards, \textit{The First and Second Part of Gangraena}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{82} Sutton, \textit{A Christian Womans Experiences}, B2\textsuperscript{v}.
\textsuperscript{83} Turner, \textit{Choice Experiences}, H1.
Acts 22:16 (‘Arise and be baptised, why tarryest thou?’) (H4). She spoke to her husband ‘who was then much in the same condition’ and ‘had some discourse about it’ and they agreed to go to the church the next time it met (H4). Here they were required to ‘declare what God had done for us in the great work of conversion’, which ‘gave them full satisfaction, and the week following were baptized and added to the Church’ (H4\textsuperscript{v}). Although Turner never mentions the church by name, it is likely to have been that of John Spilsbury who wrote one of the prefaces to her experience and was one of the signatories to the Baptist Confession of Faith. It was usual for Baptist congregations like Turner’s to ask for evidence of grace in a person, given by them in front of the congregation (as discussed above), before they could undertake baptism: J. F. McGregor writes that ‘it was the seal of the covenant of grace confined to those in receipt of that grace through conversion’. As infants were not capable of conversion, they could not be baptised.

Not all women writing about baptism were in favour of its proliferation, and it is clear that one woman in particular took up her pen and published her work in part to urge leading London ministers to come to a decision regarding the ordinances of ‘the laying on of hands’ (assigning offices to members of the congregation) and of baptism. This was Sara Jones who was a member of what has become known as the ‘Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey’ separatist church established by Henry Jacob in 1616 and she wrote and published three pamphlets, the second of which, To Sions Virgins ([4 November] 1644), advocated infant baptism. It has written on the title page: ‘by an Antient Member, of that long agoe gathered Congregation, whereof Mr. Henry Jacob was an Instrument of gathering it, and the Pastour worthy of double honour, Mr. John Lathroppe succeeding him, now pastor in New England’. Henry Jessey became the new pastor of the church around 1637, and two Baptist historians have remarked on his absence from this summary of the congregation’s history. Both historians have assumed that the author of the pamphlet (Jones) had written this account of the congregation, which goes further in saying that the author is ‘waiting when God shall give more liberty and Pastours according to his own heart’ (A1). Jessey, at the time of Jones’s writing, was accepting both

\textsuperscript{84} There is no evidence for where Jane Turner lived before she was married and the date of her marriage is not yet known.
\textsuperscript{85} McGregor, ‘The Baptists: Fount of all Heresy’, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{86} Sara Jones, To Sions Virgins: Or a Short Forme of Catechisme of the Doctrine of Baptisme ([London]: Printed in the yeare 1644), titlepage (A1). Thomason has written on the title page: ‘Nov: 4th’.
\textsuperscript{87} See W. T. Whitley, ‘Rise of the Particulare Baptistes in London, 1633-1644’, Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society, 1 (1908-9), pp. 226-36 (p. 229); Wright, ‘Sarah Jones and the Jacob-Jessey Church’. Whitley writes that Jessey had probably ‘so far excited the ire of this ancient member, that he [sic] omitted all reference to him, and almost implied that Jessey was to be recognized as only a Teacher, not a Pastor after his [sic] own heart’ (pp. 229-30).
paedo- and antipaedobaptists into his congregation, which she might have assumed was not according to God’s ‘own heart’. Her pamphlet is a ‘defence of the Baptisme and forme we have received’ (A2r-v) meaning that infants should be baptised making them into ‘sions virgins’: the supper would make them into ‘spouses’. According to Jones, the practice should also not be through ‘dipping’ or immersion of the whole body in water, but rather sprinkling.

Arguments over the ordinance of Baptism were central to the development of Jessey’s inherited congregation. A year after his arrival a group of church members left to join with John Spilsbury ‘being convinced that Baptism was not for Infants, but professed Beleivers [sic]’. In the early 1630s Spilsbury had departed from John Duppa’s Independent congregation (of which Katherine Chidley was a member), which had originally seceded from Jessey’s congregation when it was under the pastorate of John Lathrop. Two years later the congregation ‘became two by mutall consent’: one half remaining with Jessey, and the other leaving to follow Praise-God Barebone. Richard Blunt, who remained with Jessey for a time, was then convinced (with Jessey) that Baptism ‘ought to be by diping yᵉ Body into yᵉ Water, resembling Burial & rising again. 2 Col: 2:12. Rom: 6:4’. Believing that no other English church practised ‘dipping’, Blunt was sent to the Netherlands by the church and returned to baptise a group of like-minded believers that joined together, ‘not by any formal Words or Covenant’, apart from Jessey’s church. Jessey, himself, according to Whitley, ‘accepted immersion as the only baptism, though he still administered it to infants’. Sara Jones rejected both the practice of immersion, resembling burial and rising again in Christ, and the practice of adult baptism in her first published work, The Relation of a Gentlewoman (1642). She refers directly to her congregation’s transformations in doctrine, contradicting the belief in being ‘born again’ in baptism, and that it takes the place of a ‘visible’ covenant (‘order’):

By vertue of the externall covenant the children of the visible Congregation are received into the Kingdome by Baptisme; they are not received by vertue of the parents beleeving, but by vertue of their parents visible order are they received in by Baptisme; they are not regenerated

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88 Whitley, ed., ‘An Old MSS’ in ‘Rise of the Particular Baptists in London’, p. 231. This document has been referred to as the ‘Kiffin manuscript’ because Thomas Crosby refers to it in The History of the English Baptists, from the Reformation to the Beginning of the Reign of George I, 4 vols. (London: n. pub., 1738-1740) as so. Whitley is inclined to it being authored by Henry Jessey, mainly because ‘the phraseology of the anonymous Life of Jessey, published in 1671, more than suggests that these papers were used in the compilation’ (p. 229).
and borne again by outward washing, neither are they saved by their parents faith, but outwardly saved in the visible Congregation of the saints, as Noah in the Arke; wherefore unlesse you doe agree in the Name of Christ, consenting to visible order, you shall never gainsay such as deny the washing or baptising of Infants; wherefore get into order, and manifest faith, to the joy of the Saints in order.93

Here, Jones is advocating that a truly separated congregation will only be saved by their ‘visible order’ or an ‘externall covenant’ which she compares with Noah and the Ark. Katherine Chidley, a member of John Duppa’s congregation and a vehement justifier of separatism, uses this biblical allusion in her Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ, written in the same year, to ‘declare by the testimony of the Scripture it selfe, that the way of Separation is the way of God’.94 She writes that ‘Noah and his family [...] were saved, when the world was drowned’ (Genesis 6), thus, in effect, ‘separating of his Church from the world’ (*3). Jones shows that this visible order was what allowed children to undertake the ordinance of baptism. It was not enough for the parents to ‘believe’: they had to ‘consent to visible order’ to have their children received. Significantly, Jones also speaks against those who denied the ‘washing or baptising of Infants’, writing that the only way a congregation could defend their position was by upholding a covenant of belief rather than having to do so in baptism, later.

The validity of a covenant, as Jones was advocating, came under further scrutiny the next year in 1643. Hanserd Knollys, a member of the church from about 1641, was encouraged by the congregation to baptise his newborn child: ‘it had bin endeavoured by ye Elder [presumably Jessey], & by one or two more’.95 He referred the matter to be discussed in the church, having substantial doubts about the lawfulness of infant baptism and several meetings were appointed between Knollys, Jessey, and William Kiffin (‘B. Ki.’), who seems to have been a member at this time. Jessey outlined the congregation’s basis for its covenant in Genesis 17 where God laid out an everlasting covenant between himself and the ‘seed’ of Abraham. Jones seems to support this belief when she addresses paragraphs of her Relation to the ‘Daughters of Sarah’ who was Abraham’s wife and called by God to be ‘the mother of nations’ (17:16). She writes in her sermon to the church, ‘we are of the free woman [Sarah], and not of the bond woman [Hagar]’, and that members of the congregation would build a ‘holy house for the King of Saints to rule in, as the first-born sonne [Isaac], and not as a

95 Whitley, ed., ‘An Account of divers Conferences’, in ‘Debate on Infant Baptism’, p. 240. The next ‘elder’ to speak is glossed by Whitley as Jessey, so this is presumably him.
Mosaicall servant [Ishmael]’ (C4). Though Ishmael was Abraham’s first son chronologically, he was not born from his father’s first legitimate marriage to Sarah, who was later miraculously cured from barrenness, giving birth to Isaac. Jones traces the legitimate line from Abraham to her congregation, and implies that the established church might resemble the illegitimate line descended from Hagar, which did not come about by God’s hand. The ‘seed’ of Abraham and Sarah (interpreted as the members of the congregation) were to be circumcised on turning eight days old (17:12), and the congregation took circumcision to mean baptism for infants. Doctor Daniel Featley in The Dippers Dipt (1645) would also assert ‘that which circumcision was in the old law to the Jews, that is baptisme now to us, the sacrament of entrance into the church; for so St. Au[gu]stine and all sound divines hold’.

Knollys referred to this belief in his argument against baptising his new-born child:

That Gen: 17 proves [baptism/circumcision] no more to be given to a Church as a Church, for their Infants to have the token of Covenant in Infancy, then for the Churches Servants all bought w[th] money &c without exception of Religion to be Baptized [Genesis 17:12-13]; & ye not only ye Chil: but Childrens Children to many Generations though neither Father nor Grandfather ware faithfull must be Members.

Knollys refutes the argument that circumcision was given only to the church as it was given to the whole household of Abraham, including servants of other faiths who were bought with money, their children, and subsequent generations ‘though neither Father nor Grandfather ware faithfull’. This kind of circumcision/infant baptism, in Knollys’s belief, did not separate the faithful from the non-faithful. Discussions continued with William Kiffin showing that the congregation should look only to New Testament teachings in which there was ‘no Institution for Infants Baptism’ and ‘being ye Seed of Abraham, of Godly Parents, would not qualify them’ for the ordinance (p. 242). These discussions continued ‘for many weeks together. [...], whereof some searched ye Scriptures, some prayed earnestly for light, & had such impressions on their Spirits against Pedobaptisme [infant baptism], as they told ye Elder [Jessey] upon his enquiry, that he could not but judg there was much of God in it’ (pp. 242-3). Although Jessey was moved against pedobaptism, he ‘remained in his judgment for it’ even though sixteen members were so definitely against it, in the space of a week, that they would not speak to those who upheld it (p. 241). Those of this opinion left to join congregations led either by Knollys or Kiffin, and some were unconvinced about who had sufficient authority to baptise members. They eventually decided that ‘such Disciples as are

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gifted to teach & evangelize may also baptize’ (p. 244). Jessey, himself, was not baptised until he had discussed the matter with other Independent ministers, but eventually he was baptised by Hanserd Knollys on 29 June 1645, although he did not make believers’ baptism a condition of entry to his congregation.98

Jones published two works in the aftermath of these discussions which took place around April 1644. To Sions Virgins and To Sions Lovers were bought by Thomason on 4 November 1644 and 6 November 1644 respectively, one month after the Baptist Confession of Faith was published (16 October). The Confession was signed and published by the seven Baptist churches of London having been accused of ‘doing acts unseemly in the dispensing the Ordinance of Baptisme, not to be named amongst Christians: All which Charges wee disclaime as notoriously untrue’ (A2v). The pamphlet vindicates separatists as ‘a company of visible Saints, called & separated from the world’ (C1), as Jones’s works do, but there is a difference of opinion over the way baptism should be practised. The thirty-ninth article reads that ‘Baptisme is an Ordinance of the new Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed onely upon persons professing faith, or that are Disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptized’ (C1v-C2). Knollys’s argument that those undertaking baptism should be faithful held fast. On how to go about the practice, the Confession dictates that ‘the way and manner of the dispensing of this Ordinance, the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water: it being a signe’ (C2). The sign is of Christ’s burial unto death and the resurrection of his body imitated by the rising of the body from under the water. It is possible to see Jones’s disagreement with this interpretation in the quotation above from her Relation: ‘they are not regenerated and borne again by outward washing’. In To Sions Virgins, she takes this further by constructing a ‘catechisme’ to help believers to reinforce the values of infant baptism:

Q. What is it for the sinners to goe into the water themselves, and come out themselves to shew forth death and burial?
A. A lying signe, to make a figure of the creature, for wee must see Christ in the imployment of the Officer and use of the water, powring, sprinkling, washing, there must bee a dipper dipping his hand, but not a dipped, but in Christ himselfe.99

For Jones, Christ was reflected in the baptising minister, and not in the member being baptised, believed by Baptists to be a ‘figure’ or representation of the burial and subsequent resurrection of Christ. Her entire work is devoted to establishing the validity of infant baptism:

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99 Jones, To Sions Virgins, A3v.
baptism and warning those that had adopted the practice of ‘dipping’ rather than ‘sprinkling’ believers. The minister should not immerse ‘the head, the creature going in and out of the water’ (A2\textsuperscript{v}) but ‘dip his hand and to power cleane water, sprinkle and wash the sinner, and so it is fully baptised’ (A3\textsuperscript{v}). Her evidence for ‘sprinkling’ is found in Isaiah 52:15 (‘So shall he sprinkle many nations; [...]’); the water coming from Christ’s side when it was pierced at his crucifixion. Her minister Henry Jessey was practising immersion for all baptisms, although still administering infant baptism, and not the ‘sprinkling’ Jones upheld. She warned both the dippers and the dipped: ‘beware of the taile of the Beast, that must draw the third part after him [Revelation 12:4]; I wish our godly friends would mind it, that so easily imbrace old errors new furbushed as new truths’ (A2). Referring to the ‘old errors’ of anabaptism, Jones shows how ‘the Beast will plucke hard’ in order to ‘deceive the Elect’ and persuade them that believers should be immersed as adults (A2).

Jones’s arguments predate the publishing of Featley’s *The Dippers Dipt* which outlines a dispute between himself and William Kiffin on 17 October 1642 in Southwark. It is likely that Jones would have attended such a debate, and that her writings were prompted by such discussions. Not only does she question the form of the ordinance of baptism, she also questions whether it should be neglected until a profession of the believer’s faith. She laments that it is ‘a sad thing that the Citizens of Sion should have their children borne forreiners not to be baptized’ (A2\textsuperscript{v}), and instead waiting to be baptised when they can profess their faith. She continues, ‘let such as deny Infants baptisme, and goe into the water and dip downe the head and come out to shew death and burial, take heede they take not the name of the Lord in vaine, more especially such as have received baptisme in their Infancy’ (B1\textsuperscript{v}-B2). She ends with a warning to those who ‘baptise them againe’: ‘Let them take heede they be not the taile of the beast, for the Prophet that teacheth lyes is the tayle [Isaiah 9:15]’ (B2).

Given that the gathered churches allowed women only very limited ways in which to take part in doctrinal debates, it seems likely that this text and its successor were written in order that Jones could have her say in congregational matters. The catechism could easily have been used in her family and those of her ‘private friends’ to educate their children, persuading them to uphold ‘the forme we have received’. Publishing the work would have ensured the work’s circulation within other such ‘mixed’ congregations. Whitley also discusses the catechism, while mistaking Jones for a man, and shows that ‘he defends [baptism] at length,
so that we can see the matter was burning, and all the details had been up for discussion'. It seems likely that Jones feared Jessey’s defection to the Baptists, having read their Confession, and sought to persuade him to uphold both the covenant of believers and infant baptism.

Jones also shows that it is breaking the bread, and pouring the wine that recalls Christ’s death, and it is only the ‘washing [that] makes us capable of eating’ (B1v), because the supper is only, in her opinion, to be administered after the recipient can examine themselves. She shows that ‘Baptisme declares Infants to be virgins, the Supper declares believers to be spouses’ (A2v). This change of the believer’s state is reflected in the titles of both of her 1644 works: the change from ‘virgins’ to ‘spouses’ of Christ. Jones’s third text, To Sions Lovers, is addressed to those who have already undertaken infant baptism and explores instead the doctrine of ‘the laying on of hands’. In it, she requests the help of Dr William Gouge, one of the ‘Maisters of the Assemblie’ of Westminster, who had had ‘ancient acquaintance with mee and my Father long since at rest’. She pleads that ‘this is too great a labour for my selfe’, because it was a complex doctrinal argument, so instead, she writes, ‘I doe but hint it to the honored [men] that labour in the word and doctrine as a patient desire to be healed wherein I erre, I earnestly beg these questions of the wise and learned’ (B1v). She asks him to ‘fasten some naile concerning the Doctrine of laying on of hands, which will cleare up holy fellowship and take off that aspertion layd upon your congregations, that they are false’ (A2). This is likely to be a response to written disputes accusing the gathered churches of not being according to the rule of God because of the way they practised the laying on of hands: the ordination of their ministers and accepting members into the church. She records that

the Presses are filled with their Letters, that open their mouthes wide to smite the Saints with the tongue, and wound them with the Pen, blotting them with their Inke, as if they would not have the name of holy Ones among them; as in the time of the Hirarchie, the precious were put out, and the uncleane kept in. (A4v)

Jones had ‘thought to have been silent’ about the matter but realised that ‘this is a time of warre’ (A3): the Civil War had begun and the saints needed to stand firm in the face of adversity. As J. F. McGregor writes, ‘during the civil war, [...] there developed among the General Baptists the innovation, probably derived from Anglican confirmation, of laying

101 Sara Jones, To Sions Lovers, Being a Golden Egge, to Avoide Infection: Or, a Short Step into the Doctrine of Laying on of Hands ([London]: Printed in the yeare 1644), A2. Jones’s father had died in 1617.
hands on all believers after baptism’ which ‘disrupted and divided congregations and turned church against church’. Although most Particular Baptists, like Jessey, do not appear to have adopted this practice, the uncertainty over ordination led to some congregation members forsaking ‘all fellowship [including baptism] till Christ shall send forth new Apostles to lay on hands; All this is (as I conceive) is for want of the knowledge of those two middle principals’: baptism and the laying on of hands (A2v). To her, the principles had ‘been as it were lost’ because of ‘the doctrine of foule hands, yea, bloody hands of the Prelates, hath beene taken for the doctrine of laying on of hands’ (B1v). Instead of ministers ordained by the established church, she and her separatist congregation wanted to choose their own ministers and officers by electing, choosing out from among themselves, ordaining, investing by her [the congregation’s] owne power given her from Christ, shee being in his stead the Eldership to appoint her Officers, [...] many members becomes one body according to Gods Ordinance to have power to take in & cast out by uniting together by faith & order agreeing in the name of Christ, and so we are indowed with power and order; as two parties husband and wife becomes one by Covenant. (B1v)

Ordination of ministers by their own congregation was crucial to upholding the ‘order’ of the covenant. Jones then goes on to criticise those groups ‘that know not the Doctrine of laying on of hands’, by ordaining their ministers, and ‘that know not how to deale with one another, 1 by telling privately, 2 by two or 3 & then to the Congregation, whereof they be members that know not how to elect, choose, ordaine, invest Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, Male and Female, qualified according to holy writt’ (B2). She requests clear instructions from Doctor Gouge as to these particular practices so that her church might be strengthened and ordinances might not be neglected. This would protect her congregation from the censures and scrutiny of those that would ‘wound with their pens’.

Perhaps unsurprisingly open-communion Particular Baptist churches seemed to have produced more internal disputes than their more rigid contemporaries. Both women who argue at length about believers’ baptism and the form it should take were members of congregations who did not make re-baptism a condition of entry. Sara Jones, as discussed above, was a member of Henry Jessey’s congregation that baptised both infants and adults by

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103 John Bunyan’s Bedford congregation was also open-communion. Anne Dunan-Page asserts that ‘Vavasor Powell, John Tombes, and of course Henry Jessey, whose principles Bunyan appended to Differences, had all pleaded in favour of open communion’, Grace Overwhelming, p. 58. In his A Confession of my Faith, and a Reason of my Practice, Bunyan wrote that ‘there is none debarred or threatened to be cut off from the Church, if they be not first baptized” (London: Printed for Francis Smith, 1672), E1.
immersion, much to her unease, and Anna Trapnel was a member of John Simpson’s open-communion congregation that worshipped at Allhallows, Upper Thames Street, London. Trapnel adopted the opposite stance from Jones, in that she supported believers’ baptism by immersion rather than infant baptism by sprinkling. As Tolmie writes, Simpson became a Baptist early in the 1650s, ‘but like Henry Jessey he made believers’ baptism a personal rather than a church matter, and his congregation continued as an Independent church’. Simpson was appointed as a lecturer at St Botolph’s, Aldgate, but he had to share the pulpit with Zachary Crofton, a Presbyterian, which may have provoked Trapnel to present the longest and most forceful defence of the ordinance of baptism by a woman writer still extant. Her folio, which is known only to exist in one edition held by the Bodleian Library, presents two prophecies disproving infant baptism and validating believers’ baptism which she had undergone some time between her release from Bridewell in mid-1654 and her prophecies recorded in the folio which start on 11 October 1657. The first was given on 28 November and the second on 2 December 1657. The latter explores the opposition that Trapnel had received in her undertaking of baptism and refers to ‘vile Rabbies’ who tried to prevent her:

Though that the Rabbies me oppose,
Yet I found thine Ordinances sweet,
And the more they did make void thy Law,
The more I lay at thy feet.
I did not matter it, O Lord,
Nor regard their friendship then,
That have so shewed themselves to be
Such vile opposing men.

The more the paedobaptist ministers tried to oppose the ordinance and make it ‘void’ by their arguments, she writes, the more she disregarded their ‘friendship’ as ‘vile’ and ‘opposing’. Later in the prophecy she shows how their ‘arrows’ would ‘not do any harm’ because she was ‘secured’ within the Lord’s ‘arm’ (p. 125). While Trapnel mentions no names in her prophecies (save her disgust for Cromwell and her admiration of John Pendarves), the oblique references to opposing ‘Rabbies’ could refer to the opposition her minister John

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105 Other women writers in this study that mention the ordinance are Katherine Sutton and Jane Turner. Deborah Huish includes considerations of various scriptures in her *The Captive Taken from the Strong* (London: Printed for Livewell Chapman, 1658).
106 Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 125.
Simpson received from the troublesome Zachary Crofton. Their dispute became a matter for all the frequenters of St Botolph’s Church.

Crofton had become the minister of St Botolph’s in mid-1655 by order of Cromwell, which might have been reason enough for the contempt of Trapnel and Simpson. Unfortunately, he was also very critical of the ‘profane and Anabaptisical spirits’ he found under his ministry, laid much stress on catechising those in his care, and actively prevented Simpson, as afternoon lecturer, from taking the pulpit. On 10 February 1657, Cromwell received a petition from the frequenters of St Botolph’s asking that Simpson be granted a permit to lecture which was approved, but Crofton continued to prevent his adversary, critical of his catechising and his baptising of infants, from preaching in the church. Later that year, Crofton was called to appear in front of the Guildhall commissioners accused of preventing Simpson’s preaching, but also of whipping his maidservant Mary Cadman, among other small trespasses. In his defence he published, under the pseudonym ‘Alethes Noctroff’, *Perjury the Proof of Forgery; or, Mr Crofton’s Civility Justified by Cadman’s Falsity*, bought by Thomason on 2 December 1657. Although the pamphlet deals mostly with vindicating his whipping of Cadman, which paradoxically he both denies and defends, it attempts to shift the accusations from himself onto Simpson and his followers. St Botolph’s, he writes, had been ‘subjected to the seducing Church-divastating Ministry of M. John Simpson’ (A1v), whose followers had engaged ‘some good women (of more affection then judgment) to molifie M. Crofton, and work him to consent that John Simpson (whom they did love) might again preach among them’ (A2v). They were not successful: as ‘M. Croftons care for the good of souls would not be hereby abated, their intreaties also were repelled’ (A2v). Evidently concerned with the health of his congregation whom he obsessively catechised, he was reluctant for them to hear the errors of Simpson, the ‘anabaptist’. The ‘two grand enemies of our churches peace’ were the ‘profane and Anabaptistical spirits’ and ‘others of a sectarian spirit’, and Crofton wrote that they were provoked by the administration of infant baptism:

they fret at the constant and successful administration of baptism to the infants of believing parents; they are cut to the heart to hear each Lords dayes Sermon closed with, The Sacrament of Baptism is to be administered, and you are desired in all silent reverence to attend that Ordinance. Oh! this they cry out against as a Prelatical command, making all M. Croftons Ministerial exhortations to be to themselves Popish injunctions. (A2)

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107 Zachary Crofton (pseud. Alethes Noctroff), *Perjury the Proof of Forgery; or, Mr Crofton’s Civility Justified by Cadman’s Falsity* (London: Printed for James Nuthal, 1657), A2. See also J. A. Dodd, ‘Troubles in a City Parish under the Protectorate’, *EHR*, 10 (1895), 41-54.

108 See Dodd, ‘Troubles in a City Parish’, 44.
Crofton seems here to take delight in causing the ‘anabaptists’ in the congregation to ‘fret’ over infant baptism, ‘cutting them to the heart’ when he announces its administration after his sermon. They are requested to attend in ‘silent reverence’ while Crofton took the pulpit: he continued to try to prevent Simpson’s preaching in the pulpit up until Cromwell’s death on 3 September 1658 and after which he believed the Protector’s order was no longer valid.

Trapnel’s prophecies on baptism coincide with the height of Crofton and Simpson’s dispute culminating in the publishing of *Perjury the Proof of Forgery* on (or a few days before) 2 December 1657 when Crofton appeared in court at the Guildhall. On the same day, Trapnel prophesied about the ‘vile opposing Rabbies’ that sought to prevent the proper administration of baptism in a similar manner in which she gave her prophecies included in *The Cry of a Stone* (1654). The latter part of these prophecies accompanied the trial of Vavasor Powell at Whitehall where Trapnel was overcome by the Lord and spoke for eleven days and twelve nights. It is conceivable that the prophecy from 2 December was influenced in some way by Crofton’s trial: his punishment would have enhanced her position on the sinfulness of infant baptism and its departure from basis in scripture. On this same day the untitled folio of her prophecies records her declaring:

The Children of believers, they
Have no more right then others,
If that it be made out that they
Are believing Sisters and Brothers.
It’s faith that gives a right into
The Ordinances sweet;
And it is onely by faith, that
We the Lord in them meet.\(^{109}\)

Trapnel’s belief is that the children of the saints should not automatically be baptised because it was faith that determined whether they could meet God in the water. Although she recognised that ‘the promise is to *Abraham* and his seed’, it was only to be administered to those ‘that are spiritual throughout’: it the ‘Antichrist that doth / Apply to Children’ (p. 131). There had to be evidence that the person to be baptised was one of the ‘election-seed’, which could not be ascertained until their faith was established, which prevented children from receiving the ordinance. Earlier, in her prophecy from 28 November, Trapnel spoke of how the Antichrist did endeavour to ‘break down’ the practice of baptism by allowing it, ‘but not according to / The Institution sweet’ (p. 74). By upholding the antichristian infant baptism,

\(^{109}\) Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 131.
which she did not believe was according to the ‘Gospel-Baptism’ presented by John the Baptist and Christ in the Gospels, this kept off many from meeting with ‘true Baptism’ with Christ under the water (p. 74).

Trapnel also took issue with the practising of ‘sprinkling’ rather than immersing infants at baptism, advocating immersion as a ‘figure’ of Christ’s resurrection: just what Sara Jones was arguing against. She highlights that ‘sprinkling’ as a practice was not scripturally based:

O those that are baptized in Christ,
According to Gospel-truth,
They are plunged into water, and
They do his death and resurrection shew.
O they are plunged in the water,
A little sprinkling will not do:
For what similitude hath that
To this Baptism that is true?
For what similitude hath sprinkling
To burying in his grave?
And to that resurrection which
Is so choice and so brave? (p. 76)

Immersion under the water was a ‘sign’ of Christ’s death and resurrection and the subsequent new birth of the baptised person from sin. Sprinkling, Trapnel believed, had none of the emblematic qualities of immersion, as well as no concrete scriptural basis. ‘Though it be hated by many’, she said, ‘Yet it [immersion] in my soul hath gain’ (p. 125). By speaking through such prophecies, claiming to speak with the Holy Spirit, Trapnel’s words were given more authority to argue against the ‘vile Rabbies’ who refused and ‘greatly abuse[d] [...] true Baptism’ (p. 73). ‘Let none think’, she asserted, ‘that they can / Pluck down this Baptism wall. / Let none think they can have power / Baptism to destroy’ (p. 75). Her audience and readers were urged to ‘be not deceived / By those that do creep in’, and not to maintain ‘dissembling [...] / Because the Rabbies say it is so’ (p. 77). She believed that she had been called by God to warn ‘poor England’ (p. 77) away from the practices of the antichrist, and what better ‘sign’ was there than one of infant baptism’s chief exponents appearing on trial for scandalous behaviour?

This chapter has shown, by interweaving works by their ministers and fellow-members and their own writings, that women saw it as their duty to speak out and help their congregations when they were in danger of weakening their resolve or embracing new and false doctrines. Despite scriptures telling them to be silent in their churches, Sara Jones,
Susanna Parr, and Anna Trapnel found that their words would find supporters if they behaved as Deborahs, using God’s words to rouse up their male co-religionists to uphold the rightful doctrines, separate from unlawfully established churches, and stand up against the forces of the antichrist. Although these women all had very different doctrinal views, they highlight the sorts of arguments occurring as congregations split off to varying degrees from the Church of England and display a variety of literary techniques to persuade their readers and audiences. Silence would have been a sin.
Chapter Two

‘It is recorded’: Defending the Name of the Godly and Writing History

See how the Foes of Truth devise
   Her Followers to defame,
First by Aspersions false and Lies
   To kill them in good Name;
Yet here they will in no wise cease
   But Sathans course they take
To spoil their Goods and Wealths increase,
   And so at Life they make.¹

When An Collins wrote and published ‘A Song composed in time of the Civill Warr, when the wicked did much insult over the godly’, she showed the cause at hand to be the defence of ‘Lady Verity’ (F1), the defence of scriptural truth. While Collins’s other poems tend to be more devotional in subject, ‘A Song’ is one of few that comment on current events, describing how the godly (those who fought for the true spiritual ‘Cause’ (F1¹)) would be ‘severely try’d’ by the wicked. These trials had already included, she writes, having their good names sullied, which she likens to being ‘killed’, and their livelihoods damaged or confiscated: all this, she says, is an attempt at their lives. Her next stanza continues by showing how the wicked were sowing ‘seeds of Error’ and ‘circumventing’, or trapping, men and women’s souls. To maintain their errors, leaders of both sides and their religious supporters would ‘falsly [...] apply’ scriptures and tempt people to ‘false Worships’. They also sought to ‘bind Soul and Body both / To Sathans service sure’ by tying the people to oaths of political and religious allegiance, or else suffer ‘the Losse of lightsome [cheerful] Liberty’ and confiscation of lands. ‘A multitude’, she writes, are forced ‘to hazard their Salvacion’ (E8⁵). Readers of Collins’s work are divided about what her own political and religious opinions were, although it seems clear that she understood her election and salvation in a Calvinistic framework.² Publishing her work in 1653, it seems doubtful that Collins

would be vindicating the Royalist cause, and, as Helen Wilcox has previously written, it would be more likely that her work is ‘critical of the radical wing of the Parliamentary movement’. The oath she refers to is likely to have been the ‘Solemn League and Covenant’, an agreement between the English Presbyterians and the Scots, which bound the signer to worship ‘by the example of the best reformed churches’: for Scottish assistance, the English were to adopt their form of church government. This led the Scottish Covenanters to fight alongside the Parliamentary soldiers, subsequently defeating the Royalists in the First Civil War, but Collins condemned their ‘Opposing Truth implicitly / The greater side to gain’ (E8’). Lady Verity and her followers should not be compromised to gain a greater army.

Not just in the Civil War, but throughout the period of this study, great numbers of people were ‘severely try’d’ for choosing not take oaths and support the acts imposed on them by their rulers. Refusing to conform to these set practices put a great many dissenters in danger of losing their liberty, and possibly even their lives. Those who met in separatist and Baptist congregations were mercilessly persecuted during the personal rule of Charles I when the Star Chamber and the Court of High Commission dealt harshly with those suspected of publishing seditious works, and those caught, or suspected of, conventicling. The most extreme cases included the famous imprisonment and maiming of John Prynne, John Bastwick, and Henry Burton, who, although separately accused, were pilloried on 30 June 1637, branded, and had their ears cut off. Alexander Leighton, a member of the Jacob-Lathrop congregation (of which Sara Jones was also a member), received similar treatment for the publication in Amsterdam of his critique of the English bishops: An Appeale to the Parliament, or, Sions Plea against the Prelacy (1628). He was arrested in early 1630 coming out of the church at Blackfriars and carried 'through a subterranean-way, opening up a doore

3 Her Own Life, p. 111.

4 Gottlieb proposes that Collins could be referring to either the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), or the Oath of Engagement (1650) (Gottlieb, ed., Divine Songs and Meditacions, p. 112). The latter seems too late to be of relevance to a poem about the Civil War, although for all separatists and Baptists, swearing any invented oath was an ‘affront to political and religious liberty’ (Gottlieb, p. 112). The Solemn League bound all army men, and those in public office, to a reformation of religion in England, with the possible implication of it resembling Scottish Presbyterianism. John Lilburne, Leveller and separatist, resigned from his position in the army in April 1645 because he would not sign the Covenant. See Michael R. Watts, The Dissenters, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 118.

5 Leighton had joined Henry Jacob’s separatist congregation in London, and would have been known to Sara Jones, who was also a member. Leighton’s first three publications appeared from the 'press of the Ancient (separatist) church of Amsterdam which was run by Sabine Staresmore' (Francis Condick, ‘Alexander Leighton’, ODNB, who was also a founding member of the Jacob church (Whitley, ed., ‘The Records of An Antient Congregation of Dissenters […] ex MSS of Mr H. Jessey’ in ‘Records of the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church’, in Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society, 1 (1908-9), pp. 203-25 (p. 209)). For Staresmore see Tolmie, The Triumph of the Saints, pp. 14-17.
(as they [the pursuivants] said) not opened since Queene Maryes daies’ and then to Newgate. Leighton wrote that ‘they had almost kill’d my Wife: and there they cast me into A nasty Dog-hole, full of Rats, and Mice, no light almost but from the uncovered Roofe [...], affooring me neither meat, drinke, nor bedding’. No doubt trying to frighten Leighton into submission and confession, the pursuivants threw their prisoner into a cramped cell open to the winter weather, and directed his thoughts to the horrific sufferings of the Marian martyrs. This seems to have made a great impression on him: in relating the episode, these are the only spoken words that he records. Although not sentenced to death, Leighton was pilloried, his ear nailed to the post before being cut off, branded with ‘S. S.’ (Sower of Sedition), and imprisoned indefinitely until his eventual release by Parliament in 1641. His pamphlet, An Epitome, or Briefe Discoverie, [...] he vindicates himself by a just defence (1646), not only relates the sufferings of himself and his family, but also presents replies to individual arguments and accusations. Leighton’s cause, he thought, was to speak ‘in defence of the Truth as it was given me of God’ (M1v), and he proceeds to lay out a ‘just defence’ of his publishing of seditious books against the bishops and of conventicling. Afterwards he wrote that even the bishops’ punishments would not make him believe his principles were not of God:

Beegoard in bloud of cruell p[relates] scourge  
Dismemberd ears, eares, stigmatized, to urge  
Me to despaire to earths and heavens grace,  
That to the sun I nere might showe my face.

These powerful iambic pentameter couplets, which use reversed feet, repetition, and harsh alliteration, show that no matter what the punishment, Leighton would not cede to the prelate’s opinions, and hence despair of ‘earths and heavens grace’. Leighton seems quite unusual in that he attempted to escape the night before his punishment was due, changing

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6 Alexander Leighton, An Epitome, or Briefe Discoverie [...], of the many and great troubles that Dr. Leighton suffered (London: Printed by I. D., 1646), B2.

7 The authorities persecuting the saints frequently attacked their ‘good name’, as Collins referred to above, and this was part of the reason that punishments inflicted on them were carried out in public and left such disfiguring marks upon their bodies. Leighton, Prynne, Bastwick, and Burton were all flogged on a public pillory and the branding and cutting of their ears left permanent, visible signs that they had been imprisoned for seditious behaviour. Although no women received this particular punishment, they were as keen to vindicate themselves from damaging accusations of lewdness, and sought, as men did, to refute these claims by writing and publishing. Those who stood accused offered a different interpretation of their sufferings and imprisonment, completely opposed to that of the persecuting clergy. A good example of this is William Prynne’s Latin verses on his branding of ‘S. L.’, meant by Laud to mean ‘seditious libeller’. Under Prynne’s hand, the letters are made to stand instead for ‘sign (or stigma) of Laud’ (William Lamont, ‘William Prynne’, ODNB).

clothes with a visitor. It seems that usually separatists and other dissenters (including even the Marian martyrs) were avidly concerned that they present themselves as ready to suffer any reprisals for the ‘truth of God’: confidence that God would uphold them in their martyrdoms was a sign for their enemies that they were chosen. Leighton uses his book to defend reproaches from other sufferers, writing that if ‘God should offer or deny the meanes’ then escape should be attempted. The visitor to his chamber also told him that if he ‘answered not the Opportunity, it was a tempting of God, and to my bloud-shed I should bee accessory’ (M2v). Such an argument sought to restore not only his godly name, but that of his fellow separatists.

Leighton’s case also shows, quite explicitly, how his family were affected by his imprisonment and sufferings. Four days after his arrest, the pursuivants of the High Commission arrived at his house where ‘they came to search for Jesuites Bookes’:

There those violent Fellowes of prey, laid violent hands upon your Petitioners distressed wife, with such barbarous inhumanity, as he is ashamed to expresse, and so rifled every soule in the house, holding a bent Pistoll to a childs breast of five years old, threatening to kill him, if he would not tell where the books were, through which, the child [Caleb] was so affrighted that he never cast it [threw it off]. [...]. They and some of the Sheriffs men spoyled, robbed, and carryed away all the Books and Manuscripts they found. (M8v)

Such accounts are plentiful, as shall be seen in the case of the imprisonment and examination of Sara Jones and her congregation. Petitions filed after the abolition of the High Commission and Star Chamber often present the cruelty enacted on wives and children: wives who were pregnant seem often to have miscarried after the fright of the events.°9 Pursuivants seem to have stopped at nothing to obtain (what were labelled) seditious books and manuscripts. Whilst in Newgate, Leighton suffered so that his skin and hair fell off, which his closing petition attributed to poisoning (N1), and his wife, Isobel, nursed him at their home until he was then returned to the Fleet Prison. At the time of his trial and sentencing, Leighton was extremely sick, and Isobel carried a certificate to the court signed by four physicians verifying his ‘weaknesse, and sicknesse unto death’ (L3). He writes of this:

My weak distressed wife was sent for, by James the Jaylor of Newgate, and a Tipstaffe [court-crier or constable], to be at the Tryall, [...] my wife delivered a Petition to supersede the hearing, but having no good answer, she went away, and hastned homeward in regard of my weaknesse; but they called her back by a Tipstaffe, that the dreadfulnesse of the Censure

°9 The petitions of Elizabeth Milbourne and Elizabeth Eaton discussed below show that they both were brought to childbed before their time. Elizabeth Bunyan also miscarried when her new husband was first arrested. Sara Jones, although married, was very likely above child-bearing age, and Anna Trapnel and Agnes Beaumont were not married when they wrote their experiences.
(as it seemes) might overwhelm her spirit: but the God of our strength upheld her marvellously that she was not so much as danted, but spake freely in the Court, yet with modesty enough. (L3)

The dreadful censures were read that Leighton might suffer the pillory and ‘perpetual imprisonment’, but Isobel was seemingly unperturbed: she presented her husband’s petition by speaking freely in the court, upheld in strength by the Lord. Leighton depicts the harshness of the convenors in their sentencing of an absent man, stricken by an illness caused by his imprisonment, but also that they heaped troubles upon his wife in order, as he thought, to break her spirit. However, she, like other women petitioning for the lives of their husbands (and themselves), is shown to have spoken out undaunted, to the glory of God and her faith.10

Similar treatment was given to many vocal disputers of the prelates and their families. Those who wrote and/or published what were considered ‘seditious’ texts received the harshest penalties, and the court’s constables and pursuivants took care to remove any books or manuscripts from the offender’s home. Censorship developed throughout the personal rule of Charles I and was designed to quell inflammatory arguments and establish a kind of uniformity of opinion. Randy Robertson has also observed that ‘Charles’s failure to call a parliament was itself a subtle form of censorship: not only was parliament the voice of the people but sitting parliaments generated news’.11 However, this oppressive environment did not quench the fire of religious fervour, and manuscripts would seem to have continued to circulate even if the censors prevented them from going to print. As discussed below, Sara Jones made notes to help others who were asked to take the inquisitorial ‘oath ex-officio’ after she was arrested with her congregation at a separatist conventicle in 1632. She preserved these notes until her house was ransacked for books and manuscripts in 1640, but would seem to have preserved a sermon that she spoke before her congregation directly after the event. Although Parliament dissolved both the High Commission and Star Chamber courts in 1641, other acts were put in place to censor the press but they were not so exactingly enforced, and by the mid-1640s in the midst of the Civil Wars, a variety of opinions were being published. Perhaps riding the wind of change, a pamphlet unheard of in the time of Laud because of its criticisms of the Anglican prelates was published under the persona of ‘Margery Mar-prelate’, thought now to be a pseudonym of Richard Overton, later

10 Isobel Leighton née Musgrave (c. 1600-1653) was Leighton’s second wife and daughter of Sir William Musgrave of Cumberland. She had a son, Caleb, in 1625 and later a daughter, Sapphira, and was stepmother to Leighton’s three sons and a daughter from his previous marriage. See Condick, ‘Leighton’, ODNB.
a Leveller. At the beginning of *Vox Borealis, or the Northern Discovery* (1641), a mock address from ‘the Printer to the Reader’ has the ‘aged bonny lass’ Margery (replacing her forbear Martin Mar-prelate) presented as publishing Borealis, the blowing North Wind (signifying the concerns of the Scottish Presbyterians) into print. The writer (Overton) asks, ‘what will the Prelats doe?’ as she unleashes her books:

> Shee’l scould in Print, whole Volumes till they roare,  
> And laugh to see them strangled in their goare;  
> While BOREAS blows, shee’ll put his Wind in Print,  
> And venture Life to strike their fatall dint [stroke or blow].¹²

Urging that Margery would ‘doe as much’ for the South, East, and West winds, the writer claims that the North wind will drive the prelates (the papist ‘BEAST’) to the ‘Romish Coast’. And, to hurry it along, Margery was on hand:

> To speed your voyage, if you want some Wind,  
> MARGERY will helpe you, though she break behind.  
> If this verse (Reader) doe offend thy Nose,  
> VOX BOREALIS brings perfumed Prose. (A2⁺)

Although showing that the mock-publisher Margery might be a better publisher than she is a writer (note the writer’s comparison between her odious verse and his ‘perfumed prose’), it is clear that, despite ability, she would venture her life to strike the final textual (and airy!) blow. Clearly meant to be humorous, the pamphlet implies that women publishers (and writers, even though they might not be as skilled) have the ability to vanquish the prelates, and send them back to their Popish lands. The writer, here, is only mildly more flattering to women than he is to the Romish priests, but he presents a message that times were changing, and even women could contribute as part of the North Wind.

The 1640s saw an unprecedented rise in publications, but things were still far from easy for separatists and Baptists. Influenced by the Scottish Presbyterians, the House of Commons became predominantly Presbyterian and began to establish a state church according to their doctrines and practices. By May 1648, Parliament had passed ‘An Ordinance for the Punishing of Blasphemies and Heresies’ which outlined the penalties for those who practised such ‘errors’ as believing ‘that the baptizing of Infants is unlawfull, or

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¹² *Vox Borealis, or the Northern Discovery* (London: Printed by Margery Mar-Prelat, 1641), A2⁺. For Overton’s possible authorship of the pamphlet see B. J. Gibbons, ‘Richard Overton’, *ODNB*.
such Baptism is void, and that such persons ought to be baptized again’. 13 Other ‘heresies’ treated as felonies were asserting that ‘the church Government by Presbytery is Antichristian or unlawful’. Jane Turner, writing retrospectively from the early 1650s, remembered with thankfulness,

that I was not insnared by the change of times and laws; For at that very time when the Presbyterian party, so called, began to reign, and I might have reign'd with them, and enjoyed smiles from them, being convicted of a further discovery of truth I left them, and was content to become a scorn and a by-word amongst them.14

In her society, Turner became a signifier for sedition, and heresy, and, although she does not elaborate on her treatment, it is possible that she was ostracised by those who adopted the Presbyterian faith. Of the Presbyterians, Turner wrote that she had ‘seen as persecuting a spirit in them as ever I did in the former [bishops], and they did appear as bitter, if not more, against such as were called Anabaptists, than ever the Bishops did against those that were called Puritans’ (E7v-E8). Mary Overton was another Baptist who suffered at the hands of the Presbyterian ministers, although her case is the more severe because of her crime.15

Mary’s husband, Leveller Richard Overton, had been in and out of prison between 1646 and 1647 for publishing texts critical of the Presbyterian government, and advocating the rights of free-born citizens, along with those of a fellow imprisoned Leveller, John Lilburne. In January 1647 a tract critical of the monarchy, Regall Tyrannie Discovered, was published, and those caught with it in their possession were to be arrested charged with treason. On 6 January, Mary was found stitching ‘divers of the scandalous Books in the House of one Overton’ with her brother, Thomas Johnson.16 Both refused to tell the House of Lords from where they had obtained the pamphlets, and Mary was sent to Bridewell Prison. In The Commoners Complaint (1646/7), Richard declared his wife to be under ‘their High-Commission Star-chamber bondage’, his phrasing deliberately aligning the House of Lords with their predecessors, and indicating that they would ‘obliterate the honour of her modesty, civility, and chastity’.17 They would send her to

14 Turner, Choice Experiences, E6'-E7.
15 Richard Overton was a member of Thomas Lambe’s General Baptist congregation at Bell Alley, Coleman Street, the congregation that was said to produce the notorious female preacher Mrs Attaway. It is likely that Mary Overton joined her husband in worship.
17 Richard Overton, The Commoners Complaint: Or, a Dreadful Warning from Newgate (London, [30 February 1646]), B4'. The same story is recounted, seemingly, in Mary’s words in To the Right Honourable, the Knights,**
the most infamous Goale of Bride-well, that common Centre and receptacle of bauds, whores, and strumpets, more fit for their wanton retrograde Ladies, then for one, who never yet could be taxed of immodesty, either in countenance, gesture, words, or action. (C1)

He reports that Mary refused to go until she was dragged through the streets with her baby in her arms being called ‘strumpet’ and ‘vild [sic] whore’ which ‘dishonourable infamous usage’ her husband thought was ‘sufficient matter to blast her reputation for ever, [...] that for the future [...] she should not passe the streets upon her necessary occasions any more without contumely and derision, scoffing, hissing, and pointing at her’ (C2r-v). Mary’s crimes would have received a lesser penalty had she been caught with the pamphlet in her possession three years later, after the execution of Charles I, but her husband was concerned that it was her punishment and not her crime that her contemporaries would remember. Being sent to Bridewell Prison was indicative of the prisoner being mad, disruptive, poor, or whorish, and if she had been paraded through the streets Mary would have received branding on a similar level to that of Leighton, Prynne, Bastwick, and Burton: however, she received it from men’s tongues and not from the branding iron.

Anna Trapnel was also sent to Bridewell following her journey into the West Country, and she and her friends paid specially to have a copy of her indictment so that she could show the Matron who was charged to look after her that she was charged with nothing and that she ‘was onely to be kept there, till further order’.18 According to Trapnel’s own account of this episode, the matron thought that she was part of ‘a company of ranting Sluts’ and ‘one of the plotters’ (F3v), but her friends, when they came, asserted that ‘this our sister is no vagabond’ and vouched for her ‘civill manner of life from a child, though the Counsell is pleased to deal thus with her, to send her to such a place, among harlots and thieves’ (F4). Trapnel was left in a rat-infested room which ‘smelt grievously’ where her spirits faltered and she was ‘much assaulted by Satan’ (F4). She feared that she

should be a by-word and a laughing-stock while I lived, and that every one would point at me as I went and up & down the streets, when I came out, they would say, there goes a Bridwell bird, and then many will gather about thee, to mock and deride thee; and as for thy kindred, they will be ashamed of thee. (F4v)

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18 Anna Trapnel, Anna Trapnel’s Report and Plea, or, a Narrative of her Journey from London into Cornwall (London: Printed for Thomas Brewster, 1654), G1.
Trapnel knew that if she was released from her incarceration she would always be tainted by her time in Bridewell, the notorious prison of ‘harlots and thieves’, and she was also worried her fellow believers would disown her because her name had become a ‘by-word’ for disgrace. In fact, her friends paid sixteen pence (which she thought was too much for ‘a few words copying out’) to obtain a copy of the order that showed ‘nothing was laid to [her] charge’ (G1). Such a purchase shows that Trapnel was extremely concerned with public opinion of her, and sought to vindicate herself no matter what the cost.

The next time the saints were subjected to such serious measures was during the ‘Great Persecution’ of 1660-1688, when fears of another Fifth-Monarchist uprising, to overthrow the restored monarchy, led authorities to clamp down on sectarian activity, especially conventicles. One of the most startling instance for contemporaries must have been the case of twelve Baptist men and women from Aylesbury (and a Quaker from Bristol) who were sentenced to death under the Elizabethan Act against Conventicles. The sentence was enacted only if the accused would not sign an oath declaring that they would conform to the Act for three months, which these would not. It seems to have been William Kiffin’s influence over Charles II that allowed them all a reprieve.19 John Bunyan was arrested under the same Act in November 1660 while he was preaching to a meeting in Lower Samsell, near Bedford. During his imprisonment, which he talks of in his book of spiritual experiences, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), he writes that he was often ‘possessed with the thought of death, that oft I was as if I was on the Ladder, with the Rope about my neck’.20 However much he feared the penalty of death, Bunyan found comfort that his violent end, if it occurred, would encourage others in their faith: ‘indeed I did often say in my heart before the Lord, *That if to be hanged up presently before their eyes, would be a means to awaken them, and confirm them in the truth, I gladly could be contented*’ (p. 79). If he could face his punishment with confidence that he was going to be saved by Christ, eternally, then he would vindicate himself and his faith.21 Bunyan knew the impact of wrongful imprisonment, and even martyrdom, on the faithful, and took comfort from his pains.

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19 See the Introduction for Lady Ranelagh’s letter to Clarendon at the request of William Kiffin.
21 Similar sentiments can be found in the work of the Baptist, Joseph Davis (*The Last Legacy: or, the Autobiography and Religious Profession of Joseph Davis*, ed. by William Henry Black (London: Mill Yard Congregation, 1869), where he describes his imprisonment for not swearing the Oath of Allegiance and the hardships this brought upon his family. During his ten year imprisonment, his wife Elizabeth died of ‘a deep consumption’ having coped with her husband’s shop and three children after despairing of his liberty (pp. 15-16). When she became weak she still visited Davis, as ‘her Affections carry’d her sometimes beyond her
In these days rightful records were of extreme importance to the saints, as any bad report of their conduct could turn popular opinion against them or alert the authorities to them, if they were not already averse. This fight for ‘truthful’ relations can be seen clearly in John Bunyan’s account of his trials and imprisonment which he most likely wrote to circulate within his congregation and perhaps beyond: it was only published by the will of descendants in 1765.22 A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan consists of five small reports with separate introductions, which were almost certainly written very soon after the events they describe. It is the end of the second report that has led Roger Sharrock to conclude that the Relation was ‘a letter or report from prison to the Bedford congregation to strengthen and encourage them’.23 Bunyan wishes his receivers, ‘The Lord make these profitable to all that shall read or hear them’, indicating that the works were directed to his followers, and probably beyond.24 However, it is Bunyan’s account from his wife Elizabeth’s mouth that expresses how important the truth was to his own, and his congregation’s, understanding of his persecution. Under the sentence of banishing or hanging, the couple decided not to ‘leave any possible means unattempted that might be lawful’ and, by his wife, Bunyan presented a petition to the Judges (p. 117). On the third attempt, Elizabeth appeared before them at the Swan Chamber ‘where the two Judges, and many Justices and Gentry of the country’ were in company together, like, as Bunyan writes, ‘the poor widow did to the unjust Judge’ (p. 117). Referring here to Christ’s parable in Luke 18:1-8, Bunyan presents the Judges as ‘the judge, which feared not God [18:2]’ and his wife as the ‘poor widow’ who petitioned him unceasingly until he relented. The comparison is clearly meant to encourage the steadfastness of all believers, but it also highlighted the helplessness of his wife, who was likened to a penniless widow because she was deprived of her husband. Indeed, later in the report, she acquainted the Judges with her situation, saying that she had ‘four small children, that cannot

Ability’ and ‘when she was so weak I was forced to carry her up Stairs in my Arms’ (p. 16). He was only allowed out of prison to see her in her last hours, to sell his shop, and to ‘put [his] Children out to Nurse’. Looking back on these events from 1706, Davis accounted it a ‘Joy’ that he was ‘worthy to suffer for the Cause of Christ, and by my Constancy many of my Brethren waxed more bold, and the feeble Hands were made strong [Jeremiah 33:3]’.


23 Sharrock, ‘The Origin of A Relation’, 254-55. Sharrock writes that the words ‘read or hear’ would not be written about ‘a printed work in the late seventeenth century’, which, as I shall show later in this chapter, is incorrect. It does seem extremely likely, however, that Bunyan’s words appeared in manuscript, like a letter. This has implications for the discussion of Agnes Beaumont’s experiences later in this chapter.

help themselves, of which one is blind, and I have nothing to live upon, but the charity of good people’ (p. 119). She also further related:

I was with child when my husband was first apprehended: But being young and unaccustomed to such things, said she, I being smayed at the news, fell into labour, and so continued for eight days, and then was delivered, but my child died. (p. 119)

Although one judge expressed pity at her story, Judge Twisden told her that ‘she made poverty her cloak’ and that she exaggerated her case.

The account of Elizabeth as a ‘poor widow’ with a ‘bashed face, and a trembling heart’ introduces her as a meek example of propriety, but it is her arguments that appear to confound the Judges in the ensuing dialogue. She (and Bunyan) understood that the Elizabethan Act against Conventicles was not set up to respond to the current times and so was ‘unlawful’, and that the previous trial had not asked him if he was guilty of the offences. She said: ‘it was but a word of discourse that they took for a conviction’ (p. 118). Justice Chester, who it would seem was at the previous trial, ‘endeavoured to stop her mouth’ by repeating the words ‘it is recorded, woman, it is recorded’ as if, as Bunyan wrote, ‘it must be of necessity true because it was recorded’ (p. 118). The narrative implies that the Judges had made a mistake and Justice Hales answered that she should try for ‘a writ of error’ as they had taken what her husband said ‘for a conviction’. Twisden responded by calling Bunyan’s doctrine ‘the doctrine of the Devil’, but Elizabeth countered this: ‘My Lord, [...] when the righteous judge shall appear, it will be known, that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the Devil’ (p. 120). When the Day of Judgment arrived, all reports would be accounted for and the truthful would be separated from the false: Elizabeth was quite convinced that her husband’s behaviour was approved of by God. She also expresses sorrow, not because of her own and her husband’s situation, but because of what her opponents would face when Christ came again:

Only this I remember, that though I was somewhat timorous at my first entrance into the chamber, yet before I went out, I could not but break forth into tears, not so much because they were so hard-hearted against me, and my husband, but to think what a sad account such poor creatures will have to give at the coming of the Lord, when they shall there answer for all things whatsoever they have done in the body, whether it be good, or whether it be bad. (p. 120)

Her confidence that she is of the rightful party seems to have given her both courage and comfort in dealing with her persecutors. Like the prophet Anna Trapnel, who wrote that she was ‘no Enemy to her Enemies; but prayeth for them’, Elizabeth pities her husband’s
accusers with tears. The editors of her account assert that ‘Elizabeth Bunyan’s lofty response is remarkable testimony, in view of the social intimidation to which she had been subjected, to the liberating effects, perhaps especially for women, of Puritan convictions’ (n. 120, p. 255). The authority of speaking as part of the godly certainly allowed women a powerful voice. Elizabeth’s account, presented by her husband, shows her to have the ‘winning’ argument, that her husband had been unlawfully convicted by a ‘writ of error’, but also that the Judges had no arguments to persuade her otherwise apart from the increasingly hysterical repetition of Judge Chester’s ‘it is recorded’.

The key argument for Elizabeth was the truthfulness and lawfulness of the conviction which was recorded falsely. It was important for the saints that they were represented correctly, not only because this could mean the difference between being at liberty or imprisoned, but also that there would be a true record of their sufferings and the miscarriage of justice. If Bunyan had not written down his wife’s account relating what happened in court, its readers would never have known the ‘truth’ of trial. As it stood, his readers (and listeners) could see that the authorities recorded falsities and used false arguments (even by the mouth of one of the Judges) and that their documents were unreliable. Relations and reports were common ways of redressing wrongs caused by the authorities, and their importance for readers at the time cannot be overlooked. As I discuss below in the section on Sara Jones, the Laudian authorities confiscated such books and notes of relations, labelling them ‘seditious’, from men and women’s homes, obviously recognising that they presented an underlying threat. If they could destroy the saints’ shared histories, they could erase the ‘truth’ of their persecutions more easily. The only way to fight back against this textual persecution was to write and publish more accounts of the persecutions so that the community of saints would have examples to follow and the rightful history would be known by further generations. Sara Jones advised her fellow sufferers and relaters: ‘let us not be the last to race [raze] out the name of Antichrist’. What is most remarkable about this statement was that she was addressing it particularly to women.

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‘You that have the art of inditing, set your hand to writing’: Sara Jones’s *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* (1642) and the Persecution of the Separatists in the 1630s and 40s

Sara Jones’s first extant pamphlet, *The Relation of a Gentlewoman long under the persecution of the Bishops; with some Observations passed in the High Commission Court during Her Bondage*, was published in 1642 as a response to the persecution of her separatist congregation in the previous decade. These congregations, who had separated or withdrawn from the Anglican Church, were under especial pressure in the 1630s and early 1640s while efforts were being made to take the established church back to the time of its original reformation. Sara Jones was a member of a gathered congregation which had separated, on principle, from the Anglican Church and refused to conform to what she thought were false and unscriptural practices. As a result, she and her congregation were mercilessly persecuted by the church officers and they were forced to appear in front of the Court of High Commission several times. Her first text, *The Relation*, is a response to these imprisonments, fines, and appearances: it is a relation, or account, of the actions of tyrannical clergy of the 1630s, and how her congregation remained true to their beliefs in the face of such persecution. However, Jones is doing more than just ‘relating’ events: she is responding directly to accusations made against her in the High Commission Court, and utilising the textual space she has to justify both her own and her congregation’s practices. A defendant’s ‘relation’ might be used in court to vindicate them, but a ‘relation’ might also account a complaint or even a claim. Jones’s narrative is so interesting because it does all these things (vindicating and proving her congregation’s validity, and complaining at their unjust treatment) while also forging a place for her to adequately represent herself, in her own words, something she was not able to do fully in court. Presenting a relation would also be in line with Pauline precedents as it suggests that Jones’s words are more factual than interpretative, and have more of God in them than her own voice.

*The Relation of a Gentlewoman* was printed, according to the title page, ‘at the cost of S. J. for her owne use and her private friends’. Until recently, the work has been left

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26 Jones was a member of the congregation gathered by Henry Jacob in 1616, which was later led by John Lathrop. According to Murray Tolmie, John Duppa led a secession away from Lathrop in 1630 because he wanted a more strict separation from the Parish Churches to be established in the congregation’s covenant. Many were reluctant to introduce such a promise because of being held accountable in the new persecutions of the separatists, so Duppa and others withdrew. Those who joined him included Daniel Chidley ‘the elder’ who was Katherine Chidley’s husband. Her son, Samuel, later became the congregation’s pastor. See Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, pp. 16-17; Gentles, ‘London Levellers in the English Revolution’.
unexplored by researchers, in part perhaps because the only extant copy is held by the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand, and the only way to access a copy in England is to view a microfilm reproduction in the Bodleian Library (it is not even available on *Early English Books Online*). Another reason for its neglect might be that it is unclear, immediately, who the persecuted gentlewoman was without researching the mysterious ‘S. J.’ of the title page and signed at the end of the pamphlet. The Baptist historian Stephen Wright has gone some way to establishing, beyond all doubt, that this pamphlet was authored by the same Sara Jones who was a member of what is generally accepted to be the first separatist congregation in London, set up by Henry Jacob in 1616, and the same gentlewoman that appeared frequently in the Court of High Commission, maintained by Laud, then Bishop of London. Jones was the daughter of Sir Thomas Hayes, mayor of London from 1614-15 and livery man of the Draper’s Company, and the husband of Thomas Jones, a dyer. The couple had two children, Martha and Sara, and lived at Lambeth, London, during the 1630s and early 1640s, before moving to Tower Hill. After her imprisonment she writes that her *Relation* would have been much ‘enlarged’ but she had limited time ‘in regard of the duties of my familie’ (B9). She worked through the night by candlelight every night from ‘the 29. Novemb. 1632. to the third of December following’, as she ‘could not spend much time of

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27 Jones’s two later texts, *To Sions Virgins* and *To Sions Lovers*, have been discussed in three recent studies of seventeenth-century political writings: Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent*, pp. 9, 11, 33; Gray, *Women Writers and Public Debate*, pp. 22-24, 30; Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 114. Mack’s attribution of *This is Lights Appearance in Truth* (1650) to Jones is questionable. Wright asserts that if it is by the same Sara Jones, ‘she had acquired Quaker views earlier than any other known Londoner’ (‘Sarah Jones and the Jacob-Jessey Church’, 9). Gray, having not read Wright, also attributes this text to a Quaker writer (209, n. 5).

28 Using information from *The Relation*, Stephen Wright has pieced together a family tree. Sara Jones née Hayes, born c. 1580, was the daughter of Sir Thomas Hayes (d. 1617) who was a livery man of the Drapers Company and was knighted on 26 July 1603. He was Sheriff of London (1604-5), Mayor of London (1614-15) (Wright cites A. Beaven, *Aldermen of London*, 2 vols. (London, 1908), 1: p. 124; 2: pp. xlii, 48), and married twice, the second time to Sara’s mother, Martha. They appear to have had several daughters other than Sara. Sara married Thomas Jones, a dyer, on 15 December 1606: ‘Mr Thomas Jones and Mrs Saray Hayes’ (W. B. Bannerman, ed., *Registers of St Mary the Virgin, Aldermanbury* (London: Harleian Society, 1931), p. 79). Wright, using J. Howard and J. Chester, eds., *Visitation of London 1633-5*, vol. 17 (London: Harleian Society, 1883), p. 20, records that the couple had two children: Martha Jones who married a Thomas Hallowes of London, and Sara Jones (named after their grandmother and mother respectively). Jones writes that the catechism published at the end of her *Relation* was ‘taught in the family of Sir Thomas Hayes, about fifty years ago by Edward Barber, who there exercised once in the week in the time of the elder children, and so hath been kept among them to this time’ (p. 50). Wright uses this to suggest that it was the elder Sara Jones, and not her daughter, who wrote *The Relation*. *To Sions Virgins* records that she was ‘an Antient member’ of the congregation, indicating that she could well have been over sixty. See Wright, ‘Sarah Jones and the Jacob-Jessey Church’.

29 Although Jones is recorded as living at Lambeth during the 1630s, she and her husband were living at Tower Hill by 1647. See Wight and Jessey, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace*, p. 9.
the day’ (B9). She was adamant that her writing would not impinge on her family duties, as her imprisonment had already done.

Although Jones and her fellow congregation members were held in prison by the High Commission during the early part of the 1630s, it was not until 1642 that she sought to publish the ‘notes’ of assurance and vindication that she had written at the time of the persecutions. One reason for this would seem to be that she wanted to preserve her ‘notes’ and thoughts from harm. She writes, in defence of the *Relation*:

> I was much moved to utter my thoughts by my penne, then having some of my notes by me did not find, for 1640. our houses were searched, I know not for what, but little they had, but some of my writings they keep from me; wherefore lest such times may be again, I would willingly keep my poore labours from the spoil, and desire to scatter these few lines among the scattered Saints in every Parish. (C4v-C5)

In order to save her ‘poore labours’ from being stolen and wasted, she desired to publish her work so that there were too many copies for the authorities to keep track of. In a later work of hers, *To Sions Lovers* (1644), she wrote likewise: ‘I printed a few for my own use, because I would not loose my thoughts, & for such as shal counsell me for the best; for without counsell the thoughts perish’ (A2v). Significantly, the *Calendar of State Papers* records that on 18 September there was a warrant issued ‘to search the houses, &c. of [...] Jones, a dyer, [...] of London’ or ‘any other person whatever suspected of having Popish or seditious books, which are to be brought away’. 30 The same warrant was given to search the house of a Dr Cornelius Burges who was living on ‘London Bridge’: on 6 August previously he had met with other Puritan reformers including Edmund Calamy and John Goodwin to compose a petition about ‘new canons which had been proclaimed two months before’. 31 These were the oft-quoted canons that dictated that every church altar be moved to the East end of the church and railed to separate it from the people. Jones had also been imprisoned earlier in the year on 21 April 1640 when she was arrested, with others in her congregation, at a Mrs Wilson’s at Tower Hill while they were fasting for the Parliament which was ‘like to be dissolved unless they would grant Subsidies for Warrs against ye Scottish’. 32

30 *CSPD*, 18 September 1640-1, p. 73. Wright takes this to mean that the Joneses lived on London Bridge with Dr Cornelius Burges who is recorded to live there in the warrant below. Jones does say in the *Relation* that ‘there was about fourtie houses burnt up on the Bridge; my self being one of the fourtie prisoners that refused the oath Ex Officio’ (C4v), but in the Records of the Court of High Commission she is said to be living at Lambeth (p. 292). Wright assumes that the burning of the houses was done deliberately by the clergy but there was an accidental fire on the North part of London Bridge in 1633.

31 *CSPD*, 6 August 1640-1, p. 73.

‘Arch Prelates Pursevant’ caused the Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir William Balford to imprison Henry Jessey and ‘Mrs Jones’, with over twenty others. Archbishop Laud bound them to the Sessions court but nothing was found against them and they were freed.33

Jones’s Relation depicts some of the sufferings she and her congregation encountered in the early 1630s when they were imprisoned in the Gatehouse prison, which was specifically for prisoners of the Court of High Commission. She explains that she was

one of the fourtie prisoners that refused the oath *Ex Officio*. The same yeer I was carried from the High Commission to prison, with Constables, and Halberts, with Taylors and Pursevants. 1632. [I was] being oft brought before the High Commission, sometimes to Pauls, sometimes to Lambeth, where much blasphemie or evill speaking, calling good evill, and evill good [Psalms 109:5]; pleading for Idolatrie, for Hyrarchie, materiall Temples, and Altars, without which as was there said, there could be no true Religion. (C4v-C5)

As Jones tells us, she was often brought before the Court of High Commission which involved taking the ‘oath *Ex Officio*’ where the person called to court was asked to swear on the Bible and was so forced to tell the truth. Those called were not directly accused of any crime but were asked incriminating questions: W. T. Whitley, editor of the Jones’s congregation’s records, compares the practice to that of the Inquisition.34 Jones alludes to David’s sufferings depicted in Psalms 109 where ‘the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened’ (109:2) against the believer and ‘fought against [him] without a cause’ (109:3). Katherine Chidley, writing after the courts were abolished, believed, like Jones, that the courts were ‘void of Reason [...]; for if the Parliament should judge a man before they heare his cause, they would be like the Court at Lambeth, which were used to sit in the high Priests Hall, judgeing matters without due triall’.35 To be tried without accusation and to be forced to take such an oath were ecclesiastical innovations that, for the congregation’s members, had no basis in scriptural law. Jones and her congregation all refused to take such an oath because of their separatist principles which meant they could be

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34 Whitley, ed., ‘The Records of an Antient Congregation of Dissenters’, n. 17, p. 218. Roger Quatermayne published his account of his arrest and persecutions during the time of Laud showing that he would not take the oath believing it to be ‘an accusing Oath indeed’ (B1v). He was sent to Dr Daniel Featley’s residence so that he could be persuaded and he was given some scriptures supporting the use of oaths. Quatermayne argued the unlawfulness of the oath which was used, he thought, ‘to suppress the people & truth of God’ (Quatermayne, *Quatermayns Conqvest over Canterbvries Covrt* (London: Printed for Thomas Paine, 1642), C2).
imprisoned at the pleasure of the High Commissioners. The congregation’s records document the particulars of their arrest:

1632. the 2d Month (called Aprill) ye 29th Day being ye Lords Day, the Church was seized upon by Tomlinson, ye Bps Pursevant, they ware mett in ye House of Hump: Bornet, Brewers Clark in Black: Fryers, [...]. About 42 ware all taken & their names given up.36

According to the same records, after the arrest some members were sent to the Clink prison, some to the ‘Bishop’s Prison’, and some to the Gatehouse, at Westminster. The pastor of the church, John Lathrop and a ‘Mr Jones’, presumably Jones’s husband, were added to the prisoners soon after.37 The records continue, that ‘in that time, ye Lord opened their mouths, so to speak, at ye High Commission & Pauls & in private, even ye weake Women, as their Subtill & malicious Adversarys ware not able to resist [hinder] but ware asshamed’.38 Here, the recorder gives thanks that the Lord was on the side of his congregation which enabled ‘even’ weak women to speak out and expose the High Commissioners’ practices. Jones certainly did speak out when examined by the High Commission, and she also spoke (and wrote) out in her Relation. She writes that she ‘spake and writ this writing [the Relation], being a sufferer with the fortie; we being blamed, and counted not able (through ignorance) to defend the way we walked in’ (A2v). Quite the opposite to the ‘ignorant’ defendants Jones claims the Commissioners expected, she and her congregation argued convincingly for their right to abstain from unscriptural oath-taking. Luckily, the proceedings from the Records of the High Commission have been preserved and the responses of the members are written in some detail. After others were questioned, Jones was asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury to swear the oath, but she replied implying that the bishops were not lawful, godly magistrates.39


37 Burrage conjectures that ‘Mr Jones’ might be a ‘Francis Jones of Ratcliff, Middlesex’ who was a basketmaker and accused on 11 January 1635/6 in front of the Court of High Commission for keeping ‘private conventicles’ and of being an Anabaptist (CSPD, 1635-6, p. 468). Jones’s husband was a dyer and it seems unlikely he could ever be accused of being an ‘anabaptist’.


39 Gardiner, Cases in the Court of Star Chamber, p. 285. Those questioning the congregation were William Laud (Bishop of London), George Abbot (Archbishop of Canterbury), Richard Neile (Archbishop of York), Edward Sackville Earl of Dorset, and the King’s Advocate.
Jones and her congregation were recalled a week later on 8 May 1632 where the court continued to try to persuade the congregation to take the oath. Sara Jones was, this time, the first to be called to the book:

First. Sara Jones was asked, of what parish she was? She said she dwelleth at Lambeth. [BISHOP OF] LONDON. ‘Doe you come to the Church?’ S. JONES. ‘None accuseth me to the contrary.’ LONDON. ‘Where were you upon Sunday was sennight [a week ago]?’ S. JONES. ‘When I have done evill and my accuser come, I will answere.’ KING’S ADVOCATE. ‘I doe accuse you, take your oath and you shall knowe your accusation.’ S. JONES. ‘I am afraid to take Gods name in vaine, I know noe other worship then God hath appointed.’ LONDON. ‘This you are commanded to doe of God who saith you must obey your superiors.’ S. JONES. ‘That which is of God is according to Gods word and the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vaine.’

Jones is adamant, both that she is guiltless of any crime, but also that she will not answer to any ‘accusers’ apart from God himself. Her last answer turns the Commissioner’s accusations around by showing that taking the Lord’s name in vain, not according to his word, will prove them guilty. Another member, Elizabeth Milbourne, also defended the congregation’s practices by saying, “‘I doe not know any such thing as a Coventicle, we did meete to pray and talke of the word of God, which is according to the law of the land’”. To this the Archbishop of York, Richard Neile, replied: “‘God will be served publiquely not in your private houses’”. Jones answers accusations like these in her Relation by vindicating her congregation’s practices: something she was prevented from doing so in front of the High Commission. Reversing binary oppositions, showing that the Court called ‘good evil and evil good’, she produces a powerful response to the priests’ words. Just as a gilded church building could be hiding evil in ornamentation, so could the words of the prelates be gilding evil and unscriptural teachings.

Even when the defendants were sent back to prison, where some unlucky members remained for up to eighteen months, they evidently still managed to produce texts that edified and strengthened their readers. Some years after the arrests, the congregation’s records showed that the saints were ‘so farr from being scared from the Ways of God that even then many ware in Prison added to yᵉ Church’, and a list of new members follows. The record-writer’s intention seems to have been to show the congregation cheerfully suffering, upheld by the Lord. In the face of persecution, they remained a united people whom nothing could

40 Gardiner, Cases in the Court of Star Chamber, p. 292.
41 Gardiner, Cases in the Court of Star Chamber, p. 295.
42 Laud ordered that ‘these women for the honour of the court be sent to other prisons’ (Gardiner, Cases in the Court of Star Chamber, p. 302).
destroy: ‘not one of those that ware taken did recant or turne back from the truth, [...] all ware y^e more strengthened thereby’ (p. 216). It was also an opportunity to record how the Lord had upheld the congregation in its sufferings: ‘It’s good to record & bring to remembrance our Straights & y^e Lords Enlargements, Experience works Hope & Hope maketh not ashamed because y^e Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts’ (p. 222). Remembering and reflecting on how the Lord had upheld the congregation through its sufferings strengthened their belief that they were part of the elect and that their congregation was part of God’s kingdom on Earth. The records work as a kind of conversion narrative for the people of God, showing when, and in what way, they received God’s ‘enlargements’. Remarkably, some writings that were produced during their imprisonment are summarised in the records including a ‘chronicle’ of God’s dealings with the congregation, written by Sara Jones:

The Answers of M^a Jones & Some others in y^r time of their Sufferings are not yet Extent for y^r Comfort and Encouragement of others against taking that Oath ex officio against false Accusers.
Their Petitions to his Maj^y.
Sarah Jones her Grievances given in & read openly at ye Commission Court.
Her Cronicle of Gods remarkable Judgments & dealings that Year &c wonderfull are the Lords works its meet he should have all y^e Praise. (pp. 217-8)

Looking at these titles, the priorities of Jones and her congregation seem to have been to encourage others who were arrested to refuse to take the unscriptural oath ex officio, and strengthen them in their sufferings. The answers which were ‘Not yet Extent’ may refer to Jones’s notes not existing at that time, in ‘extended’ form, for public consumption, which tallies with Jones’s account of her ‘notes’ being stolen in 1640, before they had been enlarged and written out in full.44

Another member of Jones’s congregation also came in for textual persecution and confiscation. In 1643, Elizabeth Eaton petitioned Parliament to obtain compensation for the death of her husband, Samuel, in Newgate Prison, and, as well as being ‘assaulted by Flamsteed, a pursuivant to Sir John Lamb, being then with child, which caused her to

44 Whitley, ed., ‘The Records of an Antient Congregation of Dissenters’, p. 217. It is interesting to note that the ‘Answers’ of Jones and others were ‘not yet Extent’ for the benefit and encouragement of others, a phrase that both transcribers of the manuscript records seem to have misread. Burrage was doubtful as to whether ‘the Answers of Mrs Jones’ existed at the time that the manuscript was written (c. 1641), deciding that the sentence reads, ‘are not yet Extant’, i.e., not yet in existence (Early English Dissenters, p. 298). Whitley, writing later, writes in a footnote that the sentence should read ‘are even yet Extent’, keeping the sense, ‘continued or prolonged at length’ (OED, sense 2a), but assumes that the writings were available extended for others. See Gray, Women Writers and Public Debate, p. 72, for an exploration of these ‘Answers’, but without knowledge of The Relation.
miscarry’, ‘John Ragg also took divers books out of her house, which were never returned’. That Elizabeth Eaton would mention the loss of ‘divers books’ from her home, as well as recounting the imprisonment of her husband, is important when trying to understand the motives of separatist congregations under persecution. Due to strict press censorship before 1641, few subversive books or pamphlets were published that were contrary to the state’s intentions. For this reason, there are few, if any, extant works justifying separatist doctrine before this date. However, if some were published anonymously or passed around in manuscript, it is quite conceivable that they were confiscated and destroyed by officers of Laud and the High Commission; this was certainly the case with some of Jones’s written work and that of Lady Eleanor Davies. Given that Jones and her congregation were continually persecuted and arrested, having their houses subject to searching and spoiling, it is small surprise that she was so preoccupied with retaining and recording both the trials of the church in what was (to her and her congregation) the first days of the reformation in religious worship, but also to vindicate her church from accusations of lawlessness and scandal.

Jones’s Relation works not only to contest the teachings and practices of the established church, but also to encourage a more godly version of speaking and writing, further spreading her gathered church’s message using the irrefutable ‘language of Canaan’ (C6’). Using preacherly language including biblical allusion, she encourages every believer to fulfil their station as part of the congregation. She asks, in the first section of her work:

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45 CSPD, ‘undated 1643’, 1641–3, p. 518. The congregation was also arrested with similar consequences on 22 August 1641 where they received similar violent treatment: ‘L. Mayor Sr John Wright came Violently on them, beat, thrust, pinched & kicked such men or Women as fled not his handling, among others Mrs Berry who miscarryed & dyed the same week & her Child’ (Whitley, ed., ‘The Records of an Antient Congregation of Dissenters’, p. 224).

46 ‘Sarah Jones’ appears under a fine for ‘Lady Eleanor Davies alias Douglas’ on 1 July 1634 for ‘publishing certain fanatical pamphlets’ of 3,000 l (‘Acts of the Court of High Commission’, CSPD, 1634–5, p. 176). It is highly likely that they would have known each other. Lady Eleanor was accompanied by her husband to Amsterdam in 1633 and arranged to have her prophecies printed there to avoid censorship. Laud had her printed books publicly burned and she was arrested, fined, and imprisoned in the Gatehouse until 1635. See Esther S. Cope, Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies, ‘Never Soe Mad a Ladie’ (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 66. Cope also shows that she had not paid her £3,000 fine by February 1640 (p. 74).

47 Sara Jones also appeared in front of the High Commission in 1634. On 12 June, ‘Sarah Jones, wife of Thomas Jones of Water Lambeth, Surrey’ was brought before the Commission for ‘refusing to take oath to answer articles, she was committed to the Gatehouse’, but afterwards discharged upon bond for her appearance (‘Acts of the Court of High Commission’, CSPD, 1634–5, p. 112). By 1 July she was fined, although the amount and the crime is left blank (‘Acts of the Court of High Commission’, CSPD, 1634–5, p. 176). The last entry for her, until her arrest in 1640, is 16 October where there is an act: ‘Sarah Jones: To appear next court day’ (‘Acts of the Court of High Commission’, CSPD, 1634–5, p. 267). Jones had also been imprisoned earlier in the year on 21 April 1640 when she was arrested, with others in her congregation, at a Mrs Wilson’s at Tower Hill while they were fasting for the Parliament (Whitley, ed., ‘No. 1 manuscript’, pp. 223-4).
All that have ‘the art’ of sermonising or uttering are told that they are to write it down, especially if they can write quickly ‘in Court hand’. This should be published and scattered so that the ‘builders of Sion’ would be encouraged and ‘come into worke’ to build the Lord’s house. To Jones, it mattered not if the believers were rich or poor, learned or unlearned: all could contribute towards the Lord’s ‘great house’. Addressing the whole congregation, she writes: ‘ye deare friends of Christ, as the weaker vessel bear with my foolishnesse a little; though we were first in the transgression, let us not be the last to race [raze] out the name of Antichrist: Jehovah will give women cause of joy’ (B12v-C1). Jones acknowledges that women ‘were first in the transgression’, recorded in the book of Genesis, but that this should (and would) not prevent them from strengthening their congregation by ‘razing’ out all opposition. Earlier she is more explicit, directing her advice and encouragements to women more directly:

You Daughters of Sarah, be not afraid of any terour, you shall be saved in all your travels, though you never beare children, if you continue in faith with holiness and sobrietie; and though you were the first in transgression, be not the last in bringing in your King, trust to the might of the Lion of the tribe of Judah [Genesis 49], and feare not the wrath of man, though it be as the roaring of a Lion. (A11v)

Jones compares the ‘travels’ of childbirth with the saints’ suffering under ‘the wrath of man’. Although some women might ‘never beare children’ literally, this does not mean that they cannot bring forth the Christ child by living in ‘holiness and sobrietie’, reflecting what Gillespie has observed in other sectarian writings, including Jones’s To Sions Lovers. She

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48 Court hand was the style used by the law courts for quickness. See Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred: Girls’ Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 56: ‘Shorthand was a favourite accomplishment among seventeenth-century girls, and more than one manual was published on the subject’. Hannah Allen writes in *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings* (London: Printed by John Wallis, 1683), p. 12, that ‘It was my custom for several years before to write in a Book I kept for that purpose in Short-Hand, the Promises, together with my Temptations and other afflictions, and my experiences how God delivered me out of them’.

49 Sarah was Abraham’s wife and called by God to be ‘the mother of nations’ (Genesis 17:16). Jones considered her congregation, in covenant together, to be the children of Sarah and Abraham. She wrote in *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* that ‘we are of the free woman [Sarah], and not of the bond woman [Hagar]. […], as the first-born sonne, and not as a Mosaicall servant’ (C4). See chapter one.
writes that ‘sectarians themselves propagated and celebrated the idea that the gathered churches were institutional and holy products of a maternal agency expressly lacking in “elderships”’.50 In Jones’s texts, as in other ‘sectarian’ works, child labour becomes a metaphor for bringing forth joy, an unwavering belief in Christ, by the struggling of all the members of the congregation. After the passage above, Jones then shifts focus to addressing the whole of her congregation when she writes ‘you that are in paine, as a travelling woman, to bring forth to the King of Saints, helpe those women that labour with you in the Gospell, which receive the truths you teach, and build up with you by an holy conversation, and so winne others’ (A12, my italics). She seems here to refer to those holding offices within the congregation who have a responsibility towards ‘those women that labour’ with them in following scripture: if the ‘women’ (used here as a collective term for both men and women) ‘build up’ a ‘holy conversation’, they will win others to their cause. Back to solely addressing women, Jones writes, ‘walke not with stretched out necks, and wandring eyes’;51 Live by faith, and walke humbly with your King, which was borne of your flesh’ (A12). Further to ‘holy conversation’ the women of the congregation should not be either proud or wanton in their ways, but should be humble and do the work of the Lord. Jones’s advice, while conventionally asking women to watch their behavior, significantly asks that they should not only speak to one another, but speak to those in office for the strengthening of the congregation as a whole.52

The latter section of Jones’s work, written in 1642, is significantly more concerned with promoting the role of women in uniting the ‘Scattered Saints’ than the first, and becomes more violent and apocalyptic in the scriptures to which she alludes. For example, when discussing her lack of ‘schoole learning’ she writes, ‘I thinke when the Viall is powred forth upon the ayre [Revelation 16:17], that humane breath shall not be so much prided in’, before she remedies this with writing: ‘but I submit to better judgement’ (C7). When the seventh, and last, angel of Revelation 16 would pour out God’s wrath on the earth, Jones thought there would be no need to worry about whether a speaker was learned or unlearned, male or female. Writing this half of her Relation on the eve of the First Civil War, Jones, as Catharine Gray writes, ‘emphasizes her debt to armed political conflict, highlighting real war

50 Gillespie, Domesticity and Dissent, p. 39.
51 Jones uses Isaiah 3:16 from the Geneva translation here.
52 As Gray observes, Jones ‘inverts the common male poetic practice of appropriating maternity as a figure of authorship’ (Women Writers and Public Debate, p. 30). In To Sions Lovers she writes: ‘I presume to father this naked child without scholastic phrases, or school learning to dress it and garnish it’ (A2). For Jones, gendered roles involved with publishing and controlling a congregation are reversed.
and ideological warfare as the condition of authorship’. Gray also records that these circumstances gave women ‘unprecedented opportunities’ for ‘participation in public culture’ (p. 22), particularly in religious controversies which seem to have been a site for women to take part in this ‘ideological warfare’. The time had come when learning and sex were less regarded: it was a time of conflict, a time when women could participate and influence their contemporaries. As Tereas Feroli argues in her Political Speaking Justified, ‘although the sects were not official government organs, their members came to play a prominent role in the period’s politics’: women prophets speaking to their congregations had power to ‘influence the course of political events’. Although Jones held back initially, ‘submitting to better judgement’, later in the Relation she addresses her reader/audience: ‘you shall [...] have the witnesse of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecie, speake one by one [1 Corinthians 14:31], for Sions sake be not silent’ (C10v). Recognizing that women prophets could influence their congregations in rising up to ideological warfare, Jones encourages all believers to speak to one another within the nurturing congregation. As a result, she wrote that ‘all may learn, and all may be comforted’ (14:31). This is an extremely logical response: if the women were perceived as weak and misguided, surely all attempts should be made to rectify this. She writes: ‘let not the weaknesse of the female sect weaken any hand from helping the Lord against the mightie, but let the strong helpe the weake, and let that which is halting be healed’ (C9r-v). That Jones spent more time justifying why women should be able to speak in church, and corrected if they did not understand doctrines and scriptures in the same way as the congregation as a whole, might have been because of the increasing strictures on women’s conduct within the gathered churches. It is clear that Jones respects that those who speak in front of the congregation must be sufficiently learned in scripture and doctrine. She writes, ‘I do not despise learning, but wish rather to have it’ (C6v), which would enable her to use this knowledge to help the gathered saints, hoping to ‘prevaile with some to agree in the name of Christ, to walk in his wayes’ (C6v). It is only the absence of learned men, or their reluctance to speak out, that had caused Jones to speak and publish. Similar sentiments can be found in the pamphlet A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers, which includes the rumoured opinion of female preachers that ‘there was a deficiency of good men’ (A2). Jones implies in her own work that certain godly men were not fulfilling their pastoral

roles, which was an accusation most likely directed at the current minister of her congregation, Henry Jessey. Although never openly critical of her minister by name, Jones later disagreed with the congregation’s adopting of the doctrine of anti-paedobaptism in *To Sions Virgins* in 1644. At the time of publishing her *Relation*, she seems to have thought his efforts inadequate, and she does not include him on the title page as the congregation’s minister.\(^{55}\)

In *To Sions Lovers* (published two days later than *To Sions Virgins*, in 1644), Jones also addresses the importance of women writing and speaking within their congregations. Gillespie briefly discusses this text, showing that Jones writes

> optimistically of a world in which […] an empowered ‘Congregation’ consisted of a ‘body’ of ‘Shee preachers to whom the command is given, to whom the promise is made [Psalms 68:11-12], goe Preach and Baptize, observe and doe all I command you, and I will be with you to the end of the world [Matthew 28:19-20].’\(^{56}\)

Although there is certainly an implication that Jones thought women should be allowed to preach within their congregations, she is also feminizing the congregation by showing that they would play the role of the ‘shee preachers’ referred to in the Geneva Bible. Unlike her *Relation*, *To Sions Lovers* has margins filled with scriptural references and, beside each reference to ‘shee preachers’ (A4; B2\(^{v}\)), she has ‘Psalms 68:11-12’. While in the King James Bible the reference reads: ‘The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it’ (68:11), the Geneva version has ‘The Lord gave matter to the women to tell of the great armie’.\(^{57}\) In the quotation above, Jones shows that whenever the Bible refers to a ‘company’, or group of disciples, it could include women as well as men; so when she refers to Christ telling the disciples to ‘goe Preach and Baptize’ in Matthew 28:19 she uses the term ‘shee preachers’ in place of ‘disciple’. Earlier in her work, under the heading of ‘Comfort to Gods People’, Jones shows her readers how the Saints

> shall have a two edged sword in their hands [Psalms 149:6], they shall be terrible as an Army with banners [Song of Solomon 6:4]; great are the Armies, many were the publishers all the Congregations of the Saints; as shee preachers hold forth Christ, publish the Gospel. (A4)

Here, Jones shows again that the congregations of saints can be styled as ‘shee preachers’ who can speak, publish, and hence ‘tell’ of the great company acting as a godly army. Earlier, 

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\(^{55}\) For an exploration of why Jones did not include Henry Jessey’s name on the title page of *To Sions Virgins* see Wright, ‘Sarah Jones and the Jacob-Jessey Church’, 8.


\(^{57}\) Jones may have been more familiar with the Geneva version as she was of an older generation of dissenters, although she uses a mixture of both bibles in her work.
in *The Relation*, Jones had believed that God wanted her to help to form and strengthen the great army of saints gathered in congregations set apart from the established church. She pleaded that

some worthy Baruch would goe forth with valiant Deborah, and set the Armies of Jehovah in order, even the fellowships of the Saints, [...], such well ordered Armies the friends of Christ, I beleeve will doe more service, than the scattered Armies out of order, knowing not who are friends, nor who are enemies. (C9’)

‘Telling of the great armie’, Jones pleads that a worthy male leader (Baruch) would join her (valiant Deborah) in the task of leading and strengthening the saints. In the book of Judges, Baruch, a military leader, and the prophetess Deborah, defeated the armies led by Sisera whom, a page later, Jones styles as the persecuting bishops. Sisera was tricked by Jael, a woman who ‘smote [a] nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground’ (Judges 4:21). While not going so far as to suggest she would play the part of Jael, Jones urges her fellow believers to band ‘themselves together with spirituall weapons, and drive that Antichristian beast into some Jael’s Tent’ (C10). Gillespie points out that Katherine Chidley’s *Justification*, written later in 1641, also uses this violent biblical story on its title page to provoke similar comparisons in the minds of its readers. 58 Also, in his study, *Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England*, Marcus Nevitt shows that this story ‘records a period of Israelite history where local congregational rule was replacing more absolutist forms of civil government’.59 He refers to Judges 17:6 where it is written that there ‘was a king in Israel, but every man did which was right in his own eyes’. Not only was Jones showing that her congregation as an army could overthrow ‘absolutist civil government’, but she as a prophetess could ‘tell of this great armie’ and work for the encouragement of the ‘Scattered Saints’.

Jones’s *Relation* is remarkable for many reasons: it is one of very few self-written accounts of the separatists under persecution in the 1630s; it is a rare example of a woman speaking (or perhaps preaching – the line is fine) in front of her congregation; and it is also skilfully written. Jones uses biblical language which is inextricably intertwined with her own, and this forms what she calls the ‘language of Canaan’ (C6’). She writes:

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58 Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent*, pp. 82-3.
I have not time to search the book, chapter, and verse: I desire to speak to such as are acquainted with holy Writ, I hope I shall speak the language of Canaan and they that understand it will construe [construe] all to the best. (C6)

Jones desires to use the community language of Canaan to encourage others in their faith and to learn how to speak in the same way, whether they are male or female. Spreading this language, whether by word of mouth or by publishing, would help to drown out the clergy’s polluted words, and would surely influence the political conflicts to come. She urges the congregation to ‘speak oft one to another, as they that fear the Lord; for Sions sake keep not silence, shine forth’ (B9v). In the speaking and publishing of her text, Jones was overcoming two groups of opponents: the prelates, and those in her congregation who opposed women speaking in front of the congregation. She uses sophisticated reasoning to show that women should speak and publish, and, by comparing two translations of the Bible, showed that they could even preach and take office. To find any relation of the sufferings of the separatists under the Court of High Commission is uncommon and to find such account written by a woman is rarer still (especially as we know that books and manuscripts found in separatists’ houses were often seized). However, what is even more special is that Jones’s Relation is one of the only examples, in this period, of a sermon written, given, and published by a woman. Whereas it was usually the opposition of the gathered churches that published derogatory accounts of women preaching, Jones shows exactly how a woman could forge a place for herself to adequately represent both her and her congregation’s words: something that she could not ‘relate’ fully in court.

Dreams, Dispensations, and Defence Strategies in The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont (c. 1674/5) and Anna Trapnel’s Report and Plea (1654)

Sara Jones’s Relation of 1642 vindicated her and her congregation’s right to worship in front of the High Commission, but this was not done by the way of a chronological narrative. Concrete events are mentioned briefly, and biblical allusions made, because the work was meant for the ears of those who had experienced the trials she spoke of. The narratives of Anna Trapnel and Agnes Beaumont are quite different. These were not meant as sermons, but as stories vindicating the truth of their experiences against specific charges: Trapnel was
accused, among other things, of spreading sedition and encouraging rebellion on a journey to Cornwall to visit those sympathetic to the Fifth-Monarchist cause in 1653/4, and Beaumont was accused of her father’s murder after he prevented her from attending church meetings in February 1674. Though the testimonies were written twenty years apart, they recount similar reactions produced by community anxiety about separatist/Baptist worship and the specific ways in which a woman could be damaged in the long and short term by accusations in court. Trapnel was widely recognised for her prophecies spoken and sung publicly at Whitehall, so notorious that Thomas Hobbes recorded in *Behemoth* (1679) that in the year 1654 ‘there appear’d in Cromwel’s time a Prophetess, much fam’d for her Dreams and Visions, and hearkened to by many, whereof some were Eminent Officers’.60 While Trapnel was adopted by the Fifth-Monarchists and supported by various ‘eminent officers’, Agnes Beaumont, though she had few visible followers, used foresight and prophecy in very similar ways. Speaking as prophets, or instruments of God, is one of the ways both women present their narratives and this practice enables them to justify their words and actions. This aspect of Beaumont’s work has been left under-discussed, particularly her inclusion of her dreams and premonitions which work as a way to vindicate her behaviour, and to establish her innocence in the death of her father. At the beginning of her narrative Beaumont describes the many Dreams that I had, which I believe some of them was of God. I should often dream I was like to lose my life, and could hardly Escape with it. Sometimes I have thought that men have run after me to take it away; & sometimes that I was tried for my life before a Judge & Jewry, and me thought I did Escape with it, and that was all.61 Placed at the beginning of her narrative, this passage indicates that her sufferings and persecution were of Divine origin. She believes that the dream is ‘of God’, showing that the Lord had sent her the dreams as a preparation for the trials she would endure, showing what Stachniewski and Pacheco call ‘some modest claim to prophetic gifts’ (p. 275). Beaumont did escape with her life, but she writes ominously: ‘that was all’. Trapnel records similar experiences in her *Report and Plea*, but usually calls them ‘visions’ rather than ‘dreams’ suggesting a greater immediacy:

I saw the Clergie-man and the Jurors contriving an Indictment against me: and I saw my self stand before them: in a vision I saw this. And I sang with much courage, and told them, *I feared not them nor their doings, for that I had not deserved such usage*.\(^{62}\)

Trapnel gained confidence from the knowledge that God would uphold her during her trial and give her words and courage to speak out against the authorities. She also refers to visions alluding to those that St Paul experienced when the Lord called him to preach to the gentiles. Before her journey to the West Country, she wrote that she lay ‘exceedingly filled with the presence of the Lord, who shewed me a vision of my Cornwal-journey’ (B1v-B2) and justified it thus: ‘*But as sure as his was a vision from the Lord to go to Macedonia, so as sure had I a call and true vision to go to Cornwall*’ (B2). Just as Paul was arrested, imprisoned, and brought to the ruling city to be judged, whilst on his travels, Trapnel faced the same trials and these allusions were how she gave her story, and her words, more spiritual authority. Beaumont also uses her dreams, consciously or unconsciously, to vindicate herself from aspersions by confirming that events were preordained. Like good Calvinists, Trapnel and Beaumont present themselves as instruments controlled and directed by God, and so absolve themselves of the sins which are heaped upon them.

Beaumont’s text is certainly a vindication of her behaviour concerning her father’s death, but it is not clear whether the text was meant for circulation just within her congregation, near Bedford, or whether it was to be passed beyond to the villages near where she resided. As shown above, Beaumont’s minister, Bunyan, wrote letters to his congregation that were later published in *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan*, and it is likely that something similar happened to her work (even though written a decade later). Roger Sharrock suggests that the first four reports of this work were written at a time when the congregation’s meetings (according to the church records), had ‘bene for some time neglected through the increase of trouble’.\(^ {63}\) A manuscript letter could have been passed between the members or read aloud, even when they were not regularly meeting because of persecution: it was a way to knit them together and strengthen each other in faith without danger. Beaumont’s text was probably meant for a similar purpose. Just as Bunyan’s text was in part to vindicate him from the authorities’ aspersions, it is likely that she also needed to protect her reputation inside her congregation. Kathleen Lynch speculates that the readership or audience for Beaumont’s work would have been ‘the expected community of her church’.

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\(^{62}\) Trapnel, *Anna Trapnel’s Report and Plea*, D2v.

but only because of the minor differences between the two surviving manuscripts: one appears to be a fairer copy derived from the other. It is not known whether Beaumont wrote the first of these manuscripts, although Patricia L. Bell has speculated on the matter, but the fact that the text was preserved in different copies suggests that it was circulated. For Lynch, the narrative appears to be a record of Beaumont’s devotion to her church, and to God, in the face of persecution, and this is no doubt why the narrative has been published in many editions since the first by Samuel James in 1760. Sheila Ottway also observes that Beaumont ‘set herself up as an example to other Christians, who may be in need of spiritual reassurance under similar circumstances of affliction’, in the same way as Sara Jones wrote down her ‘answers’ to help others in their sufferings under persecution. For Tamsin Spargo, the narrative appeals ‘to the reader’s rational judgment and sympathy’: to convince them ‘just as she had convinced the coroner’. Although Beaumont’s experiences would have been valuable to others, her use of narrative suggests that this was a vindication, and not just to the wider world: it was almost certainly a vindication addressed to her congregation in particular.

The Bedford mixed communion congregation, led in the 1670s by John Bunyan, seems to have been particularly concerned with the excommunication of what they perceived

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64 Kathleen Lynch, “‘Her Name Agnes’; The Verifications of Agnes Beaumont’s Narrative Ventures”, ELH, 67 (2000), 71-98 (90). Beaumont’s narrative exists in two manuscript copies, both kept by the British Library. The first, Egerton MS 2414, Camden describes as ‘written in a close, ill-educated hand’ (Vera Camden, ed., The Narrative of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont, p. 7) whereas Bell shows that it is ‘in a fluent, practised hand’ (Patricia L. Bell, ‘Agnes Beaumont of Edworth’, Baptist Quarterly, 35 (1993), 3-17 (16)). Although the hand is small and tightly packed on the pages, it is more legible than most used for church records. It has no title and Beaumont’s name can only be obtained from a note at the end of the manuscript added afterwards saying, ‘her name Agnes’. Bell also draws attention to information indicating that the narrative was written over a year after her father’s death: ‘I hard that a twelvemonth after they would speak of me with teirs’ (p. 222). Egerton 2128 looks like it could be a fair copy of 2414 and has the title ‘Divine Appearances, or a Very Wonderfull Account of the Dealings of God with Mrs. Agnes Beaumont. Who was afterwards Married to Mr. Story, a Merchant at High-Gate, Taken from a Coppy Transcribed from a M. S. S. in the hands of Mrs. Kenwrick at Bavant in Hampshire’. This dates the second copy to after 1707 when Beaumont’s first husband died. It is not known when she married Samuel Storey, her second husband. There are three paragraphs added to this version where she denies that John Bunyan encouraged her to poison her father.

65 See Bell, ‘Agnes Beaumont of Edworth’, p. 16. Whether Beaumont wrote either of the extant copies in her own hand is not known. It is probable that she dictated her experiences to a member of her family or her congregation. Egerton 2128 asserts that the narrative was ‘written by herself’ which may or may not be reliable. Bell examines the two examples of Beaumont’s signature on her father’s will, and that of her first husband, Thomas Warren: ‘Of the two signatures, that on her father’s will is printed and extremely neat, “Ann Beamovent”, the u written as v. On the sale of August 1708 her signature, “Agnes Warren”, is not in as fluent a hand as the signatures of the two Woolheads [cousins], but that could well be a difficulty with the surface of the parchment or the state of the quill pen. There is nothing in either to suggest that she penned Egerton 2414, which is in a fluent, practised hand’ (Bell, p. 16).

66 In 1760 it was published in a collection of nonconformist conversion narratives: Samuel James, ed., An Abstract of the Gracious Dealings of God with Several Eminent Christians in their Conversions and Sufferings (Hitchin: n. pub., 1760). There were ten editions up to 1842.


to be sexually deviant women, and this might be part of the reason for Beaumont’s vindication. She had been in the congregation for eighteen months, after she was ‘awakened’ (p. 193) to her life as one of God’s elect: her desire to join the Bedford church is recorded in the congregation’s records on 31 November 1672. At the meeting at Gamlingay ‘the desire of sister Beemont to walke in fellowship with us was propounded and was received at the next Church meeting’. Her name was then written on the list of members by Bunyan as ‘Agniss Behement’. Beaumont was the youngest of her three surviving siblings and lived alone with her father, a widower, in a farmhouse with three hearths in Elstow near Bedford. Her brother, John, and sister, Joan, lived with John’s wife in a house nearby and would seem to have travelled to meetings at both Bedford and Gamlingay, but Beaumont was the only family member to seek and attain membership at the church. Even though her father was later ‘censed’ against Bunyan and his preaching by an ‘evil minded man in the town’, he had previously ‘heard him preach gods word, & heard him with a broaken heart as he had done several others’ (p. 209). It was these rumours, encouraged by clergy of the established church, that made Beaumont’s father reluctant to allow her to attend meetings and leave off from listening himself: she records that she had to pray hard to God to appease her father so as to be allowed to go. As an integrated member of her church, she was expected to represent them through godly behaviour, and when she was accused, both of improper behaviour with her minister and the murder of her father, she would presumably have had to defend herself from the allegations. Like many aspects of being a member of a gathered church, behaviour was not just an individual concern. It reflected on the accused’s congregation and the doctrine they followed but, most importantly to the believer, it concerned the name of God. As Agnes Beaumont reflected on being accused of murdering her father, in danger of suffering death by

69 Tibbutt, ed., The Minutes of the First Independent Church, p. 75.

70 Agnes was baptised ‘Ann’ on 1 September 1652 (Parish register) to John Beaumont (b. about 1615), yeoman, and Mary Pakes of Pirton, Hertfordshire (they married in 7 June 1638 and she was buried in 1662). She was the youngest of seven children (four survived) – the eldest, John (b. About 1639 and married Elizabeth Retchford an heiress in 1661. Their house, of two storeys, was taxed in 1671 for seven hearths (Bell, ‘Agnes Beaumont of Edworth, 4)) which was the largest house in Edworth. This suggests that his father had already given him his share of his estate (Pacheco and Stachniowski, p. 275, n. 195). There was also Joan (bap. 22 March 1646 and was married by August 1670) and William (bap. 16 October 1650 and was apprenticed as a vintner, bur. 1720). Beaumont married Thomas Warren of Cheshunt, Hertfordshire (landowning gentlemen) on 14 October 1702 (she was fifty) who died in 1707, leaving half his estate (PRO 11/496 will of Thomas Warren), and then married Samuel Storey, a London fishmonger, who survived her. She died on 28 November 1720 and was buried ‘at her own request’ near the minister John Wilson in the yard of the Tilehouse Street Baptist meeting in Hitchin (she had contributed to the cost of erecting the church building in 1692 – Bell: Minute book of the Tilehouse Street Baptist Church, Hitchin). A stone on the wall near her grave recalls that ‘this Stone was erected by Subscription in 1812, in respectful Remembrance of a Person so justly celebrated, for her eminent Piety, and remarkable Sufferings’. Original records in Bedfordshire Parish Registers, ed. by F. G. Emmison (Shire Hall: Bedford County Record Office, 1831). See also Bell, ‘Agnes Beaumont of Edworth’.
burning: ‘I see my life lye [lay] at stake, and the name of god lye their too’ (p. 216). Disciplinary issues included withdrawing from meetings, gambling, and one woman, Elizabeth Bisbie, was accused of ‘immodest lieing in a chamber several nights wherein also lay a young man, no body being in the house but them two’.\textsuperscript{71} At this time it was concluded that ‘inquiry be made into the truth of things not yet fully known’ (p. 77). Nehemiah Coxe, the only man asked to defend himself from excommunication at this time, was asked to ‘publickly make an acknowledgment of several miscaridges by him committed’ and repent, but because ‘had bin faulty in such things’ before, he was requested to record his submission to them in writing (pp. 76-7). Evidently, Coxe’s miscarriages were serious enough to require a textual as well as an aural testimonial that he had sinned. A copy of his two sentences declaring that he was ‘unfeignedly repentant and sorry for the same’ are included in the church book, and would probably be used as evidence against him if he sinned again. It is possible that something similar was required of Beaumont which encouraged her to write or dictate her experience, but, given that there is no evidence of her addressing the evidence to the congregation, it seems unlikely that it was requested. It may be that she wanted to further clarify events if she felt that there was some doubt surrounding her reputation, and a written copy was also able to reach those members who could not, for reasons of distance, persecution, or family circumstance, attend meetings. The church records are not as detailed for the year 1675, especially in the second half of the year, where the church appears not have met as often, and is a likely date for the composition of Beaumont’s narrative. By the time the second extant manuscript copy of her work was made, in the early eighteenth century, the narrative was considered an example of ‘The Wonderful Dealings of God’ with her, which highlights how vindicating works were also used as examples for the godly community under persecution.

It is very difficult to make assertions about Beaumont’s text because it is the only known surviving manuscript by a woman who actively participated in separatist or Baptist meetings. Whereas several published experiences and vindications survive, circulated manuscripts do not. Part of this can be attributed to low levels of literacy amongst the gathered churches, especially amongst women, but also because manuscripts were often destroyed in times of persecution. As seen in the experiences of Sara Jones, works were often published in order to disseminate ideas throughout the country, and to preserve them by

\textsuperscript{71} Tibbutt, ed., \textit{The Minutes of the First Independent Church}, p. 76. See the accusations made against Mary Allein discussed in chapter one.
It is difficult then, to assert, as Kathleen Lynch does, that Beaumont is ‘unmindful of the generic need to appeal’ to the support of an ‘editorial preface and ministerial testimony [...]’, as the very grounds on which a public or ministerial role may be constructed for a woman. Although it is clear that most printed works written or dictated by women were prefaced by the words of a minister, it is not at all clear whether this was done with manuscript testimonials. If we consider that Beaumont’s testimony originated as a vindication, it would be unlikely that she would have asked for her minister’s support, especially as that minister was John Bunyan who also seems to have been accused of impropriety in this case. However, despite not having ministerial backing, Beaumont establishes her spiritual credentials in what feels like an introduction to her main narrative. She sets up her extraordinary experience by showing exactly how God had affected her life, constructing the relation of her trials within a divine framework: the events that follow, she believes are predestined by God, which renders her a passive instrument. Through the deliberate inclusion of prophetic dreams early on in her narrative, Beaumont establishes herself as a woman whose words and actions were of God. She declares that she foresaw the events she relates in dreams, although she did not realise the significance of the dreams until after the events occurred: she does not assert her ability to interpret her dreams, but the fruition of them proved to her that they were sent by the Lord.

Beaumont simultaneously vindicates her writing and her part in her father’s death by relating her dreams at the beginning of her narrative, and also tempts the reader to carry on, despite revealing the main outcome. The main dream she recounts is that of a great apple tree which Sister Prudon, her friend who also acts as a witness to these dreams, ‘tould me of after my father was dead’ (p. 195):

Me thoughts in my fathers yard grew an old Aple tree, and it was full of fruit. And one night, about the midle of the night, their came a very suddaine storm of wind, and blew this tree up by the roots, and I was sorely troubled to see this tree so suddenly blew down.

I run to it, as it lay upon the ground, to lift it up, to have it grow in its place again. I thought I see it turnd up by the roots, and [me] thoughts I stood lifting at it as long as I had any strength, as it lay upon the ground, first at one Arm [branch], then at another, but could not stir it out of its place to have it grow in its place again; at last left it, and run to my Brothers to Call help to set this tree in its place again. & I thought when my Brother and his men did Come, they could not make this tree grow in its place again; and, oh, how troubled was I for this tree, and so greived that the wind should blow that tree down and let others stand. And many such things that I see afterwards did signifie some thing. (p. 195)

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72 Lynch, “‘Her Name Agnes’: The Verifications of Agnes Beaumont’s Narrative Ventures”, 75.
Beaumont’s description of her father’s death is very similar to this account, obviously meant to chime with the reader or listener. She makes the connection, ‘as some afterwards said, my dreaming of the Aple tree did signifie something of this’ (p. 212) while trying to move his ailing body. John Beaumont, senior, was taken over with chest pains in the middle of the night (a particularly ‘dark night’ as she recalls) and, as he clutched his breast, Beaumont tried to help him. When he moved to his bedchamber, which they shared, he collapsed on the ground and could not be roused: she could not move him, as she had with the branches of the tree, but had to leave to run to her brother’s house for help. When they returned he had died. It could be possible to attribute the dream to previous natural occurrences in the vicinity: Bedford had recently experienced violent storms and ‘Tempestuous Winds’ that had, according to one contemporary pamphlet, ‘tor[n] up the Trees by the Roots, the Gates off the Hinges, Breaking them in pieces, Driving down Houses, To the Terror and Amazement of the Inhabitants’. However, in Beaumont’s dream there is only one particular tree struck down, a strong tree because it was ‘full of fruit’, and she grieved most because the wind had chosen that tree, and let the rest stand. This is surely Beaumont showing that her father’s death was a providential occurrence: like the strong, fruitful apple tree, he had been chosen to be uprooted. Her inability to re-root the tree, or prevent the sudden wind from felling it, is representative of her impotency in affecting or changing such events. The placement of such a dream in the narrative, before she begins to relate her story, shows that, although Beaumont does not realise the significance of it until after her father’s death, she believed that the events were predestined by God and there was nothing she could have done to prevent them. It also invites the reader to ask why God decided to take away such a tree, John Beaumont, and not others.

The way Beaumont structures her narrative and the information she includes indicates why she thought her father was struck down. Her relation begins with her wanting to attend a particular meeting at Gamlingay on Friday 13 February 1674, and her persuading her father to let her attend as long as she was carried on horseback with ‘Mr Wilson’. She walked to her brother’s farm to meet the riders, but Mr Wilson did not appear, and she prayed ‘that god


74 John Wilson eventually became the minister of the Hitchin Congregation, later known as the Tilehouse Street Baptist Church in 1677. After her death at Highgate in 1720, her body was buried at the meeting house yard by her own request. The stone marking her grave reads: ‘This Stone was erected by Subscription in 1812, in respectful Remembrance of a Person so justly celebrated, for her eminent Piety, and remarkable Sufferings’. According to Bell, ‘Agnes Beaumont of Edworth’, 3, ‘it is said that she wished to be buried near the grave of the Revd John Wilson, who appears in her story’.
would please to put it into the heart of some body to come this way and Cary me’ (p. 197). As if his appearance was an answer to her prayers, Bunyan arrived ‘un Expected’ (p. 197) on his way to the meeting. As she was afraid to ask, her brother entreated him to carry Beaumont on the back of his horse, and Bunyan was reluctant: he realised that his carrying her would cause her father to be ‘greivous Angry’ with him, but he was eventually persuaded (p. 197). After they left, her father, learning who it was who carried his daughter, ‘fell into a pastion, and ran down to the Close End, thincking to have met me  in the fields, where he intended to have pulled me off of the horse back, he was so Angry’ (p. 197). When Beaumont returned he had locked her out of the house and she spent the night in his barn. Beaumont tried to make peace with her father several times, but it was after she and her brother attended a meeting on Sunday 15 February, that she gave in to his demands and, despite the encouragements of her brother to the contrary, she agreed: ‘I will never go to a meeting; Again, as long as yow live, without your Consent; not thinking what doler and misery I brought upon my self in so Doing’ (pp. 206-7). She compared the misery she then experienced to that of the disciple Peter who denied knowing Christ three times in Matthew 26 for fear of his life: ‘but poor weak Creature that I was, I was peeter like , as you will hear afterwards’ (p. 205). As she interpreted it, she had denied God by declaring that she would no longer go to meetings and condemned herself as a traitor (albeit one who was later forgiven). The story of Peter’s denial further enhances Beaumont’s use of prolepsis (using dreams, but also phrases like ‘as you will hear afterwards’) as his actions were also predestined, and predicted, by Christ before his crucifixion. Peter tells Jesus that he would never fall away from his belief, but his teacher replied, ‘Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice’ (26:34). Peter again disputed: ‘Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee’ (26:35), but later the prophecy of Christ came to fruition. The events were preordained, and Beaumont interrupted those surrounding her father’s death in the same way: she and he were part of a divine framework.

Whereas a reader of Beaumont’s text might assign a portion of blame to her for giving in to her father’s demands, for if she had continued to refuse and had lived with her brother God might have seen fit to keep him alive, her inclusion of prophetic dreams, constructing herself as passive in the events, and continued use of narrative prolepsis convince the reader that her actions were already predestined. The dream of the apple tree foresaw events long before, and there was nothing she could have done to frustrate God’s divine plan. This was not an isolated experience for her. She writes:
That before a tryal hath come upon me I have had great consolations from God; insomuch that I have expected some thing to come upon me, and that I had some trouble to meet with, which hath often fallen out. According to my thoughts: some times one scripture after another would run in my mind several days together. That would signify something I had to meet with, and that I must prepare for a tryal, which would drive me into corners, to cry to the Lord to be with me. And oh, how hath the Lord as it were taken me up into the mount, that my soul hath been so raised and comforted as if it had been out of the body for a time. (pp. 193-4)

Her relation of her father’s last words also works to establish that she is one of God’s chosen people. On the night of Tuesday 17 February, Beaumont records her father’s dying words where he pleaded for the Lord’s mercy, and that he regretted being against his daughter: ‘I have been against you for seeking after Jesus Christ; the Lord forgive me, and lay not that sin to my Charge’ (p. 212). As editors Pacheco and Stachniewski note, Beaumont’s father here refers to two biblical passages. The first, Acts 7:60, shows Stephen being stoned asking the Lord to remove blame from his persecutors (‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge’), and the second, 2 Timothy 4:16, has Paul asking the Lord that mercy be shown to those who forsook him in the act of spreading God’s word.75 By aligning himself with sinners, like the stoners of Stephen and the forsakers of Paul, Beaumont asks for mercy for the mistreatment of his daughter who is effectively compared to both New Testament figures. Her father forsook and persecuted her, and asked mercy for the same: his repentance establishes her innocence.

The next explanation Beaumont had to give was why she was accused of her father’s murder by a neighbouring lawyer. When friends and neighbours were alerted to events, a Mr Feery accused Beaumont of poisoning her father, even though, as Patricia L. Bell has shown, John Beaumont was likely to have been about seventy years old and near his time.76

75 2 Timothy 4:16: ‘At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge’.
76 Bell, ‘Agnes Beaumont of Edworth’, 4. Marriage across religious divisions seems to be at the heart of why Beaumont was persecuted by Mr Feery, and evidence for this can be found both in her narrative and in her father’s will. John Beaumont made his will on 15 August 1670 which was most likely penned by Mr Peter Feery and witnessed and signed by his son Thomas and Agnes, herself. See the Will of John Beaumont PRO 10/1058, made 15 August 1670, and proved 30 May 1674. Joan had received provision on her marriage, John the younger had been given the main farm, and William would get £200. Agnes signed it and was otherwise the main beneficiary. In it, Agnes was the main beneficiary: her brother and sister had received the main farm and a dowry, respectively, and her other brother had money for an apprenticeship. It was only after John’s funeral that Feery told her brother-in-law that his wife, Agnes’s sister, would receive less than she should in the will, and arranged to ‘set him in a way to come in for a part’ (p. 222). Agnes gave her brother-in-law and sister £60 in order to prevent them from suing her and taking everything. She wrote in her narrative that it was true that she was given more than her sister, but that this was the design of Feery: ‘he put my father on to give me more then my sister because of some design that he had then, but afterwards when I came to go to meetings he was turned against me’ (p. 222). Bell shows that Feery’s design was to match his son, Thomas, to Agnes, but that this was thwarted when she began to attend congregational meetings and joined them in fellowship. (Peter Feary was
Patricide was a crime against a superior, and re-enacted the monarch and subject relationship, and if she had been convicted of the crime the penalty was to be burnt at the stake. The ways in which Beaumont talks about the trial that followed these accusations reinforces the divine framework that her dreams introduce. When informed that she will have to face a Coroner and a jury, she flew ‘to God for help’ and prayed that he would ‘appeer for [her] in this fiery tryal’ (p. 216). Seeing that her life lay, quite literally, ‘at stake’ (p. 216), her thoughts of being burnt, she wrote, ‘would sometimes shake me all to pceses’, asking the Lord, ‘how shall I endure burning?’ (p. 217). Her repetition of the scriptural phrase ‘fiery tryal’, taken from 1 Peter 4:12, begins when she spends the night in her father’s barn, shut out in the cold. Here, the Lord addressed words to her heart: ‘Beloved, thinck it not strange Concerning the fiery tryals that are to try yow [1 Peter 4:12]’ (p. 200). She remembered this promise later, after her father’s death, thinking that her trials were over, but realising that the promise might come to pass literally, she tries to draw strength from it. No doubt taking reference from the next verse, 4:13, which asks sufferers to ‘rejoice, insamuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings’, Beaumont says, in introduction to her narrative, ‘And oh, how great hath the kindness of god been to me in afflicting dispensations! [...] thank god for trouble when I have found it drive me nearer to himself’ (p. 193). She suggests that her sufferings have brought her closer to God, trusting in him to be with her through whatever trials should befall, and this further establishes her godliness and the truthfulness of her narrative. After resigning herself to her potential fate, she becomes more concerned with how others will see her predicament:

But still I was greatly Concernd for the name of god, that is like to suffer, let it go which way it will with me; for think I, Though it may be some will not beleeeve it, yet a great many will; Doubtless the Name of god will suffer. But, thinck I, I must leave it with god, who hath the hearts of all men in his hand. (p. 218)

Setting apart her own suffering, Beaumont hopes that God will be able to control the opinions of others, to not believe the false accusations. She shows herself to be more concerned about the opinions of others, that this would damage the reputation of her congregation who

married by 1647 and three children are known: Thomas (bap. at Edworth, 1 August 1647), Ann (bap. at Edworth 10 June 1649), and Elizabeth (bap. and buried at Astwick in 1657). Thomas Feery, five years older than Agnes. ’as a yeoman, an owner of his land, he would eventually have ranked higher than them, for they remained tenant farmers‘ (p. 11.). Members were encouraged to marry within the congregation as part of the community of the godly, and the Feerys seem to have been in ardent opposition to these ideals. Beaumont’s religion seems to have broken two bonds: that between her and father, and between herself and an intended husband. Scholars have suggested that damage to her reputation is why Beaumont did not marry until she was fifty years old, in 1702. Even then it was to a fellow dissenter.
worshipped in the ‘name of God’. Her preoccupation with her outward appearance at the trial reflects contemporary attitudes to the accused or condemned: reports were often circulated as to how a person conducted themselves when being accused with how much confidence they faced death. If the condemned faced death confidently with what appeared to be a clear conscience, then those watching would be convinced that angels had come to save them. Beaumont prayed to the Lord:

And it was much upon my heart, to Cry to the Lord to give me his presence that day; So much of it that I might not have a dijected Countenance, nor be of a daunted spirit before them; for I see that to be brought before a Company of men, and to Come before them of being Accused of Murtherin my one father, that, although I knew my self clear in the sight of god, yet without A boundance of his presence, I should sink before them. Thought I, if they should see me dejected and loock daunted, they would thinck I was gilty. I begged of the Lord that he would please to Cary me A bove the fears of men, and devils, and death it self; And that he would give me faith and Courage that I might look my Accuser in the face with boldness, and that I might lift up my head before him, with Conviction to themself. (p. 218)

With God’s presence, Beaumont would not be afraid to face her accusers, and, like the disciples Peter and John in the Acts, would face them with ‘boldness’, knowing that she was ‘clear in the sight of God’. Afterwards, she records the observations of the jury members, to provide evidence that the Lord was with her in her sufferings: ‘Some gentlemen that was upon the Jewry said, they should never forget me, to see with what a Chearful Countenance I stood before them all. They said I did not look like one that was gilty’ (p. 222). As she predicted, ‘great Observation was made of my Countenance’. When she is questioned, her words are meek and truthful (truthful because they relate what she has already set down in the narrative), and she provokes pity when she is asked if there was anyone with her: she answers, ‘no body with me but God’ (p. 221). All charges were dropped against her, and she reports that even ‘a twelvemonth after they would speak of me with teirs’ (p. 222).

Anna Trapnel, a Fifth-Monarchist prophetess, was also summoned to appear in front of a jury. Although not accused of murder, like Beaumont, Trapnel was accused of spreading sedition and treason while she made a journey through Cornwall to meet her friend, and fellow Fifth-Monarchist, Captain Langdon. Her work, unlike Beaumont’s which appears to be destined for readers and listeners of her congregation, seems to vindicate herself to both members of her congregation and the wider world (including the clergy whom she criticises). The account of her trial in Truro is presented in her Report and Plea, styled a ‘Defiance Against all the reproachful, vile, horrid, abusive, and scandalous reports, raised out of the bottomless pit against her, by the prophane generation, prompted thereunto by Professors and
Clergie’. She writes against these scandalous reports, presenting her own version of events: that God had told her to undertake the journey, and he gave her words to speak. She writes:

> truth engageth me to let the world know, what men have acted against the pouring out of the Spirit in a dispensation beyond their understanding; they hearkened not to Scripture-advice, which would not have any judge that they know not [1 Corinthians 4:3-5; Romans 14:13; John 7:51]. (D3’)

Trapnel certainly shows her accusers, the judges, to be incompetent and vindictive, and uses powerful scriptural imagery to establish her righteousness. Constables came to fetch Trapnel from Captain Langdon’s house, where many people came to watch, but she remained in a trance and could not be moved: she awoke in the evening having, according to her own account, not heard a sound. After this, she writes, ‘many came to catch at my words; and it was very probable, that the Rulers sent some to watch for what could be had further against me’ (D3’). Drawing on the events of the Gospels, where the Pharisees came to catch at Christ’s words for evidence to use against him, she continues to compare the unjustness of his trial with her own. Before she is called to trial, she walks in the garden as Christ did before his apprehension by Judas and a crowd with clubs. Here she felt the Lord’s presence who she realised would ‘give thee answers suitable to what shall be required of thee’ (D4). The officer came to fetch her and she was followed down the street by ‘a bundance of all maner of people, [...] and some pull’d me by the arms, and stared at me in the face [...] and thus they mocked and derided at me’ (D4). The parallels with Christ’s Passion continue:

> I was never in such a blessed self-denying lambe-like frame of Spirit in my life, as then; I had such lovely apprehensions of Christ’s sufferings, and of that Scripture which saith, He went as a sheep, dumbe before the sheerers, he opened not his mouth [Isaiah 53:7; 1 Peter 2:23]. (D4”)

In this Christ-like manner she went silently to the Sessions house which was full of people, and she writes that it was only the presence of the witch-tryer with her great pin that caused her to speak. To add to the scriptural parallels, the justices had brought, what turned out to be, two false witnesses: Trapnel draws the court audience’s attention to this when she declares, ‘you may suborne false witnesses against me, for they did so against Christ’ (E2). She also draws on other male biblical examples of trial behaviour in order to establish both her authority and the unjust nature of the accusations made against her. These include references to Moses and Aaron to which she likens her ‘timorous, fearful nature’ regarding what she

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77 Trapnel, Report and Plea, title page.
‘should do and say before the Magistrate, having never been before any in that kinde’ (D2). Like Moses who was taken into the mount pleading, ‘O my Lord, I am not eloquent [...]’ but I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue’ [Exodus 4:10], the Lord saw that Trapnel was ‘not prepared to go before them, nor strong enough’ (D2). She wrote then that the Lord ‘would take me first into the Mount, and give me the preparations of the Sanctuary; and so he did before I was called before them’ (D2). These preparations work to excuse and explain the forthrightness of her words in the trial and give further credibility to her prophecies which are aligned with those God gave through Moses.

As well as the examples of Christ and Moses, Trapnel also draws on the imprisonment and trial of Paul, which she interprets as having many similarities with her own. When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem there were no specific charges made against him although both the people and the authorities were uneasy about the new ‘sect’ following the resurrected Christ that they knew ‘that every where it is spoken against’ (Acts 28:22). He appeared on trial in Jerusalem, but appealed that he should rather ‘stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged’ (Acts 25:10). The Justices present at Trapnel’s trial at the Cornwall assizes criticised her for publishing a book of inflammatory Fifth-Monarchist millenarian prophecy, referring to her *The Cry of a Stone* (1654), but she counters that it was spoken at Whitehall, ‘neer a Councel, I suppose to call me into question if I offended’ (d1). In the words of Paul she refers her case ‘unto Caesar’, meaning Cromwell, who had the jurisdiction to preside over it. Like Paul, Trapnel was spreading the good news of Christ, and like him, was accused of being part of a seditious ‘sect’ of followers which only time had redeemed in the eyes of the people. After meeting the judges in Jerusalem, Paul was then taken to Rome where he was imprisoned in a house for two years ‘preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence’ (Acts 28:31). This example of confidence, along with the God’s presence as he gave to Moses, Trapnel says gave her the boldness to speak. She also remembers the trial of

a dear friend to Christ, who smiled in the face of a great man, that looked fiercely on him, and sate as a Judge to condemn him for the testimony of Jesus; but this servant of the Lord looked cheerfully all the time of his accusations charged upon him; so I thinking upon that posture of his before those that acted against him, I begged the same cheerfulness, and I had the same courage to look my Accusers in the face: which was no carnal boldness, though they called it so. (D4')
The editors of *Her Own Life* gloss the ‘dear friend to Christ’ as Vavasor Powell, another Fifth-Monarchist writer ‘for the testimony of Jesus’. Trapnel, who was present at some of his trial before she took to bed in a chamber to prophesy nearby, took example from his behaviour at the trial which included cheerfulness and courage that Christ, Moses, and Paul also represented. Aligning herself with these powerful male figures, she defends herself from the accusations of ‘carnal boldness’: unlike the disciple-like ‘boldness’ that God gives Beaumont to defend herself, Trapnel is accused of a more sexual (*OED* 3b) and unspiritual and unregenerate (*OED* 5) kind of ‘boldness’. These accusations were more keenly felt afterwards when she was sent to Bridewell, a notorious prison for thieves, whores, and vagrants. The comparison of her behaviour to that of eminent male examples is one way that Trapnel defends her speaking out in front of the court, but she also uses the ever-present figure of the town witch-tryer to show how she was forced into those actions. By mentioning the ‘great pin which she used to thrust into witches, to try them’ (D3v), referring to the pricking of birthmarks to see whether or not they would bleed, the terrifying image is planted in her readers’ minds. When the Justices decided to question her, which she tells us was not usual practice given that her friends Captain Langdon and Major Bauden had already paid ‘sureties’ of £300 to ensure her appearance at the next assizes, she explains why she had to answer:

> The report was, That I would discover my self to be a witch when I came before the Justices, by having never a word to answer for my self; for it used to be so among the witches, they could not speak before the Magistrates, and so they said it would be with me; but the Lord quickly defeated them herein, and caused many to be of another minde. (d1)

Rather than the silent witch the Justices were hoping would emerge, Trapnel speaks, like Moses and Paul, to justify why she had come to Truro and how her words were from the Lord. Her narrative shows that to speak out was the only choice she had if she did not want to be pricked and she records that this helped to change public opinion. From the mouths of witnesses, she writes: ‘the rude multitude said, *Sure this woman is no witch, for she speaks many good words, which the witches could not*’ (d2v). Trapnel shows that she could and did speak ‘good words’ regardless of whether she was considered ‘carnal’ or a witch, and she reminds her readers that ‘Christ lives in me; and the life that I live, is by the faith of the Son of God, who died, and gave himself for weak handmaid, as well as for a strong Paul’ (A2v).

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78 *Her Own Life*, p. 85, n. 20.
Trapnel, like all the other women discussed in this chapter, was concerned with the presentation of the ‘truth’ of events, and not just to vindicate herself as an individual. She writes specifically that ‘I go not about to vindicate my self, but Truth’ (A2). The title page of the Report and Plea shows it to proclaim ‘the rage and strivings of the People against the comings forth of the Lord Jesus to reign; manifested, in the harsh, rough, boisterous, rugged, inhumane, and uncivil usage of Anna Trapnel’. The ‘truth’ that she is vindicating is the second coming of Christ, and all those who had dealt with her critically were automatically placed in the position of being opposed to this. Hence criticising Trapnel would mean criticising Christ. The work seems to have been directed to anyone who lived in a part of the country where rumours of her exploits had reached:

Reader, I beseech this of thee, whosoever thou beest; under Forms, or without forms; obedient to Ordinances for the LORD’s sake, or yet in the dark concerning them: I beseech all sorts of people, high and low, to weigh in the balance of the Sanctuary, the true Relation which followeth; for I shall relate the Truth without addition: though I cannot (it may be) remember all the passages in order, yet as many as the LORD brings to my minde, I shall relate, for the satisfaction of the LORD’s friends known and unknown in all parts where the rumour hath run. (A4)

Whether the readers were regenerate or unregenerate in Trapnel’s eyes, they would need to know the truth of her relation so that they would not believe rumours that had run through word of mouth, and through print. To counter false representation, Trapnel produces her own ‘report’ to pass throughout the land indicating her version, or ‘narrative’, of events surrounding her arrest and imprisonment. The word ‘report’ has various meanings including being an account (OED 2a), sometimes an account of a case heard in court (OED 2b), and also as a rumour or hearsay (OED 4), all of which are parts of what Trapnel’s work is doing. Most significantly, perhaps, is the meaning of ‘report’ regarding ‘reputation’ (OED 5). Her work redefines her own reputation in her own words replacing her opponents’ slanderous words. By publishing her own report, styled in her own words, Trapnel competes with rumours already in circulation in contemporary newsbooks.79 One of these, Mercurius Politicus, included a report from Truro, Cornwall describing her trial and criticised the authorities at Whitehall for letting her walk free across the country causing many ‘spirits’ to

79 Trapnel was discussed in several newsbooks during the period 1654-56. See Severall Proceedings (11 January 1653[4] (12-19 January 1653[4])), pp. 3562-4; Mercurius Politicus (11 April 1654 (13-20 April)), pp. 3429-30; Certain Passages of Every Days Intelligence (15 April 1654 (14-21 April)), p. 111; The Weekly Intelligencer (20 April 1654 (18-25 April)), pp. 229-30; A Perfect Account of the Daily Intelligence (7 June 1654 (7-14 June 1654)), p. 1425; The Publick Intelligencer (24-31 December 1655), pp. 193-4; Mercurius Politicus (23 May 1656 (29 May-5 June)), pp. 6997-8.
The report claims that there were ‘two convincing Reasons against her Spirit; the one is, that it withdraws from Ordinances, and the other is, that it is Non-sensical’. There is textual evidence in Trapnel’s Report and Plea that she read this report, published for the period 13-20 April 1654. Relating part of the trial, she writes:

they had a saying to Major Bawden, and to Captain Langdon then, whom they derided in a Letter sent from Truro by some of their learned Court, which wrote, that Captain Langdon and Major Bawden stood up, and made a learned defence. (d2)

The newsbook report had indeed recorded that ‘Langdon and Baudon, her Compeers and Abettors, endeavored to make a learned Defence for her, but it was not suffered’. Although Trapnel does not include their ‘learned defence’, perhaps preferring to record her own exchanges, she does defend their words and deportment, recording a rather different reaction:

They had indeed such learning from the Spirit of wisdom and of a sound minde, which the Jurors and their companions were not able to contend against, their speech and whose deportment was so humble and self denying, and so seasoned with the salt of grace [Colossians 4:6]. (d2)

Opposed to the report from Truro, Trapnel shows that the speech of her supporters was full of grace and humility, taken directly from the spirit of God. Their simple language contends against the ‘eloquent speeches’ and ‘guilded words’ of the clergy and jurors, and Trapnel asks her readers, ‘is it not more commendable to be in heart, then in head?’ (A3’). She shows the clergy, as Jones does, as like to ‘those who call good evil, and evil good [Isaiah 5:20]’ (A2): she that is good, is called evil.

Trapnel also does the same with her own words, which she presents at length. Quite contrary to the ‘non-sensical’ woman the newsbook portrays, Trapnel presents herself as witty and scripturally informed:

Justice Lobb. You prophesie against Truro. A. T. Indeed I pray against the sins of the people of Truro, and for their souls welfare; are you angry for that? Lobb. But you must not judge Authority; but pray for them, and not speak so suspiciously of them: and more to this purpose he spoke to me. A. T. I will take up your word, in which you said, I was not to judge: you said well; for so saith the Scripture, Who art thou that judgest another mans servant to his own master he standeth or falleth [Romans 14:4]; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand: but you have judged me, and never heard me speak: you have not dealt so well by me as Agrippa dealt by Paul: though Agrippa was an Heathen, he would have Paul speak before he gave in his judgement concerning him. Justice Tregegle. Oh you are a dreamer! A. T. So they called Joseph, therefore I wonder not that you call me so. (d1)81

80 Mercurius Politicus (11 April 1654 (13-20 April)), p. 3430.
81 This exchange and most of Trapnel’s appearance in front of the judges is recorded on an extra ‘d gathering’, and in a smaller typeface, following the D gathering and preceding the E gathering. Rebecca Bullard explores
It seems clear that Trapnel includes the words of the judges for the purpose of arguing against them. Where Lobb lectures her on judging authority, she only includes the point that she specifically argues against, that she should not judge those in authority. She turns this around to show that, in the same way, they should not judge her: even Agrippa, a ‘heathen’ man, listened to Paul before he gave judgement, and in the same way, Trapnel should be allowed to justify herself. This exchange also highlights something else that Trapnel was accused of; being a ‘dreamer’. This was probably more threatening than it sounds, as the word has quite negative connotations, especially by the way it is used in scripture. Of the four times the word is used in the King James Bible, three of those come from the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy which decrees that a ‘prophet, or that dreamer of dreams’ who advocates different religious opinions ‘shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God’ (13:5). These threats were also spoken of in the report from Truro, where the writer draws parallels between Trapnel and ‘Elizabeth Barton, the holy maid of Kent [...] in the dayes of Henry the 8’. Barton, an unlearned maid of Kent, experienced trances where she ate or drank nothing, paralysis, and prophesied future events, all of which Trapnel also experienced. What the newsbook referred to, however, was that Barton had prophesied against her ruler, and was eventually executed.82 For the report writer, Barton ‘was made use of by certain fanatic Popish Priests, by fained Miracles and Trances, to raise admiration in the multitude, and foment seditious humors against the Government; for which she and her accomplices had in the end their reward’.83 No doubt this was a warning for Trapnel and her ‘abettors’ to leave off from causing the people to reject their rulers, something that she recognised in opinions at the time. She writes: ‘others said, The people would be drawn away, if the Rulers did not take some course with me’ and that ‘the Clergie gave information in many places of the Country, what an imposter, and a dangerous deceiver was come into Cornwall’ (D1v). She contests this interpretation of her character by drawing

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82 See Dianne Watt, ‘Elizabeth Barton’, ODNB. Watt writes that Barton has since been viewed by history as everything from a ‘puppet’ and a ‘naive and innocent victim’, to a ‘sexually immoral hypocrite’.

83 Mercurius Politicus (11 April 1654 (13-20 April)), p. 3430.
on biblical precedents, particularly her namesake, Hannah whom she would ‘imitate’ (A2\(v\)) as a ‘sober holy woman’ (A3\(v\)). In 1 Samuel 1:10 Hannah is shown to weep and pray for a son when she is overheard by Eli, a priest, who thinks she is drunk. As Trapnel prays for the bringing forth of the son of God, the clergy are styled as Eli who misconstrues what she is asking for. She writes:

> there is such an old evil spirit of mis-construing, and judging holy actions to carry in them evil consequences. Eli the Priest of the Lord, is imitated in his worst part. England’s Rulers and Clergie do judge the Lords hand-maid to be mad, and under the administration of evil angels, and a witch, and many other evil terms they raise up to make me odious, and abhorr’d in the hearts of good and bad, that do not know me. (A3)

These words could easily have been addressed to the Truro reporter who drew upon a tradition of what Trapnel thought were ‘holy actions’, but interpreted by others as having ‘evil consequences’. Different interpretations of good and evil actions and words were at the heart of why separatists and Baptists recorded their reports and vindications: they wanted their version of historical events to survive.

Sara Jones, Agnes Beaumont, and Anna Trapnel all advocate, to greater or lesser extents, the power that women had to record the ‘truth’ of what befell the saints during the mid-seventeenth century. While defending their own beliefs and those of their congregations, they also used innovative techniques to defend their ‘boldness’ in writing and speaking to defend the name of the saints. Just as Jones believed that women could fight with words, as Deborah did, thinking that ‘when the Viall is powred forth upon the ayre [Revelation 16:17], that humane breath shall not be so much prided in’, Trapnel also thought that the day of Christ’s coming would establish a new order where the lesser members of society might be the ones that the Lord chose to write the account:

> And then who shall be so deep speecht, as Saints now who are counted Novices, and shallow fellowes, and frantique handmaids, not fit to stand to speak to the Learned wise Rabbies of these times, which call such that speak plainly phantick [fanatical], and under the administration of evill Angels and seditious whimsicall headed ones; but the time is coming which will discover the King of Beauty to his, that are so slighted, and then they shall be the onely Scribes who are the Lords chosen Baruchs, he will imploy them to write his Roules [Jeremiah 36:4; 36:32]. (H3\(v\))

At the coming of ‘King Jesus’, Trapnel shows that roles will be reversed and the saints will be the ones projecting their profound and ‘deep’ speeches, rather than the ungodly and false clergymen. Those that the clergymen consider as ‘shallow’, ‘frantique’, and not fit to speak in front of them will be chosen of the Lord to write ‘his Roules’. She continues by writing that
‘fierce looks, nor deep speech gathered up and fetched from both Cambridge and Oxford Universities shall not affright the Lords flock’: though they ‘stammer, they shall be understood’ (H4). Like archetypal Hannah’s, seemingly ‘frantique’, drunk, or mad, Trapnel argues, handmaids should continue to speak out against the ‘Learned wise Rabbies’. When Christ the King returned he would choose them to record his works as Baruch did, the scroll writer who recorded the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36). These biblical prophecies were like Trapnel’s words in that they criticised the depths to which their nations had sunk, and they were destroyed by being cast into the fire, and their compilers were sought after, but they were ‘hid’ by the Lord (36:26). In the face of persecution, Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch again but enlarged with declarations of vengeance from the Lord, that he would punish the king, ‘his seed and his servants for their iniquity’ by heaping ‘evil’ upon them (36:31). The implication is that no matter how many times the authorities tried to destroy prophecies that originated in the Lord, by women or men, their message would remain stronger and clearer.
Chapter Three

‘Like to an anatomy before us’: Conversion and ‘Body’ Language

And indeed, the whole is an Epistle that may be seen and read by all discerning Christians, to have been written on her heart, by the Spirit of the living God; which I hope will more commend it to every gracious soul, then anything from man can do.¹

Textual ‘anatomies’ were published frequently in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A reader would have expected an attempt by the author to present a detailed analysis of his or her chosen subject, dividing it into parts for closer examination. Like the sense of the word ‘anatomy’ referring to ‘the artificial separation of the different parts of a human body’ in order to discover the mysteries of its insides, a textual anatomy delved deeply into obscure areas for the benefit of its readers. The subject under discussion became an organic body, to be explored and analysed in public, imitating the public dissections occurring in anatomy theatres of the period.² Jonathan Sawday notes that ‘by the 1650s, it has been calculated, an average of eighteen anatomical texts were being published in England each year, a threefold increase when compared with the situation in the period before the civil war’.³ Readers, and theatre observers, were eager to learn more about their interiors, and it is not surprising that the word ‘anatomy’ came to be applied to anything that sought to lay knowledge open to a wider audience or readership.

As textual ‘anatomies’ could dissect bodies, it was a logical step that they would also look at spiritual matters, examining the inward ‘hearts’ of men and women. If divine order could be observed in the construction of the human body, it could also be seen in the examining of the work of God on men’s hearts by their spiritual experiences.⁴ Separatist writers required that believers look inwardly to discover the ‘work of God on their hearts’ in order to examine whether they were one of his elect. Deborah Huish’s experiences, recorded by her brother-in-law William Allen as The Captive Taken from the Strong: Or, A True Relation of the Gratious Release of Mistrisse Deborah Huish, published in 1658, present us

⁴ Indeed, modern divisions between physical and spiritual matters would not have made sense to an early-modern readership who regarded physical illness as inextricable from spiritual maladies.
with an example of this ‘heart work’ including her forbearance during many trials before believing God would save her. These sufferings stemmed from an intense belief that she was damned to hell, and that God had turned his face from her. This, often painful, introspection was a kind of spiritual ‘dissection’ which believers were encouraged to carry out on themselves, and, just as anatomies might be carried out in public, examples of spiritual self-dissection were published both as examples to others, and as advertisements and vindications of nonconformist practice. The preface to Huish’s conversion narrative, written by her brother-in-law John Vernon, a prominent Baptist and later Fifth Monarchist, likens her condition to that of an ‘anatomy’: her dissected ‘heart’ is published as an example to others, and to give them strength on their way to conversion. The exploration of her spiritual ‘inward man’, as in medicine, ‘takes place in order that the integrity and health of other bodies can be preserved’.\(^5\) Huish’s narrative is transcribed, not only for her own spiritual ‘reckoning up’, but for the benefit of others in her prospective Baptist congregation at Loughwood and beyond them the ‘saints’ in Ireland. As Neil Keeble has explained in his *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, such writing, because of its allusiveness, ‘sets up trains of thought which reach out beyond the individual to all time and space. In that sense, nonconformist style is expansive: it begins in the experience of the individual and comes to encompass all experience’.\(^6\) Through her narrative’s depiction of suffering and recovery, Huish becomes an example of how to convert, repent, and hence be ‘cured’ of her sin. The publishers of Huish’s text had a more particular idea of what ‘cured’ her sense that she was damned eternally which was adult baptism. The entire narrative is constructed as a build-up to the moment when she is baptised, and this would certainly have encouraged readers in similar spiritual distress to engage in the same process. Huish’s troubles and the ‘cure’ of her convincement are styled by her male prefatory writers as metaphors for the struggles of the wider population of believers, from her Baptist congregation to the whole of God’s people. Her microcosmic state reflects the troubles or ‘diseases’ of the whole ‘body’ of believers, to which the only effective cure was baptism.

This chapter will discuss how women’s conversion experiences explained the spiritual using bodily language, using bodily discomfort to represent their spiritual angst but also wearing that anxiety as a kind of proof or evidence that they were part of the elect. Developing the idea that believers’ experiences laid open their bodily and spiritual anxiety as

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\(^5\) Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, p. 3.

examples to teach potential members, as anatomies, it will explore different ways believers came to an assurance of God’s grace culminating in a discussion of women’s experiences of the ‘new birth’ at points of conversion and baptism. Women’s texts were often intended, in various ways, as ‘cures’ or antidotes to those suffering under the assaults of sin and Satan by their ‘approachable’ content and language. Not only were they godly examples to their readers, but they also vindicated rightful doctrines against those they had been tempted by. Anne Wentworth’s *Englands Spirituall Pill* (1679) was titled by her to be a ‘purging Pill’ which would ‘kill or Cure’ her persecutors ‘of that foul disease of sin’. These persecutors were the Baptist church, led by Hanserd Knollys, of which she had been a member, and her husband, who remained a member of the congregation, and it was to them, and others who shared their opinions, that she addressed the ‘purging Pill’ of her experiences and prophecies. Likewise, Sarah Jones’s *To Sions Lovers* (1644) was styled a ‘golden egg, to avoid infection’, referring to a preventive for contagious diseases. In it she makes a case for a tighter practising of the ordinance of the laying on of hands, without which, she writes, would weaken her congregation against the attacks of the established church. The experiences of believers and the way they examine scriptures were antidotes to the sin of unbelief and would help to prevent the assaults of the Devil.

Deborah Huish’s narrative has rarely been discussed in any literary critical work, and then only as a comparison with the young prophetess Sarah Wight, so the analysis that follows will open with a brief overview of the text’s main content. Huish gave the narrative before the Baptist congregation at Loughwood, of which both her brothers-in-law and one of her sisters were members. In the experience she records that in the depths of her despair she believed that she had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, a sin for which, she believed, there was no forgiveness (B5). Her conviction that she was not one of God’s chosen elect had caused her to blaspheme and eventually led her thoughts towards attempting suicide. John Vernon was Huish’s guardian when she accompanied him and his brother to spread their Baptist ideas and doctrine in Ireland as part of the occupying army, and he records the difficulties they had coping with her in this melancholy state:

9 See Gray, *Women Writers and Public Debate*, pp. 98-103. Wight’s words were also transcribed and published, but her sickness (whether spiritual and physical) appears to have been more serious than Huish’s. Like Huish she experienced severe spiritual angst, refused food, and tried to take her own life. See *The Exceeding Riches of Grace*. 
Oh! how have we been terrified together in our assemblings on her behalf, who have seen her sorrow, and disability to speak, unlese sometimes in such like Language against her soul, and our seeking her Salvation; who was as a very fearful spectacle pining away (even like to an Anatomy) before us: and how many of us, like the Friends of Job, came at first to mourn, and comfort her; but fainted, left off, relinquished her, concluding hopelessly! how hath a whole Church flagged in their Faith herein. (my italics, a3v)

Vernon’s use of the word ‘Anatomy’ is interesting, as he depicts Huish’s emaciated frame ‘pining away’ for want of sustenance, resembling a skeleton (another meaning of the word ‘anatomy’), and as an anatomical body ready for dissection. Earlier in his prefatory epistle, Vernon associates her spiritual affliction, and belief in damnation, with specific physical degradation presented in the scriptures. Describing her wasted body, he writes, ‘with David she might have said I may tell all my bones’ (a3).10 David’s words in Psalm 22 prefigure and prophesy Christ’s crucifixion, when he asks despairingly in the first verse ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’, words cried later by Christ when he is nailed to the cross in Matthew’s gospel. What follows in the psalm is an extraordinarily ‘bodily’ description of someone in the depths of anguish, fearful that God has left them: David feels as if his ‘strength is dried up like a potsherd [broken to dust]; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death’ (22:15). Vernon’s preface is similarly ‘bodily’ in its concentration and indicates that Huish was unable to speak, in her melancholy state, except in another, perhaps blasphemous, language. She was weak, and, it was feared, near death. Aligning this experience to those depicted in the psalms, Vernon continues to use the voice of David: ‘my heart is smitten and withered like grasse, so that I forget to eat my bread […] my bones cleave to my skin [Psalms 102:4, 5]’. The deliberate blurring of agency by Vernon is evidence of the truthfulness of Huish’s suffering, and, more importantly, of her recovery. After her conversion, when she is considering the validity of believers’ baptism, she finds that these particular ‘scriptures were FOOD AND STRENGTH to my soul’ (E2), and again ‘these were MEAT TO ME INDEED at that time’ (E2v).11 These depictions of Huish’s suffering and recovery are akin to most other nonconformist conversion narratives in that they depict spiritual and bodily pain and torture as inextricably intertwined. Her physical appearance is used as an outward manifestation of her inward spiritual afflictions: God’s love and comfort is the nourishment she needs to survive and without it she becomes a wasted

10 Psalms 22:17 ‘I may tell all my bones: they look and stare at me’.
11 ‘Meat’ in this spelling refers to the foodstuff she requires for sustenance. Bearing in mind that the experience was transcribed, it is possible that the adjective ‘meet’, meaning ‘fitting’, ‘becoming’, or ‘proper’, might also have been meant.
skeleton, reduced to the ‘dust of death’. The depth of her sickness makes her recovery more remarkable, and also attempts to prove to her readers that God can visit the sickest, or the most spiritually bereft. Her experience is meant as ‘an Epistle that may be seen and read by all discerning Christians, to have been written on her heart, by the Spirit of the living God’ (A2v). The examinations of her heart are all the more visible because she was spiritually wasted, and in need of nourishment and a cure.

That Vernon should compare his sister-in-law’s sufferings to those of Christ is significant for presenting a narrative advocating conversion and believers’ baptism. By fending off Satan’s assaults on Huish, while she was establishing the validity of believers’ (or adult) baptism, God is shown to condone and encourage the practice of the Baptist congregation at Loughwood. Vernon interprets her uncertainty as the ‘subtle slights Satan used […] to hinder her obedience to the Commandments of Christ, and particularly to that of Baptisme; presenting it as a poor low thing’ (b8). She, too, seems to recognise the role of Satan in her doubts and writes of ‘some fears on my heart, about my being carried on in that duty, which I see to be so contemn’d and despised: but did judge, these were but the tempters suggestions’ (E5). What Huish’s narrative does is to anatomise her heart so that all who read it would be encouraged to find strength in scripture, throw off Satan, and take the ordinance of Baptism. By ‘sprinkl[ing] them with clean water’, Huish writes, they will be cleansed ‘from all their Idols and Iniquities […] thou wilt take away the stony heart and give them hearts of Flesh [Ezekiel 11:19]’ (pp. 46-7). Huish’s ‘heart’ was already made flesh so that God could mould it and write upon it, and it was laid open by her brothers-in-law for all to observe and marvel at.

Separatist and Baptist women and men often examined their own hearts by judging themselves in private meditation. Jane Turner, in her Choice Experiences of 1653, insists that ‘no hypocrite’ could carry out ‘private duties, meditation, self-examination, self-watching, self-judging, self-humbling and prayer’.12 ‘By these’, she wrote, ‘we are acquainted with our hearts, & come to know wherein we are weak, and wherein strong, […], for the subduing of such a corruption, or for the supply of such or such a grace’ (O5). Heart examination was important to the continuing health of the believer, who could spot corruptions (faults in behaviour and where they had sinned) and mend them by prayer. They could also build up knowledge of God’s grace towards them that meant they would be one of the elect. Those who were ‘strangers to these private duties’, Turner was ‘confident’, were ‘also strangers to

12 Turner, Choice Experiences, O5.
their own hearts’ (O5v). Sarah Davy also recognised the importance of ‘heart examination’, devoting a section of her work, published after her death in 1670, to a discussion of its importance in communing with God and citing Psalms 4:4: ‘Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still’. Earlier in the work, she compares herself to Lydia, ‘a seller of purple’ whose story is recorded in Acts 16. Lydia’s heart was ‘opened’ by the Lord, ‘she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul’ (16:14), and was subsequently baptised into the Christian faith (16:15). When Davy was between twelve and thirteen years old, she wrote that she

began to apply my heart unto the Scriptures, desiring the Lord to give me an understanding therein, it was much upon my spirit to desire that the Lord would be pleased to open my heart as he did Lydia’s that so I might attend unto the things that were of God.13

Davy’s heart was ‘opened’ by God so that she could understand the scriptures herself: hers was no longer a ‘stony heart’ affected by the ‘profane walkings’ of the people she resided with at this time, but a heart of flesh ‘enlarged’ by the Lord. She looked back to her former dullness and asked, ‘oh why was my heart so dead that I was so long contented in a state of Ignorance’ (B5). God opened her heart to scripture and gave it life. Turner also used an allusion to Lydia to explain how hearing a ‘Puritan’ minister helped her to come to an understanding of the true way of worshipping. Citing Daniel 12:8, she wrote that up until then, ‘I heard, but I understood not’ (D3v). After hearing the minister, ‘the Lord had opened my understanding, and now I hoped I should have more knowledge, and delight more in hearing and reading, whereas before it was wearysome to me, because I did not understand any thing but in a confused manner’ (D4). Opening her heart left her more receptive to the words of the minister, who showed her ‘the superstitious vanity of [her] former zeal’ (D4) which she then laid aside. The opening of the heart was linked to a greater understanding of God, and its continued examination was thought important for overall spiritual health, as well as the physical. As An Collins wrote in ‘A Song exciting to spirituall Alacrity’, a believer’s heart, meaning their understanding of God’s grace towards them, would affect how effective the rest of the body was in its functioning:

Discomforts will the heart contract
And joy will cause it to dilate;
That every part its part may act,
A heart enlarg’d must animate.14

13 Davy, Heaven Realiz’d, B6.
14 Collins, Divine Songs and Meditacions, D8.
Collins suggests in the opening stanza of her poem that a believer’s heart would be affected by trials and by joyful events, but only an ‘enlarg’d’ heart could ‘animate’ the members of the body to fulfil their various employments. If a heart was contracted, Collins thought, the body encasing it would be a spiritually dead and lifeless carcass, which is certainly supported by accounts of melancholic individuals who had not felt the presence of the Lord in opening their hearts and receiving his grace.

For some (if not most) believers whose experiences are recorded, spiritual ‘deadness’ was a horrific passage in which they were tempted by various means to believe that they were damned for eternity and were not one of God’s elect. Although many contemporary writers considered that a certain amount of anxiety and grief was expected from a Puritan while they examined their conduct and whether they felt as if they were one of the elect, chosen by God, Deborah Huish’s despair, along with that of some other published female sufferers, seems to have been regarded as above and beyond what was considered healthy.\(^{15}\) Huish was convinced that she had committed the ‘sin against the Holy Ghost’, which included ‘despising, slighting, and contemning God, his word, works, and wayes’ (B1). She displays the symptoms of what Burton calls ‘Religious Melancholy’: ‘needless speculation, contemplation, sollicitude, wherein they trouble and puzzle themselves about those questions of grace, freewill, perseverance, [and] Gods secrets’.\(^{16}\) She thought that ‘God loved to torment and bring misery upon his Creatures’ (B2) and this caused her to sink deep into a cycle where she doubted her belief in God, and could not find any evidence of his love. Burton refers to melancholy as ‘an Epidemical disease, that so often, so much crucifies the body and minde’.\(^{17}\) It is remarkable that Huish talks little of her physical body, in contrast to her brothers-in-law, concentrating instead on her spiritual, inward sickness. Though Huish contracted smallpox, she leaves unmentioned the physical effects of such a torturous disease that drove its victims out of their senses with pain. Alice Thornton, describing the visitation of smallpox upon herself and her family in her *Autobiography*, wrote about the appearance of her daughter’s suffering: ‘then began my daughter Katte with a violent and extreme pain in

\(^{15}\) Jeremy Schmidt makes the important point that ‘English Protestants (and Catholics) thought of moments of despair as both common occurring features of the Christian life and as spiritually healthy, or at least health-bringing’. A certain amount of self-examination and despair was expected from godly individuals. See Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy, and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Aldgate, 2007), p. 52.


the backe and head, with such scrikes and torments that shee was deprived of reason, wanting sleepe, nor could she eate anything.\textsuperscript{18} Huish must have been in similar agonies, and it seems she neither recovered her appetite nor her ability to rest. As Burton writes, ‘a sicke man looseth his appetite, strength and ability’,\textsuperscript{19} and, as well as describing her as an ‘anatomy’, her brother-in-law John Vernon highlights ‘the trouble we had to get her eat her bread’ (A4) when she was in the depths of her despair. She explains her actions in her own narrative: ‘Why should I eat and drink, when I am in dayly expectation of being cast into Hell?’ (B6). She also mentions being ‘afraid to sleep, lest I should be cast into Hell ere I waked again’ (B6). Burton, although he believed that the devil and his agents could also torment those who were melancholic, thought that lack of food and sleep encouraged them to see apparitions without basis in reality. He writes:

> as a concave glasse reflects solid bodies, a troubled braine for want of sleepe, nutriment, and by reason of that agitation of spirits […], may reflect and shew prodigious shapes, as our vaine feare and crased phantasie shall suggest and faigne, as many silly weake women and children in the darke, sick folks, and frantick for want of repast and sleepe, suppose they see that they see not.\textsuperscript{20}

Burton compares ‘silly weake’ women and children’s fears of the dark with how the sick and sleep-deprived could hallucinate in their illnesses. The mind of a melancholic wanting sleep and food could easily see the kind of visions that Huish’s, and other men and women’s experiences, recorded. Instead of attributing their distempers and diseases to anything bodily, writers of these experiences interpreted their illnesses as part of a grand scheme of conversion where God visited pain upon the believer to test them before they were healed by the revelation of his grace. Huish and her prefatory writers never attribute her sufferings to the smallpox, but interpret them as the devil’s torments that she overcame with the help of the Lord.

Interpreting sufferings in this way enabled believers to participate in the community of the gathered churches and to become exemplars of the divine workings of God upon a believer’s soul. The prevalence of women’s spiritual narratives, mouthpieces for how God had revealed himself and recovered them from their sufferings, might indicate that they were thought of as reliable relaters and interpreters of God’s providence. As Diane Purkiss writes, in her ‘Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body’, ‘women were thought to be particularly

\textsuperscript{18} Alice Thornton, \textit{The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton} (Edinburgh: Surtees Society, 1875), p. 157. Kate recovered from the smallpox but was left without her celebrated complexion.


prone to illness’, and this illness along with the regular mortal danger of childbirth was believed to bring them into the closer presence of God. Purkiss also shows that women obtained a certain kind of power to speak through this weakness because ‘the speaker’s proximity to physical death licensed minor reversals of hierarchical relations, so that wives could give orders to husbands and children to parents. Such inversions were themselves predicated on the liminal status of the dying person: suspended between earth and heaven, partaking of both’.21 Existing hierarchies in the family, and within congregations, could be overturned if the speaker was on the verge of death, closer to God and Huish’s experience was surely privileged for this reason: she had stood on the brink of death and had recovered because of her faith in the Lord.

Another sometime Baptist writer, Anne Wentworth writing later in the 1670s, describes herself in similar terms to Huish and her prefatory writers. Having married her husband, William Wentworth, in the early 1650s, her health began to decline, and she describes the changes to her physical appearance in biblical terms.22 She writes in *A True Account of Anne Wentworths* (1676):

> after 18 years I had been my Husbands wife, and was consumed to skin and bone, a forlorn sad spectacle to be seen, unlike a woman; for my days had been spent with sighing, and my years with crying [Psalms 31:10], for day and night the hand of the Lord was heavy upon me, and my moisture was turned into the drought of Summer [Psalms 32:4]. *When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long* [Psalms 32:3], having an Hectif [Hectic] Fever, which came by so great oppression, and sorrow of heart; and wanting vent, and smothering it so long in my own brest, grew so hot, and burnt so strong, that I was past all cure of man, and given over by them, and lay at the point of death, being bowed together with my infirmity of 18 years, and could in no wise lift up my self [Luke 13:11].23

Evidence can be gained from Wentworth’s writing to suggest that she experienced much cruelty at the hands of her husband. She writes of his being ‘so great a scourge and lash to me’ (B1v), not in public in ‘his carriage to the World before men’, but ‘in secret, that God hath seen all along, and is angry at’ (B1). Later in her *Englands Spirituall Pill*, she writes down the words of God who told her she should ‘go on to write’ about ‘thy Husbands tongue; which has been a sharp sword to make thy heart bleed for 18. years, and his teeth were as

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22 Anne Wentworth was born c. 1629/30 and was ‘of no mean parentage’ (*Englands Spirituall Pill*, p. 48). She married William Wentworth, a glover, around 1653/4 as she recorded that had been married 23 years when her *A True Account* was published in 1676. They had one daughter who survived into adulthood.
spears and arrows to wast thy flesh from thy bones [Psalms 57:4]. God then told her that her husband’s ‘jaws shall fall, and his tongue shall cleave to the roof of his mouth [Ezekiel 3:26]’ (p. 7) because of his treatment of his wife, his words, as menacing weapons, reducing her to skin and bone. Her texts deal predominantly with her husband’s poor treatment of her, along with that of the Baptist church where they were both members, and how God would visit them with his wrath for causing her such suffering. Wentworth declares that the eighteen years she spent with her husband ‘consumed’ her to ‘skin and bone’, so much so that she had lost her womanly features. Referring to a verse from the Psalms, she also shows that her ‘moisture’ had become the ‘drought of Summer’, which is an extension of her observation that she is ‘unlike a woman’. The ‘drought’ suggests a drying up, making her body barren and unlikely to produce anything fruitful, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. If Wentworth was reduced to skin and bone, she would have been unlikely to menstruate, an indication that her womb was not likely to reproduce, her moisture having dried up. As women were thought to have a predominance of cold and wet humours, the disruption of the heat from a burning ‘Hectiff Fever’ in her breast made her suffer unbearably. Like Huish’s prefatory writers, who use the same reference to Psalms (32:3-4), Wentworth is presented as being near death because of her sufferings whether because of trials, circumstances, or illness, intensified by a burning fever inside her and the reducing of her physical frame. Just as she was ‘at the point of death’, Wentworth records that

at that inch and nick of time the great Physitian of value came, the good Samaritan passing by, and seeing me lye wounded, and bleeding to death [Luke 10], even as it were at the last gasp: then he spake as he did to the woman, Luke 13.11. and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity; and he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God: and I was as immediately restored as she.25

Just as the woman in the gospel was healed, Wentworth was ‘made straight’ instead of being ‘bowed together’. Comparisons with the sick healed by Jesus in the gospels were common: Sarah Davy, for instance, used the parable of the woman touching Christ’s garments to be healed in Matthew 9:20-22.26 This moment of Wentworth’s healing also corresponded with her leaving the Baptist church with which she and her husband had joined, and she looks back on the twenty years she spent with ‘being a dark, blind, formal professor’ with a ‘dry,

24 Wentworth, Englands Spiritual Pill, p. 7.
25 The Samaritan is also referred to in Wentworth, Englands Spirituall Pill: she was ‘consumed all thy strength to skin and bone, and made thee a sad spectacle to be seen, then the Lord took pity, who am the good Samaritan; and passing by thee, saw thee lye bleeding to death’, p. 46.
26 Davy, Heaven Realliz’d, C3.
barren soul’ (B4v). Her soul became fruitful when she left the Baptist church, and her body simultaneously became healthy. God is the only ‘great’ physician that has ‘value’ in narratives like hers.

There was certainly a connection between women fasting (whether forced or voluntary) and what Purkiss calls ‘prophetic empowerment’.27 Many of the congregations mentioned in this thesis had regular fast days to pray for individual members, the health of the congregation as a whole, and for political events. For example, Huish’s Loughwood congregation organised fast days towards the end of the 1650s to pray for a change in government. Women prophets, like Sarah Wight and Anna Trapnel, often took little or no food for days on end when they were in their prophetic trances, which might be interpreted as more dedicated, individual fasting to pray for the events that they prophesied. Purkiss highlights their ‘power to give or withhold nourishment from others’ in the form of their nourishing messages and prophecies directed to the godly.28 The prophets themselves received no nourishment apart from what they gained from God and his word: scriptures and ordinances are often compared to ‘meat and drink’ which has its origins in John 6:55 (‘For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed’). Sarah Davy enjoyed ordinances as if they were her ‘meat and drink’ (C5), and ‘in her retirements’, prayed and meditated, ‘feeding on the word’ (A4v-A5). Sarah Wight also told her brother who tried to persuade her to ‘refresh her body’, that she was ‘fild with heavenly Manna’ and did not need any earthly food.29 That these women prophets could claim that they were upheld by heavenly food alone gave them prophetic authority because they were closer to God, and women like Huish and Wentworth were certainly part of this tradition. Their words had meaning because they were closer to the divine, and their works include evidence of their physical wasting. As Wentworth records, her recovery was ‘not done in a corner, neither am I a stranger in London, but in and about the City an hundred that were eye-witnesse, that knew my body was so’ (B2): she supports her spiritual recovery by using the evidence of her bodily transformation. John Vernon also shows how Huish was a ‘fearful spectacle’ to those of her congregation and news of her recovery was sent across the Irish Sea because it was so remarkable.

Believers often compare their sufferings to passages in the Bible in order to find meaning in their trials. Anne Wentworth compared her sufferings of eighteen years to those

29 Wight, The Exceeding Riches of Grace, p. 31.
of the woman cured of her ‘spirit of infirmity eighteen years’ in Luke 13:11. Finding a biblical precedent helped legitimise God’s hand in the miraculous recovery, placing the believer within a grand biblical narrative. Sometimes parallels were less specific. Wentworth also compared her sufferings to a ‘long travail in the wilderness’ before she was ‘raised [...] up from the grave’, following in the tradition of Christ’s trials before his resurrection. He spent time in the wilderness resisting the temptations of Satan (Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4), and rested in a tomb before he was raised up by the Lord. That believers found legitimacy through finding similarities between themselves and biblical figures recalls the discussions of chapter two, where the persecuted saints compared themselves to former fighters and sufferers for Christ. Those who experienced more private sufferings within their own hearts also did so, seeing their individual struggles as important for the furthering of God’s work on earth. As Sheila Ottway observes, ‘the martyrs described in John Foxe’s Acts and Monuments [...] functioned as eminently suitable role models, insamuch as they were portrayed as demonstrating their faith and fortitude in the face of extreme affliction’. Narratives detailing these wide-ranging afflictions and how believers recovered themselves were part of the larger fight against the antichrist, and it seems likely that the most extreme sufferings and recoveries were those chosen to be published. To suffer for Christ was to earn a place in the saints’ collection of godly histories, and so it should not be surprising that in order to enter into a congregation, many believers expressed great torments before they came to a belief that they were one of the elect.

Elizabeth Avery’s narrative, although shorter than others this chapter considers, is remarkable in its interpretation of this type of intense suffering. It was included by John Rogers in his collection of believers’ experiences taken when they entered his church in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. Avery struggled with the lack of preaching ministers in the area where she lived, a state of affairs that appears to have continued until she joined Rogers’s congregation. Although she experienced the ‘Free-grace’ of God, she also felt his ‘rod [...] laid heavy’ upon her with the loss of three of her children in rapid succession. She describes one particular incident when friends gathered at her house during the serious illness of the third of these children, when she writes ‘my Husband came and told me my childe was dying; at which I was left in an horror [Genesis 15:12], as if I were in Hell, none could

30 Anne Wentworth, A Vindication of Anne Wentworth Tending to the better Preparing of All People for her Larger Testimony (London: n. pub., 1677), p. 7.
32 Rogers, Ohel or Beth-shemesh, p. 403.
comfort me, nothing could satisfy me’ (p. 403). In order to try to gain some comfort, she proceeded to converse with a minister who satisfied her with a letter he had received. She then understood the reason that God had punished her, and afterwards thought she ‘was content to part with all, and to let all go’ (p. 403). After that she tells us, ‘God tryed me, and took away another childe from me, […] I could bear it very well, and was not troubled, but rather did rejoice within me to be thus tryed’ (p. 403). That she could rejoice rather than grieve for the death of her child is a remarkable resolution but one not uncommon in the scheme of narratives like these. In the depths of her torments, where she had ‘no comfort, nor ease, nor could I eat or drink’, she came to the conclusion: ‘here was all the comfort that was left me, and it was my Heaven in my Hell, that God would be glorified by my destruction’ (p. 405). She found comfort in knowing that her sufferings, warranted by her sins or not, would glorify God. Later, Avery described how she ‘heard a voice say’ (p. 406) that she would see no more sorrow, but she struggled to find an explanation for the trials that she was yet to face. In the end she came to the understanding that Christ was purging her of her sins:

Yet I was struck in the flesh again, which I wonder at; and then I heard the voice again say, It was sin that was suffering in me, and the flesh as the punishment of sin; and so I found it was, for the destruction of the flesh; and ever after that I found Christ in me, ruling and reigning, and taking all power to himself, and he hath caught [snatched/taken] the man-childe up to God, which I brought forth. i.e. The flesh, (by his incarnation) and I have found in me (and do yet) his judgement-seat sit, to judge and sentence sin, and lust, and corruption. (p. 406)

Avery’s resolution that her newborn child’s death was due to Christ judging and then purging her of the sins of the flesh is remarkable. She attributes her pains as punishments for the sins of the flesh, and the taking away of her son is the most effective way that Christ has sentenced her corruptions. This is an example of how sufferings could be understood as part of God’s providence, and how they could be explained after the believer realised that they were one of God’s elect.

The sinful nature of the flesh was also explored by Sarah Davy in one of her devotional poems included at the end of Heaven Realiz’d. By presenting ‘A Dialogue between Flesh and Spirit’, she shows how believers are susceptible to fleshly desires and temptations when they should be more concerned with the state of their souls. She has the voice of ‘Flesh’ ask its companion, ‘Spirit’:

is it not better mirth for to injoy,
Which maketh fat the bones and glads the heart,
Then [than] in thy musings thus thy self annoy
At last persuad be with them to part.33

Flesh is presented as obsessed with a comfortable life filled with ‘mirth’ which makes its bones ‘fat’ and ‘glads’ its heart. Significantly, Isaiah 58:11 shows that it is the Lord, and not ‘mirth’, which would ‘satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones’. This is meant to be an example of what Spirit shows in the next stanza to be Flesh’s ‘spetious flattering speech’ (10), which tries to persuade it that ‘musings’ on scripture and on God’s graces would only ‘annoy’ or trouble the self and would not bring happiness. Spirit is given five stanzas to reply with only a one-line interjection from Flesh who says it is being treated unfairly: ‘Poor Soul alass why dost thou cavil so’ (25). The lasting ‘heavenly comforts which will never dye’ (16) dominate Spirit’s dialogue which criticises Flesh’s unsubstantial pleasures: these are merely presented as ‘froths and bubbles in the wind’ (18). For Spirit, ‘musing’ is something with which it will not part because it holds the key to finding ‘the love of Christ my King’ (28). It urges Flesh to ‘set [its] pleasures forth’ (24) that obscure its ‘fleshly eyes’ (21) from the real ‘jewels of most rich and glorious worth, / That pearl of price, that City of pure Gold’ (22-3): the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 13: 45-6; Revelation 21:18).

Earthly, fleshy pleasures are rejected by Davy as preventing her coming closer to God and she writes of this earlier:

why doe we spend our mony for that which is not, why doe we spend our pretious time in catching shadows, and in the mean time let go the substance, why doe we promise our selves good out of vanities, which are nothing but deceit and in the mean time deprive our selves of that Soul satisfying comfort which can only make us happy to all eternity. (E8)

Davy is showing that the obtaining of material comforts is like ‘catching shadows’ with no ‘substance’ and joy in the flesh was not the same as obtaining real joy for life after death: she opposes the eternal with the perishable and the latter is found wanting. Those believers suffering as ‘like to an anatomy’ had no pleasure in the flesh to fatten their bones. Their examples show them recovering through faith in God’s grace and not through any unsubstantial earthly pleasures. Believers should wait for God to ‘satisfy [their] souls in drought, and make fat [their] bones’ and then they would record their sufferings like those of the Protestant martyrs. The weaker and more spiritually bereft the believer, and women were believed to be both, the more God would be glorified when they were restored to a life in Christ.

33 Davy, *Heaven Realiz´d*, L7, lines 5-8 (my line numbers).
‘This wound is such that the Devils claw is awaies in, to prick it’: Melancholy and the Devil’s Bath

If women were thought to be closer to God because of their proneness to illness (of which childbirth was a major cause), then they were surely also closer to the devil and more prone to experience his temptations. It was also thought by some that women were more likely to be deceived by Satan because of Eve’s biblical precedent. Jeremy Schmidt in his *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul* quotes John Brinsley’s 1645 sermon on 1 Timothy 2:14 as one example of the belief that women were ‘a fitting Object’ for the devil to work on, being ‘the weaker Vessell’.

Referring to the scripture in which ‘Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression’, Brinsley addressed his *A Looking-Glasse for Good Women* to the ‘daughters of Jerusalem’ in his congregation in Great Yarmouth. He was responding to the growth of separatism and what he called ‘anabaptism’ in the area which he thought plunged believers into ‘dangerous and destructive errors’ (B3"). He advised women, who he thought were being ‘led away to the imbracing or looking towards any of the dangerous Errors of the Times, specially that of the Separation’ (A1), to be ‘conscious of their own naturall infirmity and weaknesse, withal of their naturall pronenesse and propensity to be deceived and misled’ (B1"). Brinsley used scripture to explain that the flocking of women to various heretical sects could be explained because of their propensity to be fooled by Satan in his various guises. As the introduction to this thesis has suggested, critics of the separatists and Baptists often presented the devil as running amok within their meetings, exposing them as sites of social disruption. That women were more prevalent in these congregations suggested to contemporaries that this was because they were especially prone to be deceived by heretical ideas. Actual members of congregations seemed to support this same belief, still holding that women were likely to be tempted during their spiritual trials, although denying the claim that their sect was a hotbed for devilish seductions. As women were closer to these extreme temptations, it stood to reason that they would be good examples for others, providing that their experiences were also sanctioned by more stable male congregation members: the godlier the man, it seemed, the better. This would be one way of explaining the prevalence of women’s conversion narratives in the mid-seventeenth century.

John Bunyan’s address to his readers in *Some Gospel-Truths Opened*, published in 1656, is an example of a warning to his fellow congregation members to consider ‘the

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Stratagems, or subtile temptations of the Devil, whereby he lyeth in wait, if by any means he may, to make [the believer] fall short of eternal life’. 35 It was presumably meant for both male and female readers as it makes no distinction between them, and outlines a wide range of the devil’s methods that would be applicable to a wide variety of believers. One of the main methods Satan used, according to Bunyan, was that of the temptation to Quaker tenets. He writes that if a believer had not come to a firm belief in God’s grace they were particularly ‘lyable to the next damnable heresy that the Divel sendeth into the world. See and consider, Luke 8.13 2 Tim. 2.[26]. I say thou doest lie lyable to be carried away with it, and to be captivated by it’ (B5v). The latter scripture refers to being the ‘captive’ of Satan in his ‘snare’, an experience which the title of Huish’s work, The Captive Taken from the Strong, published two years later, refers to directly. The recovery of her from the point of despair, physical wasting, and death, was linked to her conquering of Satan who had tried to convince her not to partake of baptism. Mary Simpson, whose deathbed experience was published after her death in 1648, also recorded that ‘the Devill implied Instruments to taint my soule with monstrous, grosse errors’ including the doctrines ‘that there is free will in man to doe good’, ‘That there is no Election’, ‘that none are irreconcilably lost’, ‘that Christ was not come in the flesh’, and that ‘most of the Scriptures were to be understood in an allegory’. 36 As Bunyan was showing, believers like Simpson were often tempted by Quaker tenets, especially as they offered a gentler theology compared with the harsh Calvinism of most separatist groups. Indeed, Simpson spent time considering these tenets promising that if she could not ‘give them arguments in one week’ then she ‘would not speake against, but for, that which they held’ (C2v) and she set about examining scripture and praying to the Lord for guidance. Although she had previously perceived that ‘the Scriptures I apprehended made against the truth’, God showed her how ‘they made for the truth’, and she prayed that she ‘might be able to hold out these truths so as to stop the mouths of gainsayers’ (C3). When the adherents of the tenets returned to her after a week, she writes, ‘God gave me to speak that they were not able to answer’ (C3).

Similar perceived attacks were made on Jane Turner and her husband Captain John Turner who strayed beyond the safety of their Particular Baptist church in London at the same time Simpson’s experiences were recorded, the late 1640s. Finding themselves in the

36 Mary Simpson, and John Collinges, Faith and Experience: Or, a Short Narration of the Holy Life and Death of Mary Simpson (London: Printed for Richard Tomlins, 1649), C2.
country without good ministry, Jane wrote that ‘Satan had transformed himself into an Angell of light’ who ‘beguiled and deceived’ in the form of Quaker tenets, one of which, she records, was their coming together to ‘sit and wait till they had a power, and then to speak, whether men or women’.

In both Simpson’s and Turner’s cases, the recording of temptations to join other sects and adopt their beliefs is presented as the Devil’s deception, and the recorded comfort offered is often linked to the state of their beliefs at the time. It seems likely that, for Simpson, the thought that there was no election and that none were ‘irreconcilably lost’ would have been a particularly tempting thought, especially as she shows how she went on to experience intense melancholy at the thought of irreconcilable damnation. For Turner, whose text is certainly part of a doctrinal argument against Quaker tenets, the tempting doctrine was to have an inner voice (rather than an outward power resembling a dictator), and to have the power to speak within the congregation, as was the practice of most Quaker groups. All three texts explored here record that the devil and his party were opportunists, always looking for a way to disrupt and ‘prick’ believers from attaining the truth of God’s grace.

Other experiences of Satan often refer to being held in a kind of captivation or thrall. Bunyan shows that the devil would ‘blind, and benumb’ believers’ consciences so that they would ‘see and feel sin to be a burden intolerable and exceeding sinful’ and that this burden would drive them ‘to dispaire, by perswading [them] that [their] sins are too big to be pardoned’ (B3). The fear of committing unforgivable sins was something that preyed on the mind of Mary Simpson, who wrote that one of Satan’s most terrible afflictions was when he ‘perswaded me that I laye under the guilt of some sinne, that was not pardoned’ (D3v). She declared that she had received the promises that God had ‘acquitted’ her from all, which ‘fully answered’ Satan’s ‘objection’ (D4), but not until after she had been under the burden of sin for some time. At one stage in her conversion, the devil’s temptations were so many ‘all at once’ that he put her

soule into a darke mist by his temptations, and I walked sadly for some Dayes together, to the wonderment of my friends that were about me. I could not expresse my selfe in any thing because my temptations and tumults in my spirit were so high in many things. (C5v-C6)

It was only the promise of the Lord, recorded in Isaiah 50:10, that ‘refreshed her spirit’ and through her observance of other people in similar trials that these temptations abated. Another

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37 Turner, *Choice Experiences*, K1; K1v-K2. For more on Turner’s experience and its attack on the Quakers see chapter four: “‘Worldly matters’: Baptist Association Meetings and the circulation of women’s experiences”.
of her trials was in ‘Gods taking away my neare relation which was a sister of mine’ where Satan ‘took an advantage by the weaknesse of my body oftentimes to trouble me with many thoughts of her death, [...] and I was in some question about her eternall condition’ (D4). Here, Simpson draws attention to her bodily ‘weaknesse’ which could have meant her poor health, her state as a woman, or her proneness to the devil, but shows how God brought her to the state of mind where she would have to submit to ‘his prerogative royall who judgeth righteous Judgement’ (D4v). God, as her sovereign and head, would judge her sister’s soul, and if there was ‘any work of God [in her] he would owne his owne work’ (D4v) which she would seem to have accepted. Despite all these temptations, in which Satan made the most of her ‘weaknesse’, Simpson realised that her (and the Lord’s) reaction to these was as a ‘weapon’ against him. She dictated:

This I found, that the more Satan tempted me, that his temptations were as a weapon put into my hand to fight against himself withall; through the mighty operation of God, his strength was made knowne in my weaknesse [2 Corinthians 12:9]. (C6v-C7)

Presenting herself as ‘weak’, Simpson shows that this would be the best place for God to show his power and strength in upholding her from the devil’s temptations. Although weak and liable to be deceived by Satan’s advances, she, with the help of God’s promises, was able to overcome these trials: if the weakest of God’s flock could overcome the devil, his opposition became weaker. 2 Corinthians 12:9 continues that the believer would ‘gladly […] glory in my infirmities’ if they were an opportunity for God to show his strength and power. If even women, perceived as weaker in mind, could withstand the temptations to sin, then it is perhaps not surprising that this should be proclaimed and published.

The anonymous female speaker of Conversion Exemplified also desired that her temptations before and during her conversion be published to the greater glory of God. She first experienced Satan’s temptations when he ‘mingled’ them ‘with a childish disposicion of waggery’, or practical joking, causing her to ‘hurt one of my Brothers in his sleep, out of no reason, but an inclination to do him harm’.38 After she repented of this, she wrote ‘Satan finding himself under so unexpected a defeat, pursued his work to countermine the work of God thus begun in me’ (B4). He urged her to murder her ‘near Relations’, and to ‘make away my self as a Reprobate without hope’ which she ‘looked at as more unnatural than the other’

38 Anon., Conversion Exemplified; In the Instance of a Gracious Gentlewoman, now in Glory (London: n. pub., 1669), B4. The work was published earlier in the same form in 1663 and the only extant copy is held by Canterbury Cathedral Library, H/A-4-2(15).
(B4v). As Bunyan also testified, the devil would foreground ‘the most sad sentences of the Scriptur...Judas’. The anonymous gentlewoman also records that she was ‘ignorant’ of the Gospel as if a ‘vaile was over my heart, and the Scriptures were to me a Book clasped up’ which made her like to despair and make away with herself (B4v). Like many believers who experienced times where they were unable to find comfort in scripture, the gentlewoman was tempted to take her own life. Deborah Huish was tempted to throw herself out of an upstairs window, and one of the testimonies in Henry Walker’s collection of experiences shows how she was tempted to drown herself in a pond. The woman, known only as D. M., wrote how she tried to understand why God had ‘taken away my husband, goods, and all, from me’, and realised that it was due to her love of material, earthly things. She perceived that she had sinned by loving her husband, a fleshly thing, more than she loved God. She continues: ‘this wrought upon me great troubles, and despaire; that I cryed untill I was almost blinde’ (p. 35). She then

had a temptation by Satan to drown my selfe in a Pond neare Leeds in York-shire, whither the Devill might led me, telling me that I might doe it there; it being a private place where no body could see me; and I was by him drawn out thither, and came to the Pond side, but by the providence of God, having a great love to a young infant I had then, I tooke that childe in my arms. (pp. 35-6)

While at the pond side she considered ‘shal I destroy my selfe and my poor child? and cryed unto God, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? and I had a sore conflict at that time with the Devill’ (p. 36). She believed that God then comforted her by turning her mind to scripture where the book was open and not clasped up, which caused her to relate her experience to the temptation of Christ in the wilderness by Satan. Overcoming this temptation and conflict made D. M. believe that she was on the road to salvation, making her proud to recount how she was nearly overcome and that God had helped her in her hour of need.

The anonymous gentlewoman of Conversion Exemplified spent much of her time in spiritual straits, and her experience is remarkable in its descriptions of attitudes towards those with such troubles. She records that she felt unable to communicate her feelings to friends that might have relieved her because

39 Bunyan, Some Gospel-Truths Opened, B3v.
40 Vavasor Powell and Henry Walker, Spirituall Experiences, of Sundry Believers held forth by them at Severall Solemne Meetings (London: Printed by Robert Ibbitson, 1633), p. 35.
they counted wounds of conscience for sin, melancholy fits. And if the wound were deeper and more smarting than ordinary, then they esteemed them maddish upon whom it was, and that it befell them from being guilty of some foul secret sin, worse than themselves had ever committed. (B4'-B5)

Her friends appear to have interpreted wounds of conscience, which she believed were caused by her sin, to be caused by the excess of melancholy, the black humour. If the wound was especially deep and the believer especially taken over with it to the extent of distractedness and madness, they interpreted it as punishment for a terrible secret sin. Sarah Davy, who also experienced spiritual melancholy, also recorded her reluctance to tell anyone of her sufferings because she feared they ‘would make my trouble greater’.41 Instead of talking, the anonymous gentlewoman records that she ‘sought diversion with merry company’ to rid herself of ‘black thoughts’ (B5). Referring, then, to Ecclesiastes 2:1 she shows how seeking ‘mirth’ was nothing but ‘vanity’ which eventually ‘encreased the disease’ by ‘multipl[y]ing sin’ (B5): this ‘mirth’ is what Davy called nothing but ‘froths’ and ‘bubbles’ to keep a believer from recognising God’s grace. Often wishing she had ‘never been born’ being often on ‘the brink of utter despair’ (B7), the anonymous gentlewoman lived for a while until Satan ‘roused himself with great fury and rage’ (B8) inside her to tempt her to commit blasphemy that he ‘injected’ into her thoughts (B8v). It was then that ‘the old wound of my Conscience, not yet healed, began again to throb and bleed afresh’ (B8v) and she continued to struggle to find evidence of God’s grace in the scriptures, continuing in this way for three years (C1). Satan gave her no rest, taking advantage of her ‘weakness, to recover in what degree he could his almost lost possession’ (C1) until she received some consolation from God. Narratives like hers often presented Satan’s ‘injections’ in this way, representing any objection or temptation the believer had to take them away from God’s word, and also their feelings of damnation caused by painful introspection. As John Hart, the relater of the troubles, supposed possession, and recovery of Mrs Joan Drake, memorably states, the wound of conscience by sin ‘is such that the Devils claw is awaies in, to prick and gall it, and to give scarce any respite of torment or time to close and heal’.42

The publication of Conversion Exemplified may have been in part to enlighten others about the plight of those in the depths of sin and temptation, to show how the Devil could cause the believer to appear mad and distracted. It seems clear that those under this kind of devilish influence were understood to be suffering from a mixture of both spiritual and bodily

41 Davy, Heaven Realiz’d, C6v.
problems: friends of the anonymous gentlewoman interpreted cases like hers to be a result of ‘melancholy fits’. Robert Doyley’s preface to Deborah Huish’s narrative also suggests that her self-condemnation was caused by a mixture of bodily and spiritual problems. He writes that the Lord had ‘set her feet in a large place’ by her eventual conversion ‘so that now, if sin, Satan, her own corruptions, or any other Spiritual Adversary, comes to lay any thing to her Charge, she may be ready (the Lord assisting) to produce her pardon’ (b5). The word ‘corruptions’ seems to have been italicised for its biblical origins, rather than its importance, but it is revealing in its suggestion of both bodily and spiritual problems. As well as meaning moral perversion, ‘corruption’ can also mean disintegration or decomposition, in an unpleasant sense, and can also refer to the matter inside a boil, or sore, which needs to be expelled from the body in order for it to heal. Both the bodily and spiritual connotations are applicable to Huish’s state: as well as being vulnerable to spiritual corruption, Huish experienced intense anxiety, or ‘melancholy’, which physicians recognised as a bodily illness characterised by an imbalance of humours. Every human body was thought to have four types of ‘humours’ flowing through it: choler (originating in gall), phlegm (from the liver), sanguine (the blood), and melancholy (from the spleen). Michael MacDonald writes that the dominance of one of these humours in an individual’s constitution was assumed to be inevitable, and not in itself a sign of illness: for instance a melancholy complexion ‘proceeds from an abundance of the natural form of that humor, rather than its corrupted “adjust” state, and produces a character that is sober, contemplative, and timorous’.43 While it was possible to be ‘naturally’ melancholy, it was the ‘corrupted “adjust” state’ that seemed, according to Burton, to attract the Devil, who used this ‘black humour’ as his bath:

[Satan] insults and domineeres in melancholy distempered phantasies and persons especially, Melancholy is balneum diaboli, as Serapio holds, the divells bath, & invites him to come to it. […] So that such blasphemous, impious, uncleane thoughts, are not his owne, but the Divells; they proceed not from him, but from a crazed phantasie, distempered humours, blacke fumes which offend his braine.44

Even Huish’s sister Anne recognised, while observing Deborah’s ‘dejected frame’, that the first ‘blasphemous thoughts cast into [her] mind’ could be dismissed as not hers, ‘but the Devil’s’ (B1v). Such was the familiarity of the Devil’s suggestions in this period, that this eased Huish for a time, but she continued to be ‘assaulted’ by him until ‘the Lord of his free

Mercy began to make way for [her] escape’ (B1v-B2). Her narrative, originally given in front of her congregation, is constructed out of several of the Devil’s ‘assaults’, and, at times, she writes that she believed that she had talked with him and was ‘possessed’ (B2). Her belief that she was one of the Devil’s party continued throughout her stay in Ireland, where, while staying with a friend at her congregation’s meeting-house, she heard ‘a great voice’ (B7v) above her, which she thought to be the devil, until ‘Mistress Roe’ told her it was the ‘people who lay over [her] head’. Before morning she heard ‘a ratling of Chains’ which she ‘judged to be the Devils hasting to fetch me away’ until Roe told her that it was ‘onely people opening Shop-windows’ (B8). Huish remained unsatisfied and lingered ‘in an inexpressible horour’. Throughout the narrative the cycle continues: Huish’s humoral corruptions both aggravate, and are aggravated by, her belief in her own sinful estate, and the Devil’s own ‘blacke fumes’. Doyley recognises the difficulty of her cure when he lists four different adversaries (sin, Satan, her corruptions, and any spiritual adversary), whose assaults work to the advantage of Huish’s readers by showing how she overcame her inward enemy.

Hannah Allen’s testimony, Satan’s Methods and Malice Baffled (1683), also details ‘the great Advantages the Devil made of her deep Melancholy’ which caused her, like Huish, to give way to her suicidal thoughts.45 Before God brought to her ‘Triumphant Victories, Rich and Sovereign Graces, [...] over all [the Devil’s] Stratagems and Devices’ (title page), Allen tried various ways to commit suicide, including smoking spiders (then believed to be poisonous) in a pipe with tobacco (pp. 32-3), hiding under some floorboards at the top of the house for almost three days, and, perhaps more seriously, making an attempt at bleeding to death (p. 44). She writes that she had tried to ‘make away’ herself:

sometimes endeavouring to let my self blood with a pair of sharp sizers, and so bleed to death; once when the Surgeon had let me blood, I went up into a Chamber and bolted the Door to me, and took off the Plaister and tyed my Arm, and set the Vein a bleeding again; which Mrs. Walker fearing, ran up stairs and got into the Chamber to me, I seeing her come in, ran into the Leads [alley/hall], and there my Arm bled upon the Wall; Now (said I) you may see there is the blood of a cursed Reprobate [Romans 1:28]. (p. 44)

Believing herself to be one of the eternally damned, Allen relates that she often tried to harm herself, carrying blood-letting, a common treatment for illness in the seventeenth century, to its extreme. Perhaps originally trying to bring herself relief, she seems to believe that the treatment for ‘the blood of a cursed Reprobate’ should be more serious and more violent. Although Allen believed that she had ‘sinned the Unpardonable Sin’ against the Holy Ghost

45 Allen, A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings, title page.
when she was younger, not ‘revealing it [...] to any one’ (p. 4), it was the absence of her first ‘dear and affectionate’ husband, Hannibal Allen, that made her ‘much inclined to Melancholy’ from which, she wrote, ‘the Devil had the more advantage’ (p. 7). The idea that melancholy was the ‘devil’s bath’ from where he took advantage of the believer seems to be the over-riding opinion of Allen’s prefatory writer, as well as her own when she writes from a position of hindsight. The anonymous writer of the address to the reader (which is likely her relation, Mr Shorthose, who gave her much comfort in her sufferings) outlines the relationship between the humoral and spiritual problems which caused Allen’s religious melancholy:

The blood and humours are the Souls Organs, by which it doth exert its actions. If these be well temper’d and kept in a balance, Ordinarily there is an inward calm serenity upon the Spirit. Ordinarily I say: For in some cases the most cheerful Temper may be broken down and overwhelmed either by the immediate impressions of God’s wrath upon the Soul, or the letting loose of those Bandogs of Hell to affright and terrifie it. (p. ii)

As if in demonstration of this idea, Allen’s narrative shows that she interpreted her melancholy as the reason for the Devil’s intrusions: ‘no sooner did this black humour [melancholy] begin to darken my Soul, but the Devil set on with his former Temptations’ (pp. 7-8). The absence of her husband, and his subsequent death ‘beyond the sea’, caused the overflow of her melancholy humour which the Devil utilised to his advantage. Like Huish, Allen began to believe that she saw and heard devils everywhere: ‘the voice of two Young Men singing in the Yard, over against my Chamber; which I said were Devils in the likeness of Men, singing for joy that they had overcome me’ (p. 22). For Allen, the Devil’s claw in her wound was a bodily and spiritual problem, and her prefatory writer held her up as an example that ‘the lease core of bitterness in the Wound shall cause it wrankle afresh’ (viii).

In the depths of her melancholy Allen seemed unable to recognise that her sense of damnation was a side effect of her humoral imbalances, relating her feelings only to the spiritual condition. Opposed to the measured narrative voice she uses to explain her experiences with hindsight, she records an exchange with her Aunt in the midst of her troubles. Her Aunt asks her, ‘Cousin, would you but believe you were melancholy it might be a great means to bring you out of this Condition’, to which Allen answered, ‘I have Cause to be Melancholy, that am as assuredly Damn’d’ (p. 60). Here, she shows that she believes that melancholy follows feelings of damnation rather than the view she takes with hindsight: that the Devil took advantage of the black humour to work his temptation and terror. Believing the latter view would remove the pressure of election and damnation as it implies that it was
her melancholy feelings that allowed the Devil access, rather than that she was a ‘cursed reprobate’. After she spent time with Mr Shorthose and his wife, and found ‘a very suitable Match’ in Mr Charles Hatt, also ‘a Widdower’, she began to live more ‘comfortably’ (p. 71). It was then that she wrote: ‘God convinced me by degrees; that all this was from Satan, his delusions and temptations, working in those dark and black humors, and not from myself’ (p. 72). The prefatory writer of Allen’s work deals with the difficult question of why God would punish believers in this way if they were not destined for damnation, and defends rash words against God when believers are under such sufferings:

[God’s] Infinite Wisdom hath seen it fitting to keep his Saints from Hell for ever, by casting them as it were into Hell for a time. It being too much for the choicest Saints to have two Heavens, one in Earth, and another in Glory. Flesh is kept from Putrefaction by powdring it in Salt and Brine: and Gold loseth nothing of its Worth by being melted in the Furnace. (pp. ii-iii)

Looking to the scriptural examples of David, Heman, Hezekiah, Abraham, and Job, the prefatory writer shows how believers were often forced to suffer for a time, and that it was not unusual for them to have ‘Temptations to Self-murder as well as some others fearing God under horror’ (p. iv). Suffering is understood as a sign that God had destined believers to eternal life in heaven, and Allen is placed alongside other Old Testament prophets. She records that her ‘Melancholy hath bad effects upon my body, greatly impairing my Health’ (pp. 15-16) so that she ‘grew to Eat very little (much less than I did before) so that I was exceeding Lean; and at last nothing but Skin and Bones’ (p. 64). One woman, seeing her in her melancholy state, said that ‘she hath death in her face’ (p. 65). At one point she saw soldiers with halberds and, as if wanting to reflect the captivated condition she was in, observed, ‘you will see such as these (one of these days) carry me to Newgate’ (p. 31). She believed that she ‘was worse than Cain or Judas’, and that she ‘was undone for ever’ (p. 21), and so should be imprisoned with the sinners of the age. She is drawing here on a tradition which, as Michael Macdonald writes, ‘taught that God inflicted madness and despair on notorious sinners’, punishing them by insanity and the temptation to suicide (in the case of Judas). What Allen’s prefatory writer asks is that readers not ‘wonder’ at believers’ ‘impatience, and in their agonies at blasphemous expressions’ (p. iv) because, although they might view themselves as sinners, they were only being subjected to the same sufferings as the Old Testament prophets. As Richard Baxter also wrote, ‘for Satan to possess the Body, is

46 MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam, p. 174.
no certain Sign of a graceless State, nor will this condemn the Soul of any’. 47 ‘Satan’, he writes, is ‘the Executioner of God’s correcting them, and sometime of God’s Trials, as in the Case of Job’ (p. 25): for believers it was thought necessary to experience some form of suffering from the demonic.

The interpretation and treatment of Allen’s maladies seems to have followed the prevailing belief that both spirit and body needed attention in order for the melancholic to be eased: Allen’s Aunt significantly only asked for help from friends in London when ‘both’ her ‘inward and outward distempers grew to such a height’ (p. 25). It was thought ‘the best means for Soul and Body’ (p. 26) that she travel with her mother to London. After she had grown melancholy after her husband’s death, Allen was prescribed ‘both […] Physick and Journeys to several Friends for Diversion’ (p. 10) and later took ‘much Physick of one Mr. Cocket a Chymist’ (p. 29), but to no avail. In London, an anonymous minister was ‘desired to come and discourse with her, […] finding her in a more dejected state than any he ever saw’ (p. 37). This part of her narrative appears to be an interpolation written not by Allen, but could have been written by someone familiar with the events of minister’s visit. Jeremy Schmidt suggests that the account was written by the minister, perhaps later as a case study, and draws attention to the minister’s advice to ‘all Christians to mortifie inordinate Affection to lawful things’ (p. 40). Referring to Colossians 3:5, the minister advised that believers should leave off from immoderate affections to the ordinances and duties of Christ and pay special attention to prayer and self-examination. Earlier it is recorded that when Allen stayed with him and his wife she was ‘loath to engage in any Duty’ of this kind and excused herself from praying saying she was unfit ‘to take the holy and reverend Name of God within her polluted lips’ (p. 39). Schmidt interprets this as a warning akin to what Baxter was advising in his Reliquiae:

we call Men more to look after Duty than after Signs [of election] as such […] [T]oo many of late have made their Religion to consist too much in the seeking of these [signs] out of their proper time and place, without referring them to that Obedience, Love, and Joy, in which true Religion doth principally consist. 48

If believers withdrew from their spiritual duties then they would continue in errors ‘pushing the soul with a weak governing power into a condition of uncontrollable sorrow and

anxiety’. Allen’s minister certainly thought this was the case with her and if she had been able to see and be treated by Baxter, as she expressed a desire, she would have probably been told the same thing (p. 55).

The message of Allen’s visiting minister seems to have been an established view of the treatment for melancholy. John Bunyan also wrote in *Some Gospel-Truths Opened*, from his similarly debilitating experience, that the inward war against Satan had many false refuges and certainties, and that spiritual afflictions needed spiritual cures:

>[Satan] will seeke to persuade thee it is but a melancholly fit, and will put thee upon the works of thy calling or thy pleasures, or Physick; or some other tricke he will invent such as best agreeeth with thy nature: and thus thy heart is againe deaded, and thou art kept in carnal security, that thou mightiest perish for ever.50

Bunyan shows that distractions from proper self-examination and prayer were the work of the Devil. To gain proper assurance of God’s grace believers needed to pray and look into their hearts. Another example is that of Sarah Davy, who recorded that she ‘tryed so many medicines before I came unto the Lord, or looked up to him for help’ showing that ‘Physick’ was a distraction from the real spiritual problems that needed addressing through prayer.51 In contrast to this, Allen shows that the only effective cure was from ‘a good friend […], a Minister, Mr. John Shorthose’ (pp. 10-11) who did her ‘much good both in Soul and body; he had some skill in Physick himself, and also consulted with Physicians’ (p. 70). This, accompanied by her attending ‘publick Ordinance’, visiting friends, and no doubt by her ‘very suitable Match’ to Mr Hatt, brought her melancholy afflictions to an end, and she wished the experiences to be published ‘lest this great Affliction should be a stumbling block to any’ (p. 72). As Anne Dunan-Page notes, ‘being far too aware of the interaction between physical and spiritual ailments’, believers like Allen and her contemporaries ‘seldom rejected the help of a skilful physician’.52 Bodily and spiritual problems were unreliably intertwined.

49 Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul*, p. 110. Although it is not clear from Allen’s narrative if she met Richard Baxter, her new husband Charles Hatt corresponded with him later in 1691 about a house he believed to have been haunted in 1667. The letter, dated 16 May 1691, speaks of ‘my Lady Rich’, referring to Lady Elizabeth Rich wife of Nathaniel Rich, the Hatt’s neighbours in Essex (see Baxter, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* (London: Printed for T. Parkhurst, 1691), pp. 71-3; Neil Keeble and Geoffrey Nuttall, eds, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 318). Allen addresses ‘several passages, as they came to my mind which passed there, which your Ladyship may make use of as You please’ (*A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings*, p. 34) which could refer to Lady Rich. As Susan Wiseman conjectures, ‘it is possible that the Hatts were connected with a network of puritan friends’ and ‘Hannah’s narrative may have been written for that circle’. See Wiseman, ‘Hannah Allen’, *ODNB*.

50 Bunyan, *Some Gospel-Truths Opened*, B2'.


I could have laid down in his grave,  
And so I did indeed:  
And upon his death and suffering  
My soul did sweetly seed:  
O his grave it is precious;  
But I did not continue there.  
But I rise from thence for to behold  
His resurrection rare.\(^5\)

Bunyan’s ‘author’s apology’ at the beginning of The Pilgrim’s Progress promises that the book ‘will make a Travailer’ of its readers, if ‘by its Counsel’ they will be ‘ruled’.\(^5\) As Michael Davies has also noted, Bunyan plays on the related meanings of ‘travail’, to describe the effect of his protagonist’s journey on fellow believers.\(^5\) Fellow ‘travailers’ might experience similar painful, arduous trials (\textit{OED} 1) on their spiritual journeys (\textit{OED} II 7), metaphorical childbirth (\textit{OED} 4), or would follow Bunyan’s example in bringing forth a written testimony or ‘work’ (\textit{OED} 3). What his work hopes to do is advertise what Bunyan encountered when he came upon the three or four poor women sitting in the sun, recorded in his own account of his spiritual journey, \textit{Grace Abounding}. He writes that these women’s ‘talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts’ and that, as Bunyan was then, ‘they were far above out of my reach’.\(^6\) Here, the women describe their conversion as a ‘new birth’ within themselves, and the period before this assurance as the travail or labour by which the joy of assurance is brought forth. It is this, Davies argues, that prompts Bunyan to experience a ‘Dream or Vision’ where he sees ‘these poor people at Bedford [...] on the Sunny side of some high Mountain’ (p. 18) separated from him by a wall, and longs to be with them. Bunyan continues:

At the last I saw as it were a narrow gap, like a little door-way in the wall, thowr throw which I attempted to pass: but the passage being very straight, and narrow, I made many offers to get in, but all in vain, even until I was well nigh quite beat out by striving to get in: at last with great striving, me thought I at first did get in my head, & after that by a side-ling striving, my shoulders, and my whole body; then was I exceeding glad, and went and sat down in the midst of them, and so was comforted with the light and heat of their Sun. (p. 19)

\(^{53}\) Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, pp. 126-7, mispag. 129.  
Whereas this passage draws on Matthew 7:14 (‘strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it’), Bunyan’s emergence into the sun is also described like a new birth through the ‘narrow gap’, head first. He sees in the vision what he longs for, to experience a new life in the sun with the congregation made up of God’s elect, and to do this he recognises that he must undertake an uncomfortable travail. As Davies summarises, ‘the language of pregnancy and childbirth is central to the entire concept of salvation for Bunyan’. As Bunyan shows his own ‘new birth’ in *Grace Abounding*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* depicts an allegorical journey to encourage others to undertake similar ‘travails’ and be born anew.

By these images, Bunyan describes how the way to convincement of God’s grace was laborious, full of trials, and not unlike earthly pregnancy. However, it is significant that in the example above, Bunyan sees himself as the child being born into a new life: he is not in the pangs of childbirth himself. It is only in *Grace Abounding*, where he describes how he brought church members to a belief in God’s grace, that he compares himself to a travailing woman: ‘in my preaching, I have really been in pain, and have as it were travelled to bring forth Children to God’. Referring to Galatians 4:19 (‘my little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you’), Bunyan relates the image of pregnancy to his efforts in bringing members of his congregation to a fuller belief in Christ. Each converted member is likened to a new born child brought forth by Bunyan’s ministry of the word. He struggles to bring forth others with his teaching, playing the part of a mother, whereas in his own conversion, he is as a new born child. Sara Jones, although writing earlier than Bunyan in 1632, used this image to urge more vocal members of her congregation, including her minister, to fulfil their duties in provoking the seed of belief in the rest of the flock. She advises these ‘elders’ of the congregation in *The Relation of a Gentlewoman*:

They must not be broken as Ephraim, because he willingly obeyed the commandment of man [Hosea 5:11]; If any be so broken that he cannot distill the seed of the Word [Deuteronomy 32:2], for the begetting of children to the King of the Saints; also if he be not able, as in paine, as a travelling woman to bring forth to the King of the Saints, yet an hypocrite may nurse them on her knees, and be usefull for the body: but if he be either broken, as in judgement, or she uncapable to beare it, must be put away, as he that offereth a male in his flock, and offereth a female, offereth a corrupt thing: So he that can do good service, and doth the worse, offereth a corrupt thing [Malachi 1:14].

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Jones’s writings are preoccupied with the act of preaching and how it affected fellow members of her congregation, and she goes on to argue that women speaking and teaching was important for the furtherance of God’s word. Here, she is asking her congregation to ‘put away’ those preachers who were so ‘broken’ in their doctrine and opinion that they were unable to ‘distill the seed of the Word’, referring to Deuteronomy where the speech of preachers is depicted as ‘distilling’ the raindrops of ‘doctrine’. Repeating the word ‘broken’, aligning bad, ‘broken’ preachers with the descendants of Ephraim who were ‘broken in judgment’ (Hosea 5:11) because they worshipped idols (4:17), Jones explains that ministers who could not preach and nurture the ‘seed’ (meaning both a potential for fruitfulness, and male and female semen) effectively would not ‘beget’ children of Christ. The procreation metaphors continue, moving from images of the minister as the seed-producing father, to the travailing mother bringing forth children to Christ while ‘in paine’. These, according to Jones, were the true vocations of a minister, and if their judgement were ‘broken’, or they were ‘uncapable’ of bearing children, then they offered only the care of a ‘hypocrite’ which she describes as a kind of wet nurse, suckling the children but not bringing them forth. Those ministers who provided only nursing were not fulfilling their true vocation and were offering to God only a ‘corrupt thing’. This could be one of the reasons why Jones adopted male language tropes for the dedicatory epistle to her *To Sions Lovers* (1644). She writes of her text: ‘I presume to father this naked child without Scholasticke praises, or School learning to dresse it and garnish it’.60 While showing that she has not the learning of leading ministers, she suggests that there is no one else prepared to clarify points of doctrine, namely the practice of ‘the laying on of hands’. She requests Doctor Gouge to ‘open the Doctrine’, but in his stead, and that of the ‘broken’ ministers, she published her pamphlet to advocate the practice. Here, Jones plays the part of a preacher in providing the ‘seed’ to help others to bring forth.

If ministers were presented as the seed-producers, it is perhaps unsurprising that lay believers often presented themselves as metaphorically bringing forth Christ through painful, often melancholic, childbirth. In a part of Jones’s *Relation* discussed in chapter two, she asks those ministers or elders that are ‘in paine, as a travelling women, to bring forth to the King of Saints’ to ‘helpe those women that labour with you in the Gospell, which receive the truths you teach, and build up with you by an holy conversation’ which would help them to ‘winne others’ to their cause (A12). She uses the image of the travailing woman for the ministers

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who would ‘bring forth’ children to Christ by preaching the ‘truths’ to women within the congregation. The same image is used to describe the women who were ‘labouring’ to bring forth Christ, with the help of the ‘truths’ of their preachers: women were an important part of bringing about Christ’s reign on Earth. She speaks directly to her fellow female members: ‘You Daughters of Sarah, be not afraid of any terror, you shall be saved in all your travels, though you never beare children’ (A11v). Though this metaphorical birth could be painful, Jones writes that women would be saved and supported by God. Though women, she writes, ‘were first in transgression’, they should ‘be not the last in bringing in [their] King’ (A11v). This is not to say that women always believed that they needed profitable male ministry in order to be fruitful and bring forth joy in themselves. Although they often bewailed the lack of effective preaching in their part of the country, women frequently attributed their spiritual births to meditating and praying on the word of God and waiting for his assistance. Sara Jones placed such importance on the presence of ministers who could effectively convert souls to God because she was making a point about the need for profitable ministry (whether it was from a male or female preacher) and that it had a powerful effect on the number of women brought forth to Christ. For Anne Wentworth, who was vindicating her behaviour against the charges of the Baptist church she and her husband belonged to, her travail was the time she had spent in their membership, and she was brought forth only by the intervention of God. By the time of her healing, on 3 January 1670, she ‘had been for 18 years such a woman of sorrow, and acquainted with grief, and from man could have no relief’.61 Referring to the travailing woman in John 16:21 that ‘hath sorrow, because her hour is come’, Wentworth showed that her travails of distress and melancholy, as discussed above, could not be cured by ‘man’, who only aggravated her sufferings. After this ‘long travail in the wilderness’ where she was ‘brought even to the gates of Death’, she was ‘raised up by the immediate and mighty hand of God [...] from the grave’.62 Echoing the Psalms where it is written, ‘consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me’, Wentworth writes that God had lifted her up ‘from the gates of death’ (9:13), and brought her forth to joy. She contrasts this with her husband, the Baptist, who ‘never yet knew the new birth, the life of the new man’ and other members of his congregation: ‘nor they must needs be no Saints or Christians in deed and in truth, nor know the new birth themselves, if they take him to be one that is born again’.63 Her husband’s ‘new birth’ is shown to be false, and those who believe in it are also shown to have

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equally immaterial experiences: although they had been washed in water, the ‘soul was never yet washed from the filth of [their] inbred natural corruption’ (p. 7).

One of the ways believers knew that the ‘new birth’ within them was not false security was the intensity with which they experienced the travails of metaphorical childbirth. John Collinges’s sermon on the death of Mary Simpson outlined some of the troubles she faced in coming to a belief in God’s grace:

Her life was a life of afflictions. 1. [First] Inward, then outward. Inward, but the temptations of the Devil, terrors of conscience, and such usuall pangs as accompany the first birth: besides that her God was sometimes afterward behind the Curtain, and when he hid his face she was troubled; when after much seeking, she had found him whom her soule loved, and had got inward peace.64

It seems to have been considered usual to experience ‘pangs’ when bringing forth Christ, and these, for Simpson and for others, seem to have consisted of the Devil’s temptations and an affliction of conscience. Collinges also implies that God must be present in order for the new birth to occur, as he often ‘hid his face’ from her until she found him ‘whom her soule loved’. In her own experience she records looking ‘upon Christ as a husband, but yet as a husband going a Journey, and hid behind a curtaine’ who ‘sent many love letters’ to her in the form of scriptural promises (D6). Figuring Christ as her spiritual bridegroom, she shows how they were once united, but he was then hidden while she travailed alone. Their reuniting enabled her to be delivered. For Collinges, this time of affliction ‘was a growing time of grace’ (I6v), and the longer the better. Recording a similar idea, Katherine Sutton wrote that she was ‘about 14 years in the pangs of the new birth before I received the witness of the spirit, in which time I was exceeding troubled’ although afterwards she realised that ‘something of Jesus Christ was in mee all that while’.65 Christ was ‘growing’ within her for the space of fourteen years. The terror that accompanied the ‘pangs’ of metaphorical childbirth had a connection with earthly child-bearing in that believers undergoing such pains often believed that they were likely to be destroyed imminently. The sufferings of women discussed in the previous section show that feelings of melancholy mixed with fear of their own sinful nature often brought believers to the brink of despair: many explored suicidal feelings in the depths of their troubles, and prefatory writers and ministers often asked fellow congregation

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64 Simpson, Faith and Experience, 16.
65 Sutton, A Christian Womans Experiences, D4v. See chapter five for the significance of the number fourteen. Significantly, Elizabeth Avery’s experience, discussed in the previous section, records that she did not care for herself for ‘three quarters of a year’ (nine months) before Christ ‘caught the man-childe up to God, which I brought forth’ (Rogers, Ohel or Beth-Shemesh, pp. 405-6).
members to support these ailing members, rather than condemn them. Deborah Huish was one such member on the brink of committing suicide, and her words show the connections that believers made between literal and metaphorical child pains and deliverance:

When my Sister Vernons hour of Child-bearing drew near, I could not seek God for her, but was unsensible of her danger approaching: and after her delivery I was then in greater terror than before, thinking then that God would bring swift destruction upon me, as upon a Woman in travel, and I should not escape [1 Thessalonians 5:3].

The child labour of Ann Vernon, one of her elder sisters, provoked Huish to despair that she would die of her own travailing pangs and be like the Thessalonians lying under false security who Paul said would experience ‘sudden destruction’ like the suddenness of ‘travail upon a woman with child’ (5:3). The guilt of not praying and assisting with her sister’s lying in seemed to contribute to Huish’s despair, along with the belief that if she experienced travails (whether literal or metaphorical) she would not escape as her sister had. The pains and sorrows leading up to a state of assurance of God’s grace, she believed, would decide whether a believer was saved or not.

It seems not to have been just women who expressed feelings of being in the ‘pangs’ of childbirth as they experienced their conversion. Whereas Bunyan used language to show he was the child being reborn, John Rogers, under the heading ‘Gods divers wayes of Working’, wrote that both male and female saints’ sorrows before they felt assured could be compared to those of ‘a woman in travel, that is full of pangs’, but these pains ‘shall be turned into joy [John 16:20-22]’. He also asked the members of his congregation to support their fellow-strivers in the work of God while they were in ‘those strict passages which are through the strait-gate [Matthew 7:14; Luke 13:24]’ (p. 366). As Bunyan detailed in Grace Abounding, Rogers referred to the time of travail as one of struggle and rebirth, both for men and women, and drew on the passage through the strait-gate as an example of this struggle. The images are both of believers giving birth and of being (re)born themselves through the strait-gate. The frequency of the biblical reference to travailing had special resonance for women, some of whom regularly risked their lives to bring forth children. Such experiences brought women closer to God because of the hazardous nature of childbirth and the very real threat of death, causing Richard Sibbes to remark in The Hidden Life (1639) that because of this women were ‘forced to a nearer communion with God’.

66 Huish, The Captive Taken from the Strong, C2.
67 Rogers, Ohel or Beth-shemesh, p. 366.
sufferings of earlier Protestant martyrs, men evidently occasionally drew on specifically female versions of suffering in order to further validate their experiences. Women like Sara Jones also seem to have utilised this gender slippage to explain how women could be ‘fathers’ and convert edify members of their congregation.

Images of childbirth and travail also helped to justify women writing and publishing. As Michael Davies has written, ‘early modern women writers would also legitimize their activities as authors through the “natural” metaphors of motherhood’. 69 Conception and childbirth were natural processes, and so for readers to reject books that had been conceived and brought forth might have felt ‘unnatural’. In some cases, women wrote texts styled as ‘mothers legacies’ to their unborn children for fear that they would die in childbirth, and some, like Mary Simpson and the anonymous author of *Conversion Exemplified*, wrote out of their bodily sufferings which they figured as metaphorical travails. Their messages acted as children brought forth out of their sufferings, surviving long after their ailing mothers. Male writers also used such language tropes: Catharine Gray draws attention to the ‘common male poetic practice of appropriating maternity as a figure of authorship’ to show the labouring and delivering of the works of the author or poet. 70 Some male writers, Michael Davies writes, ‘adopt a language that associates the male creative imagination with the fertile female body or womb’ by which they produce ‘textual offspring’. 71 In this way authorship is shown to be a gift of God which compelled believers to tell others of their experiences: once the conception of an idea occurred, it was presented as inconceivable that the producing of it could be hindered (unless the idea was not God-given). The labouring to produce such works could also be hazardous to all believers, and particularly women, who did not often venture into the realm of publishing, but were driven by the need to provoke ‘new births’ in other followers. As Davies has noted about the preface to *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Bunyan seeks to ‘make a “Travailer” out of its reader’, encouraging fellow believers to follow in the spiritual journey of its protagonist. 72 John Gardner in his preface to Jane Turner’s published narrative also praised her ‘spiritual worth, which hath been very advantageous to many’ who were ‘so drowned in confused and immethodical thoughts, that all their intentions are like an untimely birth’. 73 By following her works, as a rare example of ‘a Mother in the true Israel’, others whose ideas of election did not come to fruition as an ‘untimely birth’ would be instructed by

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her ‘clear conceptions, and sound judgement; being more naturally given to the exercise of
godliness with sobriety than others’ (B5v). Turner was a good example to others because she
had ‘conceived and brought forth spiritual fruit, to the view of good and bad’ (B6). Her
fruitfulness in bringing forth is contrasted to the ‘great sorrow of the Jewish woman to be
barren, being thereby deprived of bringing forth Christ in his humane nature; and it is greater
sorrow to ingenious Christians to be barren in spirituals’ (B5v-B6). Likely referring to
Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, who was barren because of her advancing years, Gardner
shows believers’ sorrow in not being able to produce spiritual fruits. Turner’s experience was
to be an example to others on how to worship and pray. She observed, herself, that ‘the
reason why many persons do sit a long time in the profession of truth, and yet continue weak,
ignorant, barren, and fruitless branches, it is because they are remiss in private duties’ (O6v).
Her work was to encourage others in ways to be fruitful and profitable in spiritual duties, as
‘travailers’ in the path to joy.

The language of conversion utilised metaphorical images to express radical
transformation. Only exceptional images, such as rebirth and resurrection, were powerful
enough to represent the life-changing conversion that had taken place. Jane Turner observed
that her rejection of Quaker tenets brought such ‘joy and comfort’ to her soul that she wrote:
‘I cannot express it, but this I say, it was to me as life from the dead’ (L1). She and her
husband, back from his travels with the army, ‘sate in admiration, neither of us scarce being
able to speak for tears’ (L1v), unable to express in words the change that had occurred in their
souls. Earlier, with her first separation from the established church, Turner wrote also that
‘there was some change wrought in the whole soul; and every faculty of it, which before was
dead, had now some life and motion in things relating to God and godliness’ (E3). Other
believers used images of barrenness transforming into fruitfulness to express their
experiences. Katherine Sutton showed how the Holy Spirit was ‘poured out upon the soules
of Believers (as floods upon the dry ground) And those spiritual showers and shinings do
make a spring of Grace in the wilderness of their hearts’. Wentworth also described
having a ‘dry, barren soul’ during her years as a Baptist church member, and Anna Trapnel
called her saviour Christ, ‘that great Prophet, that lives for ever, who maketh fruitful, and
removes barrenness’. The dry, barren ground of the souls of the unconverted was moistened
and made fruitful, cultivating a ‘spring of grace’ inside each believer. Sarah Davy also hoped

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74 Sutton, A Christian Womans Experiences, a2.
that the Lord would ‘water this barren ground, barren by nature’ to make her ‘a fruitful garden’ which would ‘bring forth fruit yea much fruit’.76 ‘To be in Christ’, she writes, ‘is to be a new Creature quickened, inlivened, delivered from the power of sin and Satan, and the deadness of our sinful natures’ (G2v). Through the Holy Spirit, ‘the whole nature is changed’: she became a ‘new creature [2 Corinthians 5:17]’ (G5).

For An Collins, the transformation was understood in more concrete, bodily terms. Although she does not identify her illness, Collins writes in her collection of poems, *Divine Songs and Meditacions*, that the ‘crosses’ that bred in her ‘Cradle’ were physical as well as spiritual.77 Illness made her ‘by divine Providence, [...] restrained from bodily employments, [...], which enforced me to a retired Course of life’ but, nevertheless, the Lord gave her ‘inlargednesse of mind, and activity of spirit, so that this desolate condition proved to me most delightfull’ (A2). It was at this time that she ‘became affected to Poetry’ (A2) and she called the verses she produced, ‘the offspring of my mind’ (A4v). Using birthing metaphors for literary production was not unusual, but in Collins’s case they have an extra dimension. In ‘A Song expressing their happinesse who have Communion with Christ’, she describes the time before a soul’s conversion:

> When scorched with distracting care,  
> My minde finds out a shade  
> Which fruitlesse Trees, false fear, dispair  
> And melancholy made,  
> Where neither bird did sing  
> Nor fragrant flowers spring. (C6v)

Collins thought a mind ‘scorched’ with distracting thoughts would only find the shade of a fruitless tree made of despair and melancholy, and, continuing the natural imagery, she shows that no ‘flowers spring’. The ground is barren and the trees fruitless. Collins uses the same images to describe her illness and spiritual barrenness in infancy: her ‘wintery’ youth had given way to ‘Spring’ but it was one of ‘exceeding dry[ness]’ (E5):

> But in my Spring it was not so, but contrary,  
> For no delightfull flowers grew to please the eye,  
> No hopefull bud, not fruitfull bough,  
> No moderat showers which causeth flowers  
> To spring and grow. (E5)

Where these lines refer to spiritual fruitlessness, subverting images from the Song of Solomon 2:11-12, Collins seems also to be referring to her inability to reproduce physically. As Sara Read writes, in ‘Another Song’ (‘The Winter of my infancy’) Collins ‘makes oblique references to her lack of menstruation’.78 ‘Flowers’ is a term often used in the period for menses (OED 2b), and the lack of ‘moderat showers’ to make them ‘spring’ forth is telling of how Collins thought of her illness. Read writes that it was thought that women needed to menstruate for the sake of their health because of the ‘build-up of blood and other waste’ which was explained as a result of ‘a woman’s more sedentary lifestyle’.79 ‘Failure to menstruate regularly’, Read continues, was ‘considered a disease, which physicians went to great lengths to cure’.80 This disease made Collins talk about herself as ‘barren’, but the Lord’s intervention made it possible for her to bear literary and spiritual offspring. She writes in the same poem:

Yet as a garden is my mind enclosed fast
Being to safety so confind from storm and blast
Apt to produce a fruit most rare,
That is not common with every woman
That fruitfull are. (E5)

Apart from the outside world, Collins’s mind was kept confined from events that would disrupt it, and she was able to produce ‘fruit most rare’ that was not common in other reproductively fruitful women. This fruit was her religious verses, glorifying God that he had made her spiritually fruitful, even if she was physically barren. She observed in ‘The Discourse’, how ‘permanent are the celestiall Flowers’ (B4v), compared to the inconstancy of the flowers of her own body.

Another image used in the language of conversion relating to the transformation of barrenness to spiritual fertility is that of the resurrection: believers depicted their bodies and corresponding spiritual states as being raised from the dead by the intervention of the Lord. This image draws on the idea of the new birth. As Mary Simpson wrote, after discussing that ‘all shall certainly dye a temporall death, and only some shall be delivered from dying eternally’, that ‘the worke of Resurrection is a curious work, and secretly wrought [Psalms 139:15] in the wombe of the earth, as the child is secretly wrought in the womb of the

79 Read, ““Thy Righteousness is but a Menstrual Clout””, 1.
80 Read, ““Thy Righteousness is but a Menstrual Clout””, 1.
mother’. It is significant that she describes the work on the body in the ‘womb’ of the earth (and in earthly childbirth) as ‘secret’, preserving the mystery of the reproduction or resurrection of an earthly body, while it is also spiritually changed. On the Day of Judgement, she believed, ‘the same bodies both for substance and forme, every joint and limbe shall rise againe, and not a bone shall be wanting’ (B5v), and she proves this by citing Christ’s own resurrection where he rose up with the same body. Although Simpson writes here about the literal idea of resurrection after death, she is exploring images that relate to the more abstract ways that believers use resurrection to mean a quickening of their spiritual states; a new spiritual birth. These ways of the Lord were ‘secret’ and inexplicable, so prayers and written records of meditations were ways in which believers could try to interpret his providence. An Collins’s ‘The Discourse’ explains how she understood that God sent his Holy Spirit to sanctify believers and both ‘renovate’ them and ‘restore’ them to life:

The other part of true Sanctification,
Is life or quickenning to holinesse,
And may therefore be called to renovacion,
Like a Restorative it doth redresse,
And him revive, that is dead in trespasse;
Tis by the power of Christs Resurrection,
That we are rais’d from sinne to such perfection.

Here, Collins writes that sanctification causes a ‘quickening’ or ‘renovation’, meaning regeneration or a spiritual rebirth (OED 1a), which raises and ‘revives’ a person from the ‘deadness’ of their sinful transgressions. Believers would be transformed from their position as sinners to true ‘holinesse’ by the power of Christ’s dying for their sins. As she writes in an earlier stanza: ‘Corruption of our nature purge d is, / By vertue of Christs Precious Blood only’ (C4v). Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, signified in some narratives by the image of ‘blood’ pouring from his chest in both visions and dreams, was a comfort to all believers who believed they had sinned inexcusably. For the anonymous gentlewoman’s experience published as Conversion Exemplified, Christ appeared in a dream,

with his breast open, and Blood issuing out as Water from a Fountain, and uttered these words, viz., Come, drink freely, and be satisfied. Upon this invitation, I seemed to draw near to him, and to drink of his Blood abundantly, and with great pleasure; continuing still thirsting, and drinking, while I awoke from sleep, and found my self gasping for breath, and soul and body refresht as with a rich Cordial.

81 Simpson, Faith and Experience, B3v-B4; B6
82 Collins, Divine Songs and Meditaicions, C4v.
83 Anon., Conversion Exemplified, C2.
Developing ideas of how God’s words of comfort were as ‘meat and drink’ or as rich ‘feedings’, the anonymous speaker relates how she was invited to consume the blood from Christ’s wounds which ‘refresht’ her body and soul. The blood acts as spiritual food, refreshing and renovating her, but also purging and cleansing her, representing how she thought that Christ’s blood had removed her sins. This assurance, she says, ‘God hath now in great mercy brought me’, but she was still subject to the assaults of her ‘spiritual Enemy’, the Devil (C3). She continued to meet ‘with many conflicts’ especially about her ‘Soul state, whether in Christ, or not in Christ, reconciled to God by his Blood, or not reconciled?’ (C7). This was a common feeling amongst those interpreting their experiences, asking whether or not Christ died for them in particular. Despite these early doubts, the female relater testifies at the end of her experience that she ‘was raised from the dead by that Power which Christ himself was raised, *Ephes. 1.19, 20*’ and was ‘kept by no less Power to this very day’ (E6–E7). Directing this statement at her relatives who were not Independent church members like herself, she appealed to them to turn to ‘the work of God’ that would bring ‘home a lost creature’ and lead even ‘a blind sinner in the streight way to Life’ (E6”). By drawing on Ephesians 1:19-20, she emphasised the Lord’s ‘exceeding greatness’ to ‘us-ward who believe’, whose power was manifested in the raising of Christ from the dead. Even her relatives who were taken with episcopacy could be saved if they would only turn to the healing qualities of Christ’s sacrificial blood.

Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* also refers to recurring feelings of relief when he realised that Christ’s blood would purge his sins, and release him from under his heavy burden. He wrote, after describing how he was confirmed in the ‘Truth’ by the presence of false Quaker tenets, that ‘the guilt of sin did help me much, for still as that would come upon me, the blood of Christ did take it off again, and again, and again, and that too, sweetly, according to the Scriptures’.

For Bunyan, the presence of the opposition confirmed for him the truth of his feelings of election. His continuous crises of assurance, common in all spiritual testimonies, maintained his feelings that Christ had died for his sins, his blood continually purging and cleansing. Human beings were thought to be inherently sinful and corrupt, which led to the inclusion of many different episodes of crisis and assurance in spiritual testimonies, male and female. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* allegorises this sinful nature of mankind as a burden or pack upon Christian’s shoulders, which is ‘loosed from off his Shoulders’ at the sight of a Cross.

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84 Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, pp. 36-7.
and Sepulchre. The burden falls away into the mouth of the tomb and Christian is confronted with angels who mark him on his forehead and give him a ‘Roll with a Seal upon it’ that he subsequently goes on to misplace and regain. Representing salvation, ‘the assurance of his life, and acceptance at the desired Haven [representing heaven]’, the roll is given to those who had their sins forgiven by the dying of Christ on the cross, signified by the cross and tomb (p. 45). His sinful burden given to him at the Fall is removed by the sight and remembrance of Christ’s death on the cross. That this burden was often taken up as pain and suffering and later removed by God enabled believers, Bunyan wrote, to realise what Christ went through to take away their sin. As Anne Dunan-Page quotes, from Bunyan’s *Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659):

> the Lord goeth this way for this reason also, that it might make the soul sensible what it cost Christ to redeem it from death and hell. When a man cometh to feel the sting and guilt of sin, death, and hell upon his conscience, then, and not till then, can he tell what it cost Christ to redeem sinners.

Bunyan was not of the opinion that believers should imitate Christ, just that they should, as Dunan-Page writes, follow ‘solely in his conduct towards his tormentors, most notably his meekness at the time of his arrest’. Believers should, instead, remember the intensity of Christ’s sufferings in comparison with their own, which would make them ‘sensible’ of the sacrifice he made to redeem them from sin. Such suffering, Dunan-Page continues, ‘brought man closer to Christ’. Many of the women’s spiritual testimonies also speak of the burden of sin which for some became greater than they thought they could bear. Jane Turner feared that she ‘should sink under my burthen, temptations comming on me like the waves of the Sea’ but prayed and eventually God freed her ‘from that bondage by the manifestation of his love and grace though his Son’. Later, under temptation from Quaker principles, she was again ‘scarce able to bear my burthen’ (K5v), but after concluding that ‘there was something amiss in my Judgement as to those notions’ (K6) she wrote that ‘the Lord was pleased to recover me from them’ (K7v). Sarah Davy also wrote that she desired that ‘the Lord would ease me of my burden, which I thought to be very great often should I sit and bewail my sad condition; and be ready with *Job* to curse the day of my birth’, and Hannah Allen wrote in

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89 Turner, *Choice Experiences*, D6v; E1v.
fear that ‘if God should send some further trials, I should sink under them; and my Life be
made a burthen to me’. Only the continual reading of scripture and recording of God’s
providence would raise them up from under their burdens and sinking under the weight of
iniquity.

Believers who, after their initial assurances of salvation, undertook baptism, few of
whose testimonies survive in written or printed form, went further in their practices to
become closer to Christ. They took their example from Paul’s words on baptism to the
Romans at 6:4-5 where it is written:

> Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up
> from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For
> if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness
> of his resurrection.

The pushing of the heads and bodies of believers under the water signified the death and
burial of Christ in the tomb, and their emergence was like the ‘newness’ of life shown in
Christ’s resurrection. Dunan-Page quotes Henry Danvers’s *A Treatise of Baptism* for a ‘most
striking exposition’ of this idea: ‘Abiding under the Water, how little a while soever, denotes
his descent into Hell, even the very deepest of lifelessness, while lying in the sealed and
guarded Sepulchre, he was accounted as one dead’. If the minister did indeed push believers
down into the water, they would have no doubt been forced to consider the weight of sin
pushing them down and then feelings of release attributed to the redeeming power of Christ’s
death and resurrection. Deborah Huish, after long debating whether to be baptised into the
church at Loughwood saw from Romans 6:4-5 that it was her duty to undertake the
procedure. As she expected ‘advantage by the Lord Christ his death and Resurrection to my
poor soul’ she

> ought by my visible obedience to this his Command, to declare my putting him on, and being
> planted in the likeness of his death, being buried with him by Baptism into death; and also
> my being raised with and by him, and the Power of his Resurrection, unto newness of life’.

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90 Davy, *Heaven Realiz’d*, B8'; Allen, *A Narrative of God’s Gracious Dealings*, p. 14. These feelings were also
thought to be caused by melancholy. As Dunan-Page writes, ‘many contemporary commentators remarked, for
instance, that the melancholic generally complained of carrying a burden; Thomas Walkington regarded
melancholy as “the most unfortunate [of the four humours] and the greatest enemy to life”, giving the feeling
that “the soule is being pressed down with […] ponderous weight”, Walkington, *Optick Glasse of Humors*
91 Henry Danvers, *A Treatise of Baptism wherein that of Believers and that of Infants is Examined by the
87.
92 Huish, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, F3'-F4.
Being immersed under the water would be a re-enacting of the death of Christ, and emergence from beneath the surface would signify a new birth into her new congregation, as its elders were to write in the prefatory epistle to her work. The 1644 *Confession of Faith*, put forward by leading London Baptist William Kiffin, also writes of the importance of the link between baptism and Christ’s resurrection: ‘as certainly as the body is buried under water, and riseth againe, so certainly shall the bodies of the Saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of the resurrection, to reigne with Christ’.93 If believers wanted, as Huish wrote, ‘advantage’ from Christ’s resurrection, then they were asked to join with him in burial under the water before rising up, renewed. Katherine Sutton also declared from ‘mine own experience that [to] lose is the way to gain, [...], and death is the way to life’, drawing on Christ’s words: ‘he that looseth his life for my sake, saith Jesus Christ, the same shall find it [Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Luke 9:24], through the valey of tears lieth the way to the mountain of joy’.94 God had given her faith in Christ ‘who was exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give me repentance’, and made her willing, after some temptations, to ‘be baptised for the remission of sins’. Imitating the actions of the resurrection cleansed believers from their sin, and brought them to a new life in Christ.

Anna Trapnel’s untitled, 990-page folio, which Erica Longfellow has called a ‘Fifth Monarchist Bible’ because of ‘the large, monumental format of the book’, speaks in more detail about the ordinance of baptism than any other female-authored text of the period.95 Trapnel devotes much time, recorded in columns of continuous fourteeners, to advocating the practice of baptism, despite the slights of her enemies, and how it urged her to communicate to others how it had enriched her faith. In the verse recorded from her on 28 February 1657/8, she encourages others to ‘prize’ the ordinance of baptism and describes how Christ himself was baptised by fire (with the dove of the Holy Spirit) which she compares to the sense of sanctification and assurance, but also with water by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. ‘Christ, by his example’, she writes, showed that water-baptism ‘was not in vain’, and those that counted it ‘poor, mean, and lowe’ and worthy of rejection were merely ‘notioners’.96 Trapnel wrote that Christ did ‘so sweetly hold forth and show’ the ‘patern’ of full baptism that ‘the Lord did shew, he was well pleased / with this submission sweet’, therefore

96 Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 74.
believers should keep ‘a fixed eye’ on this ‘rare example’ (p. 75). Speaking later, on 2 January 1658, Trapnel reflects on her own joyful baptism to encourage others to partake of the same. She praises it, drawing on references from Romans 6:4-5:

Blessed be God for Baptism,  
That doth thy burial shew,  
And also thy Resurrection  
In its high shining glow.  
That is a very sweet Ordinance,  
That carries to the grave;  
And that holds forth the Resurrection  
That’s so powerful and brave.  
Is it not a precious institution  
That shews death, and rising up:  
That carries to the grave, and then  
Doth give the soul a pluck?  
Blessed be Baptism, O Lord,  
My soul doth love it dear;  
And O let all thy children  
In thine Ordinances appear. (p. 125)

In the first quatrain, Trapnel shows that believers’ baptism reflects Christ’s burial and the ‘shining glow’ of the resurrection, whereas the second reflects that the ordinance ‘carries to the grave’ whereupon the baptised elect would eventually be raised up to heaven. Asking her audience rhetorically if the ordinance is not ‘precious’, she proceeds to describe its practice as giving ‘the soul a pluck’ upon a believer’s death in the body. The soul of a baptised believer who had reflected Christ’s resurrection with baptism in the flesh, Trapnel thought, would be pulled sharply up to heaven. She says later: ‘[Baptism] shews my soul an enterence / Into salvations gate’ (p. 125). After this question, she moves back to addressing the Lord, saying that she prayed that all of his children would undertake his ordinances and join him in eternal glory. Trapnel also refers to her belief in the cleansing properties of baptism by immersion, declaring that ‘it is not the outward washing, but / Inward cleansing’ that the Lord intends by the ordinance: ‘according to record’ (p. 126). The next quatrain draws explicit parallels with the ‘cleansing and healing of his bloud’ that, she says, ‘revives my soul, / And quickens every part’ (p. 126), showing that the purging with the waters of baptism reflects/represents the washing away of sins by Christ’s blood. ‘Through [God’s] grace’, she says, ‘I did arise / As a cleansed washed mould’ (p. 127 mispag. 129). Although referring to herself as a ‘mould’ of God’s making, she could also be alluding to the idea of a believer as a ‘mould’ or vessel to be filled with the words and prophecies of God. It was the event of her baptism, she writes, that caused her to ‘behold’ to others Christ’s ‘resurrection rare’ (p. 127).
Trapnel also records the devices Satan used to keep her from the ordinance of baptism, and linked his endeavours with more political obstructions to the practice. Upon seeing a ‘bright Angel’ that told her to be baptised, she began to consider of it, but received doubts and temptations from the Devil. She declared that at this time:

O it was shewed unto me  
What Baptism was not:  
And here Satan did take advantage:  
He gave to me a Cut:  
He also brought some curious Speculations  
For to tickle my ear;  
But the Lord he did keep my soul,  
That I to them did not hear. (p. 129)

Here, Trapnel uses the idea that the Devil’s claw caused wounds which he pricked on occasion of their doubts and sorrows, giving her a ‘cut’. He took advantage by attempting to persuade her to leave off from the ordinance using the ‘curious Speculations’ of others to tempt her away. In an earlier prophecy she likens Quaker doctrines to the lies of the Devil (p. 49), and refers to those who would deny the importance of baptism, or practise it in an incorrect fashion. She had ‘many Objections’ against the ordinance, as it was ‘hated by many’, ‘but the Spirit laid them flat’ (p. 125). Katherine Sutton also recorded that

Satan for some time laboured to hinder mee in obeying the Lord in this piece of service, with this temptation, that by this means a death (in all likelyhood and in an eye of reason) would fall upon my livelyhood, but God made it a furtherance to mee and to others also, so that many of us were at that time (after waiting on God by fasting and prayer) baptized together.97

Tempted to abandon Baptist doctrines, which would have conceivably done great damage to her livelihood as a governess, Sutton read scriptures (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48) to establish the practice’s validity and fasted and prayed for guidance. Satan also assaulted Deborah Huish while she was establishing the validity of the ordinance, and her brother-in-law John Vernon interprets her uncertainty as the ‘subtle slights Satan used […] to hinder her obedience to the Commandments of Christ, and particularly to that of Baptisme; presenting it as a poor low thing’.98 She, too, seemed to recognise the part of Satan in her doubts and wrote of ‘some fears on my heart, about my being carried on in that duty, which I see to be so contemn’d and despised: but did judge, these were but the tempters suggestions’ (E5). For Trapnel, baptism itself was the way to repel the ‘Antichrist’ which she thought had a ‘great

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98 Huish, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, b8.
footing’ in England at the time she was prophesying. ‘Water-Baptism [...] (Performed in Christ's way)’ (p. 139) would stand up against the antichrist and his followers, and it was her responsibility to advocate and justify the practice so that she would bring more children to Christ. It was the Lord, she said, who ‘opened my mouth, that so / I might of him declare’ (p. 126).

It was extremely important to the separatist and Baptist women discussed in this chapter to speak of their knowledge and experience of Christ’s resurrection, and what it meant to them. Women were said to be closer to God in their more smarting physical sufferings, their proneness to melancholy, and more subject to the deceptions of the Devil because of Eve’s temptation at the Fall. This would have made them more reliable witnesses of the power of God to subdue the Devil, and of the power of Christ’s blood to forgive and cleanse the soul of all sin, and this perhaps in part explains the high number of female spiritual experiences published in this period compared to other female-authored genres. Katherine Sutton goes some way to explain to her readers why she thought her experiences were valid testimonies to the work of the Lord at the end of her *A Christian Woman’s Experiences*, where she dwells on the part of Mary Magdalene in the resurrection story. Sutton writes of Mary’s devotion to Christ, following him ‘to the last’, ‘gonig [sic] early in the morning to the sepulchre’ to discover that he had risen from the dead.99 She draws attention to the fact that ‘Christ put this honour upon [Mary Magdalene], that she must bring the first glad tidings of the Gospel of the resurrection unto the Disciples’, later asserting that women are required by God, to ‘honour him as well as men’ (E4v) as the ‘free grace of God’ was granted both ‘to the one as the other’ (F1). As Mary had been given the great honour of spreading the good news of Christ’s resurrection, Sutton thought women should have the opportunity to speak of what Christ had done for them taken from their own personal experience. She also dealt with the accusation that women were more sinful because of the events of the Fall and uses Mary’s story, as well as the story of his speaking with a woman of Samaria, as proof of God’s love to sinners:

Christ herein shewed his great Love to sinners; for she [Mary Magdalene] being a poor ignorant woman, though full of affection, did as many of us do now a dayes, seek the living among the dead: but where Christ keeps up the affections of a soul to himself, he manifests more the knowledge of himself; and Christ doth testify in John. 4. [34] That it was his meat and drink to do his fathers will, and that was to teach the poor the knowledge of his will. And when he made known himself to that poor woman [of Samaria], her affections were so

enlarged that she goes and calls others [John 4:28-9]. Thus Christ finished the work of his father, to take care of the weakest of his flock, that as the woman was first in the transgression, she might have first knowledge of the resurrection, the gift of the well of water, which springs up unto everlasting life [John 4:14]; and that gift God is pleased to give it unto women as well as unto men. (E4')

Sutton refers to Christ’s conversing with a woman of Samaria at a well whom he amazes by telling her that she has had five husbands and lives with a man she has not married (4:18). The woman is also astonished that Jesus talks with her at all, because she is a Samaritan. Despite the disciples’ amazement upon discovering him talking to such a woman, Jesus tells her that the water he could give her, opposed to the water in the well, would spring up from a well inside her to everlasting life (4:14) and she would never thirst if she would believe. The woman then goes into Jerusalem and spreads word of remarkable things she had heard and caused many to follow Christ. Sutton uses this story to illustrate that, as Christ told Mary Magdalene of the resurrection, he also told a sinful and despised woman the secrets to his kingdom, and that she went forth and spread the news. She thought that it was fair that women, although the most sinful and the first to transgress, should have the ‘first knowledge of the resurrection’ and the ‘honour’ of speaking it to others. This is what all the women in this thesis suggest, that they should be able to spread the good news of what God had done for them in their ‘new births’.
Chapter Four

‘Living Testimony’: The Use of Exemplary Spiritual Experiences in Separatist and Particular Baptist Communities

This I trust will be a faithful remembrance and helper of us in this great work, in which I hope the Lord will have much glory, and his people comfort.¹

The publishing of separatist and Particular Baptist women’s experiences helped to preserve precious experiences and evangelise drooping spirits, especially in times of persecution. Katherine Sutton’s *A Christian Woman’s Experiences of the Glorious Working of God's Free Grace* was published at Rotterdam ‘for the Edification of others’ in 1663. Sutton had travelled across the seas from her native England in search of religious toleration. Following the restoration of Charles II to the throne, the ghosts of the Fifth Monarchist insurrections continued to plague those in authority, and anyone suspected of subscribing to those opinions was soon incarcerated. Hanserd Knollys, the Particular Baptist minister who wrote the preface to Sutton’s work, was imprisoned in Newgate prison for eighteen weeks before he travelled to the Netherlands, and it is highly likely that Sutton and her family joined him there soon after.² It was on this particular journey that Sutton’s ship was wrecked on a sandbank where the ‘Master’ of the vessel declared: ‘we are dead persons, and like to loose our lives’.³ Remarkably, she and some others found a passage to the shore by a sandy strip which caused her to rejoice and see their recovery as a sign for the whole of England: ‘As thy deliverance is, so shall England’s be, when they are brought to greatest straits, then will deliverance be from God’ (C4). What were not delivered in this ordeal were Sutton’s ‘papers of [her] experiences [...] which were lost’ (C3v) and she attributed this to God’s displeasure at her neglecting to publish this evidence of free grace that he had offered her. She vowed to produce them again and, seemingly in answer to her prayers, she wrote that his ‘Spirit’ came

² Kenneth G. C. Newport, ‘Hanserd Knollys’, *ODNB*. Newport also shows that Knollys returned to England ‘via Rotterdam’ in 1663/4 which matches both the preface and publication date of the work. Sutton records that the persecution of religious ministers was strengthened by the Act of Uniformity of 1662 where ‘our Teachers were removed into corners, and thrown into prisons’. See Sutton, *A Christian Woman’s Experiences*, D3v. Her experiences were no doubt meant to comfort and edify her fellow sufferers. For Knollys see also Dennis Bustin, ‘Hanserd Knollys and the Formation of Particular Baptist Identity in Seventeenth-Century London’, in *Baptist Identities: International Studies from the Seventeenth – Twentieth Century*, ed. by Ian M. Randall, Tovio Pilli, and Anthony R. Cross (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 3-21.
to be her ‘remembrancer to write again: and indeed it did so, not long after, in the night; both
in song, and in prayer’ (C3v). Knollys evidently saw the profitableness of Sutton’s words,
made up of prophesying songs as well as spiritual experiences, and sought to justify and
promote them in his three-page preface. He also accounted for their ‘fragmentary’
appearance, the author having no notes to refer to, by likening her experiences to ‘crumbs’
from Christ:

When our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST had fed many with a few Lo[a]ves, he
commanded his Disciples to gather up the Fragments, that nothing be lost, John 6:12. And
when God was pleased to pour out of this Spirit upon some of his faithful servants in our
Generation, he had also some of his Handmaides [Joel 2:29], who gathered up the Crumes of
that spiritual Bread, which the Lord blessed and distributed among his Disciples: Of which
Number this holy Matron was one. (*1v)

Using the image of crumbs left over from Christ’s feeding of the five thousand, Knollys
shows that no work of God (however small) should be lost. Even more significant is that he
validates the publishing of her work, recovering the fragments of experience as a ‘handmaid’
of God, equal to the male disciples of Christ. The publishing of the experience, Knollys
writes, was to the end ‘that God would not have these Fragments (which she hath gathered
into her Basket) to be lost’ (*1v). As part of the gathered churches, Knollys promoted the idea
that any memory or experience, no matter how small, should be recorded for the benefit of all
God’s people: to strengthen and edify.

As chapters two and three have shown, the gathering of spiritual experiences, or
episodes when the believer felt the presence of God, was an important part of Puritan life,
especially for separatist and Particular Baptists. It was a requirement of these gathered
churches that all potential members declare their experiences in front of the congregation to
show the working of God on their hearts, and some of these oral testimonies made it into
print, often lengthened. It seems likely that believers joining the gathered churches were very
familiar with giving an account of God’s revealing his grace to them, whether discussing this
publicly, in front of the church, or at home with family and friends. John Bunyan depicts such
a conversation in his own published spiritual experience, Grace Abounding, where he sees
‘three or four poor women sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God’.

He drew near ‘being now willing to hear them discourse, [...] for I was now a brisk talker also
my self in the matters of Religion’, but decided the women, ‘were far above out of my reach’.
Although Bunyan had believed he was well versed in religious ideas, the sight of these poor

women talking (who might well have been illiterate) opened out to him ‘a new world’. He wrote:

their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature: they talked how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported against the temptations of the Devil; moreover, they reasoned of the suggestions and temptations of Satan in particular, and told to each other by which they had been afflicted, and how they were born up under his assaults: they also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief, and did contemn, slight and abhor their own righteousness, as filthy, and insufficient to do them any good. (p. 14)

These words are evidence of a thriving oral transmission of experiences. The women tell each other how they came to be convinced of God’s grace, including which promises or scriptures had enabled this change or ‘new birth’, and also how they had been supported against the Devil’s temptations. They also described to each other how they had conquered the continuing assaults of Satan, and how they continued to struggle with their own wretchedness, surely finding strength by sharing their common failings. Other evidence for this spread of oral testimony, on a larger (and, the authorities thought, a more worrying) scale, was the way in which Anna Trapnel, on her journey to the West Country, spread her experiences through listening to and teaching those she met. She records that she visited the house of a Mrs Hill, near Truro, and was followed by curious onlookers who desired her to speak to ‘give an account for their edification and satisfactions, what God had done for [her] soul’. The recounting of her experience of grace was required by the onlookers, it seems, to teach them and simultaneously qualify herself as one of God’s elect. She wrote that she ’spake of so many things, and so largely, that it took up the afternoon for the most part’, which she did not include in her Report and Plea ‘for brevities sake’ (D1). These experiences she later wrote down, but only after she used them orally to teach and evangelise: ‘I could not have related so much from the shallow memory I have naturally, but through often relating these things, they become as a written book, spread open before me, and after which I write’ (G1”). After repeating her experiences and refashioning them to different audiences, Trapnel is then able to write them down as a coherent narrative that would have engaged her listeners, and then readers. This also highlights the importance of remembering such valuable experience and preserving it for both the upholding of personal faith, and the edifying of other godly people.

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5 Trapnel, Report and Plea, C8v.
The actual practice of recording these evidences of God’s grace seems to have varied. Those women who could afford to spent time writing regularly in the private space of their ‘closets’, whether notes, scriptures or full narratives. Women who were engaged in family affairs, or in service like Sutton, who was a governess, seemed to have had less time and inclination to undertake this regular writing. Sutton’s first attempt at recording her experiences involved her remembering ‘thirty years experiences’ before which she had to ‘set my house in order, that I might go about this work that the Lord had called me unto’ (C3). Sara Jones, who wrote a relation of her experiences under the Laudian High Commission court, records similarly that she had to write through the night by candlelight, ‘having not time in regard of my duties of my familie’ during the day. Although looking after one’s own spiritual estate was important, Sutton recognised that it was not wise to ‘neglect family duties, for I have found by good experience many wrought upon by instructions and prayer’ (D2v). Teaching her family was a way to promote her own spiritual experiences, and nurture those of her children. For a gentlewoman, writing regularly seems to have been more manageable. Anne Venn’s experiences and meditations were written in her closet to encourage others and discovered there after her death, and Sarah Davy’s prefatory writer, ‘A. P.’ advised others to follow in his subject’s practice of ‘duly calling in her own heart, [...] and self reflexion, Praying, Reading, Meditation, being her Morning and Evening exercise’. Her work consisted of ‘choice experiences, ravishments of Divine Love, admirations of grace, holy praises, sweet supports under tryals, with the account she used to take of her self of hearing the word’ (A8v). This spiritual record-keeping was to build up a store of encouragements that could be referred to if the believer experienced difficulties and to further convince them that they were one of God’s elect. The importance of keeping such a record, including comforting passages from scripture, is expressed by the anonymous female writer of Conversion Exemplified:

Many other comforts, at sundry times, from several Scriptures, were given in, fitted to the temptation that I was at such times under, which I have sinfully forgotten, the Lord pardon me in much mercy: Some I can give the better account of, because I wrote them in a Paper-book, which I have now by me.

This anonymous female convert was on her death-bed when she dictated these lines, and it is clear that a record of the Lord’s comforts was particularly helpful at this time. It is also

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7 Venn, A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning; Davy, Heaven Realiz‘d, B1.
8 Anon., Conversion Exemplified, D7.
important to recognise that she, and other believers, thought that to forget a work of God (a ‘crumb’ that could be preserved) was offensive and sinful. Davy berated herself for being apt ‘to forget the rock of my salvation’ (B5v) advising believers to record their experiences: ‘let not the gratious tast of his love slip out of thy remembrance but whilst he hath given thee life improve [enlarge] these mercies and the talent he hath lent thee, to his own glory [Matthew 25:14-30]’ (C7). She then asks: ‘how many pretious evidences hast thou lost, for want of remembring them’ (C7). Sutton says that she was more reluctant to write her experiences and it took God to ‘set [it] upon my heart in the night, that I must writte’ (C3). Remembering ‘thirty years experience’ was a daunting prospect for her, but the Lord encouraged her to continue with scriptural promises. She acknowledges that the published result was made up of fragments and pleads that old age had caused her memory to deteriorate: ‘I am an old fruitless branch [John 15:2, 6], my memory failes, and my understanding is so dull, that I am (and was at the best) a poor empty one’ (C3). This is surely Sutton expressing the modesty that was expected of a woman publishing, but it also testifies to the truth of her expressions: although much diminished, she implies that the memories have not been tampered with. Knollys defended the fragmentary quality of Sutton’s experience asking her readers not to be ‘offended with the broakenness of any matter, which thou mayest meet with’, and compared the naturalness of her relating to that of the ebbing and flowing of the sea: ‘will any who lives upon the sea coast think the frequent Ebbing & flowing of the tyde a strange thing. Neither will any experienced Christian marvel at the suddain Ebbing and flowing of joyes, and sorrowes in the hearts of Saints’ (*2). Other women’s narratives were defended by their prefatory writers for being fragmented or ‘scattered’. Jane Turner’s husband thought her experience would be ‘profitable to some precious souls [...]’, though it be written but in a broken, scattering way’. Like Sutton, she says that she preferred this method to exaggerating her memories, in case she wrote ‘something which was not’ (C2v).

Turner also realised that although ‘finding from sad experience’ that she was ‘prone to forget the particulars’, the remembrance of God’s evidences she thought was ‘much for the glory of God, and for [her] own comfort and profit, especially in times of trial and temptations’ (C1v-C2). Those which she judged to be ‘most considerable’ she resolved to write down (C2). John Bunyan advised his congregation, when he was imprisoned apart from them (around 1666), to

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9 Turner, Choice Experiences, B7v.
look diligently, and leave no corner therein unsearched, for there is treasure hid, even the treasure of your first and second experience of the grace of God toward you. Remember I say, the Word that first laid hold upon you; remember your terrors of conscience, and fear of death and hell.10

The remembrance of these experiences would bring such a treasure-trove of examples and comforts to the believer that they would be forever nourished by spiritual riches. It would also remind them what life was like before they came to believe they had received God’s grace, and to contrast their previous, unregenerate lives with their experiences of grace. An Collins also saw her thoughts and experiences in this way. Her most comforting ‘observation [...] that her memory had registered’ was that God was the ‘Rock of his Elect’, which meant that he would uphold her in all her trials, and she writes of how she thought of preserving this most precious thought:

In which review of mentall store,
One note affordeth comforts best,
Cheifly to be preser[ve]d therefore,
As in a Cabinet or Chest
One jewell may exceed the rest.11

These crumbs and fragments of thought were treasured by the saints, preserved for future need, either by themselves, or by others in need. John Rogers believed that the experiences of ordinary men and women could be of more use than scriptural figures, as readers could immediately identify with situations they recognised. Ordinary godly men and women could produce sparkling jewels of experience, vivid and affecting. Introducing the collected spiritual accounts of members of his church at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, he wrote:

That Astrologer, sayes one, was sufficiently laughed at, that looking so intensely upon the Stars, and staring with so much amazement at their twinkling, tumbled (unawares) over head and eares into the water; whereas, had it pleased him to have looked lower in the water, he might have seen them lively represented in that Christal glasse; so many doe but undo themselves, and are over head and ears, that look so high at first.12

Rogers, using allegory, justifies the collecting of his gathered church’s experiences by showing that each one is the reflection of a star in the water, the stars being the prophets and scriptural figures. The astrologer, trying to follow the stars, is ‘amazed’ and falls because he tries to reach beyond his ability, and would have seen experiences nearer and of similar godliness reflected in the water (the reflections in the water are identical). The congregation’s

10 Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 5.
12 Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh*, p. 360.
experiences ‘twinkled’ as jewels and were ‘lively represented’ by the water reflecting as a ‘christal glasse’. Chrystal glass had a high degree of transparency, which Rogers uses to show that the water reflects the stars with no defects: the experiences perfectly reflect those from scripture, except they were easier to reach. Anne Venn was one believer, although not of Rogers’s church, who looked to scriptural examples for all she did and recorded them in her spiritual diary. She testified to feeling disheartened when reading of biblical figures. She recounted that ‘when I read of the patience of Job, I am discouraged, because I am so peevish; when I read of the holiness of David, who prayed seven times a day, and many times in the night rising to prayer, this discourageth me’.13 Venn, like many believers who joined gathered churches, found solace in like-minded friends who shared their experiences with one another, for the benefit of the whole congregation.

Writers of conversion experiences that were intended to be published expressed a desire to help others by giving them advice and guidance on their way to conviction of grace, while also simultaneously glorifying God by publishing his work. The anonymous female speaker of Conversion Exemplified stated that her reasons for composing the narrative detailing God’s dealings with her were ‘but to give God the glory of his dealing with me’, but also to ‘bring’ the reader ‘to happiness the like way’.14 The male prefatory writer calls the transcript of her experiences a ‘History’ (A2) of the work of conversion on her up until her death. He writes that

she could not quietly think on dying, till she had caused as much as (in so languishing an estate as she as in) she could call to mind, to be written down, that by the publishing of it, God might be glorified, and souls by her example receive some guidance, comfort and establishment. (A2”)

Evidently, the anonymous woman writer felt that God’s grace towards her should be preserved even though her body was failing. She shares with her readers the comforts she received when fearing that she would be damned, and believed that her ‘case was peculiar, and none ever like me before’ (C4). It was only the continued reading and preserving of the verse 1 Corinthians 10:13 (‘No temptation hath befallen you, but that which is common to man; [...]’) that made her believe that hers were common temptations, and ones that she would be able to overcome.15 Others reading the testimony would have been encouraged to keep their faith that the Lord would not tempt them more than they could bear. An Collins

13 Venn, A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning, p. 98.
14 Anon., Conversion Exemplified, E6.
15 The anonymous gentlewoman uses the Geneva version in the second half of the reference.
wrote of the advantage of other believers recording God’s grace, in comparison with those who wrote with ‘sounder judgments’:

Indeed I grant that sounder judgments may
(Directed by a greater Light) declare
The ground of Truth more in a Gospel-way,
But who time past with present will compare
Shall find more mysteries unfolded are,
So that they may who have right informacion
More plainly shew the path-way to Salvacion.16

Whereas Collins shows that though others might ‘declare the ground of truth’ in a more learned way, she, who compares her ‘past’ unregenerate life with her ‘present’ experiences of God’s ‘unfolded’ grace would ‘more plainly’ show believers the way to salvation. Those in possession of God’s grace, who have been through doubt, uncertainty, and self-examination, would have the best information to show others the way through their writing. Information, spread by the publishing testimonies, was the way to salvation.

It seems the case, from testimonies that survive, that separatist and Baptist women’s written experiences were more prevalent in the mid-seventeenth century than we might expect. It is possible that intervening generations may have preserved pious female works over those of their male contemporaries, but the prevalence of these testimonies is worth exploring further. In Catie Gill’s exploration of women’s authorship in the Quaker corpus she cites Joad Raymond’s figures showing that women were much less likely to be published in the mid-seventeenth century than men. He notes that ‘the incidence of female authorship more than doubled after 1641’ but still only reached within the region of 1 per cent of total publications.17 Gill compares the writing of Quaker woman, which her sources estimate to be ‘5.7 per cent of the overall Quaker output’, to this lower figure, and observes that ‘their

17 Joad Raymond, Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 300. Raymond based his figures on Patricia Crawford, ‘Women’s Published Writings, 1600-1700’, in Women in English Society, 1500-1800, ed. by Mary Prior (New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 265-74; Maureen Bell and John Barnard, ‘Provisional Count of STC Titles 1475-1640’, Publishing History, 31 (1992), 48-64; ‘Provisional Count of Wing Titles 1641-1700’, Publishing History, 55 (1998), 89-97. Elaine Hobby has also shown that women’s works ‘form less than one per cent of the total number of texts in the period’ (Virtue of Necessity: English Women’s Writing 1649-88 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), p. 6). She writes that this figure was estimated by comparing her figures for women’s writing with Wilmer Mason, ‘The Annual Output of Wing-Listed Titles 1649-1684’, Library, 29 (1974), 219-20. Hobby also points out that Crawford’s figures are ‘distorted by her listing only numbers of texts published, not numbers of authors. Of the texts she identifies as published by women in the 1640s, 51 were written by Lady Eleanor Douglas’ (‘“Discourse so Unsavoury”: Women’s Published Writings of the 1650s’, in Women, Writing, History: 1640-1740, ed. by Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (London: Batsford, 1992), p. 199, n. 3).
presence was greater than other women at the time. This of course, is not an estimation of Quaker spiritual experiences, but a comparison of the relative frequency of women’s writing amongst Quakers in comparison with non-Quaker texts. If we were to estimate an equivalent percentage for separatist and Baptist women’s contribution to the overall output of their male contemporaries, the figure would surely be lower than that for Quaker women. Where separatist and Baptist women’s writings seem to have appeared more frequently in print is in their publishing of spiritual experiences. Taking a list of spiritual experiences published during the period of this study (1632-1675) from Owen Watkins’s *The Puritan Experience* gives nineteen male-authored testimonies that are not by Quakers, Presbyterians, or Muggletonians. In comparison, Watkins has only five published separatist or Particular Baptist women’s experiences, to which this thesis can add twelve more. Indeed, if we only count those testimonies that were by Baptists alone, there appears to be almost equal numbers published by both sexes, with possibly more by women. These figures certainly have their problems: religious classifications are fluid, and many of the writers changed their religious opinions at least once during their lives. Women also seem to have joined gathered churches and roughly equal numbers, particularly those of the Baptists, although this is offset by their lack of education, and opportunities by which to publish. While this evidence is very speculative, it does indicate that women’s experiences were likely to have been at least as popular, if not more so, than male testimonies.

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18 Gill, *Women’s Writing in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community*, p. 5.
19 See Owen Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). Given that Watkins did not have access to *Early English Books Online*, work also needs to be done to gain a more accurate estimate of male experiential writings.
22 Although contemporary accounts aligned women with heresy, church record books that are still extant record roughly equal numbers of men and women joining the gathered churches.
Evidence for the prevalence of male or female testimonies is scarce in the sources themselves. When Jane Turner wrote her *Choice Experiences*, with the defence that she only did so while her husband was away, she did so with apprehension: ‘I thought I might seem to some to walk in an untrodden path, I having never seen any thing written before in this manner or method’.23 Although, as Watkins points out, there had been spiritual experiences published before hers of 1653, including the collected testimonies of John Rogers and those prefaced by Vavasor Powell appearing in 1653 and 1652, Turner does not seem to have read any such testimony to inform her own. It is possible that neither testimony had reached her in Newcastle, where she was situated because her husband Captain John was in the army, and it seems clear from the narrative that she had begun the work well before the date it was published. It is also set out differently from the experiences of Rogers and Powell, including six ‘notes of Experience’ and then lengthy ‘observations’ following each note, allowing her to interpret the experience sufficiently both for herself and her readers. She was ‘well satisfied’ that her ‘foot-steps will be found as for matter, so for method and manner, among the foot-steps of the flock of Christ’ (B8). Referring to the Song of Solomon 1:8, which advises ‘If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock’, Turner is showing that her work, in its content (matter) and the way it was written, could show other believers how to follow the footsteps of the godly. Turner, who was already feeding ‘besides the Shepheards Tents’, was satisfied that her spiritual journey to redemption (depicted in the footsteps) would be helpful to others searching for God’s grace. John Spilsbury, who most likely baptised Turner and her husband, wrote the preface to her work. He explained that he gave his ‘testimony unto so worthy a work as this’ because it was ‘a work that is not common amongst men, being the work of a Daughter of Zion, nay I may say a Mother in Israel’ (B2). Spilsbury’s words are ambiguous: is her work not common amongst men because it is so good or because it was a rarity for a woman to publish such a work? The latter seems most likely, but then there is also the question of who he means by ‘amongst men’? Is her text rare amongst male testimonies in particular, or rare amongst all the written works of the saints? In any case, Spilsbury shows that Turner’s published experience is remarkable enough to promote her from a ‘Daughter of Zion’ to a ‘Mother in Israel’. ‘Zion’ is the term for a long awaited heaven on earth, whereas ‘Israel’ has connotations of this having already arrived. Perhaps Spilsbury is showing that Turner has gone through travail in order to bring forth her text, and so bringing forth others, much like the images of the ‘new

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birth’ discussed in chapter three. She is to be a revered mother, who has suffered for the cause of the saints. Her other prefatory writer, John Gardner, wrote similarly:

If this may be instrumental to bring forth the additional experiences of other Saints, it will be a good president, especially in this age, in which Saints time hath been occasionally taken up more in building the walls of the true Sion, than in discovering the treasures of Grace and inward Glory of Christ in the soul. These inward Experiences are not intended to limit others, but to provoke self-examination and spiritual quickning. (B67)

Here, Turner is shown to encourage, being an ‘instrument’, the ‘bringing forth’ of other believers’ experiences by her example. She would seem to have set a ‘president’ for the discovery of the ‘inward Glory of Christ in the soul’ not meant to limit, but help others to expand their feelings of God’s grace. She seems to be doing a textual version of what John Bunyan claims to have felt when preaching when he says: ‘I have really been in pain, and have as it were travelled to bring forth Children to God’.24 Like Sara Jones, who urged women to write and speak and be instruments to bring forth new believers, Turner is also evangelising and bringing more souls to the love of God.

Conversion narratives like Turner’s were valued highly by separatist and Baptist congregations as they confirmed existing evidence that they were part of God’s chosen people. As Owen Watkins writes, these works were ‘thus the answer to the Papist challenge, Where are your saints to testify to the truth of your religion?’25 These ‘crumbs’ of experience testified to the truth and were to be as valuable as the Catholic saints were to followers of their faith, and as the Marian martyrs were to the Anglican church. Such examples helped the creation of a shared history for believers to refer to in times of trouble, and this seems to have been one of the main reasons that two collections of experiences were published within two years; 1653 was also the same year that Jane Turner’s experience appeared. The first of these collections, *Spirituall Experiences, of Sundry Beleevers*, includes the testimonies of sixty-one men and women, who were likely all to have been members of the gathered congregation of Henry Walker, probably in Knightsbridge, Westminster.26 These believers’ works were prefaced by Vavasor Powell who calls them ‘good Scribes’ that ‘out of their Treasuries have

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26 See Powell and Walker, *Spirituall Experiences of Sundry Beleevers*. According to Joad Raymond, ‘a printed sermon delivered by him before Cromwell at Somerset House on 17 June 1650 describes him as “minister of Gods word, at Knightsbridge in Middlesex” [A Sermon Preached in the Chappell at Sommerset-House (London: Printed for Robert Ibbitson, 1650]. He was appointed to the living of St Martin Vintry, College Hill, London, in 1655’ (Raymond, ‘Henry Walker’, *ODNB*). Collected at the end of *Spirituall Experiences* is a ‘Confession of Faith’ of the members of the chapel at Somerset House.
been able to bring things new and old, for the refreshing, comforting, and supplying of many poore souls, which otherwise had been in extreame want and distresse’. 27 As An Collins sought to preserve and present her most precious jewel, the believers of Walker’s congregation shared their riches of God’s grace with those who were in dire need of spiritual sustenance. Powell continued by comparing their experiences to a floating aid when ‘the flouds of temptnation over-flow, and overwhelme the poore distressed, doubting, despairing, and drowning soule’ (A2v). These experiences would ‘hold up the soules-head above water, till the Arke returnde’: referring to God’s purging flood, depicted in Genesis, Powell writes that the congregation’s experiences would hold believers afloat while they were waiting for Noah’s ark with the chosen few aboard to return and save them. John Rogers, in his collection Ohel or Beth-shemesh, also promoted his congregation’s experiences in a similar way. He advised the congregation, which met in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, to ‘treasure up for afterwards’ their experiences as in Matthew’s Gospel: ‘Do ye not remember the five loaves [...] have yee not laid up these experiences! to furnish you for future? for a time of need? In adversity and want?’ 28 Referring to the same incident in the Gospels as in Knollys in his preface to Katherine Sutton’s experience, Rogers also advocates the storing up and preserving of experience, likening it to a time of war. He advises saints to ‘lay up this Ammunition, and provision for a Siege-time, seeing the enemy is making ready every day against us’ (pp. 387-8). Revealingly, Rogers’s experiences are intended as ‘provision’ for saints, as food or nurture, but they are also meant to work simultaneously as ‘ammunition’ to fight against enemies of the word, and unbelief.

These collected testimonies are useful in suggesting what in particular made certain experiences ‘worth publishing’. Powell recommended the ‘little Booke’ of Walker’s testimonies as worth ‘buying, reading, and perusing’ (A3) because of their being comforts to others in the like condition, but it must also be true that both men wanted the book to sell. The only extant versions of the text are of the second edition which, according to the title page, was enlarged with the experiences of forty-two believers. Evidently, it was thought that more experiences would be profitable both to the writers, publishers, and readers. The ‘Table of Conversions’ which includes the most remarkable parts of each believer’s experience, and which works as a contents page, suggests that readers were expected to refer back to experiences when they needed particular support. It is also worth commenting that these

27 Powell and Walker, Spirituall Experiences, of Sundry Beleevers, A2.
28 Rogers, Ohel and Beth-shemesh, pp. 387-8.
sentences refer to the most attention-grabbing part of each person’s experience: phrases like living in ‘three years terror’, being converted ‘with a peice of a Bible in a barne’, ‘seven years temptation to kill her selfe’, and being converted ‘by a young infant, when she went to a Pond to drown her selfe’, are intriguing and would have encouraged readers to go on, or to buy the book in the first place (A3v). While many of the testimonies are quite remarkable in content, the structure of each follows a basic pattern culminating in a series of proofs or signs that the convert had received God’s grace. As Watkins observes, ‘the range of texts – often given in the Geneva translation – is surprisingly small’: Matthew 11:28 occurs ‘twenty-four times’. However, rather than just being used as ‘proofs of a redeemed condition’, Watkins suggests that they are a ‘public avowal of sincerity and faith’, and this is certainly supported by the inclusion of ‘the manner of the discipline, and practise of the gathered Churches’ added to the end of the book. The testimonies, along with this description of the practices of the gathered churches, as well as providing a reference for converted believers, would have advertised the church to those unconverted or even those who were critical of the new churches. A template letter is also appended to the experiences outlining the congregation’s procedure for ‘the putting out of a scandalous Member’ ([IV]3) with gaps that could be filled in with the offending member’s name, the congregation’s pastor, and details of how long they had ‘walked together’ as a church. It is probable that these parts were added to the second edition, along with the forty-two extra experiences. The later experiences are shorter and less remarkable than the earlier, more sensational, ones, which could indicate that the earlier experiences were selected because their conversions were more persuasive and violent. It might also suggest that the later ones were given with the aim of joining an already established congregation, with these believers have an implicit encouragement to follow the pattern more strictly, and to be briefer in giving their accounts. It is perhaps not surprising that women and men privileged certain ‘crumbs’ or fragments of experience over others, especially if it was for the purpose of joining a congregation. As circulation of these experiences increased by voice, manuscript, and print, believers, consciously or not, knew what ‘crumbs’ to observe and preserve in their accounts making them seem rather conventional: ‘after all’, as Catie Gill writes, ‘such narratives were used to assess “fitness for admission” to a religious movement or sect’. Perhaps we should ask instead why these

experiences are different, rather than why they are same. Believers placed great importance on their individual experiences of God’s grace, and Walker’s collection, especially the earlier accounts, reflect this: there are some remarkable experiences, even if the overall pattern is the same. Walker would also have been aware of what sort of material would have affected readers. He was a journalist, as well as a preacher, and had published *Occurrences of Certain Speciell and Remarkable Passages* which became *Perfect Occurrences*, and, in the late 1640s, some other short-lived newsbooks. As Joad Raymond writes, Walker’s newsbooks ‘profited from advertising’, and it seems likely that if he gathered the experiences of the church, he would have his readers most firmly in mind. Not only would more individual and exciting experiences encourage readers to buy, read, and be affected by such stories, but they also made the conversion experience more remarkable: there was hope for even the worst or most despairing of sinners.

John Rogers’s collection also contains evidence that he chose certain experiences over others to put in his collection, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh*. He described two different ways that God had revealed his grace to members of the congregation, and refers to those he decided to publish. He listed how grace is made known to believers:

First, by *Revelation*, as when God reveals it to a poor soule (under *extraordinary* sad temptations, and soule-miseries) by *extraordinary* wayes, many times in *dreams* and *visions*, and voices, [.] or else secondly, by the *operation* of the *Spirit* (*& per aliqua signa* [by some sign]) in the wonder-working, and changing *effects* of grace; [.] and findest a great *change* in thy judgement, will, and affections [.]... And such kinde of *experiences* I could produce *abundance*, and intended it, but that I am this very week prevented [anticipated, OED I] by a little piece, tituled, *Spiritual Experiences of Sundry Beleevers* recommended by Mr Powel; yet how ever I shall instance some of both these sorts of *Experiences* in such as are the most *remarkable* and picked out, as they were given in at Dublin by such as were *admitted*; the rather for that I finde not the like of some of them ever put forth for *publick advantage*; and I beleeve they are some of the *flowers of the spring* in these dayes.

Here, Rogers shows that grace is revealed both in remarkable ways (with dreams and visions) and in more subtle changes of judgment over time. He seems to have intended to publish a variety of both until he saw, or heard about, the collection recommended by Powell. Both collections were also published by Roger Ibbitson, and Rogers was perhaps encouraged to include what he decided were ‘the most *remarkable* and picked out [.]’ for that I finde not the like of some of them ever put forth for *publick advantage*. His choice of experiences, then, depended on what had been published before so that he might contribute something more

32 Raymond, ‘Henry Walker’, *ODNB*.
33 Raymond, ‘Henry Walker’, *ODNB*.
34 Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh*, pp. 354-5.
remarkable than and different from what had gone before. This seems to have been the case with conversion narratives published later: they tend to have some remarkable feature about them whether it was the manner of conversion, or the depths of despair and sin the believer had sunk into beforehand. Of the thirty-nine experiences Roger includes, many refer to dreams and visions, something that he alludes to in his own testimony, which he includes.\(^{35}\) Watkins observes that Rogers was ‘susceptible to these kinds of paranormal experience and so encouraged his congregation to speak about them; for the contributors to *Spirituall Experiences* pastoral influence obviously was very different’.\(^{36}\) Walker’s collection places more emphasis on the hearing of godly ministers and the reading of scripture, rather than on dreams and visions, although the latter do appear in some of these testimonies. Not all of Rogers’s collected testimonies include experience of the ‘paranormal’, but he seems to have dwelt longer on the more remarkable. He wrote, still comparing the works to ‘flowers of the spring’, that

> in the choicest and most extraordinary ones, I shall gather the stalk longer, least I should hurt the beauty and hide the excellency of those flowers; yet without hurt to the rest, in those which are ordinary, I shall be very short. (p. 392)

It is quite obvious that Rogers made a distinction between ‘extraordinary’ and ‘ordinary’ experience, and thought the former would make for a better collection.

Both male and female experiences are present in Walker’s and Rogers’s collections in similar quantities. Although Rogers writes in his small introduction to the testimonies that ‘most of these are mens, and some womens’ (p. 392), out of the thirty-nine experiences twenty-two are male-authored, compared to seventeen by women. This difference could well have been caused by Rogers’s preference for well-known members of his church: he includes the experiences of Thomas Huggins and John Bywater, ministers in Dublin; Colonel John Hewson, governor of Dublin; as well as army men Captain John Jecock, Captain John Spilman, and Major Andrew Manwaring. By comparison, Walker’s collection is made of experiences that can be identified as male or female only by the believers’ initials, the pronouns the compiler uses, and particular circumstances mentioned in the testimony. Out of the sixty-one testimonies, nineteen can be concretely identified as male authored, and twenty-six by women. Working with the experiences, I estimate that apart from seven experiences that give no indication of authorship, twenty-nine were female and twenty-five male. These

\(^{35}\) There are 39 experiences and not 40 as the publisher or collector has misnumbered them.

numbers indicate that neither sex’s experiences were privileged, and that women’s works, which we might expect not to have been as prevalent men’s (when thinking about other genres in which women wrote), appeared just as frequently in collections of conversion narratives. This evidence indicates that women, through the giving and publishing of their experiences, could play a part in evangelising, teaching, and edifying their congregations. As ‘Mothers in Israel’ these women could assist others in their ‘new births’ as examples and advisors. The rest of this chapter will go on to show how these experiences were used both in the home and in their congregations, suggesting the types of readers that might have found them useful. What is certain is that it was not just women who read women’s experiences, and their ability to teach and evangelise was not limited to the home.

‘A Good Example to Women’? Conversion Narratives in the Homes of the Godly

In *A Christian Woman’s Experiences*, Katherine Sutton urged her readers not to ‘neglect family duties’ as she had ‘found by good experience many wrought upon by instructions and prayer, when their lot have been cast into those families, where reading, praying, and Catechising, and such duties have been faithfully performed’. At least before she travelled to the Netherlands, Sutton was a governess in several homes where, Knollys writes, she was ‘not onely a Governesse, but (as it were) a Prophetess in her family, for she prayed constantly with her children and Maidens’ (*2). So exemplary was Sutton’s conduct in evangelising those in whose houses she frequented, that Knollys desired that

Parents and Governours of families would follow her Example therein: Endeavouring (as she did) the Conversion and sanctification of them, whom God had committed to their charge, by Instructions, councel, and reproof, which she administred, with so much love, wisdom, zeal, and tender heartedness, that they proved by Gods blessing an effectual means of the conversion of many, some of whom are yet living witnesses of the truth hereof, and also of many other her Experiences related in this her Book. [...] , she also read the holy Scriptures daily unto them, and so spake from them, that many of them, who heard her (in her family duties) believed and turned to the Lord. (*2)

As Richard Greaves has observed, the marginal note to the Geneva version of Deuteronomy 21:18 insists that ‘it is the mothers dutie also to instruct her children’, and Knollys demonstrates this scriptural edict through the living example of Sutton’s teaching. However,

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38 Greaves, ‘Foundation Builders’, p. 77.
he is careful to specify that this speaking and teaching was fulfilling her ‘family duties’, and did not therefore mean preaching outside of the home. He also showed that she, rather than any adult male member of the family, ‘did so Chatechise the young children, and instruct the elder maidens, that they all learned to know’ (*2). Sutton mentions that, among the households she attended, she was ‘called by providence to remove into a dark family’ but that fortunately ‘it pleased that Lord to worke upon one of the family (to my great comfort and refreshing) who was one that I looked upon as unlike as any in the family’ (A3). As her experience would later do, Sutton’s presence in several different families, even those who were ‘dark’, brought them closer to God. Her published narrative would take her place in homes in England when she travelled to the Netherlands.

It seems that many separatist and Baptist women taught their own families like Sutton with the help of texts that they owned. Sara Jones published ‘A Short Forme of Catechisme for the use of their children who wish well to Sion’ as the second part of *The Relation of a Gentlewoman*, written by Edward Barber, ‘a silenced Minister in Queene Elizabeth’s dayes’.39 Using information about Jones’s family gleaned from Stephen Wright’s article on her work, it is possible to see that Barber taught in the house of Sir Thomas Hayes, Jones’s father, when she was a child. By preserving this catechism, which asks the believer to answer questions about the proofs for their doctrines in scripture, Jones circulates what she has found effective in bringing her to her belief in God. Sarah Davy also wrote about the importance of parents teaching their children catechisms by praising her own: ‘my Parents taught me in my Catechism what was my duty towa rds God and towards my Neighbour’.40 Instead of giving children ‘Estates, honours, and great things in this Life’ which would leave them ‘under a curse’, Davy thought that parents should ‘be in travail for grace and Conversion for their Children’ (A6’). If parents had struggled to find evidences of God’s love, they could pass on the experiences to their children with love and support: this, for Davy, was more precious than earthly riches. While at Mrs W.’s school she wrote that she was in particular need of spiritual sustenance.41 Her ‘heart desired much to *hear good men*’ which she did ‘with

41 Davy went to a school run by a ‘Mrs W.’, probably between 1650 and 1657. This could possibly be that of Hannah Wolley (bap. 1622 – died in or after 1674). She married Jeremy Wolley, the master of the free grammar school at Newport, Essex (here she practised medicine). Seven years later (1653) they moved to Hackney, Middlesex, where they kept another school (John Considine, ‘Hannah Wolley’, *ODNB*). ‘By 1666 she had moved to Westminster, and in April that year she married a forty-five-year old widower and gentleman, Francis Challiner, at St. Margaret’s, Westminster’ (Elaine Hobby, ‘A Woman’s Best Setting Out is Silence: The
convenience, which some took notice of and said I was one whom the Apostle speaks of, *having itching ears, ever learning; &c* (C2'). Referring to 2 Timothy 4:3, which is critical of those who seek out doctrines to suit their own ‘lusts’, Davy shows that those at her school were anything but sympathetic to her search for godly teaching. For her, it seems, school was not the place for learning about God.

Some households opened their doors to the children of other families, especially if the parents were learned in the ways of God. Theodosia Alleine, wife of the ejected minister Joseph Alleine, ran a boarding school in her home near Taunton for ‘divers years’ so that ‘his income was for that time considerably enlarged’. She writes, in her biography of his later life, that she had ‘been always bred to work’ and had ‘undertook to teach in School, and had many Tablers, and Schollars, our Family being seldom less then Twenty, and many times Thirty; My School usually Fifty or Sixty of the Town and other Places’ (p. 91). Although the nature of the biography means that it concentrates on her husband, Theodosia’s role in this ‘Family’ (of which none of the children were her own) shows through:

His Course in his Family was Prayer, and reading the Scriptures, and singing twice a day, Except when he Catechised, which was constantly once if not twice a Week: Of every Chapter that was read, he expected an Account of, and of every Sermon, either to himself or me: He dealt with them and his Servants frequently together, and apart, about their Spiritual states, pressing them to all their Dutys, both of First, and Second Table, and calling them strictly to account, whether they did not omit them. He also gave them *Books suitable to their Capacity, and Condition*, which they gave a weekly account of to him or me; but too often by Publick work was he diverted, as I was apt to think, who knew not so well what was to be preferred. (my italics, p. 92)

This public work, which was especially great on the Sundays when he would travel to other places in want of ministers, diverted him from spending time with Theodosia and the ‘family’ which he ‘was forced often to leave’ to her ‘great grief and loss’ (p. 92). It seems clear that she was frequently left to teach up to sixty scholars on her own, and even if Joseph was present, the students would have to give an account to her of chapters they had read and sermons they had heard. Although Theodosia wrote that she would have liked her husband to stay with her, she admitted that she ‘knew not so well what was to be preferred’ by the Lord. She supported her husband who was ‘very forward to promote the Education of

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43 In *The Life and Death of Mr. Joseph Alleine*, Theodosia recorded that she and her husband had no children (p. 87) and so spent time educating others. She writes, ‘after the Times grew Dead for Trade, many of our Godly
Youth, in the Town of Iaelchester, and Country adjacent, freely bestowing Catechisms on those that were of poor Families, to instruct them in the Principles of Religion; stirring up the Elder to Teach, and encouring the Younger to Learn’ (p. 60). By distributing printed catechisms, Joseph intended the older household members to teach the young to find God and learn scriptural doctrines. From the example of Theodosia, his wife, it seems that women, as well as men, were encouraged to teach in the home as their designated space.\(^{44}\)

It is particularly interesting that Joseph Alleine gave his scholars and servants ‘Books suitable to their Capacitys and Condition’ which they were encouraged to discuss and summarise afterwards with the help of himself and his wife. It seems clear from this that such wide-ranging experiences of God’s grace required different kinds of support manifested in the variety of different texts separatists and Baptists used to comfort, and hence teach, themselves. Spiritual autobiographies record how a variety of different texts gave believers comfort in their most desperate of conditions. The Bible was the one text that all households owned and read. One of the most sensational and affecting narratives in Walker’s collection, by ‘M. W.’, describes how, after the Royalist army took Liverpool, the writer’s husband and child had been killed ‘before my face’ and she was then ‘stript, and wounded’.\(^{45}\) She, her wounded child, and another daughter, sheltered in a barn, their only comfort coming from a ‘peece of an old Bible’ (p. 13). From this time, M. W. referred to the promises she had found to uphold her in that most traumatic time. The experiences in Walker’s collection mention few books with the emphasis put on listening to sermons rather than reading them, the exceptions being William Whately’s *The New-Birth, or, A Treatise of Regeneration* (1618 but republished seven times), a sermon advocating Calvinism, and the work of William Perkins. Books like these were priced too highly for a great many believers: works seemed to have been passed from generation to generation, preserving publications from before the reign of the Bishops. John Bunyan records in *Grace Abounding* that his wife on their marriage ‘had for her part, *The Plain Mans Path-way to Heaven*, and *The Practice of Piety*, which her

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\(^{44}\) Other evidence of women teaching in the home can be found in Anna Trapnel’s spiritual experience, *A Legacy for Saints*, where her ‘godly mother did not see [her] offend, that she might reprove [her], which she was ready to do’ (B1). One of the female experiences in Walker’s collection, initialled M. K., also remembers her mother who ‘tooke great delight to instruct me, to heare me read’. She ‘alotted [her] a portion of Scripture every day, as likewise a part of *Erasmus Rotterdamus* upon the foure Evangelists’ (p. 161).

\(^{45}\) Powell and Walker, *Spirituall Experiences, of Sundry Beleevers*, p. 11.
Father had left her when he died’ even though they were ‘as poor as poor might be’.46 The anonymous dictator of Conversion Exemplified also read The Practice of Piety.47 Anne Venn, who was daughter of Captain John Venn, sometime governor of Windsor Castle, evidently had more of a library to draw upon. In the course of her narrative she refers to John Dod’s A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandements (which had nineteen editions between 1603 and 1635 and dealt with godly conduct in every part of a believer’s life), Timothy Rogers’s The Righteous Mans Evidences for Heaven (first published in 1618 and ran to numerous editions), Adam Harsnett’s A Touch-Stone of Grace (1635), Clement Cotton’s None but Christ (1629), and an unspecified book by Jeremiah Burroughes.48 Venn also came upon a review of Edward Fisher’s The Marrow of Modern Divinity (1645) whose work ‘made concessions to Arminianism’ which comforted her during the time she believed she was damned. Just as she recorded her spiritual trials, we might assume that Venn wrote notes from her books, as had the scholars under the care of the Alleines.

As an extension of teaching their children in the home, some women wrote ‘mothers’ legacies’ to advise their offspring in the event that they died whilst giving birth. If these advice books made it into print, the author had usually passed away which, Elizabeth Clarke writes, shows ‘just how draconian attitudes to publication by women were’.49 Mothers’ legacies were popular: Clarke goes on to chart that Dorothy Leigh’s The Mothers Blessing went into twenty-three editions between 1616 and 1674. Like death-bed testimonies, there must have been some appeal for readers in the author being near death. Authors would be a step closer to God and their narrative would contain important insights. Women came close to death every time they gave birth, and were also, as was discussed in chapter three, deemed to be more sensitive to temptations from the Devil, and words from God. This made their works attractive to readers, as long as such works did not overstep the line between teaching in the home, and teaching in public. The language believers used in their conversion narratives would seem to draw much from mothers’ legacies. As I have previously discussed in chapter three, both women’s and men’s testimonies often refer to spiritual ‘travails’ before they came to believe they were under God’s grace, and their conversion experience compared

46 Bunyan, Grace Abounding, p. 9. Arthur Dent’s The Plain Mans Path-way to Heaven was first published in 1601 and ran to twenty-five editions. The Practice of Piety by Lewis Bayly was published in its second edition in 1612: later editions ran to some 800 pages (J. Gwynfor Jones and Vivienne Larminie, ‘Lewis Bayly’, ODNB).
47 Anon., Conversion Exemplified, B5).
48 Venn, A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning, B3 mispag. B5.
to a ‘new birth’. Because they were survivors of a particularly traumatic, and sometimes life-threatening, event, writers of these narratives were in some way qualified to tell others of their ‘travails’: they had lived to tell the tale. The experiences of Mary Simpson, published by her minister John Collinges as *Faith & Experience*, were published after her death in 1647 when she was thirty years old. The title page of the work bears the scripture from Philippians 1:23, ‘For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better’, indicating that she was poised on the cusp between life and death. Collinges shows that ‘for three yeares and upward before that time, she was Gods close prisoner; and the greatest part of that time (so bitter was her cup) was spent in her bed’. Speaking from her sick-bed seems to have given Simpson a certain power, to which Collinges testified in his sermon celebrating her life. He wrote that she was not of the *Noble and great persons of the Earth*, but out of a poor family did the Lord chuse this *elect vessell*, to declare the *Riches of the glory of his grace* in [Romans 9:23; Ephesians 1:18]. But you shall pardon me the expression, if I say, that while she lived, she was an *Eminent preacher*, and give her the character which our Saviour gave S. John, she was a *burning, and a shining light* [John 5:35]; and I am confident did more good, to poore soules, in the three yeares of her sicksnesse, but *telling them her experiences, directing, quickning, exhorting, strengthening, satisfying, them*, than God hath honoured any of us who have been preachers of his word, to doe in much more time. I meane not that she was a *Pulpit-preacher*, No, God had taught her to be wise to sobriety, [...], as *Priscilla & Aquila*, by privately instructing others in the wayes of God [Acts 18:26]. (14'-15)

Though Simpson was poor, Collinges wrote that ‘grace had made her *eloquent*’ and ‘the Lord had given her the tongue of excellent’ (I7'). On his visits to her he had ‘thought to speak’ but after listening to her eloquence he ‘gave her leave to be the preacher, for the gain of those in the room’ (I7'). In the quotation above, Collinges asks his readers’ forgiveness for using the expression ‘preacher’, but it is the only one that adequately describes how effective Simpson’s experiences were. Only her bedbound position allowed her to speak in this manner, leading Collinges to compare her to John the Baptist who appeared as a prophet before the coming of Christ as a ‘burning, and a shining light’. However, despite this praise, Collinges was anxious that his readers (or listeners) would not think Simpson a ‘pulpit-preacher’ which was deemed inappropriate for women. Instead, she ‘privately instructed’ others in her own home, not in the public sphere, and her words only reached the wider world at the request of Collinges.

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51 For a discussion of the problems women faced if they preached, see chapter one.
The prefatory writer of *Conversion Exemplified*, who was the gentlewoman speaker’s ‘dearest friend’ and husband, also testifies to his wife’s aptness for affecting those in his household. She hated the name ‘mother-in-law’, which meant step-mother, and ‘could not endure to think her self in that relation’ because of the name’s bad reputation.52 He writes that she delighted much to talk with young ones, and was very assiduous to take occasion to open their damnable state by nature to them, and the remedy provided, which she always did in so affectionate manner, as I did judge her the best accomplished to speak to such hearers of any that ever I did hear preach. (A5v)

He also instructed her readers not to look at ‘her worth’ with ‘an undervaluing eye’ because if the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ consisted ‘of little ones, then those that show them the way to it, will doubtless shine like stars for ever and ever’ (A6). Towards the end of her narrative, it becomes clear that the main reason for her desire to have her experiences written was, as the title page declares, ‘for the common benefit, but especially for her near Relations in the flesh’. These ‘dearest relations’ were taken with ‘Episcopacy’ which made her ‘rejoyce in the hopes of being delivered by death, from beholding those judgements’ which she feared would befall them (E5v). On the final four pages she constructs some questions which act like a catechism to ask these relations and her ‘unregenerate unaquaintance’ (E5v) why Satan tempted her, and why Christ ‘returned’ her. She wished her experiences to ‘remain upon record, [...] against those who in despite of all kindes of teaching, whether by word or example, do violently pursue their lusts, to their eternal and most just destruction’ (E7). Despite all her efforts, including ‘accomplished’ teaching, her unregenerate relations did not share her beliefs, and her published text was an attempt to widen this teaching and record it so that the message survived after her death. In a similar fashion, An Collins published her work to ‘the praise of Gods most blessed name’.53 Another reason she sought to publish her work is summarised in ‘The Discourse’:

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Moreover this is thirdly in respect
Of some neare Kindred, who survive mee may,
The which perhaps do better works neglect,
Yet this, they may be pleased to survey
Through willingnesse to heare what I could say. (B2)
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Collins hoped that her relations would read her work through curiosity as to what she ‘could say’ which would bring them to scripture. She realised that her ‘kindred’ might be more

52 Anon., *Conversion Exemplified*, A5v.
affected if they read good works through the medium of someone they knew. These published texts appear to be an extension of women’s teaching in the home sanctioned by both ministers and husbands.

It is clear from Collinges’s account of Simpson’s bedside that her words appealed to members of both sexes, which has implications for discussing the readership of such texts. This seems the case with other women who ‘preached’ from their beds, as both Anna Trapnel and Sara Wight had visitors, both male and female, to their chambers where they lay in trances. These two examples, as well as the numerous accounts of women giving spiritual accounts in front of mixed-sex congregations, show that women’s testimonies (sometimes crossing the line into teachings) were heard by men as well as women. From this we can assume that the readership of women’s conversion narratives was made up of both sexes, not just women: if men were interested enough to attend the bedside of a female prophet, then it seems likely that they would buy a transcript of their words, if they could afford it. Apart from evidence to do with congregations and visitors listening to women’s experiences, there are several ways to explore whether women’s testimonies were read by both men and women, and the first of these would be to look for signs that experiences had been deliberately tailored for a specific readership. One particular example occurs in the collected testimonies of John Rogers which he compiled ‘out of the Notes which I took of them from their own mouths’, including the most ‘extraordinary ones’ for his reader’s perusal. He annotated the testimonies so that they would be printed with directions in the margin, showing the reader how and where the conversion happened, and particular matters they should take note of. In his account of the testimony of Elizabeth Chambers, Rogers records her words: ‘I took the Bible, and looked out for Christ there; and looked out and turned to the proofs that Master Rogers mentioned, and examined them; and then I examined my own heart, and searched’ (p. 407). Next to this, either he or the publisher has written that this was ‘a good example to women’, encouraging others, but particularly women, to read scripture more closely. Below this, Chambers is recorded as saying that, while she was ‘lamenting’, she ‘told a Gentlewoman my condition, and she did what she could to comfort me, but to no purpose’ (p. 407). It would appear that her behaviour at this point was what Rogers’s collection sought to advocate: women should examine their hearts privately along with the scriptures and male-authored works, but also ask the advice of other godly women to help

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54 See my introduction for those who visited Sarah Wight’s and Anna Trapnel’s bedsides.
55 Rogers, Ohel and Beth-Shemesh, p. 391.
them. That the collection specified these things were of especial importance for women, rather than to all believers, is surely indicative that Chambers’s experience was intended to be an example for women in particular.56

Other women’s experiences contain similar advice directed at women, and, like Chambers’s experience, the advice is shaped by the male prefatory writer or editor. Anthony Palmer, the publisher and prefatory writer of Sarah Davy’s experience, titled by him heaven Realiz’d, encouraged readers:

Particularly; let younger persons (especially young Gentlewomen) be greatly affected with this precious example and be persuaded of the joy and sweetness this blessed Soul did find in seeking the Lord in the days of her youth, who received instructions betimes, about the eleventh year of her Age. [...] Especially in an Age of the great corruption of youth, where Religion is made a by-word and a scorn, when many hardened and blaspheme, when so Few of the youth of noble and generous families, Fall in with serious Godliness, sobriety, but serving divers lusts and pleasures, to all excess of Riot, to the debasing of their Spirits, in a degenerateness from true Nobility and generousness of Spirit, which is in knowledge, good learning true wisdom and pity, as fitting them to serve God and their Generation. (A4v-A6)

Palmer directs his preface towards young sons and daughters (but especially the latter) of rich and noble families who were in danger of being influenced and corrupted by ‘lusts and pleasures’ peculiar to the late 1660s. These ‘excesses of Riot’ caused ‘degenerateness from true Nobility’, and Palmer advocates the qualities of learning, wisdom, and pity to enable them to serve both God and their ‘generation’ (their family ancestors). Palmer specifically advises the noble ‘Sons and Daughters of Godly Parents, [...] to be an example and a blessing to secure Christ and holiness, and heaven, to walk in the truly noble, delightful, precious ways, which the piece and she that lived it holds forth unto thee’ (A6r-v). He also advises, referring to Hebrews 11:24-5,

When thou art come to years, to be capable to understand any thing, as ‘tis said of Moses, [...] Refuse the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, [...], vanity, emptiness, a bubble, a pleasant dream, to such a rich, solid, satisfying, durable, glorious enjoyment of Jesus Christ. (A5)

According to Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews, when he was old enough Moses ‘refused to be called the son of Pharoah’s daughter’ (11:24) who had rescued him from the river where his mother had left him as a baby to avoid his persecution. He chose ‘rather to suffer affliction

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56 These ideas appeared in a preliminary form in my article in “‘A Good Example to Women”: The Biographer’s Presence in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Women’s Conversion Narratives’, The Glass, 21 (2009), 11-19. However, this is not to say men would not have found the experience useful in order to teach the female members of their families.
with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season’ (11:25). What Palmer shows his readers, is that it is better to enjoy Christ who is rich and constant, rather than an empty ‘bubble’ or vanity and sin which is fleeting. Rather than revel in their riches with all the pleasures and lusts this could bring, he advises believers (especially women) to rely on the word of Christ which was all the more ‘satisfying’. That Davy’s experiences appeared in a small book rather than as a pamphlet suggests that it was aimed at richer families and their children, much like Anne Venn’s book which I will discuss below. These ‘Tender souls’ (A5) were advised by Palmer to ‘go’ and behave as she had by ‘diligently inquiring after his feedings, and betaking her to the following of his people, in a congregation of believers, where her soul delighted it self’ (A4v). Davy’s words which, the title page records, were ‘written with her own hand’ also show her to be aware that she was writing for godly readers. At the end of her experience she addresses a section of the work ‘to my dear Brothers and Sisters, this poor, yet sincere Manuscript of my truest love’ (F1v). She desired ‘the good and eternal welfare of the Souls of my dear Brothers and Sisters’ by giving them ‘a Sisters counsel’ (F2): she wanted her work to advise and strengthen other members of her congregation. There is little evidence in Davy’s part of the narrative that she intended it for any readership more specific than her congregation, unlike what Palmer advised.\(^57\)

Mary Simpson’s recorded narrative was also appropriated by John Collinges for the advice of women, and he had a particular woman in mind. Collinges addressed the daughter of Lady Frances Hobart: ‘To the Glory of her Sex, and Excellency of her Age, the truly Noble and Vertuous Gentlewoman, Mrs Philip Hobart, daughter to Sir John Hobart, Knight and

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\(^57\) Sarah Davy was born Sarah Roane on 18 November 1637 to Robert Roane and his wife, was married in or before 1660 (D8), and died, according to her published narrative of 1670, at about 32 years of age (1669). She had five younger siblings: Mary Roane (bap. 29 June 1639), William Roane (bap. 27 October 1641), Charles Roane (bap. 22 November 1642), Susanna Roane (bap. 3 February 1644), and Thomas Roane (bap. 3 June 1647). See Memorials of St Margaret’s Church, Westminster, ed. by Arthur Meredith Burke (London: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1914), p. 155. Further evidence that this is the same Sarah Roane can be found in her narrative. Davy looked after her ‘babies’ when she was eleven years old, who were her younger brothers and sisters (Heaven Realiz’d, B3v). As the editors of Her Own Life write, older daughters helped look after their younger siblings (p. 178). The same editors assert that the publisher ‘A. P.’ is one Anthony Palmer (c. 1618-1678), minister of Pinner’s Hall congregation in London which was, presumably, ‘the Congregation of Christ whereof she was a Member in this City’ (B1v). Davy would have walked roughly three miles to attend congregation meetings at Old Broad Street if she was still living near St Margaret’s Church, Westminster. Davy also mentions hearing a ‘Mr Pierce being then Minister’ (B6). This was likely to have been Edward Pears (c.1633-1673) who was appointed Sunday morning preacher in the parish of St Margaret’s, Westminster on 27 June 1657. See A. F. Pollard and Stephen Wright, ’Edward Pears’, ODNB. The authors draw attention to Anthony Wood’s confusion of Pears with Church of England clergyman, Edward Pears (1630/1-1694), which the editors of Her Own Life have followed (p. 179). See also Leonard W. Cowie, ‘Edward Pears’, ODNB. Sarah would have been about twenty years old at this time.
Baronet, late of Norfolke'. This was Philippa Hobart who had recently married her cousin, who had recently become Sir John Hobart, second baronet, after the death of Philippa’s father in 1647. She was only thirteen years old compared to his twenty. Collinges praised her exemplary behaviour, writing that she had ‘discovered more perfection of Knowledge at thirteen, that the most can boast of at threescore’ (A4). Sir John and Lady Francis had invited Collinges to become their chaplain while they were in London, and Elizabeth Allen’s article for ODNB shows that after her husband’s death, Lady Frances expended ‘a quarter of her outgoings on godly ministers and on poor Christians, to whom she sent her physician, and sometimes Collinges, when they were sick’. It is possible that Simpson was one of these ‘poor Christians’ he visited, which caused him to publish her words for the profit of others. Collinges asks Philippa to observe the example of

one far below you in respect of birth, and greatnesse, while she was here, but infinitely more above you now: And of one, who (I dare say) thirsted not so much after your greatnesse then, as you doe after her grace and glory now. (a3)

Even though Collinges is at pains to emphasise that Simpson’s birth was ‘mean’, he shows that this has no bearing on how high she has risen in heaven: he uses the metaphor that the Peacock does not have better meat than the Partridge because it has ‘gayer feathers’ (a3v). He writes that ‘the sutablenesse of the subject in these sheets, is such, that I dare be confident, you will be pleased not only to patronize but also practise it’ (a2v). He asks Hobart not only to accept Simpson’s example but also strive to be like her in her godliness and dedication to teaching others. Collinges advises that she

let those whose God is their pleasure, or belly [indulgence], spend the time in painting and dressing, which you are better spending in seeking the face of him who will be found of them that seek him [Psalms 23:6]. You will find your face will shine more than theirs. (A2)

58 Simpson, Faith and Experience, a2. John Collinges is referring to Philippa Hobart (bap. 1635, b. 1655) who had married her cousin, Sir John Hobart, third baronet (bap. 1628, d. 1683), in 1647 (a year before Collings published Simpson’s experience). Philippa’s father, Sir John Hobart, second baronet, died c. 20 April 1647 and the baronetcy passed to his nephew, who married Philippa. Her mother, Lady Frances Hobart (1603-1664), was the daughter of Sir John Egerton (1579-1649) and Frances Stanley (1583-1636), and Philippa was the only child of eight that survived into adulthood. Sir John and Lady Francis met the minister John Collinges when Sir John was elected to Parliament in 1646 and his wife accompanied him to London. According to Elizabeth Allen, Collinges was ‘a young Presbyterian-inclined minister’ whom they invited to become their chaplain at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, which passed to her nephew after her husband’s death (see Elizabeth Allen, ‘Lady Francis Hobart’, ODNB). Lady Frances moved, with Collinges, to Chapelfield in Norwich and later, ‘fearing that the New Model Army’s backing for Independency, which was strong in Norwich, would prevent presbyterian sympathisers from meeting publicly, she converted some of her lower rooms to make a chapel seating 200’ (Allen, ODNB).
59 Allen, ‘Lady Frances Hobart’, ODNB.
Those who spend time worshipping their appearance and pleasures would be better off spending time seeking the Lord, and Collinges advises Hobart that she would benefit if she sought the ‘Lord in secret’ (A1’). Instead of being painted with makeup, Simpson’s face would shine with the light of the Lord. The dictator of Conversion Exemplified would seem to have undergone similar temptations to Philippa Hobart. She was of similar birth, ‘being in a Family which [...] is able to make as large a demonstration of Antiquity, from honourable Ancestors, as the generality of that rank of Persons can do’.60 She records that one of her ‘greatest discouragements’ was a ‘secret stirring of vain ostentation’ which was the reason that the experience was published anonymously: her identity remains a mystery. Much of the advice given by male prefatory writers particularly to women seems to have been based around the rejection of the importance of material things. Collinges showed that Simpson was ‘more Noble’ and ‘happier’ than Hobart because ‘she hath alreadie been in Heaven a yeare before’ (A5). He advised her, and through her all his readers, to ‘Outstrip all Examples’ (A5).

Although it seems clear that conversion narratives were directed at certain readers, there is rather little evidence that writers of these narratives had read others that had gone before. As Elizabeth Clarke writes, ‘it is very rare, for example, to find evidence of one woman writer reading the work of another, although Sylvia Brown has argued that Elizabeth Jocelin had read Dorothy Leigh’s work’.61 Patricia Crawford also records that Elizabeth Moore, ‘a very poor woman who depended upon charity, comforted herself with “evidences of salvation”’: these were published by Edmund Calamy in The Godly Mans Ark [...] Preached at the Funeral of Elizabeth Moore (1658), and Lady Mary Langham requested that they be read to her on her deathbed.62 Indeed what often seems to be the case is that writers of spiritual autobiographies chose not to write that they had heard or read other believers’ experiences; they wanted to stress the exceptional nature of their own. They seem to have wanted to emphasise the individual nature of God’s dealings with them, attributing their conversion wholly to God and not to various other similarly structured accounts. It should also be noted, when trying to deduce how many of these writers might have read the works of others, that some of the women that wrote or dictated their experiences would not have

60 Anon., Conversion Exemplified, B3.
afforded a longer-length book, and pamphlet experiences might not have reached a very wide audience outside London, let alone women who wanted to write in the same way.

Apart from evidence in testimonies, there are also ways to ascertain a book’s ownership from annotations made on the pages. This is the case with the signatures of Anne Dunch and her family that can be found inscribed on the last page of Anne Venn’s book of spiritual experiences, *A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning*, now in the possession of the British Library. Anne Dunch, née Major, was the co-heir, with her sister Dorothy, of Merdon Manor on the Hursley Park estate in Hampshire. After her marriage on 2 July 1650, to John Dunch, Anne stayed there with her sister, newly married to Richard Cromwell who also resided there. On the list of names Anne’s appears first, dated 1658, which shows that she acquired it in the year of its publication. The name of John Dunch, her husband, appears second in a different script, presumably his own, along with their two daughters’ names, Anne and Dulcabella, in the same handwriting. Below is the name of Major Dunch, their eldest son and heir, signed, presumably, by himself, and below this is Samuel Dunch’s signature in the style of his father’s. These marks of family ownership reveal the importance of the narrative to Anne and her family, leading us to wonder if it was used in family devotion, and as an example of how different family members (particularly Anne and her daughters) could scrutinize their relationship with God.

Anne Venn’s spiritual experiences were published as *A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning*, in 1658, by her step-father, Thomas Weld, with the information on the title-page that they were ‘written by her own hand, and found in her closet after her death’. Isaac Knight, Venn’s minister at the gathered church she attended at Fulham, added a preface to these experiences which he describes as follows:

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63 This research has appeared in my ‘Anne Venn’s *A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning* (1658) in the Household of Anne Dunch, Sister-in-law to Richard Cromwell’, *Notes and Queries*, 57 (2010), 501-3. There are five extant copies of Venn’s published work: they are held at the British Library, Dr Williams’s Library, the American Antiquarian Society, Harvard University, and the New York Public Library in America.

64 John and Anne Dunch had eight children altogether, six of whom were born by 1658 and all baptised at Hursley: Major (bap. 9 August 1651), Samuel (bap. 26 September 1652), Dulcabella (bap. 29 September 1654), Anne (bap. 22 June 1655 and died before March 1657), Edmund (bap. 3 September 1656), Anne (bap. 11 March 1657). The couple had a further child at Hursley: John (bap. 5 October 1659). Another child, Dorothy, was baptised on 1 May 1662 at Pusey, Berkshire, and another, William, whose baptism date is unknown. See HRO 39M69/PR3; PRO 11/328; Violet M. Howse, *Pusey: A Parish Record* (Faringdon: the author, 1972), p. 48; Pete Annells, *The Berkshire Dunches* (Published by the author, 2006), p. 231. It isn’t clear why Edmund’s name did not appear on the list of signatures. Perhaps it is a sign that he had not yet heard the narrative read in the family, and so his name was not recorded.

She wrote her dayly Meditations upon the holy book of God, which shee kept in a book fair written. She contracted all she heard in the publike Ministry into a method, & in a book in Folio hath fairly transcribed some part of that work which would have contained the substance of all the labours of the Ministers of Christ, whose Ministry she was partaker of. And in another had written all the attributes of God and Christ that she could finde in Scripture for the strengthening of the faith of beleevers. (A7*)

Venn read the Bible and noted down ‘dayly Meditations’, but, curiously, she kept these ‘in book fair written’, along with a ‘Folio’ of profitable ministry, also ‘fairly transcribed’. Perhaps, most revealingly, Venn had gathered all the scriptures she could find ‘for the strengthening of the faith of beleevers’, which suggests that she wished to help other godly people to interpret and meditate on scripture and ministry. As Knight elaborates, Venn was ‘exemplary in that holy art of the Improvement of the society of the Saints, by serious propounding of prepared questions’ (A6†). She was also, he thought, contrary to what she wrote herself, ‘able and ready to communicate richly unto others’ (A7). Venn wrote that, one evening, she composed a letter for ‘a dear kinswoman of mine’ who ‘lay under some sad dispensation from the Lord’ (E3), and later wrote a prayer request to the Fulham congregation on behalf of a male relation. Afterwards, she thought she would continue, ‘not to do it onely in his behalf, but also in the behalf of other poor dark souls in relation to me’ (I6).

Venn died unmarried between late December 1653 (the last diary entry) and when her Will was proved on 26 January 1654, after complaining of a severe cold. Knight wrote that her parting was because ‘shee longed to be at home, so the Lord hastned the time, and in her tender years gathered her to himself” (A8): her premature death was presented as a blessed release. Her will made numerous bequests, including all her moveable goods, listed as ‘money, Plate, Jewels, household stuffe, Works, and Booke’, to her mother Margaret (her executrix), and a total of £847 to family and friends, ministers including Isaac Knight and John Rogers, and the poor of her Fulham congregation and the Parish of Kensington.66

Venn’s ‘Works and Booke’, presumably refer to her closet-writings: her ‘book fair written’ and ‘fairly transcribed’ Folio. Her mother would have found them a comfort in times of weakness and grief, but could have also referred to them in times of spiritual anxiety and for a godly example to her and other family members. Just as Venn’s father had reinforced, according to Knight, ‘the Truths publikely preached in his Family upon his Children and

66 Anne Venn’s will, PRO 11/243. See also Keith Lindley, ‘Anne Venn’, ODNB. Venn left ministers Knight, and John Rogers (a fifth monarchist) £5 each. The ministers she mentions in her narrative (Sidrach Simpson, Matthew Barker, Stephen Marshall, Thomas Archer, and Henry Jessey), all received twenty shillings.
Servants’ (A6r−v), her mother could also follow this example by ‘repeating and farther pressing it home upon our spirits’ (B1v). It seems that it was Thomas Weld, Margaret Venn’s new husband, that decided to publish these experiences more widely: as an ‘alarum to the Saints’ in this ‘licentious age’ (A6v).

It is perhaps unsurprising that a published version of Venn’s experiences came into the hands of wealthy gentlewoman Anne Dunch, née Major, sister-in-law of Richard Cromwell. The signatures also point towards shared religio-political allegiances between the families of Anne Venn and Anne Dunch who had more in common than just their names. Both their fathers, John Venn and Richard Major, were involved in the rise of Oliver Cromwell to the position of Lord Protector. Venn was the only surviving daughter of Colonel John Venn, an active parliamentarian and regicide, who was the ‘chief comfort of [her] natural life’ (C5v). The loss of her father on 28 June 1650 permeates Venn’s narrative, as she felt God was punishing her for her sins. Her strength and recovery would have seemed relevant to Anne Dunch, who, by 1658, had seen the death of Oliver Cromwell, the departure of her brother-in-law, Richard, to London, and the death of one of her children, Anne. Anne Dunch was also the co-heir, with her sister Dorothy, of Merdon Manor on the Hursley Park estate in Hampshire. Their father, Richard Major, sat in the Barebones Parliament in 1653, along with John’s father Samuel Dunch, and John Dunch, was also MP for Berkshire between 1654 and 1659. Cromwell seemed to have perceived Major as ‘very wise and honest; and indeed to be valued’ and praised ‘the gentleman’s plainness and free dealing’ with him over the engagement of his son, Richard, and Major’s daughter, Dorothy. The couple were married on 1 May 1649 at Hursley, and lived with Major before and after Richard’s Protectorate was deposed. Anne and John’s children were all baptised at Hursley until after the birth of their son John in 1659. By 25 April 1660, Richard Major was dead, sparking rumours of suicide because of the restoration of Charles II, and Anne and her family moved to Pusey, Berkshire (an estate owned by John’s father Samuel Dunch) where the unlawfulness of their next daughter Dorothy’s baptism was recorded by the church courts on

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67 John Venn had three children with his first wife, Mary Wood: John (bap. 13 June 1621 and bur. 27 February 1623), Richard (bap. 17 October 1622 and bur. 13 April 1625), and Thomas (bap. 21 December 1624). With his second wife, Margaret, he had Anne (bap. 1 January 1627), John (bap. 15 December 1629), and Simon, Samuel, and another Simon, who lived no more than two years each. See *The Registers of All Hallows, Bread Street, and of St John the Evangelist, Friday Street, London*, ed. by W. B. Bannerman, vol. 43 (Harleian Society Registers, 1913); John Venn, *Annals of a Clerical Family: Being some account of the family and descendants of William Venn, Vicar* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 230.

10 September 1662. The ordinance was performed at the house by ‘one Mr Lancaster, a minister of Hampshire’, who had been ejected from his living under the 1662 Act of Uniformity, instead of the local parson. John’s father Samuel left bequests to several ejected Hampshire and Berkshire ministers in his will, including Mr Lancaster and his chaplain Samuel Blower. Anne Venn also left money to various ministers whom she had mentioned in her narrative, including Isaac Knight and the fifth-monarchist, John Rogers.

The circulation of the work of Anne Venn within her private family, and then to the wider world after it was published, shows the importance that Venn and her contemporaries placed on the acts of writing, reading, and contemplating the work of God on their own lives, and the lives of others by the exchange of books and spiritual diaries. It is significant that Venn read and wrote privately, and desired to help others when they feared they had sinned. By directing their children to sign their names below their own at the book’s end, Anne Dunch and her husband seem to have encouraged their children to read such lives in order that they grow spiritually, and learn to examine their own hearts. Such an example shows the importance of the circulation of women’s experiences, whether handwritten or printed, in the development of separatism in the seventeenth century. Experiences did not just evangelise those in the houses of the women who wrote, but also other families far from London in similar straits.

‘Worldly matters’: Baptist Association Meetings and the Community Circulation of Women’s Experiences

A sense of community was extremely important to the separatist and Baptist godly community and the spread of believers’ experiences certainly helped groups to knit more tightly together. Both the physical and spiritual health of each member was of concern to congregations and believers gathered together to pray as one voice, recording the results of these group vigils. Katherine Sutton recorded how the prayers of her congregation saved her

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69 John Dunch died in November 1668, shortly after his father, and so only inherited this property for a short time. According to John’s will, Anne had predeceased him by three years: PRO 11/328.
70 Howse, Pusey: A Parish Record, p. 49.
71 Samuel Dunch left bequests to ten ejected ministers including Mr Lancaster. These included his chaplain Samuel Blower and Vavasor Powell who had been imprisoned in Southsea Castle for five years. See PRO 11/328. Anne Venn left bequests to Isaac Knight and John Rogers of £5 each. The ministers she mentions in her narrative (Sidrach Simpson, Matthew Barker, Stephen Marshall, Thomas Archer, and Henry Jessey), all received twenty shillings, see PRO 11/243.
from ‘such a distemper that my joints and sinews were by fits bound up, that I could not stirre them, nor take rest while it lasted, my pain was so great’. Though ‘several physitianers consulted what to do’ for her, she ‘concluded, there was no help but I must dye’ (B1v). Sutton had recently undertaken her first voyage ‘over the Sea, where [she] did injoy further and fuller communion with himself in his ordinances’, which was, as Michael Davies has suggested, most likely because of the Laudian reforms in the English churches. Soon after her arrival she lost a child, which certainly contributed to the debilitating illness. She then decided that ‘there is yet help in God’ and that she would be ‘healed’ if she could ‘but touch the hemm of the garment of Jesus Christ [Matthew 9:20]’ (B1v) referring to the bleeding woman who touched the fringe of Christ’s garment in Matthew’s Gospel. After this, she was visited by her pastor ‘as he was going to the meeting’ of her congregation. She writes:

I did desire [him] to pray for me, and to stirre up the bretheren to joyn with him, and I much encouraged him that they should pray in faith, believing for what they asked, telling him that by faith and prayer he would assuredly heal me, and verily according unto my faith it was done unto me, for ever blessed be God for J. Christ, for as they were praying in his name the distemper departed. (B1v)

The prayers of the congregation, or at least the male members or elders, altogether showed their collective faith added to Sutton’s own which caused her to be cured of her distemper. It shows that groups of believers cared enough to pray for every individual member of their congregation, including women members.

John Rogers recounted a similar experience in the section of his Ohel or Beth-shemesh which explains and advocates the process of giving ‘experimental evidences’ in front of the congregation ‘whereby he (or she) is convinced that he is regenerate’. In this work he sought to publish the great variety of different conversions and whether the Lord had persuaded them by ‘afflictions, crosses, losses, dangers, frights, terrors of Hell’, or ‘love, cherries, promises, warme tenders of the blood of Christ’ (p. 361). Rogers explains that these testimonies, given by individuals on entering the congregation, were beneficial because the saints could ‘instruct one another, and […] strive together, to excel in exhorting, comforting, and teaching to the edifying or one another’ (p. 2). All the saints’ voices together would be like ‘the voice of many waters, and mighty thunders’ (p. 201), and Rogers continues by citing the events of the first Lord’s day after his Dublin congregation had begun to gather together

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72 Sutton, A Christian Womans Experiences, B1v.
73 Davies, ‘Katherine Sutton’, ODNB.
74 Rogers, Ohel or Beth-shemesh, p. 354.
(13 November 1651) where a member of his congregation, whom he refers to as ‘Captain Lieutenant Johnson’s wife’, was in a most painful labour. She had been in labour for two days and nights, which Rogers remembered from notes made in the congregation’s record book. He writes that she had ‘two Midwives, her danger was great, her paine violent, her death (in the account of all present) imminent, the Midwives gave her over; friends, husband, all gave her over for a dead woman’ (p. 369). Rogers continues to recount her husband’s actions at this time writing ‘whilst she was on the racke (as it were) roaring’, and ‘(finding his owne prayers uneffectual) [he] runnes to the Church [...] in great haste’ (p. 369). ‘Being much distracted, and disturbed’, he told the church of his wife’s condition which Rogers emphasises was ‘almost past hopes in all appearance’ and begged for ‘the earnest prayers of the Church at this instant season, that God would bee seen, which the Church did [...] with a most hearty, heavenly, united strength’ (p. 369). The congregation

Begged both [mother and child] alive out of Gods hands to the admiration of all: for that very time to a minute as well as we might guesse, and as we were informed by this brother himself, (and others) at that very instant whilst the Church was so earnest and incessant, she was safely and easily delivered (even to the wonder of all with her). (p. 369)

Rogers draws a direct link with the intense praying of him and his congregation, and the recovery of Captain Lieutenant Johnson’s wife from her child labour and this is certainly meant to prefigure his later explanation of his congregation members experiencing ‘new births’. Praying together could help both bodily and spiritual births. This sense of divine providence, which Rogers summarised as ‘Gods owning us and answering us’, could not be omitted from his description of the congregation’s doctrine and discipline. This led them to be ‘abundantly confirmed in [the church’s] faith, for future’ (p. 369). God had given his blessing to the gathering of them together by saving one of their members because of their uniting together in prayer.

Three pages earlier in his work, Rogers shows how the saints should spare the censures of those who experience the despair of searching for evidence of God’s grace before they are brought to the realisation that they are one of the elect: he compares this process to that of seeding and harvesting, and to a woman in child labour. In its unregenerate state the believer’s heart is ‘dead, barren, and unprofitable’ and the ‘seed is in the ground, and lyes hid’ until there is ‘joy in harvest’ (p. 365). Rogers also shows that their sorrow, at this time, is like ‘a woman in travel, that is full of pangs’, but these pains ‘shall be turned into joy [John 16:20-22]’ (p. 366). Believers will go through a time of despair and experiencing agonising
feelings of damnation, but this will resolve itself with conversion and the ‘birth of joy’ (p. 366). Rogers asks his followers, and all those who were seeking to join such a congregation, to pity and support those ‘poor soules’ in their ‘pangs’ because it was neither piety nor charity to censure them; for in so doing, as Asaph says, Psal: 73.13,14, you will condemme the generation of the just, and will but gratifie the Devil, to scandalize the wayes of grace in those strict passages which are through the strait-gate. (p. 366)

Asaph’s Psalm shows that by censuring and condemning those who are in pain with ‘bringing forth’, there is a danger that the believer will turn away from God completely. Asaph expresses his frustration that he had been ‘plagued’ all day long and ‘chastened every morning’ (73:14) when those who were ‘the ungodly’ would ‘prosper in the world’ (73:12). Rogers recognised that if the godly were cast down by living saints, as well as the Devil and his temptations and pains, they would be less like to ‘bring forth’ successfully. As Captain Lieutenant Johnson’s wife was delivered safely of her child with the help of all the prayers of the congregation together, so were believers, in their spiritual ‘bringing forth’, to be prayed for and supported. Sharing experiences was to enlighten the congregation about different ways God chose to bring the believer to the convincement of his grace. Rogers wrote: ‘by their Experiences you will learne how various God is in his wayes and workings’ (p. 366). Taking his example from Acts 4:23-32, where Peter and John reported back to their congregation once they had been released from captivity and the group became of ‘one heart and of one soul’ (4:32), Rogers showed that the church was ‘hereby strengthened in the Experiences of her members’ (p. 368).

Deborah Huish’s The Captive Taken from the Strong (1658) was clearly prefaced and titled with a view to it appearing as another example to others of how to overcome travelling pangs, nursed by Satan, before she experienced the ‘birth of joy’. The title of the work refers to the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah which describes that the ‘captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered’ (Isaiah 49:25). Similarly to how Peter and John reported back to their congregation about how and by what means they were held captive and released, Huish also writes how she had been under ‘the Power of the Tempter’ until she was rescued by her faith in God and the scriptures. Many published spiritual narratives expressed similar desperation in a loose framework of affliction and deliverance although, as Rogers evidently observed, these feelings were experienced in different ways: the more experiences believers read, the more they could attempt to support

75 Huish, The Captive Taken from the Strong, title page.
John Vernon, Huish’s brother-in-law, recognised that he had failed in the task of supporting her in her despair and his preoccupation with ridding himself of her presence:

Even we that were nearest related also, left off our hope for this poor soul[.] Yea, how have I, to my shame, that had the charge of her, failed most herein! I must say indeed, to my abasement, the weights and fear of her untimely end; the cares of keeping her from any Instrument to accomplish it; […] Alas, Pained now at no more in my own mind, then to get her safe again delivered into her dear Parents hands, that my face might not be covered with shame, according to my fear of her untimely end, at such distance from them […] alas, she almost fell out of my memory, and was seldom in my Prayer; the Lord grant me the mercy of her earnest supplications. (a4v*)

Vernon berates himself for neglecting to pray for his sister-in-law and being too concerned with keeping her from any ‘instrument’ that would bring her to ‘her untimely end’. He, being the husband of the eldest Huish sister, Anne, was responsible for her well being. It was his face that would be ‘covered with shame’ had she accomplished the deed, and no doubt he was relieved when he delivered her back safely to her parents at Sand, South Devon.76 It was only afterwards that Vernon, and his brother-in-law William Allen, realised the significance of her ordeal, the importance of her cure by conversion, and her decision to be baptised into the Loughwood congregation.77

76 My sincere thanks go to Mrs Stella Huyshe-Shires for allowing me access to her family’s home, which is only occasionally opened to the public. The outward appearance of the house at Sand has changed very little since Deborah’s grandfather Rowland Huish extended the building in 1594. According to both John Burke and William Henry Hamilton Rogers, Deborah’s father, James Huish, ‘engaged most actively in support of the Royal cause in the Rebellion making great sacrifices of his private fortune The estates he had inherited from his wealthy and industrious grandfather, were, some sold, and on the remainder a fine was imposed of the tenth, viz. £283. By the royalist composition papers it appears he took up arms against Parliament; laid them down in 1643, and compounded in 1646. In 1660 he received the appointment of captain in the militia of foot, raised in East Devon by the Duke of Albermarle’. See Burke, A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry; Or Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. 4 (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), p. 414; Hamilton Rogers, Huyshe of Somerset and Devon: A Pedigree (Taunton: Athenaeum Press, 1897), p. 35. If this evidence is reliable, James Huish’s allowing his two eldest daughters to marry parliamentarian, Baptist army officers becomes quite remarkable. It is perhaps testament to the fluidity of political and religious affiliations in this period. Deborah’s parents, James Huish (bap. 2 May 1604, bur. 26 May 1681) and Deborah Reynell (bap. 13 August 1621, bur. 15 June 1687), had eleven recorded children. These were, from eldest to youngest, Anne (bap. 9 May 1625, m. first to John Vernon, bur. date unknown), Mary (bap. 1 March 1626, m. William Allen, died in Dublin c. 19 December 1655), Deborah, James (bap. 15 July 1630), Rebecca (bap. 20 January 1632), John (bap. 26 February 1634/5), Rowland (bap. 21 September 1636, bur. 28 November 1638), Richard (bap. 29 November 1638), Sarah (bap. 1640), Jacl (bap. 24 December 1642), and Tryphoena (bap. 5 February 1645/6). See Burke, A Genealogical and Heraldic History, pp. 414-15; Hamilton Rogers, Huyshe of Somerset and Devon, pp. 35-6.

77 My thanks to the Devon Record Office for allowing me to view the records of the congregation at Loughwood in the parish of Dalwood, Dorset: Proceedings Book of Meetings in East Devon, Chiefly at Loughwood, vol. 1 (1653-1795), DRO 3700D-O/M.1. J. B. Whitely explains that the condition of the manuscripts is due to their being stored in a barrel, exposed to the damp, before being taken to pieces and being put back together in the wrong order. It is not known how the congregation was founded, or by whom, but the first items recorded in the book are from 14 February 1654 (‘14th of the 12 mth 1653’). The church building still survives today and has
Huish’s narrative, giving an account of her seemingly miraculous recovery out of extreme despair, would seem to have rallied and united the saints within her congregation. However, as well as encouraging ‘poor, drooping, disconsolate, discouraged souls’ (A4) who were suffering in the belief that they were not one of God’s elect and that Satan’s assaults would batter their hearts for eternity, Huish was also made to stand as a metaphor for the wider body of ‘drooping’ believers by Allen and Vernon. Her experiences, like those of Captain Lieutenant Johnson’s wife, were a sign that God was on that their congregations’ side, and not on those of their enemies. Huish’s ‘raising’ from the assaults and temptations of Satan was, according to Allen, a ‘signal mercy’ to the saints in the congregation and a pledge and pattern of what God will yet do, not onely for poor disconsolate souls in like conditions; but also for the recovery and raising his publicke works, so far gone back in these Nations, in this sad declining day, as causeth many of Zion’s Friends to speak sadly and doubtfully of them, as they of Christ. (A5’-A6)

Allen sees the uplifting of Huish as a ‘pattern’ for what God would do for the people of Zion who have ‘so far gone back’ in their ‘raising’ of his ‘publicke works’. Her individual struggle is used as a metaphor for the whole of Zion ‘in these worse days of declining’ (a1). Vernon also uses the metaphor and compares the wider community of Zion to the biblical lands, and asks his readers to remember ‘God’s special presence with Israel, in driving back Jordan by his mighty power’ (a6). Israel’s response to this, shown in the book of Joshua, was to erect ‘Pillars of praise, to encourage the future Faith and hope of faithful ones that should follow God fully’. The relation of Huish’s experience in her published narrative plays the part of one of these ‘pillars of praise’ to encourage other believers not to cease following God. Her work is both a ‘monument’ and a ‘pillar’ of the cause of the saints. Vernon reminds his readers that the Israelites could not possibly have expected God’s presence if they had followed their ‘humane design, to which they were sometimes subject through unbelief’ (a6). Comparing this biblical conflict and resolution with recent events, he illustrates:

Neither in our dayes have any persons ground to suppose (much lesse to conclude) that the Lords eminent presence in the high places of the field, scil. Naasby and other parts with his been restored by the National Trust for visitors. For more on the church records see W. T. Whitley, ‘Loughwood and Honiton’, Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society, 4 (1914-15), 129-44; J. B. Whiteley, ‘Loughwood Baptists in the Seventeenth Century’, Baptist Quarterly, 31 (1985), 148-58. Deborah’s name appears on p. 2 and 6 under the list of members for the Sidbury area. William Allen is listed as a member of the Dalwood area, on p. 5, below the names of ‘B’ and S” Vernon. Deborah’s sister Mary had died before their return from Ireland: Thomas Patient, Baptist minister in Dublin, preached her funeral sermon recorded in ‘H.Cromwell to secretary Thurloe, 19 December 1655’, in Papers of John Thurloe, 4; pp. 327-8.
people, while they faithfully followed him, can now yeeld any incouragement to expect the like presence of God, while they are turning back, and declining from him. (a6v)

Both Allen and Vernon had fought with Sir Thomas Fairfax’s army who triumphed at the battle of Naseby on 14 June 1645, the most decisive battle of the first Civil War. The Parliamentary victory restored hope that those fighting against the King were on God’s side, and that their faith in a new godly kingdom was being rewarded. If these people of God had ceased worshipping and believing, then they could not expect God to fend off the approaches of the antichrist, whether it be from Jordan, or the Royalist regiments. Although Huish herself had ‘some sad considerations about falling away, after grace received; which made my soul to tremble in the thoughts of it, to think how dishonourable that would be to the name of God’ (E4v), she triumphed over Satan’s assaults and her experience remained as a ‘pillar’ (a2) propping up the ‘drooping’ godly community.

After Allen, Vernon, and Huish returned home to their Loughwood Congregation from Ireland in 1656, where both the former had been stationed in Cromwell’s army, it is clear that the desire to unite disparate and ‘drooping’ congregations, despite national boundaries, remained a particular concern. Allen later framed Huish’s narrative as an ‘epistle’ (A2) addressed to the churches in Ireland, which suggests that it was intended to encourage a closer union between the churches in the West Country, and those in Ireland. While in Ireland between 1653 and 1656, Huish had visited the meeting houses of the Baptists who met in Dublin, including the house of Thomas Patient, then the leader of this Dublin congregation.78

The practice of believers’ baptism had arrived in Ireland with the English army and proliferated in the garrison towns, particularly Waterford and Kilkenny.79 Patient, one of the foremost exponents of the ordinance in Ireland in the Interregnum, had managed to convert the towns’ governors Richard Lawrence and Daniel Axtell respectively. It was from Waterford that Patient sent a message dated 14 January 1651[2] to the Independent congregation which had been gathered in Dublin’s Christ Church Cathedral by John Rogers. Rogers recorded in his Ohel or Beth-shemesh, a defence of the congregation’s practices, that

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78 Thomas Patient, the most active Baptist minister in Ireland during the 1650s, had been a member of William Kiffin’s congregation in London, and was one of the signatories of the Baptist Confession of Faith (1644). He had arrived in Ireland by April 1650, and, as Richard Greaves has shown, was, from 22 April 1650 to 23 February 1651, a chaplain to Henry Ireton’s regiment of foot. He had moved to Waterford and gathered a congregation by the time he sent Allen and Vernon to Dublin.

79 For Vernon visiting Waterford and Kilkenny see ‘A letter of H. Warren, 14 December 1655’, Papers of John Thurloe, 4: pp. 314-5. Huish writes in The Captive Taken from the Strong about ‘coming to Waterford with my Brother Vernons Family’ (B8v), how they ‘landed at Milford’ where Vernon and Anne left her (C1), and how she and William Allen landed at Minehead (C1).
the letter was brought by ‘Capt. Vernon, and A. [djutant] G. [eneral] A. [llen] to some seven or eight of their judgement, whom they withdrew from the Church into private meetings on the Lords dayes’. 80 Allen and Vernon, while travelling around Ireland in the army, were acting as messengers to those in the Rogers’s Dublin congregation who were sympathetic to Baptist ideas, whose correspondence Rogers believed was sent ‘on purpose to break us’ (p. 300). The letter encouraged the members to secede by announcing that Patient’s Waterford church took ‘offence at [their] so walking’, and made it clear using scripture that they were not to mix with those of different religious opinions. Rogers vindicated his beliefs by disproving the Baptists’ scriptural arguments, but all to no avail. The members seceded, and Rogers returned, seemingly disheartened, to England. He reflected afterwards that Allen and Vernon ‘did much mischief in the body, and made a sore rent at first from us by some whose judgement were blinded’ (p. 301). It is difficult to ascertain the exact reason why Baptist principles proliferated so much in Ireland. Barnard suggests that the reasons for the unprecedented increase in instances of believers’ baptism was that the ‘exclusive doctrine attracted soldiers anxious to retain their distinctive identity as the elect in a country of unregenerate papists’. 81 He also observes that a large proportion of high-ranking army men, as well as the governors of towns and cities, were Baptists, and this encouraged those seeking power to convert. The circulation of Huish’s experience would no doubt have helped the spread of Baptist ideas.

There is other evidence of John Vernon attempting to unite believers and congregations through the sharing of letters and experience. Apart from appearing as the bearer of a message to members of John Rogers’s congregation worshipping at Christ Church Cathedral, Vernon is also recorded as carrying messages between the Baptist churches in Ireland (in Waterford, Dublin, and Kilkenny) addressed to those of the same persuasion in London, the first of which was written on 1 June 1653. Vernon, who was ‘in full communion’ with the Irish churches, was to promote a ‘more revived correspondency’ by delivering ‘letters and loving epistles’ in which they had previously ‘found great advantage not only by weakening Satan’s suggestions and jealousyes, but it hath begott a closer union and knitting upp of heart’. 82 Exchanging letters and information was intended to unite the churches to enable

80 Rogers, Ohel or Beth-shemesh, p. 302. Rogers had returned to England before he published this.
them to fight Satan (in whatever guise he might appear): a common enemy. The Irish churches mourned:

Oh, how many packetts have passed filled with worldly matters since wee have heard one word from you, or you from us, of the condition, increase, growth and decrease of the commonwealth of Israel [...] who were some yeeres since brought low through oppressions, afflictions and sorrow [...] Doth it not appeare by our lite zeale for him, and lesse delight in his wayes, with constant complaynings, with little sense of our victory over our leanese, our drynese and barrenese. Are not these instead of the songs of Syon [...] For, doubtless now, if ever, wee are especially called upon to put on the whole armoure of God that wee may be able to stand in this day, and, having done all, to stand.  

In recent times, the churches seem to have neglected to assess the condition of ‘the commonwealth of Israel’ since recent oppressions: imprisonment, persecution, and slander. As Huish’s body had withered and dried itself ‘like to an anatomy’, the congregations recognise that they themselves are sick and barren as they are and have no capacity to bring forth joy, or establish the kingdom on earth. Accompanying the sickness metaphor is a call to the saints to take arms against their persecutors and to the many unbelievers: a rallying call for those who were in the depths of mourning and despair to unite and rise up together. Even as late as 1658, Vernon wrote a similar reproach in his preface to The Captive, addressing the Irish churches:

And seeing the Lord alone can heal our sicknesse, and our wound [Hosea 5:13]; and the breach upon us, which is wide as the Sea; let every true Mourner humbly approach before him, on the behalf of our selves, and whole Zion […] & on behalf of the afflicted, deserted, unbelieving, divided, and thereby liable to be destroyed people. […] for now all men almost see our sicknesse, and our wound; how foolish many Physicians and our false refuges have proved. (b3)  

The people of Zion are presented as both literally and metaphorically wounded and divided from each other. The congregations are separated by something ‘which is wide as’ the Irish Sea, but they are also experiencing a spiritual breach: one that cannot be cured by a physician. Like Huish, members should fight their afflictions and unite against Satan, whatever he might represent. Her text is both a literal and allegorical message for uniting the churches in preparation for the second coming of Christ. Catharine Gray similarly notes the text’s propagandistic qualities, writing that it evokes ‘a specific community that keeps its  

83 White, ed., ‘The Irish Correspondence’, pp. 112-13. The Loughwood congregation’s records have a reference to holding a day of humiliation on behalf of their Irish brethren. On 14 February 1654 the church wrote: ‘Findinge much deadness uppon the spirits of the members in generall and much unsutablenesse appearing in our Carriages to the rich grace of god manifested to us in his severall dealings with us, and having many weighty causes laid before us by our Brethren of Ireland all calling upon us for godly sorrow and humiliation.’ (DRO 3700D-O/M.1, p. 7)
identity intact even as it crosses the borders of kingdom’. I would argue that the text was published to strengthen and further establish the ties between Baptist congregations whose identity was constantly questioned by doubters and persecutors. Vernon writes despairingly that ‘all men almost’ see the group’s division and uncertainty and Huish’s text is both part of an urge to heal the ‘wound’ that has occurred between the geographically separate Baptist congregations, and also to heal the ‘wounds’ of individual believers that make up the whole body.

In the 1650s the Particular Baptists began to gather together in regional associations to establish links between churches and discuss doctrine and church organisation, and these included the army garrisons in Ireland that Huish visited, as well as the churches in the West Country. Using women’s experiences to establish or re-establish links between churches seems to have been a process unique to Baptist groups: separatist churches tended to be more self-contained in nature and organised as individual congregations, so experiences sent from other churches would not have had the same effect. In the same way, sending letters of recommendation to other churches when a member moved their place of residence also seems to have been something peculiar to Baptist congregations. The extent of correspondence between the churches is unclear because it is not possible to know how many of these manuscripts still survive: Huish’s experience which is styled as an ‘epistle’ survived because it had been put into print. B. R. White, in his edited collection of Association records which includes ‘The Irish Correspondence of 1653’ carried to London by Vernon, conjectures that ‘when the London Baptists had read the letter and supporting documents which John Vernon had brought them, they had a large number of copies made which they had sent out, with their own covering letter, to a number of churches in England, Scotland and Wales’. As White records in his detailed study of ‘The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644-1660’, ‘in 1653 the Ilston churches received copies of letters from Ireland [...] from the Glaziers’ Hall church as their London correspondents’. Copies of the correspondence can be found written in the Ilston church record book, presumably for all the members of the church to read. As well as a letter advocating the knitting together of separate congregations, the two documents attached include an ‘agreement concerning matters requiring prayer by the

86 White, ed., ‘The Irish Correspondence of 1653’, p. 110.
87 White, ‘The Organisation of the Particular Baptists’, 213.
churches’ as well as the ‘details of the Particular Baptist churches in Ireland’. The first document contains many ideas that Allen and Vernon drew attention to five years later in their prefatory works to Huish’s narrative. The Irish churches desired prayers for twelve different intentions, especially to improve their ‘little sence of saintts’ sufferings’ and their ‘great aptnes to forget the great things God hath done for us. And the abuse of the many pretiouse mercyes he hath multiplyed uppon us’. Huish’s experience would have worked as a cross-national message showing how saints could be miraculously rescued from the captivity of Satan and how they might recognise the signs that they were suffering. By preserving this experience in publishing and sending the work abroad, the churches would be able to remember the ‘precious mercyes’ God had shown them. What is remarkable is that a woman’s experience could unite congregations across the Irish Sea, and attempt to cement bonds between different Baptist Associations.

Huish’s The Captive Taken from the Strong was not the only experience to be addressed to other Baptist churches in an attempt to create bonds and links between them. Jane Turner’s Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion, published in 1653 by her husband Captain John Turner, was addressed to the ‘Precious and dearly beloved Brethren’ in the ‘Churches of Christ who worship God in spirit and truth [...], especially those my dear Brethren at Newcastle, Barwick [Berwick], and Scotland’, with whom he had ‘taken sweet counsel in the house of God for several years past’. John Turner experienced ‘no small joy’ that ‘the Lord is pleased in these our daies any way by any means to put his People in mind of that which they are so prone to forget, namely the various workings of God in their poor hearts’ which was included in his wife’s ‘small Treatise’ (A2v-A3). The Irish churches’ assertions of believers’ ‘aptnes to forget the great things God hath done’ seem to have been common amongst Baptist churches, and Turner’s narrative was published to remind members of these ‘precious mercyes’. As a serving army officer, it is likely that John Turner had travelled to Newcastle, Berwick, and Scotland with the travelling regiments. A ‘Captain-Lieutenant Turner’ is recorded in a list of officers in Robert Lilburne’s regiment from 1659, and would surely have joined Lilburne on Cromwell’s ‘military expedition against the Scots in 1650-1’ and after, when he became commander-in-chief of the army in Scotland. This would fit with the experiences of Jane Turner, who records that she undertook ‘a passage on the Sea from London to Newcastle’

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88 White, ed., ‘The Irish Correspondence of 1653’, p. 119.
89 Turner, Choice Experiences, A2. It was probably published just after 7 October 1653.
(K4) where she stayed while he was often ‘some time’ (L1) away from her. It can be assumed with some confidence that husband and wife were members of ‘the first Baptist congregation in Newcastle’ that had been founded by Lilburne, with Major Paul Hobson, ‘when he was governor there in 1647’.91 Before this, it is likely that the Turners were baptised into John Spilsbury’s congregation when they were in London which required baptism on entry: Jane wrote that she and her husband gave the congregation ‘full satisfaction’ before the next week when they ‘were baptized and added to the Church’ (H4v). After travelling north with the army, it would appear that the Turners joined a similarly ‘closed communion’ church under Hobson.

From evidence in the Hexham church books, B. R. White has asserted that the leader of the Hexham congregation, Thomas Tillam, was ‘in conflict with the far more rigid “closed communion” leaders, Paul Hobson and Thomas Gower, who led another congregation some twenty miles away at Newcastle’.92 Tillam disagreed with various practices of the Newcastle church, including the laying on of hands, and Hobson later reproved Tillam’s communication with ‘open communion’ churches. In the same year as Turner’s experience was published in London, White writes ‘a letter from Swan Alley [church in London then led by Hanserd Knollys] to Hexham mentioned the decision to draw the “closed communion” churches nearer together – a decision taken in the summer of 1653’.93 Jane Turner wrote that although she did ‘much respect, love, and delight in some who are not yet come up to the true worship of Christ in his Church’ she must be true to her principles:

> I cannot see how we that are, according to the Gospel, joined to the Lord, and his Church, by which we hold out to the world a visible profession of his name, and a separation from all false ways of worship, which in our principles we judge them who are not rightly constituted with us according to the appointment and practice of Christ and his Apostles to be no other, I say I cannot see how we can meet with them in their public worship, to hear their Ministers, or in any other spiritual duty, but it is a crossing our own principles. (I1v)

Here, Turner writes of her congregation’s separation from gathered churches that were, in her opinion, ‘not rightly constituted’ according to the practices and process of appointing members and ministers set out in the New Testament. Tillam’s practice of the laying on of hands was almost certainly one of the disputed practices, and Turner’s support of these principles would have advertised them to other readers. Readers of her narrative would have

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91 Coward, ‘Robert Lilburne’, ODNB. Lilburne became governor of Newcastle and Coward writes that ‘the earliest reference in the town records to him in this office is 11 August 1647’.


been able to see doctrines discussed, but as part of a simpler, allegorical format.\textsuperscript{94} That the correspondence between London and the northern churches occurred at the same time as the publishing of her work addressed to the northern churches, still in their infancy, perhaps suggests the uneasiness of the northern Baptists, and their desire to keep their membership only for those that had been baptised anew.

Other Baptist congregations were not the only threats to believers belonging to Hobson’s church. Quakerism was growing in the north and must have seemed an attractive alternative to the stricter doctrines and discipline of the Baptist churches. Richard L. Greaves writes that Hobson, being the leader of the Newcastle congregation, ‘battled with the Quakers, who converted six of his followers’.\textsuperscript{95} In the same year that Turner’s narrative was published, he wrote and published \textit{A Treatise Containing Three Things} to be sold in the same book shop, the Three Bibles in St Paul’s churchyard. In it he describes the process of being under the ‘Burthen of Sinne’ and then returning to God bringing ‘sweet and unexpected Entertainment’.\textsuperscript{96} It seems to have been meant as an encouragement to those who had recently left off from attending or had withdrawn from the congregation. His later work, \textit{Fourteen Queries and Ten Absurdities [...] presented by a Free-willer to the Church of Christ at Newcastle} published on 18 May 1655 in Newcastle deals more specifically with the tenets of free will and Quakerism. Thomas Weld, later Anne Venn’s stepfather, published a similar text earlier in 1653 which he named \textit{The Perfect Pharisee under Monkish Holinesse} and also published it in Newcastle. Although Weld also criticised the Baptists, he appears united with them in their criticisms of the Quakers whom he accused of ‘Grosse Blasphemies and horrid delusions’.\textsuperscript{97} The point of his pamphlet appears to be enlightening believers to the practices and doctrines of the Quakers, whom he aligned with Satan appearing ‘like an Angell of light’ (A1\textsuperscript{v}). Luckily for believers, Weld writes, ‘something ever doth breake forth in his closest contrivances, that makes the designe of the Serpent very visible’ (A1\textsuperscript{v}), and this is what he sought to bring out with his text. Turner’s experience expresses these preoccupations with the spread of Quakerism, but because she accounts for how she was...

\textsuperscript{94} The Harvard University Library copy has a hand pointing drawn onto the page highlighting the last part of Turner’s quotation (I2). This does not happen on any other page and might conceivably be the mark of a reader particularly interested in this part of her experience.

\textsuperscript{95} Richard L. Greaves, ‘Paul Hobson’, \textit{ODNB}.

\textsuperscript{96} Paul Hobson, \textit{Fourteen Queries and Ten Absurdities [...] Presented by a Free-Willer to the Church of Christ at Newcastle} (London: Printed by Henry Hills for William Hutchinson, bookseller in Durham, [18 May] 1655), title page.

\textsuperscript{97} Thomas Weld, \textit{The Perfect Pharisee under Monkish Holinesse} (Gateside: Printed by S. B. to be sold in Newcastle, 1653), title page.
affected in personal terms these worries would surely have become even more relevant to believers. If Turner, a godly woman who examined herself and read scripture regularly, could be tempted by the tenets of the Quakers, then so could they and they should be on their guard. Like Weld, Turner describes the appearance of Quakerism as a manifestation of ‘an Angel of light’ (I7), mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:14, into which Satan had transformed himself. He is described as waiting for the ‘opportunitie to catch me as a fish in the water, covering his hook with a bait of mystery and spirituality’ (I7\textsuperscript{v}). By deceiving her as ‘an Angel of light’ with the ‘bait’ of ‘corrupt principles, which [she] would have trembled at the thoughts of before [she] had such principles’, she was confused about the ‘Mystery, Spirit, [and] waiting upon God’ (K1). She then goes on to discuss ‘the particulars about which I was deceived’ which describe Quaker doctrines of listening to the moving of the spirit within themselves: ‘as to the time of doing duties they were to wait for the moving of the Spirit […] they were to do nothing by sit still and wait, […]’, and then to speak whether men or women’ (K1\textsuperscript{v}). By using her own experience to enlighten others on the doctrines of the Quakers, she shows how any member of the godly could be deceived by such corrupt principles and what those principles were. Weld explains and attempts to disprove Quaker principles in \textit{The Perfect Pharisee}, but his work lacks the personal touch of Turner’s.

Turner first encountered the Quaker ‘Angels of light’ when she and her husband had moved into the countryside with the army where they ‘had not that privilege’ of ‘the practice of the Gospel’ as they had previously (I8). There they found whole churches ‘very much corrupted, owning \& practising strange things’ though doing so under the guise of godly churches and she recorded that it was difficult to find a person with ‘sound principles, much less a whole Church where there was a powerful Ministery, and a wise government’ (I8\textsuperscript{v}). It was then that she became ‘confused’ and looking back was amazed that she had not been ‘swallowed up with confusion, as many were in those daies’ (K1). It was then that Satan appeared in his guise, taking advantage of the godly church’s confusion, and tempting her to adopt Quaker principles. Although tempted, Turner records that she did not fully adopt their practices because she thought they ‘lead to loosness, either in matter of conversion [conversation], or slighting the \textit{Churches} or ordinances of Christ’ (K2). She is anxious to show that she never spoke critically of her Baptist faith, or the ‘Churches’ that were grouped together. Unlike the ‘loose’ speaking of other Quakers Turner would seem to have remained loyal to her Baptist principles, and she carried on in ‘private duties’ (K2) realising that there was ‘no Scripture-ground’ for Quaker practices despite being ‘very much troubled’ (K2\textsuperscript{v}).
She wrote that she had not experienced ‘such temptations’ since she first questioned the existence of God when on her journey towards conversion, and it was with these troubles that she travelled to Newcastle with her husband by sea. She interpreted, as did many women in their experiences, ‘the raging waves of the Sea’ (K4) as reproofs from God and she rejoiced that ‘it pleased the Lord to bring us safe to Land’ (K5). Speaking of it with her husband ‘who was at that time much in the same condition’ (K5v) they decided to speak ‘but little’ about it so that they might not be condemned from their own words. This set Turner off to look in private to ‘reading and examining my Scripture-grounds’ where she found the evidence for her former Baptist opinions ‘very full and plain’ as opposed to finding ‘nothing’ for Quakerism (K6v). This, and her remembrance of the comfort her former principles brought her on the sea voyage, restored her to the doctrine of grace which, she writes, ‘was to me as life from the dead’ (L1).

At the end of this part of Turner’s experience she gives five reasons why she and her husband would ‘for ever admire [...] such a mercy’ (L1v). One was that she and her husband had been brought off from Quaker principles ‘so clearly’, because ‘many are brought off from them, and yet there is still so much confusion remaining upon their spirits, that it is hard to discern whether they are brought off or no’ (L2). It is possible that this is reference to ‘open communion’ churches that let believers of different religious persuasions to meet and worship. It is also quite clear that it was the confused ministry the Turners had found in the country that had prepared the way for Satan to appear in the guise of Quakerism. If the churches had been grouped together in a tight community then there would not have been room for doubts and differences in doctrine to creep in. Turner records that she ‘obtained mercy’ because she followed Quaker principles ‘ignorantly’ (K5v), and her description of her experience made known the potential temptations that saints who were not gathered in churches with a ‘powerful Ministry, and a wise government’. Turner had attempted to turn this sad (yet blessed) Experience, to his praise, and our great advantage, the remembrance of which I trust shall be a mercy that shall stand us in stead at times of need, whiles we live; which the Lord grant it may be so, to the honour and praise of his great name. (L2v)

Her husband, John, supports these ideas in his preface to her work which is addressed to the churches of Newcastle, Berwick, and Scotland. He owns the narrative because the churches may have thought it ‘strange’ the ‘Treatise’ should have come into their hands without an explanation from him, having a ‘neer relation to the Author’ (A2v). Using his wife as an example, he stresses that it was important to safeguard the soul after conversion, as well as
before, and not to leave ‘an open door for Satan to deceive us with his manifold temptations, by which we suffer much harm’ (A5). He prayed that

The Lord [...] would give all his people more care and diligence in watching their own hearts and waies, for the increase of their spiritual strength and growth in grace, lest they being led away for a time, with the error of the wicked, fall from their own stedfastness, 2 Pet. 3. 17, 18. as many have done to their greatest grief and loss. (A5r-v)

To counter this, Turner’s experience, he trusted, would be ‘a faithfull remembrancer and helper of us in this great work, in which I hope the Lord will have much glory, and his people comfort’ (A8). He implies that reading this narrative would remind believers of the temptations they would be likely to face and stop them from turning to Quaker doctrines. John Spilsbury, who contributed another preface, also wrote that the work was ‘seasonable for the time we live in’ being ‘a large discovery of the most devilish and strong delusions of our times and the depth and danger of them, with the great Soul-losses of such as are taken with them’ (B3v). The readers of the work were intended to use it as a warning to look out for Satan’s temptations under the guise of Quakerism. As John Turner highlights in his epistle to the reader, the work was ‘not intended principally for such Ismaelites, but rather for those who have their faces Zion ward enquiring the way thither’ (B1r-v). Turner’s was not a work intended for Quakers to read and use, but for those tempted away from the Baptist churches to their doctrines.

Turner’s experience provoked a strongly-worded reply the next year from active Quaker Edward Burrough as *Something in Answer to a Book called Choice Experiences*. If her book had not been effective in its criticism of Quakerism then it would not have warranted such a reply. Burrough was ‘moved of the Lord’ to come into the ‘Assembly’ of her congregation ‘to declare the truth from him, concerning you’.98 He includes a ‘copy of a letter sent to the Assembly of those that are called Anabaptists in Newcastle’ (title page) where he further addressed Turner’s congregation and ‘thee who was the Speaker when I was present among you’, probably referring to Paul Hobson. Here he tries to convince the congregation that they are the ones that are ‘deceived’ by following the scripture so closely, and shows that they are ‘bewitched from the obedience of the truth within, to obey the letter without; as they were that the Scripture speaks of’ (B3v). Referring to Galatians 3 in which St Paul explores the importance of faith rather than the law saying ‘after that faith is come, we

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98 Edward Burrough, *Something in Answer to a Book called Choice Experiences, given forth by one J. Turner* ([7 November] 1654), B3.
are no longer under a schoolmaster [scriptural law]’ (3.25), Burrough shows how the Quaker emphasis on the inward spirit overrules the Baptist congregation’s strict adherence to scripture. He writes that he has a duty to declare the truth according to Quaker thinking ‘for the simple ones’ (B2v) who did not understand the nuances of religious argument. His strong words emphasise his frustration and he declares, ‘let her mouth be stopped, and let shame strike her in the Face, who professes her selfe to know the Lord’ (A4). He then shows that her fellow Baptists should ‘all be ashamed of her who professes them-selves members joyned with her in Church: she hath made manifest the ignorance of them all’ (A4). 99 What is interesting is that Burrough deals with Turner’s words, and not those of her prefatory writers, showing that she is a mouthpiece for her congregation’s views and doctrines. He often engages with quotations from her work, for example:

her selfe declareth in the 109. Page of her Booke of being brought out of Babylon into Syon, but all along through her Booke, her language is one and the same, before her comming out of Babylon, and in Syon (as she saith) her language is the language of Babylon wholly, and she is yet a servant in bondage in Babylon unto the Mistresse of Witchcraft, and never came to witnesse freedom in Syon. (A2)

Whereas Turner called the Quakers ‘Angels of Light’ that Satan had transformed himself into, Burrough turns this image around so that she becomes a ‘Mistresse of Witchcraft’ under the ‘bondage’ of her congregation, styled as Babylon. The Baptists’ views then become the deceptions of the devil. Burrough also wrote a reply to John Bunyan’s Some Gospel-truths Opened two years later in 1656. Bunyan’s work spoke of ‘gospel-truths’ which would enable the unregenerate, particularly those that could be tempted by Quakerism (those that ‘mocke at Christs second comming’), to uphold their principles and not be seduced by their ideas. 100 Those that followed the ‘truth’ had oil in their lamps, and could defend themselves by using scriptures against any form of devilish Quaker seduction. Bunyan draws on personal experience when he warned his readers that the Devil would ‘endeavour to keepe thee from hearing of the word’, and ‘from the Ordinances of Christ, in hearing, reading, meditation, &c. or else, he seeks to disturbe, and distract thy minde when thou art conversant in these things’ (B2v). Turner also records experiences of this kind. She wrote that the Lord did ‘discover Satan under his veil to me’ by showing her the errors of Quakerism, particularly ‘as to that of being saved by a Christ within, and not by a Christ without’ (K7v). John Burton, Bunyan’s

99 Women seem to have been encouraged to disagree with Quakers. One letter gathered in the Swarthmore Manuscripts records that ‘one woman of Bunian his society’ opposed them in Bedfordshire in 1659 (Friends House, vol. 3, fol. 45).

100 Bunyan, Some Gospel-Truths Opened, p. 144.
prefatory writer, also referred to this belief as false, that the ‘operation of the spirit which
dwels in them [Quakers]’ (A9), was a deception Satan had contrived. He continued:

However these may talk much of Christ within them, yet it is manifest, that it is not the spirit
of Christ, but the spirit of the Divel; in that it doth not glorifie, but sleight and reject the man
Christ and his righteousnesse. (A9r-v)

By including her own experience of the danger and charm of Quakerism, Turner participated
in arguments against their ‘devilish’ works, highlighting where their tenets were different to
her own Particular Baptist congregation. Although not presented as a doctrinal argument, as
Bunyan’s Some Gospel-Truths Opened is, Turner uses her own providential evidence to
establish the validity of her belief. Experiential writing was perhaps a more acceptable genre
for women, generally believed to be closer to the divine, than doctrinal arguments usually
maintained by male ministers or elders, but a combination of the two, utilised by both Turner
and Bunyan, could be extremely effective.

What this chapter has explored is how women’s experiences were received and used
by their readers, both to teach in their homes, and the homes of others, and within their
congregational networks. There was certainly something about women’s works that was
fascinating to separatists, most likely stemming from the belief that women were closer to the
divine and its fight against the antichrist. Women were also perceived as weaker than men,
and it was thought that if God could raise a weak thing, then he could do the same for any
individual, or even a whole congregation. As John Turner wrote at the beginning of his wife’s
experience, ‘Beloved Brethren, you have here the labours of one of the weakest sex, which I
trust will occasion you the more to give glory to God, in that his strength appears in
weakness’ (A5v-A6). This gave women’s experiences a unique insight into how God would
treat the rest of the saints in the future, prefiguring his blessings and curses; showing
believers how to behave in the face of temptations to other doctrines and sin. As well as
showing the conversion of an individual, conversion narratives can also show us the anxieties
of different congregational communities struggling to stay true to scripture, as well as
depicting what these communities hoped for the future.
Chapter Five

‘The Broad River is preparing’: Prophecy, Politics, and the Daughters of Zion

Although published conversion narratives developed out of the congregational practice of the believer standing up and declaring the evidences of God’s grace they had experienced, they also tended to have a very public dimension, as chapter four has shown, using the private workings of grace to signify something of greater and more universal importance to both existing and potential followers. As Patricia Crawford has noted, citing Sara Mendelson’s work, ‘the practice of piety, [...] could provide “a coherent and satisfying explanation of world-historical events”’.¹ Both women and men interpreted their life events by God’s providence, using his blessings or chastisements as explanations for life or death in their families. They also took meaning from the shape of their own lives as they wrote and drew larger significance through connections with contemporary religio-political events. The individual struggle of each believer could be mapped onto the struggles of the people of God as a whole, and the temptations of the Devil were easily comparable to the various enemies of the saints, whether the Laudian bishops, the Presbyterians, Cromwell seemingly abandoning the cause of the saints against their enemies by publishing her experience and advising others.² This final chapter will explore in more detail than previous chapters how women’s writings, whether they presented themselves as martyrs, prophetesses, or both, were responding to larger political issues and seeking to change them. The first section will explore how women’s conversion narratives could play their part in spiritual warfare at both a local and national level. Concentrating on the anonymous female account, Conversion Exemplified, it will discuss how such a death-bed narrative could be particularly effective in evangelising and strengthening followers, but also to prove that her religious choices were the right ones.

² Anon., Conversion Exemplified, C7.
The second section will then move to discussing the significance of the words of prophetesses in this fight, remarking on why most female Baptist prophecies appeared in the year 1658. This chapter makes explicit how women attempted directly to alter the nation’s religious views, whether by example or by passing on God’s words, as martyrs or prophetesses.

Deborah Huish’s experiences were published, like the anonymous *Conversion Exemplified*, as representations of triumph over demonic persecution, which was then aligned with more worldly persecution, as I will show. William Allen’s title for her narrative, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, refers to the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah which describes that the ‘captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered’ (Isaiah 49:25). God declares that he will contend with all enemies that oppose with his followers, and he promises he will ‘save thy children’. Huish is set up as the prisoner of Satan, and God is shown to have fulfilled his promise in saving her from ‘the Power of the Tempter’.

Many published spiritual narratives like this one expressed similar desperation in a loose framework of affliction (whether from literal or metaphorical devils) and deliverance. The author of *Conversion Exemplified* also observed that the Lord often leaves believers ‘to be led captive, and then enlarges them out of that Bondage, for the most part, by Afflictions’ (C7v). Believers who followed erroneous religious doctrines before they came to rest in what they thought was the right way of worship according to their conscience (in this woman’s case, those of Independency), were shown to have been captivated by the devil and held in insensible bondage. It was only the afflictions of the Lord that made them sensible of their mistake. All potential members of separatist congregations were actively encouraged to interpret their lives in this way and to tell their fellow believers of their sufferings and assurance in order to become one of the congregations of saints. Owen Watkins shows that those who wrote such narratives

were neither preachers nor teachers and mostly lacked the skills of […] better known men, but so thoroughly and so persistently had Puritan preachers anatomized the soul and the content of the Christian life that any of their followers had the means both to relate behaviour to the inner process of regeneration and to describe what was happening.

No longer did believers need the intervention of a priest or minister to analyse their relationship with God: they had the language and images to analyse and write about it for the benefit of themselves and others. This ‘anatomising’, ‘taking apart’, and ‘looking into’ was

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3 Huish, *The Captive Taken from the Strong*, title page.
important, not just for the individual, but for the rest of the godly who could learn from such experiences. Believers, in effect, cut themselves open so that all others could see the battle between God and the Devil going on within their hearts, and invited readers to draw parallels with religio-political events.

The metaphorical image of the believer’s body laid open for observation is most powerfully illustrated by a later woodcut attributed to Robert White for the first edition of John Bunyan’s *Holy War, Made by Shaddai [God] upon Diabolus, For the Regaining of the Metropolis of the World. Or; The Losing and Taking Againe of the Town of Mansoul* (1682). Here, a town named ‘Mansoul’ is surrounded by the army of ‘Diabolus’, in the shape of a black dragon on the left, and ‘Shaddai’s army’ led by ‘Emanuell’ (Christ) on the right. The town is overlaid with the figure of a man whose heart is at the centre and labelled ‘Heart Castle’. The town of ‘Mansoul’ is an explicit representation of both the souls of believers and the larger gathered people of Zion. The image is applicable to Deborah Huish’s situation (she was a prisoner of Satan), but it would have been equally relevant to other believers under temptation and despair. Bunyan states:

*The Town of Mansoul is well known to many,*  
*Nor are her troubles doubted of by any*  
*That are acquainted with those Histories*  
*That Mansoul, and her Wars Anatomize.*  
*Then lend thine ear to what I do relate*  
*Touching the Town of Mansoul and her state,*  
*How she was lost, took captive, made a slave;*  
*And how against him set, that should her save.*

Although referring to a time later than Huish would have been familiar with, Bunyan describes how man’s soul was, at that time, imprisoned by the forces of Satan. England, the people of Zion, and the individual believer, he thought, were under threat from a Catholic government which made the people ‘slaves’. Nearly twenty-five years earlier, Allen and Vernon were similarly disillusioned with Cromwell’s government, which, as has been discussed in chapter four, imprisoned the godly both literally and metaphorically. As Gray writes: ‘Huish’s metaphorical captivity and release at the hands of Satan [is] an allegory for a body of saints held captive literally and figuratively to a blacksliding, tyrannous government and to slanderous “public reproach” (b1v).’ Because of its allegorical qualities, Huish’s narrative becomes timeless: it was meant to be applicable to all the saints from its publishing

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Figure 2: Woodcut for John Bunyan’s *The Holy War* (London: Printed for Dorman Newman, 1682), attributed to Robert White.
until the coming of Christ. The ‘Holy War’ between God and Satan could be mapped onto the Civil Wars in England, and the conflict in Ireland during the 1650s, but also to events in the hearts of individual believers, and the conflicts (private, public, or both) that they would face in times to come.

Women’s spiritual ‘conversion’ and ‘deathbed’ narratives were frequently, if not always, prefaced by a male hand that drew the readers’ attentions to the wider spiritual context of a work. Often the hand was that of a minister, or an elder or active member in the cases of groups organised on congregational principles, but sometimes this could be a close friend, or family member. Huish’s experience was prefaced by both her brothers-in-law and some of the elders of her congregation; Jane Turner’s Choice Experiences was prefaced by both her husband and two ministers familiar with her work; and even Anna Trapnel’s A Legacy for Saints would appear to have been prefaced and put together by her congregation at Allhallows, London. For the most part, prefatory writers drew attention to the godliness and exemplariness of the subject, and highlighted what particular lessons were to be drawn out by the reader. The presence of a prefatory writer helped to protect the women from aspersions made against their conduct in publishing. He would support the publishing of the text and establish the validity of the experience, but usually the women who wrote their own experiences (such as in the cases of Sutton, Trapnel, and Turner), or had played an active part in revising the work of their amanuensis (as in the case of the anonymous speaker of Conversion Exemplified), seemed to have had a very clear idea of how their experience related to the wider body of the saints. The women showed an active sense of what they needed to express in order to both evangelise and encourage those who read their work and that they were well experienced in drawing universal meaning from personal experience. Believers were well-trained within their congregations to interpret their experiences of God’s grace as part of a community of saints waiting for signs from heaven; hence individual works related very closely to the views and hopes of the congregation as a whole. For instance, Jane Turner’s experience, discussed in the previous chapter, is a product of her congregation’s arguments against Quakerism and its hopes that other Baptist groups would become closed to those who were not baptised as adults. Inevitably, too, members related their own temptations and sufferings to that of the congregation as a whole. Even Deborah Huish, whose experience seems relatively unaware of the prominence that her brothers-in-law would subsequently draw to it, realised that it would be detrimental to others if she fell off from grace. Her brother-in-law, William Allen, recorded that in the words that she spoke aloud in front of the
congregation, she had ‘some sad considerations about falling away, after grace received; which made my soul to tremble in the thoughts of it, to think how dishonourable that would be to the name of God’ (E4v), and that she had ‘many fears, that if he should but eclipse his love to my soul, that might also be to the dishonour of his name, and an occasion of stumbling to others’ (E4v). Every individual believer thought that their battle against the temptations of Satan was, in effect, a microcosm of what was going on within their congregation. The body of the congregation was made up of the bodies of individual believers, and what went on in the individuals was a foreshadowing of what would go on in the whole. In Huish’s case, she is shown to triumph over Satan’s assaults and her experience, according to Allen, remained as a ‘pillar’ (a2), propping up the ‘drooping’ godly community of her congregation. She was aware that if she failed in her battle, then she would dishonour the name of God and his saints on earth.

The power of women’s conversion narratives to comment on and urge religious change, as well as to foreshadow events on a congregational, and even national, level, is an important way in which these writings work as evangelising texts. Though rarely able to take part in theological disputes, women could contribute to the spread of their congregation’s doctrine and world-outlook by publishing the experiences that they were required to compose. Conversion experiences, by their nature, were meant to be truthful testaments of the evidences of God’s grace, and so more concrete than visions and prophetic utterances that might more easily be dismissed as those of a ‘false prophet’. These experiences also gained more weight, it seemed, if they were from a ‘deathbed’ testimony published posthumously after the subject had died from a long illness. If the believer died young, it was implied that the Lord had gathered them to himself sooner because they were members of his beloved elect. It is in keeping with this that in Sarah Davy’s experience, published posthumously, she wrote a section titled ‘Meditations on Death’ advising and consoling others about their imminent passing. She encouraged them, writing,

death shall but release thee from a wretched world of misery, and prefer thee to a glorious Crown of blessedness [...] sin shall no more haunt thee, here, poor soul, thou canst not chose but see thy self daily involved with sin, followed with corruptions one of the worst of sinners; and in that thy shame should pull thee down into the dust.7

By dying early, the believer would not be further ‘infected’ by the body of sin that they inhabited: dying would ‘deliver’ them ‘from this body of death’ (G8). Davy came to view the

7 Davy, *Heaven Realiz’d*, G7v.
body as a prison for which death would come to ‘break my chains and unlock my Fetters, Locks, and Bolts, which keeps me from the presence of my Lord’ (K6v). When Davy died, her words were then applied to her own case, implying that she was preserved from sinning further before she was taken up to be with God. John Collinges’s dedicatory epistle to Mary Simpson’s dictated experiences also recorded that Simpson, dying early like Davy, had ‘set out early to seek him, and she quickly found him whom her soule loved’.8 Collinges asked ‘how many of Gods precious ones, attaine not so much peace in threescore, as she had in thirty years?’ (A1). She, herself, dictated to her amanuensis that she wondered in her illness why God ‘delaid his coming’ (E1), but interpreted this as God wanting to do more good while she was on her deathbed. She thought that she might ‘be instrumentall to doe some thing for their [her visitors’] good (if God pleased to incline me) for the helping forward of that work of his’ (E1v). Collinges also testified that God ‘gave her the liberty of speech, which she ceased not to improve to his glory’, even though he found her ‘bereaved of most of her senses’ otherwise (I8v). Simpson’s plight gave her the opportunity to teach and exhort from her sickbed. Perceived to be near death, she appeared closer to God and her words had more weight and consequence. As Ralph Houlbrooke writes, ‘women for their part had certain exceptional opportunities on the death-bed. Forbidden to speak in church, they might now utter prayers, exhortations and statements of faith which were heard with a special respect’.9

The anonymous female speaker of Conversion Exemplified, like Davy and Simpson, also faced a long illness before her death in 1662/3, and the male prefatory writer, likely to have been her husband, explains her illness in relation to the ardency of her faith and its effect on her bodily humours.10 He writes that her ‘Love to Christ and his Members burnt so hot in her (in this frigid age wherein all seek their own) as it drank up her radical [vital] moisture in a degree to the shortening of her life’.11 Whereas women were usually thought to have cold and moist humours, the anonymous gentlewoman’s love and religious fervour

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8 Simpson, Faith and Experience, A1. Simpson experienced ‘three yeares of sickenesse’ (I4v) before she died at the age of thirty.
10 The copy of Conversion Exemplified held by Cambridge University Library has the annotation ‘his work’ handwritten next to the epistle to the reader, but the writer’s gender is left unexplored by the work. He writes that he had ‘enjoyed her’ for ‘seven years’ (A5) which would roughly correspond to when the anonymous gentlewoman says she was married. This would also rule out her relatives. He speaks of her as a step-mother and she addresses him as ‘my dear’ (B2) on her death-bed. The emotion with which he writes that latter half of the epistle leaves it difficult to see him as anything other than a grieving widower.
11 Anon., Conversion Exemplified, A3.
towards Christ and his followers in her congregation was said to have been so hot that it burnt up her womanly moisture and brought her to a premature end, although one that brought her quickly to her beloved. ‘’Tis prodigious [portentous]’, he wrote, ‘to this luke-warm age to lose such a pattern in the prime of her days’ (A3r-v). In these words he praises her heat and fervour in comparison with the religious society of the early 1660s, where the people are ‘luke-warm’ in their affections to Christ and do not follow doctrines to the letter.12

It seems that not everyone interpreted the gentlewoman’s illness and death in this way, and her experience draws attention to different perspectives about religious dedication, which was also seen as fanaticism. She dictated to her amanuensis advice on different religious perspectives for her ‘unregenerate unaquaintance (and such of my relations as are in that condition)’, the latter of whom were taken with ‘Episcopacy’:

Judge, I pray you, in your most retired thoughts; for I appeal to your Consciences from your wild discourses; wherein out of your natural enmity to Conversion, you call it Phrenzy, and to a holy conversation, which gains no better title from you than Phanaticism, or (which is worse) Sedition and Rebellion; and the words wherein it is held out, Canting. (E6r-v)

The anonymous gentlewoman’s experiences detail her conversion, during which she had no small trouble and vexation, which might have led her relatives (or critics of her Independent congregation) to account her as in a ‘phrenzy’, as one who was mad. This difference in interpretation is likely to be an example of the historical change at the Restoration that Michael MacDonald charts in his Mystical Bedlam, where the conception of what could be defined as madness changed according to views of the dissenters’ practices. He writes that ‘the sufferings of people tormented by religious doubt and guilt were explained as the signs of mental illness’, rather than as a part of the journey towards assurance or ‘conversion’ that all believers in the gathered churches passed along.13 The gentlewoman’s episcopal relatives regarded her anxiety, which was part of the requirements of her Independent church, as madness and labelled her ‘phrenzied’, which, Anne Dunan-Page writes, was ‘understood to involve a degree of pathological disturbance far superior to that of melancholy’ and was characterised by ‘excessive movement’ (the effects of melancholy were ‘sloth and apathy’).14 Frenzy, Dunan-Page writes, ‘was treated as an inflammation of the brain, causing a high temperature’, which meant the symptoms of which could also be

12 Conversion Exemplified was first published in 1663 and republished in 1669 by an unknown printer. The only known extant copy of the 1663 version is held by Canterbury Cathedral Library and is not on EEBO. The different copies are identical apart from various printers’ devices.
13 MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam, pp. 66-69.
14 Dunan-Page, Grace Overwhelming, p. 169; p. 168.
confused with religious enthusiasm also thought to be caused by the heating of the humours. Dunan-Page cites André du Laurens’s ‘Discourse’ on melancholy which shows that when this humour ‘is mixed with blood and becomes hot (although staying dry)[,] “[I]t causeth as it were, a kinde of divine ravishment, commonly called Enthousiasma, which stirreth men up to plaie the Philosophers, Poets, and also to prophesie in such maner, as that it may seeme to containe in it some divine parts”’. Unlike frenzy, enthusiasm was ‘not treated as a disease’, and, according to du Laurens, was in some ways divine, making its sufferers able to prophesy. When the anonymous gentlewoman’s male prefatory writer shows that her ‘radical moisture’ was drunk up by her burning love to Christ, he seems to refer to humoral ideas from the pre-Restoration period, when burning enthusiasm was widely regarded as divine instead of being hailed as frenzied madness, or worse, unpredictable rebellion.

The gentlewoman’s husband records that his wife’s express wish was to make public her conversion experiences and her advice to her ‘unregenerate unaquaintance’ and episcopal relatives who thought that they could go to heaven through ‘the broad wayes that sin presents’, rather than the strait gate of suffering (B1). The account of her death would be proof, she thought, that believers experienced suffering of earth in order to be free of it after death. She dictated that she did ‘discharge my conscience upon my dying-bed, in declaring my experience for the information of such as need it’, hoping that they would listen to ‘a poor consumed dying creature’ who had gone before them (B6). It would seem that those in need thought it ‘worship enough to reade over a Prayer certain times in a day’ (B6); a ‘superstitious, formal, fleshly Worship, tendered to a deity created in your own fancy’ rather than ‘the Oblations of spiritual instituted Worship to the God that made Heaven and Earth, and the wide sea’ (A8v). The gentlewoman’s conversion and doctrine was according to the word of God, as opposed to the false and easy practices of the episcopalian. Styling herself as Daniel speaking to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:27), she asks the Protestant clergy and their followers to ‘Break off your sins by Repentance, your unbelief by Faith; your superstitious ignorance and prophaness, by Purity, Integrity, and a sound understanding of the Wayes of God, in his Worship’ (E7). The gentlewoman explains that she had been brought up in the episcopal tradition in the country, and when she came to London to stay with friends she conversed with a society of Presbyterians, but by April 1658 she had become a member of

John Rowe’s ‘congregational or Independent’ church at Westminster.17 She believed that she followed the right doctrine as it ‘separated betwixt the precious and the vile, betwixt regenerate and unregenerate’ in practice (E5), a discrimination that the episcopalian and Presbyterians engaged with more inconsistently. She also recorded how those in Cromwell’s court at Whitehall were not enemies to her when she first adopted these doctrines, until ‘some began to despise, and hate me partly for my Profession [religion], and partly out of some little envy, which those places abound with’ (D4). Though they tried to support their behaviour using scripture, the gentlewoman observed that ‘such a simple woman as I’ thought ‘their time would be better spent in purging out the old leaven [1 Corinthians 5:7]’ (E5). She also chides those who turned back from Independency ‘for outward advantage’ (E4) at the coming of the Restoration, and was not ‘a little scandalized at the behaviour of some of them [the episcopalian] towards their dissenting Brethren’: ‘it is no new or strange thing’, she wrote, ‘that there should be found the effects of enmity between the Seed of the Woman, and the seed of the Serpent [Genesis 3:15]: But that Christ should be devided, is neither lawful, comfortable nor comely’ (E4v). Whereas it was usual for the godly to fight the antichrist, she did not think it was the case that Christians should be so divided over different doctrines.

Making her experiences of Satan’s temptations known was risky, as it invited criticism from those who interpreted her sufferings as punishments sent by God. To counter this, the gentlewoman’s husband wrote a preface defending his wife from aspersions about the way in which she was converted, countering the arguments that others might make such as Satan not having the same power over them as over her. He tells the critical readers:

Princes levy not War against subjects that pay them due allegiance […]. The Keeper of a prison is quiet while his Prisoners are so, but if he peeps in at a crevice, or by listening, perceives them tinkering with their Fetters, or making the least provision for an escape, he doubles his Guards, and increases their weight of Iron. (A7)

The argument is that the enemies of his wife’s conversion were under the Devil’s thrall and so were insensible of his reign over them. Rather than the ‘phrenzy’-like anxiety over election that the gentlewoman experienced, her enemies are shown to be the opposite: they

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17 See Stephen Wright, ‘John Rowe’, *ODNB*. Wright records that ‘on 27 June 1655, following the death of William Strong, [Rowe] was admitted as preacher at Westminster Abbey. [...] Rowe also acted as pastor of an Independent church which included many “Parliament men, and persons of quality residing in Westminster” (Edmund Calamy, ed., *An Abridgement of Mr. Baxter’s History of his Life and Times*, second edn, 2 vols. [London: Printed for John Lawrence, 1713], 2: p. 41)’. Her husband also mentions that Joseph Caryl, ‘a worthy friend of hers, and choice Minister of the Gospel’ (A4v), visited her on her deathbed. In 1663 he was said to be ‘living near London Bridge and preaching to an Independent congregation that met at various places in the City’ (P. S. Seaver, ‘Joseph Caryl’, *ODNB*).
are dead, dull, ignorant creatures having neglected their self-examination. Her conversion experience, although not always a happy one, is depicted as fruitful in comparison. Her husband uses the image of her sowing seeds in tears during her lifetime, but enjoying the ‘harvest of that seed-time, in Glory’, now that she is dead (A2). Ignorant of God’s grace, her enemies would neglect to sow the seeds of anxiety and self-examination, and would not reap the rewards in eternity. Her husband also drew attention to ‘the unusual way of her translation out of the power of Satan into the Kingdom of Christ’ (A2) on which the gentlewoman often reflected. This alludes to the translation of Enoch up to heaven without his going through the pain of death in Hebrews 11:5 (‘By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God’). Although the anonymous gentlewoman went through pain and suffering, God kept her from death during her conversion and translated her to the Kingdom of Christ as one of the elect, prefiguring what would go on when she died. Those who neglected this method of searching for God’s grace and willingly remained in ignorance were told by the male writer to expect ‘temporal and eternal death’ unless ‘these darts’ of the ‘great Works of God’ would ‘fall into your Consciences, and remain in the wound till they be drawn out by the hand of the Spirit, and healed by the Blood of the Cross’ (A8v-B1).

The gentlewoman also knew that she would invite criticism from her episcopal relatives because of their different political allegiances, and so she spends the last part of her narrative vindicating her religious and political choices. She had been brought up from a child with ‘those who had dependence upon the Court of the late King’, King Charles I, which caused ‘the great reducement of their Families, of which I being one, had a deep share of suffering, and was accordingly imbittered against the instruments of it’ (E2v). She then left the countryside where she had grown up and joined the household of ‘his [Cromwell’s] Family who had been a chief instrument of those great Changes; against whose person (partly upon the former reason, but principally from the stories I had heard of him) I had sufficient prejudice’ (E2v). Soon after arriving in Cromwell’s court at Whitehall she married her husband, but she met with ‘great perturbation of mind: [...] the Devil providing instruments to help that business of his forward; who frequently told me how unhappy I should be, if such things and such things fell out’ (D4v). Marrying a man whose political allegiances were bound up with the fate of Cromwell would certainly have been risky in the late 1640s or early 1650s, looking to some as if she was swapping her allegiances for power and influence. This

18 See chapter three for discussion of the healing qualities of the blood of Christ.
is consistent with her later denial of ‘carnal worldly motives’ (E2v) in her praise of some aspects of Cromwell’s character, while also observing that

many of his actions had, that either for the matter of them, or maner in which, or end to which they were done, as to provoke God to pour contempt and suffering upon him and his in the view of the world since his death, and that most justly (for God doth nothing unjustly) is most evident. (E2v)

Dictating and revising her experience in 1662/3, the gentlewoman refers to attitudes condemning Cromwell’s actions and referring to the suffering of his family after his death in 1658, which included the removal of his son Richard Cromwell from power and the contempt with which the family were held. Continuing to ‘right him for the wrong I have done him in my thoughts (and it may be in my words too, sometimes)’, she then included her observations of his godliness:

Yet notwithstanding, I should bury the truth in unrighteousness, did I not from many observations, declare that he was (in my opinion) a man of greater Faith and Holiness, than is almost to be found among the sons of men: One, who had the clear understanding of Gospel-truth, and lived in the power of it (the times of his surprizal in strong temptation excepted.) One to whom Christ was dear, and every thing that seemed to have any thing of Christ stampt on it, without distinctions of this or that Sect. (E3v)

The gentlewoman records that Cromwell believed that most religious sects had ‘something of God’ in them which should not be destroyed. Speaking from 1663, she observes that his preservation of that which was godly was to be commended, in comparison with the acts of the Clarendon Code that had ejected godly ministers (including Independents) from their livings. She also praises Cromwell for his commitment to the ‘Publick Reformation’ and defends it from the attacks of Restoration ‘Professors of Religion’:

When the means to effect it is vindicated from those just scandals which Professors of Religion have brought upon it, I doubt no more of the resurrection of it, than of mine owne at the last day: And when wicked men have finished their transgressions, and fill’d their measures, they shall receive the reward of them. God will judge me very shortly as to what I say herein, and hath judged some already of whom I speak; and will judge the rest before another Age be past, and that will not be long: to Him therefore, and his righteous Judgement, I leave it. (E3v)

The ‘professors’ of religion are shown to be actively preventing religious Reformation in the English churches by piling scandals upon the practices of the sectaries under Cromwell’s protectorate. Despite her misgivings about some of his actions, necessary in a work of the Restoration, the gentlewoman seems sure that the Reformation, forwarded by Cromwell,
would soon have its resurrection, and she is no less certain of this than her own resurrection, which she believed was imminent. Closer to death than those she spoke of, she asserted her confidence in her own election, and believed that those ‘Professors’ who had scandalised the Reformation would receive the ‘righteous Judgement’ of God. These words were powerful and judgemental, the short clauses testament to the ‘preaching’ way in which she dictated it, and had more consequence because they were written by a woman described as being on the brink of death. She was sure of her resurrection into eternal glory, but her episcopal relatives, after reading her testimony, might not have been so sure of theirs.

In order to ensure that these relatives and other curious readers knew that his wife had gone to her salvation, the gentlewoman’s husband had to show that her death was met with in patience and joy, rather than with the terror that might befall someone who realised that they would be damned. As Houlbrooke writes, ‘the ability to show Christian faith and patience on the death-bed was a valuable indication of the likely destination of the dying’ and ‘some accounts were clearly written to dispel fears or malicious rumours of death-bed apathy, apostasy or despair’.19 He continues, ‘the dying could be well aware that their “performance” would be weighed up by foes as well as friends’.20 Her husband includes the details of her last moments to confirm that she had gone to heavenly joy, and to prove to her relatives and ‘unregenerate unaquaintance’ that she had not died in fear. During a period of four days, the gentlewoman was ‘deprived of [her] rest’, and for two days and nights ‘she wrestled under more immediate gripes of death’ (A4). The pain was all the more excruciating because she was sensible of both the pain and her nearness to death, and he reports her words: ‘it is hard work to be under the Arrest of Death, as I am, with all my sences in their free exercise’ (A4v). Although this left her in fear that she would long be in such pain, this did give her the opportunity to speak and communicate to others her faith and patience, which proved to others that she was destined for heaven. Her husband wrote that ‘when her time came to change her station she did it with such chearfulness that her dear Friends and Aquaintance seeing her, had their sorrow for parting with it ballanced with Joy’ (A5). They were joyful that she had gone to the heavenly place without death troubling her faith. ‘It was indeed a sharp tryal’, he wrote, ‘but not the least prevailing against her faith and patience’ (A4). He also recorded her own words at this time: ‘My pain is great, but God is good still. He restrains Satan from troubling me in the least. I feel no ravishing joy, but I have setled peace in

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believing’ (A4). That she receives no temptations to despair and unbelief from Satan was further proof that she was destined for the Lord, and further still, her behaviour was compared to the ‘child like submission, like that of Christ when he prayed that the Cup might pass from him, which he was drinking’ (A4`). She imitated his sufferings on the cross, but with the promise that she would receive the resurrection afterwards. Those with whom she took issue were meant to read this account of a blessed soul’s death with the evidence of resurrection, and consider their own beliefs and practices.

The gentlewoman’s husband was anxious to present his wife’s experience as her own work, which also makes her words all the more affecting. ‘Though she wrote it not with her own hand (as being too infirm for such a work)’, he wrote, she had dictated and ‘oft examined it, and caused some alterations to be made in it, after they were wrote: so that a Will wrote by a Lawyer or Scrivener, is not less truly the Testators than this was hers’ (B1`). Although he is not ‘wholly silent’, he felt that he had a ‘duty to discharge to a Saint, whose Faith, though she be dead, speaketh so exceeding loud’ (A3), and his account of her death enhances her experience and gives evidence of her behaviour in her last moments. It was important that the experience was presented as her own because those words are given extra emphasis by her death and the evidence of her resurrection that her husband includes. Warnings to ‘Professors’ and ‘episcopalians’ have more weight coming from the mouth of one whose soul was taken up to be with God. The preface and publishing of the experience is also a fitting memorial to a godly soul, her husband recording his own bittersweet grief that she was released from her suffering, but that she would no longer be with him. He records her touching requests to have him close her eyes and keep her chin from falling by fastening her ‘pinner’ or cap under her chin until it was ‘stiff with cold’ (B2). In her coffin she requested to have her head turned to one side on a pillow ‘that it may resemble sleep, and as little of ghastliness appear in it as may be’, and promised her husband that she would do the same for him ‘not out of hardness of heart, but intire love’ (B2`). She also urged her husband not to let ‘foolish passion keep you from rejoicing at my happiness in that hour’ of her death (B2), and, fulfilling her request, he rejoices (in part) in her resurrection and release from suffering. Only at the end of his preface does he record that he ‘would willingly make this Entry larger; but mine heart so much affects mine eyes, that I cannot see to hold open the door any longer’, but not before comparing his wife’s requests to ‘Joseph’s charge to his Brethren concerning his bones in the Scripture’ (B2`). Joseph, son of Jacob, ‘took an oath of the children of Israel’ (Genesis 50:25) that they would take his bones with them when they left Egypt, prefiguring
Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. By aligning his wife with Joseph, her husband compares Pharoah’s rule over the Israelites to the situation of the people of God at the Restoration, and suggests that soon they would be led out of their slavery. Taken with them would be the bones of his wife, set out in her *Conversion Exemplified*, whose life and death was all for the glory of God, to be treasured by the new people of Israel.

Building on the examples of the experiences of Deborah Huish and Jane Turner in the previous chapter, this discussion of *Conversion Exemplified* has shown how death-bed narratives could play their part in testifying to what they believed to be the right doctrine and the right system of belief. This particular example seems also to have brought the sufferer and her husband great comfort in knowing that they were part of the furthering of God’s work. It gave her suffering reason and being an example to others seems to have endowed her with power and strength as she encouraged and upheld others. The experience can be understood as part of a rare defence of the gathered churches after the Act of Uniformity by a woman on her death-bed, anxious to preserve and strengthen her fellow saints, while also attempting to reform her relatives. Although anonymous, probably to avoid the risk of persecution, the experience was published in a later edition (in 1669) which testifies to its popularity. The woman’s words were an insight into the beyond and what would become of those who did not listen to such an obvious manifestation of the divine on the dying.

‘Will you not take warning, that is so sweetly brought?’: The 1658 *Publications and Trapnel’s ‘Broad River’*

But O, companions, if that we
Be not suppli’d with oyl within;
Alas, our Lamps will not abide
Burning and bright for him.
Alas, our Lamps they will go out
If they are not daily fed,
Even like unto the foolish Virgins,
They will be dark and dead.
But if fresh anointing we enjoy
Every day from the throne:
We shall abide for Jesus Christ,
And be shaken by none.22

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21 Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 77.
22 Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 891.
So ends Anna Trapnel’s published folio of 1657/8, where she urges her companions to keep their lamps burning with ‘fresh anointing’ from the heavenly ‘throne’ of Jesus Christ. Her companions, her Particular Baptist and Fifth Monarchist co-religionists, were advised that they should be like the wise virgins described in Matthew 25, using their ‘oyl within’ to keep their lamps ‘burning and bright’ for the heavenly bridegroom. Those who were foolish virgins would not be ‘suppli’d with oyl within’ and would not enjoy the ‘fresh anointing’ like those who prayed to the Lord every day: their lamps, untended, would be ‘dark and dead’. However, if her companions were to be made up of wise virgins who tended their lamps on a daily basis, Trapnel asserts that they would ‘be shaken by none’, not even the antichrist in whatever form he would manifest himself. This is typical of Trapnel’s 990-page folio: it is not a call for the saints to go to arms and destroy the antichristian ‘professors’ and ‘tyrants’ of the late 1650s; she was confident that God would do this in due course and gave warnings to those concerned. It was rather to encourage the undertaking of scriptural ordinances, strengthening of a collective faith, and establishing her right as a woman to speak and prophesy about how these things could be accomplished. As this section will explore, Trapnel’s prophecies were given at a similar time to two other Baptist women’s works which also mix prophecy with experiences, in the year 1658. For three different women’s writings and utterances to be published at this time is remarkable considering it is likely that none of them knew each other. Instead, these experiences might be understood as the expression of a moment where the saints perceived they could change things if they could persuade others to their cause. This was the time following the first radical Fifth Monarchist uprising, and, although the women’s texts distance themselves from the violence of these events, they do include threats that God’s will would be accomplished and nothing would be able to prevent it. For this moment, these women’s texts appear as part of a unified people to urge religious and political change in the nation so that all preparations would be made for Christ’s second coming. This section will explore how these women’s texts work in relation to the turbulent times that produced them, but also how they, as women, thought that they could be a force for change.

Anna Trapnel’s prophecies above were given and recorded at varying times between 11 October 1657 and 7 August 1658, although, as Erica Longfellow has observed, ‘the sense of interrupting an already established personal vocabulary implies that there had been
unrecorded prophecies before this date’.\textsuperscript{23} The timing of these prophecies coincides with the saints’ sinking expectations of what Cromwell could establish with his new regime. His ‘crowning’ as Lord Protector in 1654 had done nothing to buoy these sinking ideals, and by the first half of 1657, Bernard Capp writes, ‘a scheme to make Cromwell king was being canvassed’, which further incensed the saints, especially the Fifth Monarchists, who held that Christ alone could wear the crown.\textsuperscript{24} William Allen and John Vernon, who were active Baptists and Fifth Monarchists, published their sister-in-law Deborah Huish’s experience in early 1658, coinciding with criticisms of the Protectorate made by Trapnel, where they mourned that ‘some of Zion’s pretended lovers raised and lifted up (it’s to be feared too highly) by her, are dealing unkindly with her, and that under highest pretenses of real affection to the name and cause of God, and interest of his people’ (A6). Allen, Vernon, and their fellow millenarians, who saw the overthrow of Charles I as the end of the fourth empire before the establishing of the Fifth Monarchy and the rule of the saints on Earth, saw that Cromwell and his men, whom they had ‘raised up’ and put their faith in, were now treating them with contempt. Despite her feelings of betrayal by the Protector, Trapnel urges her companions to put their spiritual state of godliness first so that God would choose them to accomplish his great works:

\begin{quote}
If that you look to the Scripture, you will
This very plainly see,
That those that be employ’d by Christ,
As instruments against the enemy,
They must be very holy that
He doth in this work employ,
To pluck down Apostates, and the
Backslider to destroy. (p. 248)
\end{quote}

In order to destroy the ‘backslider’ Cromwell and his followers, her companions are told to be ‘very holy’ so that when Christ called them up to action to establish his Fifth Monarchy they would be ready and willing to do his work, with plenty of oil in their lamps.

One of the main ways in which Trapnel suggests that her companions should be made ready for the second coming is in the ordinance of baptism which she herself had undertaken

\textsuperscript{23} Longfellow, Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England, p. 171.
after her imprisonment in Bridewell in 1654. 25 ‘Water-Baptism [...] Performed in Christ's way’ (meaning adult or believers’ baptism), she believed, stood up against the ‘Antichrist in England’ and contradicted or ‘gainsaid’ his practices (p. 139). To her Report and Plea, written and published after her experiences in Cornwall and her subsequent incarceration in Bridewell, she appended ‘A Defiance’ to all the ‘Rulers, Clergy, and their Auditors’ who scandalised her in their speeches and published their criticisms in ‘scurrilous Pamphlets’. As well as defending herself from the charges of being a witch, a vagabond, a whore, ‘dangerous’, and ‘seditious’, she prophesies using Isaiah 33:21 (‘But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no gally with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby’). 26 Referring to the ‘broad rivers’ that the Lord would be to the saints, she writes that ‘unto such will the glorious Lord be a place of broad rivers; not a narrow channel, nor a marshy ditch’ (H1v). Referring to the prophecy of Ezekiel in 47 where an angel guides the prophet along a river issuing from the Lord’s house (47:9 ‘[...] every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live [...]’), she describes the broad river’s healing qualities for those that dwell therein:

its good to be dipt or plunged in this Jordan river, wch takes away all deformity, and cleanseth from all leprosie, and its a comforting refreshing River, this is Water of Life, it recovers the dying vitalls, and fainting Spirits, the which none of mens strong liquors of Arts and Sciences can do, neither can any compounded water of humane invention be so effectuall, though they still it in the Limbeck [distillation vessel] of brain-study. (H1)

Trapnel advocates the cleansing, healing waters given to the saints rather than the ‘strong liquor’ of ‘humane invention’ that learned men give to heal the sick and deformed in body and mind. It recovers those in spiritual anguish, and temptation to sin, resembling the pouring out of Christ’s blood on the cross, issuing water from his side, while also resembling baptism. No rhetorical water distilled by the mind of man could hope to heal and cleanse away spiritual deformities. Trapnel then combines this image, which merges ideas of Christ’s blood and baptism, with the scripture from Isaiah 33 which shows how these healing waters established at Christ’s second coming would only be available to the saints who swam in them:

\[25\] She refers to her experience in Bridewell in the untitled folio, p. 130, where she declares that the Lord visited her soul during her imprisonment. For Trapnel’s discussion of the ordinance of baptism, see chapter one, and for her exploration of how baptism changed her, see chapter three.

\[26\] Trapnel, Report and Plea, H2’. For the ‘Defiance’ see H1-I2.
the soul swims in the broad rivers that are promised Zion; which Rivers will admit no gally with oares to row therein, no trouble shall come there, none of mens gallantry [Isaiah 33:21], nor ships of Merchandise shall sail there, no Turkish, nor English gally of power and strength and device, managed with Souliour oares shall appear to take the free-born captive; that river will presently sink such gallies and oares too; and if so be gallant Counsell ships, and great numerous Parliament ships, which are made of wood; and pitch, and rosin, and tarre, and okum, such stuff as wil burn to ashes when the fire comes, which Scriptures speaks of [33:14]’ (11)

The ‘gallies with oars’ Trapnel interprets as the ships of the Parliamentary soldiers ready to ‘trouble’ the saints in their haven of God’s love. The gallies filled with ‘mens gallantry’ are related to the ships of merchandise, both Turkish and English, full of material, ‘fleshly’ goods that would do no good to the saints in eternal glory. Neither of these sorts of ships, Trapnel says, would be allowed to appear and ‘take the free-born captive’: no Cromwellian judge or gaoler would have the power to imprison her in Bridewell for speaking good to the saints and spreading his word. If such ships did make an attempt on the souls pleasantly swimming in the broad river, the waters would either sink them, or wait for them to be burnt up ‘with the devouring fire’ of Isaiah 33:14 (‘The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings’). Trapnel is clearly prophesying that those soldiers who tried to take the ‘free-born’ saints ‘captive’, along with those who sailed in ships of ‘power and strength and device’, would be destroyed by the Lord’s vengeance at the day of reckoning. Those ships made with flammable wood and tar and fastened with ineffective ‘Clergy nails’ (11) were destined to burn at the arrival of the Fifth Monarchy.

Trapnel’s prophecies speak about both the healing and destructive nature of ‘broad rivers’ and baptism, and how this could be understood as separating the elect from the reprobate. One of the scriptural examples she most regularly uses to show the power of water as both purging and cleansing is in the destruction of Pharaoh and his men when they tried to cross the Red Sea in pursuit of the fleeing Israelites who were being led out of Egypt by Moses (Exodus 14-15). She uses this to chart the history of the ordinance of baptism and how its rightful practice would purge away the evil and strengthen the saints in adversity:

O, no, in despite of all enemies, 
Ordinances shall remain, 
And be in vigor and in strength, 
When that the foes are slain. 
O when that Pharoah and his host 
Were broken down and slain, 
The Pillar of fire appears, and
Baptism God made to reign.\textsuperscript{27}

In Exodus, Moses was sent to lead the Israelites out of captivity and slavery after the Pharoah had been warned by plagues and famine that he should release them, and Trapnel relates this to the case of the saints under what she perceived to be the tyranny of Cromwell. As she declared later in the folio, ‘God would not let old Israel / Fall under that Monarchs feet’ and enemies of Israel ‘must ruined be’ (p. 174). Referring to the imprisonment of ‘the Lambs followers’ into ‘Islands and prisons’, Trapnel showed how, like the Egyptians, enemies of the saints would be ‘Punished in their kind, [...] by Locusts’ (p. 648). She prophesies that her enemies would be ‘broken down and slain’ by the baptismal waters and confused by ‘the Pillar of fire’ that the Lord made appear in the clouds to frighten the Egyptians. She later refers to how the Israelites, after being saved from the waters, were ‘Baptized to Moses and to those / Administrations all’ (p. 75), drawing on 1 Corinthians 10:2 where they ‘were all baptized to Moses in the cloud and in the sea’. The water separated the precious from the vile, and the elect from the reprobate. Trapnel’s ‘broad river’ could simultaneously destroy enemies and baptise God’s people to himself, and she also uses the story of God’s saving of Noah and the ark as another example of how this could be understood: ‘for the Ark was an inclosure, a preservation from the Flood; it was a Flood to the disobedient, and a pleasant stream to others’ (p. 434). The company was ‘saved in obedience by water from the abominations of others’ (p. 435) and this was a prefiguring of what Christ went on to show in his baptism. Water could cleanse away sin and so it could also purge away enemies on a grander scale.

Trapnel also uses her discussion of the ‘broad river’ to validate her ability to prophesy and to speak. Later in her ‘Defiance’ she draws explicit parallels between the ships of the saints on the river and the furtherance of Zion:

But the broad river is preparing, its making its path thorough all opposition, & its ships are all making ready and preparing to swim: The great Ship-Wright, I speak this with reverence and holy aw of God, and say that the great artificial Ship-Wright, and Carpenters Son so called by the Jews, which was the glorious Messiah, this mighty God is fitting his ships for this time, these are the Zion spoken of, \textit{Micah 4:13}, whose horns are Iron, and hoofs brasse, who are exhorted to arise and thresh, and beat in pieces many people.\textsuperscript{28}

Trapnel’s imagery of the Lord as a great shipwright had personal significance for her. Her father, William Trapnel, was a shipwright, as she asserts at the beginning of her prophecies

\textsuperscript{27} Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{28} Trapnel, \textit{Report and Plea}, 11v.
included in *The Cry of a Stone*, and perhaps she believed that this somehow proved that she was also the daughter of the greater shipwright who would build ships of Zion with which his children could fight. In her folio she rejoices at the sight of ‘the light of Christs golden Oar’ (p. 129) when she recounts how she came to be baptised. What is also interesting is her choice of scripture to illustrate what the ships signified and what they would accomplish. Micah 4 does not speak of ships but of the travelling ‘Daughter of Zion’ who is sent into Babylon to be delivered (4:10), where many nations gathered against her to watch her be ‘defiled’ (4:11). Her purpose, like Trapnel’s, was to draw out the enemies of the saints in their persecution of her, to ‘gather them as the sheaves into the floor’ (4:12). The Lord would then say ‘Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion’ and she would attack with an iron horn and brass hooves to ‘beat in pieces many people’ (4:13). The Cornwall clergy and justices, and Cromwell’s court by implication, were those who had risen up against her and had drawn close to watch her ‘travailing’ in pain, in captivity, while she brought forth the ‘new birth’, the good news of Christ. It was they who would be ‘beat[en] in pieces’ like sheaves of corn.

In a similar fashion she applauds the actions of the prophetess Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron who sang in a similar rhyming fashion to Trapnel’s folio after the Egyptians were destroyed in the Red Sea: ‘sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea’ (Exodus 15:21). Miriam is also recorded as encouraging the other women to go out after her dancing ‘with timbrels’ (15:20), and Trapnel uses this example to teach women who would sing and prophesy a lesson. She advises that women ‘must to the Lamb draw near / In a sweet Psalm, in a sweet song, / And in humility appear’ (p. 212), but that they must not offend the ‘with a tongue / Against Mediator to speak’ as Miriam and her brother Aaron later did against Moses. If she spoke against the male mediators (or ministers) then she should be ‘turned from her place’ as Miriam was in Numbers 12:15: Trapnel shows that ‘the Lord will not endure / That they should do amiss’, and the fact that this had not happened to her showed that she was in God’s favour, drawn near to the Lamb.

Trapnel uses her established position as a ‘Daughter of Zion’, and as an obedient version of Miriam, in order to give her verses the authority of a revered prophetess. It is always to her baptism that she refers when seeking to justify why she, as a woman, might

29 Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone* (London: n. pub., 1654), A2. Anna Trapnel was the daughter of William Trapnel, a shipwright, and his wife Anne, baptised in St Dunstan’s, Stepney on 10 September 1620 (Greater London RO, X024/066, Baptismal Register of St Dunstan’s). She grew up in the hamlet of Poplar in the parish of Stepney. See Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England*, p. 153.
speak the words of God. Being a witness to Christ’s resurrection during the process of her baptism gave her leave to declare the wonder of this experience and what the Lord had brought into her mind:

When I arose out of the water
I beheld Christ’s sweet face;
And he did smile upon me, as
A token of his grace.
So that I was encouraged
Against the opposing foe,
And enabled by my dear Lord
Against them for to go.
So that I could declare, and I could speak,
And for the King up stand;
He gave me such instruction,
And brought words to my hand. (p. 129)

By being baptised in ‘water deep’, Trapnel was led, as the Israelites were, by a ‘pillar of fire’ (Exodus 13:21), ‘against mine enemy and foe’ (p. 129). The spirit of the Lord ‘made a league’ with her own voice ‘against them all to go, / And by its witness and testimony / Them for to overthow’ (p. 273). As a witness of the resurrection, Trapnel wanted to uphold the ordinance of baptism in its scriptural form, and warn those who stood in the way of Christ’s second coming by persecuting the saints. ‘It is very sad’, she writes, ‘that such as have / Fasted, wept, and did pray / For Reformation, should now from / It backslide and turn away’ (p. 273). She was confident that the Lord would ‘strike down’ ‘Cromwel and his Crown’ for being a ‘Traytor’ and acting ‘such false treachery / Against the mighty King’, God (p. 273). This sort of prophecy was what Marjorie E. Reeves calls ‘a means of bringing an ideal hopefully nearer, and divine intervention as a method of revolutionising an institution whose authority cannot be impugned’. The promise of divine retribution would help to keep the saints strong in times of persecution, putting their faith in the promise that their enemies would face eternal destruction. Trapnel hoped that those in power would come to hear of her prophecies and change their ways, turning back to the godly old cause of the Reformation, and not to continue on the path to personal gain.

1658 was also one of the years that Katherine Sutton received and recorded her prophecies. Like Trapnel, she had prophesied earlier in 1655, receiving the word of God

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when she had prayed and fasted apart from her congregation and she recorded this in *A Christian Womans Experiences*, published later in 1663:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Shall light appear, and darkness done away:} \\
&\text{Shall Sommers green be cloathed all in gray:} \\
&\text{Shall a bright morning set in shadowes dark,} \\
&\text{Oh! England, England, take heed thou dost not smart.}^{31}
\end{align*}
\]

Sutton’s prophecy depicts an England whose light, summer, and brightness would be ‘done away’ with by the greyness and darkness unless it took ‘heed’ of her warnings. If this was ignored then the prophecy would be fulfilled and England would ‘smart’ with pain and pay the penalty of suffering for its sins. Later in the night, recalling a scriptural moment when the Lord speaks to Solomon, she writes that her heart was drawn towards the verse, 2 Chronicles 7:14: ‘If my people, which are called by my name, turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sin and will heal their land’. She then had ‘laid before’ her that ‘God would afflict that nation with great afflictions’, alluding both to the Israelites led by Solomon whom God threatened with ‘evil’ if they ‘forsook’ him and ‘laid hold on other gods’ (7:22), and to England if the nation continued in its ‘wicked wayes’ of abandoning the church’s Reformation. Sutton wrote that she desired to be ‘with David’, as the Lord requested Solomon, to ‘do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments’ (7:17), rather than to fall into the ‘hands of merciless men’ (B3v). From that time, she wrote, ‘it was much upon my heart [...] that the Lord would turn a fruitful land into barreness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein’ (B3v), and then goes on to consider what sins and wickedness the people of England were capable of. They were committing the sins of ‘slothfulness, deadness, and unfruitfulness under the means of grace’, not praying and examining their own hearts to see if they had received God’s grace, and ‘that great abounding sin of unbelief’ which she ‘saw did cause persons to seek themselves and the world’, referring, undoubtedly to those in power, specifically Cromwell and his men (B4). She also saw ‘idolatry’ in ‘false wayes of worship, contrary to the rule of the Gospel and primitive exemple’, ‘resting upon duty’, and ‘covetousness’ after the ‘vain profits of the world’ (B4). She finds a reference in Isaiah 57:17 to the Lord smiting those ‘for the iniquity of [their] covetousness’, and shows how this would be applied to the rulers of England. She, as a member of a gathered congregation whose practices were by the

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'rule of Gospel’, established for herself a position of authority as a follower of David, not to be included with the idolatrous and unfruitful people of England.

Like Anna Trapnel, Sutton also found an audience in ‘high places’ that paid her prophecies some attention. It was soon after this prophecy was given to her that she ‘looked upon it as my duty to make this known, that people might be warned to depart from sin’, and she then ‘had an opportunity to declare this to some that then were in high places’, and on the way in to speak to them she had an extension to it ‘which I so declared’: ‘Didst thou not hear a voice from on high, / Deny your selves (take up the crosse), or verily you shall die?’ (B4v). This was ‘approved on by some, and received as a very suitable and seasonable word’, which might show that her words were not disregarded, but perhaps misinterpreted. Later she realised that the ‘pour soules, for not hearkening unto councl in departing from sin they were soon brought down, and laid low’ (B4v). Sutton’s depiction of vengeance is kinder than Trapnel’s, however, and she advises that the Lord would save all those who would ‘truely repent’ and that others’ falls were to be used by the saints as ‘warnings’ of what becomes of those who lust after power instead of walking true to God’s word. By 1657 she had received another more urgent prophecy:

There is a time approaching near at hand,  
That men shall be in fear by sea and land:  
There is a time, there will be alteration;  
And this same time doth hasten to this nation;  
Let now my children hearken to my will,  
And they shall see I will be with them still. (B4v)

In 1658 she received another prophecy which built on the urgency of the above, urging ‘Awake therefore to righteousness, The Lord is near at hand: And will afflict now very sore / By sea and like by land’ (B4v). The second prophecy reflects her belief in the imminence of the Lord’s vengeance, possibly referring to a time after Cromwell’s death when the Lord was seen to have heaped misery on himself and his family. The second prophecy was also ‘brought to [her] mind’ again in January 1662, after Charles II was crowned and a few months before the Act of Uniformity was enforced. Sutton’s prophecies appeared in the most calamitous times: the 1657 prophecy warned repentance, but both the 1658 and 1662 additions warned that vengeance was imminent. When Cromwell was Lord Protector there seems to have still been some hope for Sutton of a godly Reformation, but when he died, his successors were threatened with doom.
After these prophecies failed to persuade the rulers to turn to the proper worship of God’s ways, Sutton records that he communicated to her that he was angry and asked the people: ‘what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, [...] seeing thou hastest to be reformed?’ (C1). She then realised that her ‘duty of the present time’ was to urge her congregation of saints to ‘be watchful’ against ‘the cares of the world’, ‘be much in prayer’, ‘lay up treasures in heaven’ instead of material treasures on earth, and to be ‘much in humiliation’ (C1). The congregation of saints were to take comfort from the example of Lot, whose ‘righteous soul being grieved with the unclean conversation of the wicked; [...] was preserved when others were destroyed with the fiery storne of Gods pleasure [2 Peter 2:7]’ (C1’-C2). She then includes other scriptural examples of God’s upholding of his own people. Like Trapnel, she also refers to the comfort of John 7:38:

He that believeth on mee, as the Scriptures hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters [7:38]; but this spake he of the spirit, that they, that believe on him, should receive [7:39]: and he promised to be poured out in the latter days. (C2)

The presence of cleansing and healing water also appears in her experiences when she is shipwrecked upon a sandbank escaping to Holland because of the persecution of the godly in England. Not knowing where to walk in order to reach the shore, finding ‘no way out of the sea, as it were, compassing us about round’, she and her godly friends trusted in God to be their ‘Pilot [...] not knowing whether we went, for the sea was on both sides of us, and wee had but a small way on the sands to walk in’ (C4). She prayed that the Lord would ‘keep in the seas till we found out a place’ and he worked this miracle, resembling in no small way the story of the Israelites fleeing Egypt and the Lord guiding Moses as his navigator and enabling him to part the waters as a ‘wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left’ (Exodus 14:22). This was seen by Sutton as a sign of what God would do for the godly in England under its cruel rulers. She recorded that he told her, ‘As thy deliverance is, so shall Englands be, when they are brought to greatest straights, then will deliverance be from God’ (C4). What Sutton’s experience advocates is the upholding of her and her congregation’s faith which would allow them to be saved when the time of God’s judgment arrived. ‘God is pleased to set a mark upon the fore-heads of them that mourn for the abomination of the times’ (C2), she wrote, urging her fellow saints not to take part and uphold these ‘abominations’ but to pray for the release of those from under them. They were encouraged not only to ‘observe all the Commands of Christ’, but also to deny themselves and suffer, to ‘take up the cross and to follow him’ (E1). The saints are urged not only to ‘do much in
outward performances’ but to have ‘a heart right with God’, and Sutton uses the example of wise and foolish virgins: ‘the foolish virgins had lamps of profession as well as the wise, but they had not the oyle’ (E1). If the members had not felt God’s grace and believed in it through faith then they would not be able to keep their lamps burning until their bridegroom came: they would also not have the mark upon their fore-heads.

The parable of the wise virgins was used in various ways in women’s experiences, both by them and their prefatory writers, which confirms that the second coming was believed to be imminent. Figuring themselves as one of the wise women who came prepared with oil in their lamps gave them an authority to advise others how they might also be ready to meet their heavenly bridegroom. Anna Trapnel showed that the female song of ‘choice virgins’ would accompany King David in his march:

Lamb, wilt thou own a female Song  
That is made of poor things?  
I that I will, saith the dear Lamb,  
For it doth honour to me bring.  
O Lamb, wilt thou own what comes from females,  
What the Spirit by them doth yield?  
I that I will, saith the Lamb, for  
That Song enters the field.  
King David in his March shall have  
The Song of Virgins choice:  
That by ten thousands unto him  
Do sweetly lift up their voice.32

In the Bible, the number ‘ten thousand’ always refers to men in battle, and so Trapnel’s reappropriation of this for the number of ‘choice virgins’ is significant. Although these virgins could not take part in the Lamb’s war, they were to be employed by singing to spur on David’s forces against all that was antichristian. For Trapnel this meant producing her psalms to encourage her ‘companions’, upholding them against the antichristian Cromwellian institutions.33 Some comparable woman’s experiences were published in 1658 under the title A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning which was, broadly, a conversion experience meant to strengthen and uphold the faith of its readers by way of a ‘wise virgin’s’ testimony. The author of this, Anne Venn, daughter of John Venn the regicide, had died early in 1654, and her experiences were published by her step-father Thomas Weld ‘for the comfort of such as

32 Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 57.
mourn in *Sion*, and quickening of Saints by her blessed Example*. After her death, Weld wrote that even those ‘long standing in Christ’ who saw Venn’s manuscripts ‘were much humbled to see how short themselves come in such heart-searchings, self-judgings, [...] as they read in this her daylie practice’ (A4′-A5). Venn’s narrative, like Katherine Sutton’s, was intended as an example to those who survived her, to ‘quicken’ them and bring them back to a life with Christ. Venn’s stepfather, Weld, writes that he chose to publish out of her manuscripts what he hoped might

be useful in these declining times to convince some Christians of their slackness and awaken others, and shew them how to make more heart-work by the example of one of the weak Sex; and if to thy knowledge it should not add much, yet to thy spirit and practice it may conduce not a little. (A5)

The implication is that if even ‘one of the weak Sex’ could practise and record the workings of God on her heart, so could any believer. By her example, others might improve their individual efforts in ‘heart-work’ which could improve what Weld perceived to be ‘declining times’. It is certainly significant that Weld decided to publish his step-daughter’s experiences in 1658 with the title alluding to the parable of the wise virgins.

Like Trapnel’s and Sutton’s prophecies, which were also conceived of in this year, Venn’s testimony has the effect of further strengthening its audience in faith. It is not an ardently Fifth Monarchist work, which in part comes from the fact that it was written four years before it was published. Venn refers only to the reign of Christ within each individual believer: ‘where Christ comes as a warrier to conquer, there he also comes as a King to reigne, he will rule over them and in them, to give lawes to that soul, and to give an heart to obey them’ (G2). For Venn the Lord would come down removing ‘whatever it be that lies in the way when he comes to do his great work’ (G4) in each individual believer, but before this they needed to examine their hearts as to how much the Lord had already done. She recorded how, on 3 April 1653, her minister, Isaac Knight, spent time opening out Isaiah 65:24 (‘And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear’) where she made many ‘discoveries’

concerning Gods readiness to hear before his people call, where he puts us upon watchfulness, what work Christ was about in the nation, which the Lord was pleased to make

as a spur to my dul spirit to look out what that work was that God was now doing, or about to
do in my heart, even I hope fitting of me for a more full enjoyment of himself. (G3⁵)

This sermon was preached on ‘a day set apart by the Parliament for a publrick fast
thoroughout the Common-wealth’ (H7⁴), not long before Cromwell forcibly removed the
Rump Parliament establishing the godly Barebones Parliament in its place. That Venn was
also keeping watch for what Christ was accomplishing around her in the nation, as well as in
her own heart, was an example to all to be ready and watchful for when the Lord would show
himself to his people. Venn was also an example in that she prayed for the uniting of ‘one in
near relation’ who was ‘a poor, dead, dark soul [...] that they might be caused to stand up on
their feet, and Jesus Christ might give them life’ (I5⁵). In her work she advised others to
‘betake to Jesus Christ’ like ‘a poor woman [...] going with her pale of water which she had
drawn out of a well or living fountaine, and on a sudden had a slip, and spilt it all out of her
paile’ (G8⁵). Rather than sitting ‘crying to think what she had lost’, Venn thought it ‘a sign of
more wisdom for her [...] to go and dip her paile into the Well again’. Applying this to her
own and others’ experiences, Venn shows that they should ‘go to Christ, our well-head, and
make it up presently’ (G8⁵). The message, referring to Jesus’s conversation with the
Samaritan woman in John 4, is that all ‘declining’ believers could partake of the ‘living
fountaine’ if they would only approach Christ and be watchful of his presence.

Another ‘virgin’s song’ was published in 1658 by the brothers-in-law of Deborah
Huish, the title page bearing the words of the psalmist, David, in Psalms 40:2-3:

He brought me up also out of an horrible Pit, out of the miry Clay, and set my feet upon a
Rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new Song in my mouth; even praise unto
our God: Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. 35

David’s experience chimes with Huish’s whose experience included by her prefatory writers
in The Captive Taken from the Strong, was ‘Faithfully written’ by them ‘from her own
mouth’ (title page). She had been under the oppressions of Satan, ‘in an horrible Pit’, for
some years before her assurance was ‘established’ in God’s grace and received the ordinance
of baptism, setting her ‘feet upon a Rock’. The ‘song’ of her release from under the captivity
of Satan was published so that many should ‘see it, and fear’ and put their ‘trust in the Lord’,
provoking others to examine their consciences in the like way. Readers would be encouraged
by the experience, fearing in their lack of assurance before they came to a greater trust in
God. That God had ‘put a new Song’ in Huish’s mouth with which to account her conversion

35 Huish, The Captive Taken from the Strong, A1.
from suffering and temptation to assurance and baptism implies that her agency is not her own, but God’s. The idea of a woman being a ‘vessel’ or an ‘empty nothing creature’ for God’s word was common, and protected women from accusations of pride and scandal caused by their work being published, providing that others were convinced that their testimonies were legitimate.36 That Huish’s testimony was a transcript of what she spoke to the Loughwood congregation, the purpose of which was to judge whether she had received adequate evidence of God’s grace, showed that the congregation believed the signs she outlined and her experience to be of God’s work. That her experience was also prefaced by five of the elders of the church also would have left the reader in no doubt that this was ‘a true Relation’ of the working of God on a young woman (A1). Huish is also presented as ‘the wise Virgin-subject of the ensuing relation’ (A8v) by her brother-in-law John Vernon in his prefatory epistle, referring to her as one of the ‘wise virgins’ who took enough oil to wait while the bridegroom ‘tarried’. By her constant consideration of her state of assurance and by her subsequent baptism, Huish kept her lamp burning with oil until her heavenly bridegroom would arrive. She was presented as an example to others of how ‘virgins’ could use their ‘songs’ of individual experience to praise the Lord. Although her testimony does not present ardently political hopes or predictions as do the experiences of Trapnel, Sutton, or even the anonymous gentlewoman of Conversion Exemplified, Huish is certainly aware that her continual struggle with the Devil was vital for the example of others: ‘if [God] should but eclipse his love to my soul, that might also be to the dishonour of his name, and an occasion of stumbling to others’ (E4v). The recording of her struggle was to help others in their various battles against sin and Satan, and the fight was never private in a congregation that required evidence of God’s signs in each believer. Huish’s experience was part of the ‘song of Virgins Choice’ in urging on the battle of all believers against the antichrist.

The prefatory writers of The Captive Taken from the Strong clearly thought Huish’s experience was extremely valuable to their congregation, and to their companion congregations in Ireland. They saw that her individual battle could be mapped onto the struggles of all believers, and the struggle of God’s people as a whole in waiting in expectation for the establishment of the Fifth Monarchy, of which both her brothers-in-law, William Allen and John Vernon, were enthusiastic supporters. The elders of the congregation, Henry Parsons, John Owen, and James Hitt, dedicate Huish’s deliverance to the

36 See introduction for a discussion of Sarah Wight’s experiences, named The Exceeding Riches of Grace Advanced by the Spirit of Grace, in an Empty Nothing Creature (1647). Both men and women saw themselves as empty vessels for the Holy Spirit to fill, although women were seen as the ‘weaker’ vessel of the two.
‘God of Peace, who (through his own Rich and free love, after many years horror of soul) is become her Peace’ (A8’). They write of their desire to commit all his chosen Vessels to honour, for his calling in his season unto, and for his establishing and growth of those that are called in the truth, as it is in Jesus: which Jesus we desire to own as our King, our Crown, and hope of glory; and to whose appearing with that glorious Kingdom, we desire to be dayly better prepared: That at his coming we may have the honour to be of that blessed number that shall wait upon him with Hallelujahs. (A8’)

By committing Huish (one of God’s chosen vessels) to posterity, the elders show that God would soon call on other members by revealing himself to them, and further establish the faith of others that had already recognised that they were ‘called in the truth’. The phrase ‘chosen Vessel’ could allude to the conversion of St Paul on the road to Damascus, who became an unlikely ‘chosen vessel’ to ‘bear [his] name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake’ (Acts 9:15-16). There were comparisons to be made between Huish’s and Paul’s life-changing experiences, who were both called to speak out for the growth in faith of the ‘children of Israel’, but there might also be an allusion to 1 Peter 3:7 where St Paul gives marital advice. ‘Ye husbands’, he writes, ‘dwell with [your wives] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered’. The elders emphasise that ‘all’ chosen vessels should be given honour, implying that even the ‘weaker’ sort are heirs to God’s grace and their experiences should still be recorded. Women, perhaps figured as wives to Christ within their congregations, were to be honoured if the prayers of all the members were not to be held back. The elders desired that they and their congregation should be ‘prepared’ for the second coming of Christ where he would soon appear to establish a ‘glorious kingdom’ on Earth and that they would be a part of the ‘blessed number’ that would be waiting: they should be prepared with oil in their lamps ready to meet their bridegroom. That the elders portray Jesus as ‘our King, our Crown’ is significant, as it indicates that the group were familiar with ideas of the Fifth Monarchists who believed that Christ would come again to rule over the saints on Earth. Until this moment came, the group desired that believers, male and female, should make known their experiences as examples so that others could grow in faith and be constantly prepared for the bridegroom’s arrival.

William Allen and John Vernon were active Fifth Monarchists, like the elders of their congregation, and their prefatory epistles can be understood as representative of these ideas.
Both men had been part of the occupying army in Ireland in the early 1650s and had reacted strongly to what they perceived to be Cromwell’s neglect of the godly cause of the saints. Cromwell’s dissolution of the Barebones Parliament (or the Parliament of Saints) in December 1653, and the establishing of the Protectorate later that month, had caused, as McGregor writes, ‘Militant Baptists, particularly the Irish Army officers’ to share the ‘belief that Cromwell had usurped the role of King Jesus in adopting rule by a single person’.

With the dissolution came intense disappointment. Instead of a godly government of ‘saints’, the country was again to be ruled by a single person: to many of his previous supporters, Cromwell appeared to have accepted Kingship. He had also supported the imprisonment of several ministers, as the Baptist Western Association lamented: ‘those that have beene glorious lights on the right and left hand, are shutt up in bonds’. William Allen was also placed under house arrest at this time. He had returned from Ireland in 1655 to speak privately to the Protector about the matter of rule by a single person where, according to John Copleston’s intelligence to Cromwell’s spymaster John Thurloe, he ‘did nettle the protector extreamly’ and the two parted ‘in a huffe’.

On returning to his father-in-law’s residence at Sand, Sidbury, he was said to have met with ‘divers strangers, particularly from Somerset and about Bristol’, riding ‘comonly with a kind of vizard over his face, with glasses over his eyes’. Everyone who conversed with him reported ‘him to be a person highly dissatisfied with the present government’ and Copleston also reported his attendance at a meeting with ‘a cavalier of good estate’. Hugh Courtney, an active Fifth Monarchist, was also at this meeting speaking ‘treason’ and was sure that when he returned to London he would be ‘sure to meet hearts and hands enough to carry on the anabaptisticall interest; that his [Cromwell’s] government should not stand many months, and that deliverance was at hand’.

Allen was ‘awoke from sleep in his Father-in-law Mr. Huish’s by the entrance of two armed troopers’, who kept him there as a precaution by Cromwell’s order. He wasted no time in sending a reproachful letter to his captor, writing: ‘I am ill accommodated having no money nor cloaths

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39 ‘Concerning Adjutant Allen, 7 February 1654[5]’, Papers of John Thurloe, 3: p. 140. A ‘Mr Reynell’, a ‘kinsman of his wife’s’, is mentioned as travelling with Allen. James Huish, Deborah’s father, was married to Deborah Reynell.
for me, my poore wife, nor littl one’, and begged to ‘goe to hear the word, if it might be’.\textsuperscript{41}

He resented his treatment by his former friend Cromwell, which he thought was unjust:

\begin{quote}
You are also pleased to tax me with having as light an esteeme of you as of C[harles].S[tuart]. though neither any word in my letter nor any action of mine did ever give you ground for such a surmise. What my esteem hath been of you in some verticall [high] forsakeing dayes I beleev you can remember; and I cann truly saye, if I have erred, it hath been, I feare, in esteeming too highly of you.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Unlike Courtney, who was arrested and lodged in Carisbrooke Castle with Major-General Harrison, Allen was soon released with no evidence of ‘treason’ found against him, and he returned to the army in Ireland. Whatever his opinions of Cromwell were before this exchange, he certainly continued to mourn that the glorious cause of the saints he and his friends had envisaged, seemed lost.

Despite the hope Huish’s narrative and its accompanying epistles expressed when they were published early in 1658, the disillusionment with the Protectorate and its oppression of religious radicals continued. Allen and Vernon made an attempt to unite the Particular Baptists and Fifth Monarchists when they attended a meeting of the Baptist Western Association, with three hundred others, at a church in Dorchester on 12-15 May 1658. Thurloe’s spies recorded that epistles from each church represented were read aloud to enquire as to the state of other Baptist churches. They all judged the time to be of ‘apostasy and persecution, wherein the sufferings of Syon were’ and, referring to the imprisonment of some of their party,

all of them much complained of the bonds and suffereings of the saints; some callinge itt the time of Syon’s affliction, wherein those that have beene glorious lights on the right and left hand, are shutt up in bonds; vehemently prayinge, that in order to there deliverance, God would put a hooke into the nostrils of, and destroy him, who is the enemy of God and his people.\textsuperscript{43}

One night, Allen and Vernon gathered a private meeting ‘in the George’ out of those present to urge the London Particular Baptists to unite with the Fifth Monarchists. Here ‘a greate contest ar[o]se aboute there joyneinge with the fifth-monarchy-men; but for that time not concluded, by reason of captaine [William] Kiffin’s opposeing itt’.\textsuperscript{44} It is not surprising that Kiffin felt the need to distance himself from the Fifth Monarchists: he did not want to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{41}{‘From Adjutant Allen, 7 February 1654[5]’, \textit{Papers of John Thurloe}, 3: p. 140.}
\footnotetext{42}{‘From Adjutant Allen, 7 February 1654[5]’, \textit{Papers of John Thurloe}, 3: p. 140.}
\footnotetext{43}{‘Sir John Cooke &c. to Sir John Copleston, 15 May 1658’, \textit{Papers of Secretary Thurloe}, 7: pp. 139.}
\footnotetext{44}{‘Sir John Cooke &c. to Sir John Copleston, 15 May 1658’, \textit{Papers of Secretary Thurloe}, 7: pp. 139.}
\end{footnotes}
encourage the comparisons between the Baptists and the recent violent risings. Not only that
but, as McGregor writes, he was a supporter of the Protectorate and ‘with other London
leaders he worked to mollify discontented saints and counter radical agitation in the Baptist
congregations’.45 Allen and Vernon’s attempt to unite the London Baptists to their cause was
lost.46

It is not known how The Captive Taken from the Strong, published not long before
this rally, was received, being a work recommended by two men who had been regularly
followed by Thurloe’s spies because they were well-known Fifth Monarchists. The publisher
of Huish’s experience, Livewell Chapman, had been imprisoned for publishing two of John
Spittlehouse’s Fifth Monarchist works on 19 October 1654 and was again being investigated
in the Tower for holding a note for a correction in Vavasor Powell’s petition A Word for God
on 3 January 1656.47 Colonel Barkstead, the lieutenant of the Tower, wrote to Thurloe to tell
him that Chapman was ‘the owner or at least a sharer in the private presse that hath and doth

\[46\] Allen and Vernon continued to petition the government, along with other Fifth Monarchists. When Richard
Cromwell was forced to dissolve his parliament on 22 April 1659, the army took power, and he eventually
resigned on 25 May. By this time, the Rump Parliament, who had been recalled by the army on 7 May, had
already smashed Cromwell’s protectoral seal, unofficially ending his reign. News of the establishment of a new
parliament had reached the Loughwood congregation by 4 June and they record on this day:

That the 14\(^{th}\) of this instant be sett a part as a day of solemn thanksgivinge to god for his late Publique
Blessinge in changinge the Government and stre[...] of Affaires in the Nation and also that prayer be
then made that the Lord would blesse the powers in beinge. All Accordinge to a printed paper sent the
Church from some friends in London invitinge the church thereunto. (DRO 3700D-O/M.1, p. 34)

Such news was important enough to warrant a day of praise and thanksgiving from the community of saints, in
London, Loughwood, and elsewhere. Members of the church continued to urge reform in the government. In
September 1659, more than a year after publishing The Captive, John Vernon and William Allen signed the
broadside plea, An Essay Toward Settlement, along with John Owen, James Hitt, and Henry Parsons, all
brethren of the church at Loughwood, and leading Baptist and Fifth Monarchist adherents Hugh Courtney,
Henry Danvers, Henry Jessey, and Vavasor Powell (among others). Here, the signatories prayed that there be no
‘King’, ‘chiefe Magistrate’, or ‘House of Lords’, as the ‘late single Person (in professed pursuit of
Reformation)’ was ‘of an haughty and abusive spirit’. They also asked for liberty of conscience: that all men
might be judged by the laws set down in scripture, by a group of god-fearing men (An Essay Toward Settlement
upon a Sure Foundation (London: Printed for Giles Calvert, [19 September] 1659)). Over the succeeding
months, it became clear that neither the army nor the Rump Parliament were fit, or popular, enough to rule and
maintain law and order, and the monarchy was eventually restored. All hope of religious toleration was lost, and
an order for Allen’s imprisonment was issued in April 1661. He was lodged in the Gatehouse until 19 June
when his and Vernon’s release was ordered, ‘giving security of £1000 to leave the kingdom within fifteen days’.
(see Hardacre, ‘William Allen’, p. 305) Neither man seems to have left the country, as Vernon later published a
narrative detailing the life of his youngest son, who died on 29 November 1665: The Compleat Scholler; A
Relation of the Life, and Latter-End Especially, of Caleb Vernon.

\[47\] Anon [attributed to John Rye], A Word for God, [...] against wickednesse in high-places (London: [Livewell
Chapman], [3 December] 1655. ‘Equal distinction of justice’ was meant to be changed to ‘equal distribution of
justice’, p. 4, but was not altered evidently because of Chapman’s imprisonment. See ‘Col. Barkstead,
Lieutenant of the Tower, to Secretary Thurloe’, Papers of Secretary Thurloe, 4; p. 379.
doe so much mischief’. Even though he took no part in Venner’s April 1657 rising, he was regularly investigated by the authorities. Leona Rostenberg writes that ‘Desborough, the Protector’s nephew and a silent Fifth Monarchist sympathizer, was asked to ‘consider a book reflecting on the Government, Printed by Chapman’. Rostenberg, along with Catharine Gray who cites the assertion, speculates that although ‘it is impossible to determine the work in question’ it could have been for his publishing of *The Captive Taken from the Strong*. Allen’s prefatory epistle is critical of the government, and criticises Cromwell, although not by name (A6), but it is less inflammatory than some other Fifth Monarchist publications. Although it styles itself as a rallying call to other believers, it does this only in an allegorical sense, and advocates waiting for the Fifth Monarchy to be established rather than establishing it by force. Perhaps the main problem authorities would have had with the publishing of it would have been that William Allen’s name was falsely printed on a text published by Edward Sexby called *Killing Noe Murder*. The pamphlet vindicated tyrannicide, directly addressing Cromwell to whom Sexby thought ‘justly belong[ed] the honour of dying for the people’ (A1). After his death, the pamphleteer wrote, ‘Religion shalbe then restored, Liberty asserted and Parliament have those Privileges they have fought for’ (A1). Although *The Captive Taken from the Strong* was certainly critical of the times in which it was produced, it advocates steadfastness and preparation over force and violence, much like Sutton’s prophecies, and Trapnel’s folio. It was to God that Huish and her congregation attributed her release from out of the power of Satan and not their own earthly forces.

It is likely that Deborah Huish’s text was recorded and published to soothe the disheartened and disillusioned saints, both in England and Ireland, who felt let down by Cromwell and his Protectorate. William Allen shows how her narrative could be not only an example to ‘poor disconsolate souls in like conditions’, but ‘also for the recovery and raising his publicke works, so far gone back in these Nations, in this sad, declining day, as causeth many of Zions Friends to speak sadly and doubtfully of them, as they of Christ’ (A5v-A6). The experiences of a ‘chosen vessel’ could have the effect of urging other believers to recover the practices and doctrines of the Reformation, and not to lose heart. Allen writes that

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48 ‘Col. Barkstead, Lieutenant of the Tower, to Secretary Thurloe’, *Papers of Secretary Thurloe*, 4: p. 379.
if the saints let the Reformation decline then they in turn would let Christ decline, and that they should stand up against the enemies of this cause. In such a time he interpreted Huish’s experiences as a sign ‘to raise our Faith and hope in the Lord’ (A5v). The ‘bringing forth of such a glorious work as this, out of such a barren Womb of apprehended impossibilities (when even Faith, hopes, and hearts, of the strongest failed concerning it)’ was seen by him as a ‘signal mercy’, and as a ‘pledge and pattern of what God will yet do’ (A5v). Allen seems to have believed that the task of freeing Huish from the Devil’s captivity was impossible, as was, it seemed, the freeing of the people of God from out of the tyranny of the Protectorate. They were both ‘apprehended impossibilities’: the saints’ hopes were stuck in a barren womb where nothing could grow, flourish, or be conceived. It was God who freed Huish from her captivity thereby enabling her to fight against Satan and experience the ‘new birth’, the good news of her conversion that would help others to conceive. This gave Allen hope that anything was possible for the saints, if God was behind them, even if ‘Faith, hopes, and hearts, of the strongest failed concerning it’ (A5v). Significantly, it was a woman that the Lord chose to be his chosen vessel and to give birth to his heavenly joy.

The idea of the ‘new birth’ seems to have had special resonance for women writers as has been discussed in the previous two chapters. In the 1658 texts, the idea appears to have developed from the scriptures which depict the ‘woman’s seed’ battling and overcoming the seed of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 (‘And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; [...]’). Anna Trapnel’s verse draws on this reference and its manifestation in Revelation 12:17:

O the womans seed, the womans seed,
It shall the Serpent break;
It shall him utterly overcome,
And it shall him defeat.
The seed of the woman it is that
That unto man must show
Over Sin and Satan a victory,
And utter overthrow.52

Revelation 12:17 refers to the Devil continuing to make war with the woman’s children (‘And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ’). Trapnel writes that the remnant of the woman’s seed (referring obliquely to herself and her

prophecies) could overcome the Devil and his seed in its spreading of the word and urging the uniting of the saints. She specifies that it is the woman’s seed that must show ‘man’ (mankind) how to overcome the antichrist, referring to her own experiences and prophecies as the means to evangelise her audience and banish and destroy Satan. For Trapnel, the ‘new birth’ is ‘full of zeal, courage, and love’:

It is full of zeal for Christ against the Foe; It hath a courage for Christ, and for his Interest; it hath a delight in Christ. O the new birth is thine own Image drawn upon the soul; it is a choice birth, a glorious birth, a high birth: The new birth is the Image of the risen Christ, the spreading forth of that glorious Image, that so the Father, the Son, the Spirit, may be known in the World. (p. 354)

In this passage, the ‘new birth’ is the good news of Christ shown in the experiences of the godly. It is ‘the Image of the risen Christ’, the pouring out of his blood and his rising up in resurrection, that believers testify and spread in their conversion experiences. It is this image that believers reflected when they undertook the ordinance of baptism. She continued to pray that the ‘beautiful excellency of the new nature [birth] shall be more and more made manifest’. ‘It is royal’, she wrote, ‘but it is despised among men, but the Lord of Glory will appear’: ‘there is a distinguishing time a coming, when the wrath of the Lamb shall terribly break forth, and that terrible sentence pass upon opposers’ (p. 354). Like the elders of Huish’s congregation, Trapnel looked forward to the coming of King Jesus who would save the ‘blessed number’ and take vengeance on the rest. The ‘sealings’ of the ‘King’, by which she meant conversion, assurance, and baptism, she longed to ‘be made manifest’ to others, ‘that so from what they have heard and seen, they might speak of thee’. Each person who was converted could spread the good news and the means of their release from suffering to the glory of the Lord. Trapnel shows that the new birth could rectify controversies and confusion in practice and doctrine by testifying to where God had chosen to bestow his grace:

In Churches, O the new birth is wanting, let it break forth; come, and give to them the lovely birth, that thou mayst have a sweet sound in the midst of confusion, of confused Babel [Genesis 11:9]: divers voices are abroad, a very great confusion, but happy they that have the new birth brought forth that is very glorious. O the sealings of this birth fourteen years together can witness for it. (p. 354)

The allusion to the building of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 might imply that Trapnel believed that the established church was at fault for trying to build their idolatrous buildings closer to God, like the builders of Genesis who attempted to build a tower that would reach to heaven: they were punished by being made to speak different languages so that they could
not work together. Perhaps drawing on Isaiah where ‘molten images’ are shown to be nothing but ‘wind and confusion’ (41:29) and the condemnation of the ‘makers of idols’ that should go to confusion together, ‘ashamed, and also confounded’ (45:16), Trapnel shows how the new birth could establish peace and happiness. With Paul she might have said: ‘For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints’ (1 Corinthians 14:33). The prelates and episcopalians were confused, humiliated, and disordered because they had not experienced the revelations of the new birth within themselves.

It is also significant that Trapnel records that she had experienced the ‘sealings’ of the new birth for ‘fourteen years’, as this appears to have been a period of time common to the women writers of the 1658 texts. Katherine Sutton prophesying in the late 1650s, although publishing her experiences in 1663, recorded such a number:

I was about 14 years in the pangs of the new birth before I received the witness of the spirit, in which time I was exceeding troubled with my unbelieving heart through entertaining false fears: and indeed some thing of Jesus Christ was in mee all that while.53

Although fourteen years in her delivery, the babe Christ was always within her, and after she brought forth her ‘new birth’ she became a ‘witness of the spirit’ and published her testimony to the experiences of God’s grace growing within her. Huish’s experience, given in front of her congregation in 1657/8, also records that ‘about fourteen years ago I was cast into deep despair’, and William Allen’s prefatory epistle describes these torments as ‘her fourteen years dangerous Voyage through such a tempestuous troubled Sea’ (B1; A4v). John Vernon urged that her testimony would ‘help to succour also the whole of Zion of God; though she be ready to say, My God hath forgotten me [Isaiah 49:14; Jeremiah 18:15]’ and wished that the ‘travel spoken of’ in Isaiah 66:6-8, where Isaiah prophesies that a woman could not bring forth child ‘before she had travailed’ (66:7) or a ‘nation be born at once’ (66:8), might be ‘begun by all that have their hearts heavy loaden, with their own (and others) Iniquities’ (b1v-b2). ‘As soon as Zion travailed’, Isaiah had said, ‘she brought forth her children’ (66:8). To Zion or Jerusalem, Vernon showed, the Lord was to ‘extend peace to her like a river’ (66:12) so that ‘the glory of the Lord may be redeemed in the Land’ (b2). The example of Huish’s travail was surely meant to urge others to do the same, to stop ‘the mouth of all Iniquity in the Nations’ (b2). Anna Trapnel’s folio prophecies, delivered to companions and critics in

53 Sutton, A Christian Womans Experiences, D4v.
1657/8, devote time to exploring her period of fourteen years prior to the deliverance of the verses, where she was assured of the new birth. Her amanuensis records her words:

Poor Instrument hath found thee, Lord,
For fourteen years together
United so unto her soul,
That nothing can from thee sever.
Poor instrument hath found thee, Lord,
Glorious for fourteen years;
And O thou dost still more and more
To her relief appear.54

Her earlier work, *A Legacy for Saints* (1654), describes that on 3 January 1643 (fourteen years before) Trapnel’s aunt broke the news to her of her mother’s death telling her: ‘Cosen, the Lord hath taken your mother from you, now labour to be married to Christ’.55 When she realised that she had replied only ‘hoping’ that this would be so, ‘Satan buffetted’ (C1v) her heart. She wrote that there was ‘nothing but blackness before me; now I had sinned against the spirit, and this was more dreadful to me then all the time of my bondage’ (C1v-C2). The assaults of Satan were more terrible than Trapnel’s imprisonment in Bridewell, which the narrative in *A Legacy for Saints* attempts to vindicate. She realised that in all fourteen years the Lord had always been with her, upholding her under persecution from both Satan, and worldly evils.

The fourteen year period seems to have been an important one to women writers of the late 1650s and is a significant part of their justifying their experiences and prophecies as, what Trapnel called, ‘Images of Christ’. Trapnel and Huish’s texts were produced by those involved with millenarian ideas surrounding the Fifth Monarchist movement, and Sutton’s work also expresses similar millenarian sentiments, looking forward to a time when Christ would arrive on earth. Referring to the prophecy depicted in Daniel, the Fifth Monarchists believed that four successive empires, generally interpreted as Babylon, Assyria, Greece, and Rome, would fall before ‘the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever’ (Daniel 7:18). Huish, Sutton, and Trapnel seem to refer to a similar pattern of successive generations preparing for the establishing of Christ’s reign on earth. Matthew 1:17 reads: ‘all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying

54 Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 366. Trapnel dwells for nearly two pages on the fourteen year period during which she had felt God’s presence.
away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations’. What follows, according to Matthew, is Mary’s conception of Jesus Christ. Consciously or not, the period of the women’s struggles with Satan and their path towards justification is aligned with a period of fourteen years, recalling the fourteen generations which came between Babylon and the birth of Christ. Their ‘new births’ referred to the period following their baptisms, and the birth of joy after release from their travails under Satan’s thrall. It could also refer to their giving birth to the ‘Image of Christ’ by publishing it in their writings.

Trapnel uses various scriptural examples of women who were essential to bringing forth the word and the orders of the Lord. Extending the idea of the ‘woman’s seed’ overthrowing the seed of Satan, she refers to the travailing woman of Revelation 12 who suffers to bring forth ‘a man child’ (12:5) while persecuted by a ‘great red dragon’ (12:3) who waited, unsuccessfully, to devour her offspring. Trapnel praised this woman, who was thought to represent the labouring of Zion, manifested in scripture as female, for her strength and courage in adversity, and related this to the position of women in establishing the rule of the saints on Earth. Before Christ appeared as ‘the smiting stone’ to the antichrist, the woman would ‘suffer much, / Hath many groan and tear’ (p. 751) in order to bring him forth into the world. She continues:

Salvations gate and entrance
The woman doth obtain;
And nothing shall have power against
Her whom Christ doth maintain.
The woman when her figure comes forth
Which shews a mystery rare:
A woman, and a feeble thing
With such strength as none can compare.
[...]
A woman, and a sorrowful one,
That oft did sit and weep:
But is exalted very high,
And with a Crown did meet. (p. 751)

John’s vision is used by Trapnel as a prophecy of what would occur in the latter days before Christ’s appearance on Earth, and shows that the woman of Zion is instrumental in bringing about his birth and escaping from the devouring dragon of Satan. Though the woman, she shows above, is ‘feeble’ and ‘sorrowful’ (and in other places ‘poor and mean’), she had ‘strength that’s great’ from attending ‘the King’s blessed seat’ and was ‘exalted very high’. The Lord’s strength was made perfect in her weakness, making the prophesied birth of Christ all the more ‘mysterious and rare’. Trapnel defends woman’s position as a crucial instrument
for the communicating of the good news of God. She urges her companions: ‘Come love, O come to poor young ones, / To female and male too’ (p. 6). Salvation and its experience were for both men and women, and Trapnel defends womankind’s first transgression that contemporaries used to show that they were easily deceived and captivated by the Devil and his seed:

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Though that the Serpent first did come
Unto the woman weak,
Yet that cannot her comfort destroy,
Which is in the Lord compleat.
Yet that could not keep off free grace,
That could not lessen love;
That could not hinder a Redeemer
That comes down from above.
That could not hinder him from bringing
A very joyful voice;
That could not hinder him from making
The female to rejoice. (p. 210)
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Trapnel’s emphatic repetition is persuasive in its aim to convince her audience that although the woman was first to be deceived at the Fall, she still received God’s grace and love, and her sins were still forgiven by the death of Christ on the cross. Not only this, she shows how the Lord brought her the ‘joyful voice’ with which she gave out her prophecies. She was significantly ‘made’ to rejoice by the Lord because his works were so wonderful that she could not keep silent. Woman’s transgression at the Fall, Trapnel says, was to teach women to be ‘meek and humble’ (p. 210) and to be care that they were ‘slow’ of speech and ‘have very few words from self’, always looking to the Lord for their words. ‘The first transgression’, she said, ‘should unto them give a check’ (p. 211) and learn them to be ‘careful what they say’ (p. 211). A ‘prattling tongue / Doth much dishonour the King, / And a very great reproach it doth / Upon the Gospel bring’ (p. 211): women were advised to speak only what they thought to be of God and in those cases, Trapnel believed, they should have liberty to speak aloud to their congregations.

The meekness and humbleness that Trapnel advocated in women’s behaviour was a means by which her own and other godly women’s speech was authorised. It was by the ‘weak things’, St Paul had written, that the ‘mighty’ might be ‘confounded’ (1 Corinthians 1:27). According to Trapnel, God would choose the weak ones to have their mouths opened to glorify his name:

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O Lord, wilt thou send thy Spirit down?
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And wilt thou *England* teach,  
That thou dost send thy Spirit unto  
Weak ones, and by them doth preach?  
[...]  
O inspiration it doth come  
To the poor feeble one;  
To such as are willing to be taught  
By the most blessed One. (p. 136)

Women’s meekness and humbleness made them ‘willing to be taught’ and God could fill them as vessels for his word without the danger of their emphasising their own ideas above his own. This gave her own words authority: she had leave to speak given her by the Holy Spirit and therefore her words could not easily be dismissed. Using the example of Rhoda, the damsel from Acts 12:13-16 who tells of Peter’s arrival at the house of John’s mother Mary, she shows how this handmaid was called ‘mad’ (12:15) for giving the news of Peter having escaped from prison, helped by an angel. ‘And thus they do say in our time’, Trapnel wrote, ‘And count hand-maid[s] to speak / From their fancy; but it’s that / Comes from eternal seat’ (p. 45). She directs this example at the congregations assembled in Christ, the same as were praying in Mary’s house and would not believe the lowly handmaid: ‘O let not assemblies, / Against the Spirit appear’ (p. 45). Trapnel showed how the churches should believe the words that came from the ‘eternal seat’ as they were given to her because she was ‘willing to be taught’ as a ‘chosen vessel’. Rhoda is only one of many scriptural ‘handmaids’ whose actions Trapnel praises, and the use of this term is significant, as Longfellow argues. Trapnel is in a position of service to the Lord, but when the term is ‘used by men in authority it also shows Trapnel’s place within the community, and emphasises the miraculous nature of authoritative vision issuing from a person of lowly status’.  

The combination of her denial of her own agency and the lack of misogynist criticism she received, Longfellow concludes, might ‘be the strongest evidence of Trapnel’s agency as a woman prophet’.

Despite her denial of her own agency, declaring that he words were God’s, Trapnel emphasises that important work could not have been accomplished without the words and deeds of female handmaids, and uses Deborah and Jael as her main examples. She writes that the Lord ‘had songs from hand-maids’ that made ‘a loud report’, referring to Moses’ sister Miriam, but also to Deborah’s song in Judges 5 where she records the slaying of Sisera by Jael’s ‘female hand’ (p. 68). The song of Deborah shows her rejoicing ‘exceedingly / In what God did in that day’ in his conquering of the ‘foe and enemy’ (p. 69), and Trapnel’s use of

this passage is meant to highlight parallels between her own prophetic ‘singing’ and Deborah’s song prophesying victory over her enemies. Her folio, according to Longfellow, ‘aligns itself with the divine authority of the Psalms through a formal resemblance to English Psalm translations’, and she sets herself up as another prophesying, singing handmaid of the Lord.58 Trapnel predicted that the enemies of the Lord’s people would be struck down by Christ when he came again, which refers to Deborah’s prophecies recording how the ‘Lord would sell Sisera into the hand of a woman’ (Judges 4:9). Because Deborah’s words were fulfilled, Trapnel’s predictions against her enemies (the false professors, and Cromwell and his men) are made more threatening. These men should not only be wary of women prophets that could prophesy their downfall, but also the ‘female hand’ that could brandish a nail at their temples. Trapnel also uses the example of Deborah to highlight another of her functions as a handmaid of God, also utilised by Sara Jones discussed in chapter one, and this is in her encouragement of Barak to enter the battle to end the oppression of the Israelites by Sisera:

O Deborah was a valiant one,  
That so went forth to fight:  
For without her Barak would not  
Go up within the sight  
Of the Enemy: O he would not  
Without wise Deborah go,  
For she had a glorious spirit of  
Prophesie against the Foe.  
O said she, for certain God will,  
He will deliver this day  
Israel from their enemy  
In a wondrous manner and way. (p. 69)

According to Judges 4, Deborah, who ‘judged Israel at that time’, sent for Barak and told him that the Lord had commanded that he take a force to meet Sisera, whom the Lord would ‘draw unto’ them ‘with his chariots and his multitude’ and ‘deliver him into thine hand’ (4:6-7). Barak replied that he would only agree to go if she came as well, to which she agreed, and urged him to battle on the day ‘in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand’ (4:14). Trapnel implies that a woman must prophesy in order to urge a commander into action by reassuring him that the Lord is on his side. Just as Sara Jones wished ‘some worthy Baruch would goe forth with valiant Deborah and set the Armies of Jehovah in order’,59 discussed in chapter two, Trapnel showed that without a female handmaid, male ‘Baraks’

would not undertake the Lord’s work: they could not interpret his wishes without a female prophetess. Trapnel’s aim in this section of the work is to establish the validity of her prophecies by comparing her situation to Deborah’s and her male followers as like to Barak, but she also compares her audience with that of Deborah’s. ‘O this Generation’, she says, ‘Will not receive the Song, / But do object against plain words [...] though [the Psalm] comes from Jesus Christ’ (p. 69). By drawing attention to her audience’s unbelief, Trapnel styles them as disobedient Baraks who hear the word of God through a prophetess and disregard her holy words. If Deborah’s prophecies had been ignored then Israel would not have been liberated from the Canaanite armies of Sisera, and the implication is that the people of England would not be free from the tyranny of Cromwell if they ignored Trapnel’s prophecies.

As well as Trapnel’s praise of Deborah, the ‘mother of Israel’, she also identifies herself with the spouse of the Song of Solomon, especially in her opening prophecy. Both Erica Longfellow and Matthew Prineas have discussed Trapnel’s relationship with Christ using this example, the former highlighting that if Christ figured as her husband then in terms of congregational discipline she was speaking to her spouse, and not transgressing into the problematic public sphere. What Longfellow also argues, extremely effectively, is that in identifying herself with the spouse of Christ, Trapnel sets up her foes for criticism should they attack her prophetic outpourings, as she demonstrates in this passage:

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The spouse comes forth with lovely song,
And it was envied,
What note is that that thou bringest forth?
Was to her often said.
What spirit is this? O it is strange,
It differeth from other,
They did against the song complain;
But she sings of her Lover,
And maketh unto him complaint,
That they at her do strike.
For they did tear and rent the vail
Of Christs beloved Wife. (p. 1)
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Trapnel records the suspicions she provoked when she began to ‘sing’ her prophecies, and by merging herself with the spouse positions her critics as violators of her chastity. Like the watchmen of the city in 5:7 who ‘smote’ and ‘wounded’ the spouse while she was searching for him in the city, Trapnel was ‘envied’ and ‘complained’ against, and had previously been imprisoned in Bridewell, a prison for thieves and whores, for travelling and spreading her
prophecies, thought to be seditious. The image of the ‘rent vail’ is also significant in that, as Longfellow shows, it ‘describes both verbal abuse and physical assault akin to rape because it involves tearing the woman’s protective veil’. The veil is significant for Trapnel as well as any women member of a gathered congregation, Longfellow argues, because of the expressed need for women to wear veils when they prophesy recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:5 (‘But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven’). That the spouse’s enemies tear her veil is an attack on her chastity, but also on the garment by which she is allowed to prophesy. With her protective veil destroyed the only choices for Trapnel would be to stop speaking altogether or prophesy without, which would invite the reproach, not only of her enemies, but members of her own church: the ‘companions’ she addresses. She continues to speak but acting as a spouse conversing with her spiritual bridegroom:

She comes not forth with a vail, For  
She needs not be asham’d,  
Now that her husband doth appear,  
Which once for her was slain. (p. 21)

The appearance of Christ within her enabled her to speak without reproach: her husband was present and she no longer needed to be ‘asham’d’. It was Christ, she wrote, who ‘doth cause her thus to Sing’ (p. 2).

Utilising the song of the spouse and the song of Deborah, both scriptural songs spoken by women, gives Trapnel’s prophecies the authority of a new book of spiritual songs for the use of her contemporaries. The existence of such a book, Longfellow argues, ‘suggests that someone in Trapnel’s circle had more money than the poor “handmaid” herself’. The printing and publishing costs of the 990-page folio would have been considerable to produce even in one edition. Matthew Prineas’s discussion of Trapnel’s folio ‘as a book – not just as the record of “something spoken”’ is useful in that it highlights the work’s imitation of a biblical collection of songs, given in the same way as in the Old Testament, drawing on contemporary events. Its production before what was believed to be the imminent second coming suggests that the folio was preserved as a book for posterity, as were the books of the Old Testament prophets. Trapnel’s identification with the language of the spouse and of Deborah in their songs suggests that she was finding the authority to

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60 Longfellow, Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England, p. 177.  
produce her own prophetic song for the use of her ‘companions’ in Christ. She predicted how future generations would ‘say it came from God, / And told of secret sin, / And rebellions it spake against’ and would realise it was ‘not from brain, but him’ (p. 4). ‘O mind and understand the Psalm’, she writes: ‘It’s for resurrection-day’ (p. 10). Trapnel’s folio is an example of how women’s writings and prophecies were incorporated into a body of work that predicted the second coming, which was intended to be treasured after the event as a ‘newer’ testament for the mid-seventeenth century.

It is significant that the anonymous woman’s request in *Conversion Exemplified* for her husband to publish her experiences after her death is compared by him to Joseph, who in scripture asked for his bones to be carried with the Israelites when they eventually escaped from under their oppressive and tyrannical rulers. Her text is figured as a holy relic, to remind the people of God that there was hope for them, and they would soon be released from oppression. The writings and utterances of the 1658 women’s experiences are also presented as relics to be treasured as evidences of the second coming, and to unify their followers in preparation. These experiences would not survive, or have ever existed, if women’s words and deeds were not considered important to their gathered churches, and it is their importance in urging change both within and without these groups on which this chapter has focussed. Their ability to prophesy and observe the divine world made them ideal candidates for addressing and criticising their rulers. As ‘Mothers in Israel’, like Deborah, women could evangelise the people of Israel to bring forth their ‘new births’ to build a better society for King Jesus when he came to reign. They could advise others on their conduct (directly or indirectly) in the tradition of mothers’ legacies, urge them to be ready and faithful, like the wise virgins, and to be strengthened in rightful doctrine. That Trapnel’s 990-page folio exists at all is testament to the faith of her companions that she, along with other women who published at this time, was a true prophetess, and a figure whose words should be preserved like Deborah’s until Christ should come again. Separatist and Baptist women’s words were considered to be a force for change.
Concluding Remarks

‘O cry for the Book; Proclaim it with a loud voice’

As this study began with the rousing words of Anna Trapnel, it seems appropriate that her prophecies should also form the basis for a conclusion. As I have shown, Trapnel’s work is special because of its exploration of the ordinance of baptism and its importance in the establishing of Zion on earth, and because she simultaneously advocates the use of female writing and speaking as part of this process. For example, in one of her verses recorded in the untitled folio for 3 December 1657, she declares the importance of what she calls ‘the Book’ in fighting against the ‘antichristian tongues’ of the saints’ opponents. She asks:

Strong Angel, proclaim that the Book may
Be read in every place,
That so the serpents subtlety
May not the Book disgrace.

[...]
Strong Angel cry, O cry for the Book;
Proclaim it with a loud voice,
That so it may rebuke those flouds,
Whose billows make such a noise.
Antichristian billows and waters
Make such a noise in England,
That children are not able the
True voice to understand.
O antichristian billows they
Make such a noise and roar,
As that poor children cannot hear
The Spirits golden Ore.¹

Trapnel’s ‘Strong Angel’ is the figure from Revelation 5:2 who ‘proclaim[s] with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?’ The answer to who is worthy enough, according to the book of Revelation, is ‘a Lamb as it had been slain’ (5:6), the resurrected Christ. Drawing on these references, Trapnel requests that the angel proclaim that ‘the Book may / Be read in every place’ which suggests that after believers had felt Christ taking away their sins on the cross they should all be able to access it. Quite which ‘Book’ Trapnel refers to in this section is not immediately clear. She could be referring to the book referred to in Revelation 5:2, the book of Revelation itself, the Bible, or indeed her own folio of prophecies, which, as I discussed at the end of chapter five, was most likely preserved as an early modern propheticical testament to the imminent arrival of Christ. Perhaps

¹ Trapnel, Untitled folio of verse prophecies, p. 149.
her words gained their authority by blurring with those of scripture. Whatever meaning Trapnel privileged, she advocates the spreading of God’s word by books, and by their being read ‘in every place’ for the evangelising of all his ‘children’. Without books, she writes, the ‘antichristian’ waves of persecution and melancholy would drown out messages of comfort and saving graces: all England was drowning in the roaring ‘billows’ of the antichristian flood. Accessing the book would enable the children to hear and be saved by the ‘Spirits golden Ore’, probably referring to the golden oars made for the ark Moses and the Israelites built to house God’s testament in Exodus 25. Trapnel intended that her book should save believers adrift in the purging flood by alerting them to God’s saving ark; his testimony and covenant to his elect that the waves would otherwise obscure.

What Trapnel’s verses highlight in this instance is that she believed, like the companions that came to listen to her speak and who presumably published her 990-page folio, that women’s verses could be part of the force that showed believers the way to be saved and the way to interpret the evidences of God’s grace. Spreading the word of God, which she believed she had received, she directed that her book should be read everywhere to fight actively against the waves of antichristian persecution. It was the book that would show believers the way to God, to his ‘golden ore’. Trapnel’s experiences and prophecies show that separatist and Baptist women could play an active role in evangelising believers, strengthening potential members of the gathered churches, as well as those who already belonged. Despite misgivings within most congregations as to whether women should be allowed the same speaking privileges as men, a surprising number of women published in a variety of genres all for the purpose of urging the saints towards what they thought was the rightful, scriptural way to obey God. It did not suit the consciences of many women to stay silent, as they believed that they had received signs of what was to come. Whereas most women seem not to have been as vocal, or as forthright, as Trapnel was, requiring the support of male prefatory writers, discussions of their writings have highlighted that they were playing important roles within their congregations. They argued over doctrine and practice, they united their followers by vindicating their practices and disproving the validity of the established church, they were godly examples to others, and they interpreted their own experiences as signs for the whole body of believers. These women were not just concerned with their own spiritual states; they felt that they had a duty to help others in need as nursing mothers to the children of the new Israel.
When I first began this project I had intended to discuss Baptist women’s writing up to and including the Monmouth Rebellion. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions of space, this study does not refer enough to the writings of Anne Wentworth, who went on to send prophecies to King Charles II in 1677 and used her experiences under an oppressive husband as an allegory for the elect in their fight against their persecutors.\(^2\) There is certainly more research to be done into separatist and Baptist women’s writings beyond the date-range of this study. There are more explicit links to be made between writings of women themselves and representations of the feminine in the works of John Bunyan. It would also be valuable to discuss these ideas in relation to the educational books and hymns of Benjamin Keach, particularly to his advice to young women.\(^3\) There is also evidence to suggest that Baptist women were also active in what was perceived to be seditious activity during the Monmouth rebellion. For example, Elizabeth Gaunt, a Baptist according to Thomas Crosby, was arrested for aiding rebels to escape overseas in the wake of the rebellion and her fate was to be the last woman to be executed for treason.\(^4\) Undoubtedly there is more work to do to uncover the actions and writings of separatist and Baptist women from this later, turbulent period.

This project aimed to draw attention to little-known separatist and Baptist women, concentrating on those writings that had not received much scholarly attention. It also sought to show that only by considering these women as part of their various congregational networks would it be possible to understand what their texts were doing and in what sense they were unusual. The discovery of Sara Jones’s *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* allowed me to speculate on whether the position of women in the gathered churches had always been so constrained, and if not then how this affected women’s actions and writings. Instead of a sermon or rousing speech, like Jones’s, separatist and Baptist women’s writings tended to appear in genres that corresponded with when they were permitted to speak within congregational meetings: their speeches on being admitted to the church were recorded as conversion narratives; their defences if they had sinned against the congregation were represented by vindications; and the words God gave them to speak were recorded in prophecies. From the mid-1640s this seems to have been the case. However, this study has


\(^3\) See, for example, Benjamin Keach, *The Glorious Lover, a Divine Poem* (London: Printed by J. D., 1679). The first page of this bears an illustration of a woman succumbing to temptation and then being pushed towards a gaping hell-mouth by two soldiers.

\(^4\) See Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists, from the Reformation to the Beginning of the Reign of George I*, 3: pp. 185-93; *Mrs Gaunt’s Last Speech who was Burnt at London, Oct. 25. 1685. as it was written by her own hand* (London: n. pub., 1685).
shown how women could play with these genres to include discussions of doctrine, ministry, politics, women’s position within their congregations, and advisory words to their co-members. In those few verses above, Trapnel declares that her words could play the part of evangelising ministry, drawing authority from the voice of God speaking through her. She advises that all ‘children’ should be able to access ‘the Book’ to prevent their persecutors from preventing the establishing of the Fifth Monarchy, where King Jesus would rule. These women also believed that their works would be treasured for years to come, perhaps as testimonies like those of the Marian martyrs, as a body of evidence of God’s grace poured out on his chosen people. It seems fitting that this study should end with just such a statement from Trapnel, urging her companions that they should treasure her writings that God had brought into their hands as a ‘Song of Jehovah’ that could unite and edify them:

The Song of Jehovah gathered up,
Let it as a treasure be;
That when that I am taken hence,
You may not lose this harmony.
There is nothing can frustrate
What God doth bring to hand,
And therefore the Song of Jehovah
Maintain, and for it stand. (pp. 290-1)
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