Chapter 6

"Holy Living and Holy Dying"

The Response of Some British Baptist Women to "Come Out" from the World

Karen Smith

Although the story of their lives has not always made it into the annals of history, women have always been at the heart of Baptist life in Britain. Women were among the Separatists who left England and went to Holland in 1608 searching for religious freedom. Three years later in 1611, women numbered among the believers in Amsterdam who stated that "the church off Christ is a compainy off faithful people separated from the world by the word and Spirit off God."[1] Moreover, women featured among those who having declared their desire to "come out" from the world, returned from Holland to England and established a General Baptist Church (as it became known because of a belief in general atonement) on English soil at Spitalfields in London in 1612. Likewise, women were part of another group of Baptists in Britain who also grew out of Separatism, but were Calvinistic in theology, and emerged in England in the 1630s.

From their separate, but identifiable Puritan-Separatist roots, both General and Calvinistic (later Particular) Baptist congregations grew and eventually expressed their theological views in confessions of faith. The General Baptists published the *Orthodox Creed* in 1679 and Calvinistic Baptists published the *London Confession* in 1644, which was followed by the *Second London Confession* (1677/1689). Although only men signed these published confessional statements, and later men would primarily serve in leadership in the public sphere, women played a prominent role in early

1. "Declaration of Faith," 119.

Baptist life, though usually in ways that were considered culturally and socially acceptable.

There were, of course, women who seem to have assumed teaching roles in the church. In his vitriolic attack against Dissenters, entitled, *Gangraena* (1646), Thomas Edwards, claimed that Baptists were among those spreading "confusion and disorder in Church-matters both of opinions and practices."[2] He claimed: "swarmes are there of all sorts of illiterate mechanick Preachers, yea of Women and Boy Preachers!"[3] To support his accusation, he claimed that the Bell-Alley Church in London, led by the General Baptist, Thomas Lambe, was allowing a lace-woman, Mrs Attaway to speak publically.[4] Edwards gave a detailed account of Mrs. Attaway's involvement in public meetings and said that she had "offered a word of exhortation," though whether she or the members of the congregation would have claimed she was a preacher is a matter of dispute.[5]

Edwards's account was written during the tumultuous period of the Commonwealth, when it appears that there were women associated with Baptist congregations who claimed to have a word of prophecy. Curtis Freeman has described some of these "visionary women" among Baptists and collected their work in *A Company of Women Preachers: Baptist Prophetesses in Seventeenth-Century England* (2011). Those included are: Sarah Wight (1632–?), Anna Trapnel (1642–1660), Jane Turner (1653), Katherine Sutton (1630–1663), and Anne Wentworth (1629/30–1693?). As in the case of Mrs Attaway, whether or not such women saw themselves as preachers is debatable. Since some of the women had close ties to the Fifth Monarchy movement, their urgent prophetic call for change and separation from the world, seems to have reflected political, as well as theological motivations. After the Restoration in 1660, Baptist women no longer seemed to have "prophecies" and Freeman suggests that as "the Baptist movement became organized and institutionalized many of the egalitarian expressions of the early days dissipated."[6]

While there voices were not always heard in the public sphere, however, women remained in Baptist congregations. Though membership statistics are difficult to assess, from their seventeenth-century beginnings, it appears that in both Calvinistic/Particular and General Baptist congregations,

2. Edwards, *Gangraena*, 29.
3. Edwards, "Dedicatory Epistle."
4. Edwards, *Gangraena*, 30–31.
5. See Freeman, "Visionary Women Among Early Baptists," 260–83.
6. Freeman, *Company of Women Preachers*, 39.

women were for the most part in a majority.[7] The appeal of the Baptist way to British women, might be explained by arguing that Baptist ecclesiology, with its emphasis on the priesthood of the believer and congregational polity, offered women the opportunity to participate in church life. Rachel Adcock has suggested that women seeking 'greater liberty and purity of worship' may have been attracted by congregational order.[8] For example, Susanna Parr, who joined a congregation in Exeter in the early 1650s, claimed she had never before felt "a greater effusion of the Spirit, a more purity and holinesse, more union and communion, more liberty of Conscience, and freedom from that yoke of being servants unto men."[9]

Yet, while (in theory) Baptist polity allowed women, to have "a voice and a vote" within the congregation, this does not explain fully their willingness to embrace radical Protestantism.[10] Indeed, most congregations adhered to a literal interpretation of the injunction of 1 Timothy 2:11–12 which urged women to "learn with all submissiveness" and "keep silent" in the church and, therefore, did not encourage them to preach and to assume leadership roles. Hence, while "liberty of conscience" may have proved attractive to some, on the whole it would not appear that women embraced the Baptist way in order to be assured of freedom of speech.[11] To cite again the example of Susanna Parr, it seems that when she grew disillusioned with the congregation in Exeter it was not over matters of religious freedom. Rather, she seems to have complained about the spiritual state of the members of the congregation and claimed that they were not living out their commitment to Christ in the world. She wrote that she had "never heard or read in Scripture, or other history, that the Lord did make use of people of such an earthly, luke-warme, and indifferent spirit, in any publique worke of reformation" and that the people they had separated from were "more Godly than our selves."[12]

While the issues of freedom of speech and conscience were obviously important to early Baptists, it seems evident that the participation of women in Baptist life should not be equated with an imagined, nascent

7. Rachel Adcock claims that "given the fluid nature of mid-seventeenth-century congregations . . . it is not a straightforward matter to assert that women were more attracted to Baptist church membership than men" (Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings*, 3).

8. Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings*, 14.

9. Parr quoted in Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings*, 14.

10. For the use of the phrase "Radical Protestantism" in relation to Baptists, see Durnbaugh, *Believers' Church*, 94–104.

11. Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings*, 14, 70.

12. Parr quoted in Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings*, 70.

seventeenth-century feminist movement. Women were not simply seeking the opportunity to preach. Nor were they seeking to be in leadership roles. Rather, it may be argued that both men and women believed they were called by God to share together in radical discipleship as a fellowship of believers. Baptist ecclesiology among both General and Particular Baptists was grounded on the idea that members of a congregation believed that they had been called together by God to live in fellowship with God and one another through a covenant relationship.[13] Significantly, covenant life meant that not only had they been brought together or "gathered" by God, but were called by Christ to separate from the world.[14]

The Commitment to Covenant Life

In recent years much has been said about covenant life as a seminal part of British Baptist life and spirituality.[15] By laying stress on the fact that the church belongs to God and was created by God, the language of covenant has been used to try to settle conflict, as well as to encourage cooperation and unity. For instance, in discussions held between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance between 2006 and 2010, a covenant emphasis featured strongly. A report of the conversations stated:

> 'Covenant' expresses at once both the initiative and prior activity of God in making relationship with his people through Christ, and the willing commitment of people to each other and to God. The church is a 'gift' in the sense that it is 'gathered' by Christ, and it 'gathers' in response to the call of Christ. The term ekklesia indicates an 'assembly' that is 'called out' by God. Calling the church a 'fellowship of believers' does not mean that the church is constituted only by faith: faith is always a response to the initiating grace of God. The fellowship or koinonia of the church itself is both a gift and calling, just as the unity of the church is both a gift of the Spirit and a task to be achieved.[16]

13. The term fellowship of believers was used by Ernest Payne in his discussion of Baptist ecclesiology. See Payne, *Fellowship of Believers*.

14. There has been debate over the terms "gathered" or "gathering" church. The phrase "gathered" implies the activity of God, but it also suggests that it is complete. While gathering church implies process, it implies a human dimension. Hence, the use of the phrase "being gathered by God."

15. See for instance, Fiddes et al., *Bound to Love*. See also, Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*; "'Walking Together,'" 47–74.

16. "Word of God," 40.

While unity may be an important part of covenant life, early Baptists did not emphasize covenant relationship in order to stand against division among themselves. Rather, the idea of being "called out" by God to be in relationship with God and one another found expression in their belief that they were called to watch out for one another and to live in a way that reflected their commitment to Christ. This emphasis on being "set apart" or "called out" as God's people was expressed by General and Particular Baptists in the earliest confessional and covenant agreements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example, the *Second London Confession*, (1677/1689) claimed that:

> The Members of these Churches are Saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; and do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves, to the Lord and to one another by the will of God, in professed subjection to the Ordinances of the Gospel.[17]

Since Baptists believed that God created the church by calling out both men and women to be a "fellowship of believers" they believed that those who were part of the church should live lives that were holy and committed to God's ways. This call to "come out" from the world was expressed in covenant agreements in terms of guidelines or "holy duties" by which the community was bound to live. These duties included both personal conduct and care for one another and reflected the very evident way that they insisted on "holiness of life." For instance, in a covenant written by Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) and attached to his book, entitled *The Glory of a True Church and its Discipline display'd* (1697),[18] the first promise of the covenant stated:

> We do promise and ingage (sic) to walk together in all Holiness, Godliness, Humility, and Brotherly Love, as much as in us lieth to render our Communion delightful to God, comfortable to ourselves and lovely to the rest of the Lord's people.[19]

17. See "Assembly or Second London Confession," 286.

18. Keach had been in a General Baptist congregation in Tooley Street, Southwark, before moving to serve as pastor of a Calvinistic congregation in Horsleydown in London. He was also at the centre of the controversy over hymn-singing among Baptists at the end of the seventeenth century. Walker, "Benjamin Keach," 25–42. The church covenant written by Keach provided a pattern which was widely followed among many eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Baptists, both in Britain and in the American colonies.

19. Keach, "Solemn Covenant of the Church," 72.

The second promise claimed:

> We do promise to watch over each other's Conversations, and not to suffer Sin upon one another, so far as God shall discover it to us, or any of us; and to stir up one another to Love and good Works; to warn, rebuke, and admonish one another with Meekness according to the Rules left to us of Christ in that Behalf.[20]

Other promises included the pledge to pray for one another, to bear one another's burdens, to bear with one another's weaknesses, failings and infirmities. They also pledged to meet together for worship and to support the minister in terms of sustenance and material provision.

At first hearing, covenant promises sound like little more than a set of rules and regulations for members of the congregation to live by, or else face censure. Yet, for early Baptists the pledge to observe the duties of membership was to be an expression of a desire to live for God. Indeed, the covenant duties were to be an expression of obedience to the call to holiness; they believed that to be "called out" meant that they were also "set apart" to be God's people. Similar to the purpose of monastic vows, the covenant promises of early Baptist men and women symbolized their desire to live for God within community, and reflected a desire to "come out" from the world.

While women and men were expected to be separate from the world and enter into covenant life within a congregation, they did not always share equally in the congregational life. With few exceptions, congregations seemed for the most part to adhere to the biblical injunction that women are to 'keep silent' in public worship. Some outspoken women challenged this view. For instance it was reported that Sister Anne Harriman of an early London congregation explained her absence from meetings by claiming that

> Bro: Naudin said He would not walk: with such as gave libertie to woemen to speak in the Church. For she could not walk where she had not libertie to speak. And therefore rather then (sic) Brother Naudin should withdraw, she would witb-draw.[21]

Apparently the church discussed the matter of whether "woemen may speak" and concluded that "a Woeman (Mayd, Wife, or Widdow) being a Prophetess 1 Cor 2 may speake, Prophesie, Pray, with a Vayl. Others may not."[22]

20. Keach, "Solemn Covenant of the Church," 72.

21. Burrage, "Trve and Short Declaration," 145–46. This article records the minutes of an early Baptist congregation formed in London in 1652.

22. Burrage, "Trve and Short Declaration," 146.

It seems obvious that even in congregations where women were allowed to speak, the conditions were tightly controlled. Patricia Crawford has pointed out that the fact that women were visited and questioned over their behavior by men demonstrates an expectation that women were to be submissive.[23]

Even in congregations where women were allowed to speak, the roles were carefully prescribed. In the *Broadmead Records* in Bristol it is stated that women were serving in the role of a deaconess, a recognized ministry in the church from 1662. While this was not a preaching role, they were certainly serving within the congregation in a recognized capacity. They had to be over 60 years of age and also to agree not to remarry. They were set apart by prayer and fasting to

> Speak a word to their soules as occasion requires, for support and consolation, to build them up in a spirituall lively faith in Jesus Christ.[24]

Evidence from church records in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries implies that a theological emphasis on the church as a covenant people that had been called out by God provided a theological framework for the discipleship of early Baptists. Not only did church members seek to remind one another of the responsibilities of life together, but in many cases covenant promises provided a standard by which to measure the commitment of both men and women. While women usually served "behind the scenes" in ways that appeared to be traditionally and culturally acceptable,[25] they actively participated in the covenant life of the community and in so doing, by word or deed, reminded others of the importance of "holy living."

Holy Living: A Testimony of Faith

Although women were not, on the whole, recognized as "preachers" or even allowed to serve in the role of deaconess in every congregation, it is significant that from the beginning, women, as well as men, were encouraged to give a public testimony of their faith before the church. Indeed, willingness to give a public testimony to their faith was perhaps seen as the first indication that seventeenth-century Baptist women and men had responded to the call to "come out" from the world. Those who wished to be baptized and join with a congregation were required to "give in their experience," which

23. Crawford, *Women and Religion in England*, 150.
24. Hayden, *Records of a Church*, 87–90.
25. See Smith, "Forgotten Sisters," 163–83.

was a public verbal testimony of their experience with God. Although these testimonies varied in length and style, normally, they followed the pattern of Puritan conversion narratives.[26] While the point at which congregations began to expect potential members to give evidence of their faith is a matter of dispute[27], there is ample evidence in church books that early Baptist women, as well as men stood before the church meeting to offer a testimony of their faith.

In addition to offering testimony within a congregational meeting, some early Baptist women went so far as to have their testimony printed. Examining the writings of outspoken women or "Baptist prophetesses" Freeman suggests that the printed writings of these women fall into two different literary genres: oracles of speech and a conversion narrative. While neither category may be regarded as a sermon, it should be noted that both genres represent a testimony of faith that emphasized the importance being "called out" of the world. Anna Trapnel, for example, was a member of the congregation at All Hallows the Great Church in London, a stronghold for the Fifth Monarchy movement, and a regular meeting place among London Baptist ministers such as Henry Jessey and Hanserd Knollys. She claimed that after she was baptized in 1654 or 1655, her baptism led her to have the ability to prophecy. Trapnel declared:

> When I arose out of the water
> I beheld Christs 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

26. William Perkins (1558–1602) developed what may described as a morphology of conversion which included progressive stages moving from acknowledgement of sin, preparation and assurance, conviction, compunction, and submission, fear, sorrow and faith. Michael Watts has argued that "the process of conversion expounded by Perkins was upheld by English Evangelicals for three centuries as normative of Christian experience" (Watts, *Dissenters*, 174).

27. It has been argued that early Separatists did not require applicants for membership to be tested, but rather merely to give a confession which amounted to an intellectual understanding of faith. Edmund Morgan suggested that the idea of requiring members to give an account of their experience developed among non-Separating Puritans in Massachusetts and then spread back to England. See Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 63–68, 92–105, 109–10.

And for the King up stand
He gave me such instruction,
And brought words to my hand.[28]

While interest in Trapnel's exhortations has focussed mainly on her radical connections with Fifth Monarchists,[29] it is noteworthy that when she faced imprisonment for her prophetic ordinances, she wrote to the community of believers at All Hallows the Great and urged them to pray for her. She also spoke of her commitment to Christ:

> The Lord whom I serve hath from a child kept me, and still doth keep me as a Rememberer of him in his wayes, as well as rejoycing and working righteousness, and he meets me in all these according to his promise.[30]

Katherine Sutton, a member of Hanserd Knollys's congregation wrote, *A Christian Womans experience of the glorious working of Gods free grace* (1663). As the apostles received the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2, she believed that she herself had been given words of prophecy to be expressed in song. While many people were uncomfortable with women testifying in this way, Sutton clearly felt that God had given her this gift of speech. She claimed that her revelation came to her in 1655 when after a long period of struggle, she had assurance from God of her salvation. Again, it is noteworthy that her revelation was shared first within the community of faith and that her pastor, Hanserd Knollys, wrote a commendation to the reader in which he described her one of the Lord's "Handmaides"[31] Sutton's writings, while reflecting the millenarian ideas of the time, also highlight the need to be watchful and "to come out" from the world. In a testimony she claimed was given to her November 1656 she wrote:

Oh! where shall I find now
A people quickn'd still,
That seek all times to live on God
and eek[32] to do his will.

28. Trapnel quoted in Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings*, 20.

29. She apparently fell into a trance in January 1654 and prophesied for twelve days while Vavasor Powell, the Welsh Baptist and Fifth Monarchist was being examined on charges of treason by the Council of State. See Freeman, *Company of Women Preachers*, 370.

30. Trapnel, "Letter to the Church at Allhallows."

31. Freeman, *Company of Women Preachers*, 592.

32. "Eek" is an Old English adverb meaning "also" (incorrectly transcribed in Freeman, *Company of Women Preachers*, as eck!).

A people that deny themselves,
And eek the cross up take,
That doth delight in God alone,
And eek the world forsake.[33]

While Sutton wanted to sing her testimony, other women testified in different ways. The *Broadmead Records* recorded the outspoken witness of Dorothy Kelly, (later Hazard) (d. 1674):

> Mr. Kelly being some years deceased, his Widow persevered in godliness; and it might be said of her as of Ruth 3:11 (all the City did know her to be a virtuous woman). She was like a he-goat before the flock; for in those days Mrs. Kelly was very famous for Piety and reformation, well known to all, bearing living testimony against the superstitions and traditions of those days, and she would not observe their invented times and feasts, called Holy days. At which time she kept a Grocer's shop in High-street, between the Guilders Inn and High Cross, where she would open her shop on the time they call Christmas day, and sit sewing in her shop, as a witness for God in the midst of the city, in the face of the Sun, and in the sight of all men; even in those very days of Darkness, when, as it were, all sorts of people had a reverence of that particular day above all others. . . . She was the first woman in this City of Bristol that practiced that truth of the Lord (which was then hated and odious), namely Separation.[34]

Taking a public stand for faith could not have been easy. But it appears that those who had been "called together" believed that they had a responsibility to witness and were willing to face scorn and ridicule in order to stand up for their beliefs. Having pledged their commitment through covenant statements, women did what they could financially, materially, and spiritually to contribute to the life of the congregation. It was reported, for instance that Elizabeth Poole, who had been a member of William Kiffin's church in London, stood and spoke in front of the general Council of the Army (1648–49).[35] Likewise, Ann Grave (Graves) was a woman of some means who lived among those associated with the congregation of William

33. Sutton, *Christian Woman's Experiences*.

34. Hayden, *Records of a Church*, 18.

35. I am grateful to Larry Kreitzer for drawing my attention to references of women in his sources on William Kiffen(in). In a discussion of Elizabeth Poole, Kreitzer notes that the stories regarding Kiffen's treatment of her and her dismission from the church cannot be substantiated. See Kreitzer, *William Kiffen and His World (2)*, 262–89.

Kiffin.[36] On one occasion it appears that she was one of a number of women who were arrested along with Kiffin when they met for worship in 1661.

Some women offered their homes as meeting places for congregations. In the Broadmead church, for instance, the records state that church met for a time at the house of Sister Griffen and then at the house of Mrs Nethway, a Bristol Brewer's wife. Nethway was described as "a woman who in her day was eminent for godliness," and as having "a good and great understanding in the fear of the Lord."[37]

Naturally, there is evidence in Church books of those who did not keep their covenant commitments. The Church book of the congregation meeting at Cripplegate in London describes a case in 1694 of Sister Cooke who:

> neglected her place in the church for 2 years at least. In which time . . . messengers had been sent to her from the church to speak to her but they could not find her to speak to her. . . . Also she was charged with dealing deceitfully with one Mrs Green.[38]

Those who did not keep their covenant vows were often denied fellowship in the church for a time or excommunicated altogether. Usually they were visited by members of the congregation and asked to give an account of themselves. For instance, in 1651, the Fenstanton congregation sent representatives to visit Anne Pharepoint. The stated reason for their visit was:

> The cause of our coming at this time is, to know whether you are willing to walk with the congregation in the practice of the ordinances of Christ, and those examples which Christ and his disciples left us to follow.[39]

She replied that she did. After conversation with her they apparently

> declared the care the congregation had over her, and how they did earnestly desire her welfare and increase in the knowledge of God. Then she said that she was very joyful, and did return thanks to the congregation, and declared that she would come to the congregation.[40]

At times, the result of such meetings were not always positive. Often they were dismissed for a time or excommunicated altogether. However,

36. See Kreitzer, *William Kiffen and his World (1)*, 149; *William Kiffen and His World (5)*, 63–116.

37. Hayden quoted in Briggs, "She Preachers, Widows, and Other Women," 339.

38. London Cripplegate, *Church Book 1689–1723*, 7.

39. Underhill, *Records of the Churches of Christ*, 24.

40. Underhill, *Records of the Churches of Christ*, 24–25.

the censure itself was a reminder to the person, as well as others in the congregation, that they, indeed, had been called together to be "called out" from the world. While discipline meetings were held when needed, censure was not meted out without due care and concern for circumstances, as was demonstrated in another case at Cripplegate in 1699 with the charge against Sister Hewett's daughter.

> A complaint by her husband that she had abused him with very uncivil and barbarous language . . . the whole being impartially examined it was found that she had been very badly and inhumanely treated by her husband. That deep distressing poverty had afflicted her through his incapacity or negligence to get a livelihood or subsistence whereby great provocation had given her to speak and act unadvisedly.[41]

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many Baptist congregations continued to insist that women and men had to give a public verbal testimony before the gathered church as a prerequisite of church membership. In the nineteenth century this practice was questioned and it was suggested that instead of asking for a testimony, in some congregations women could simply answer questions or be visited by several members of the congregation who could report their findings to the wider group.[42] Women, of course, had already found other ways of sharing their faith within Baptist life quite apart form verbal or written testimonies. For instance, some women wrote hymns, as a way of giving expression to their faith. Probably the best known hymn-writer of the eighteenth century was Anne Steele (1717–1778) who lived in Broughton in Hampshire. In 1760 her work *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional* was published under the name *Theodosia*. Her hymns often picked up the theme of holy living. For instance, she wrote:

> Jesus, the spring of joys divine,
> Whence all my hopes and comforts flow;
> Jesus, no other name but thine,
> Can save me from eternal woe.
>
> In vain would boasting reason find
> The way to happiness and God;
> Her weak directions leave the mind
> Bewilder'd in a dubious road.

41. London Cripplegate, *Church Book 1689–1723*, 11.
42. *Baptist Magazine* 2, 388.

No other name will heav'n approve;
Thou art the true, the living way,
(Ordain'd by everlasting love,)
To the bright realms of endless day.

Here let my constant feet abide,
Nor from the heav'nly path depart;
O let thy Spirit, gracious guide,
Direct my steps, and cheer my heart.

Safe lead me thro' this world of night,
And bring me to the blissful plains,
The regions of unclouded light,
Where perfect joy forever reigns.[43]

Hymns such as this one focussed on the need to walk daily with God. Yet, it was not simply holy living that was important, but there was the whole matter of holy dying, too.

Holy Dying: Death-bed Testimonies and the Witness of Wills

Poor hygiene and lack of sanitation, as well as inadequate medical knowledge and treatment meant that up until the twentieth century, life was lived with the constant threat of death. If a person did not die of influenza or a pulmonary infection, life might be ended by cholera, typhoid, typhus, dysentery or small pox. While life expectancy varied according to social class, gender and region, it appears that by the mid-eighteenth century in Britain, the average life expectancy from birth was between thirty-five and fourty years.[44] While there are examples of women and men who lived to old age, owing to the risk of complication in childbirth, the mortality rate for women rose during the child-bearing years. Moreover, many women experienced numerous miscarriages before giving birth to a child who often lived only a few hours or days.[45]

The way people confronted death became an important indication of their piety and devotion to God. In recent years, it has been suggested that an examination of the distribution of personal property indicated in

43. Broom, *Bruised Reed*, 268.
44. Wrigley and Schofield quoted in Ottoway, *Decline of Life*, 21.
45. See Smith, "Baptists at Home," 105–10.

statements of the last will and testament may also be a sort of lasting testimony to personal faith and religious belief. Naturally, the testimony of a will is limited and does not give the full story of a person's religious beliefs or practices. Yet, the last will and testament of an individual certainly offers some insight into what was important in life and death. Hence it is noteworthy that wealthy Baptist women, as well as men, left money to ministers or members of the congregations. For instance, looking at the will of Susanna Hardy, who died in 1675, it appears that she bequeathed five pounds each to Baptist ministers: Lawrence Wise, Hanserd Knollys, Daniel Dykes and Thomas Hicks.[46] Likewise in the will of Ann Graves, money was left "Towards the maintenance of Eight poore and Aged and decayed ministers" namely, Hanserd Knollys, Benjamin Cox and Henry Forty and the other five ministers who were to be chosen by the executors, William Kiffen being one of them.[47] These examples of financial support for ministers serve as reminder of the serious way in which many Baptists took their responsibility to care for others, especially those in ministry. The support of women through wills may also have been viewed as a public expression of "holy dying."

The emphasis on holy dying was not unique among Baptists and may be seen as a long-standing concern for all Christian believers. Among Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, dying well was not only encouraged, but expected. So, not surprisingly, end-of-life stories became a tool for evangelism and a prompt to self-reflection.[48] By the nineteenth century, death-bed testimonies were often published and were used as an evangelistic tool, to educate other believers and, of course, as a means by which to encourage others to prepare to face death with faith. However, the practice of visiting the bed-side of the dying in order to extract a testimony of faith may be traced back to Puritan devotion.[49] For women, the death-bed became a pulpit, it was the place from which it was acceptable to preach to family and friends.

While the content of each testimony varied, as with conversion narratives, often there was a similar pattern to the death-bed scene. In printed accounts, the final days were depicted in high drama. Often the believer, was taken ill suddenly and confined to bed, was then visited by family and friends who posed particular questions to them regarding their faith. In answering the questions, the believer was able to speak with confident

46. Kreitzer, *William Kiffen and His World (5)*, 64.
47. Kreitzer, *William Kiffen and His World (5)*, 66.
48. See my article, Smith, "Preparation as a Discipline," 22–44.
49. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 146.

assurance of faith in Christ. For instance, when friends visited the death-bed of Sarah Miell they asked her if she wanted anything. She replied "I want everything, I want my dearest Lord. Asked about her state of mind, she replied, "I am happy, my mind is stayed on God."[50]

Of Mary Elyett, a member of the Salisbury congregation for nearly fifty-five years before she died in 1810, it was said her death-bed was a sort of "privileged station" by those who visited her. Asked about the meaning and significance of religion in the face of death, she answered "the same I have long thought, it is the one thing needful." Questioned about the fear of death she replied, "I am not afraid to die, for I can say, Thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory; but it is all through Christ." To another friend she quoted the hymn:

> He ever lives to intercede
> Before his father's face
> Give him my soul thy cause to plead
> Nor doubt the father's grace.[51]

While hymns were often on the lips of the dying in these accounts, the fact that there were some favourites which many seemed to quote leaves the impression that some of the accounts were highly stylized and perhaps shaped by those who published them. Esther Horsey of Portsea was described as a person who took seriously the importance of a holy life:

> She was not one of those professors to whom the bare name of a christian was satisfactory; nor one who was content merely because her state was safe: but her early and uniform attendance in the house of God, her regular and devout retirement, her conscientious regard to moral obligation, and the savour of holiness which marked her conversation, all declared her Christian indeed.[52]

She was also an example of someone who expressed holiness in death too. She offered advice to her grandson on "the importance of real and personal religion." Over a period of several days she spoke words of testimony to others who came to visit. At one point, when an attendant was about to adjust her pillow, she quoted part of a hymn that was often the testimony

50. "Sarah Miell," 136.
51. "Mary Elyett," 73.
52. "Mrs. Esther Horsey," 347.

of those who were dying: "Everybody thinks that I lie uneasy, but they are mistaken; no, Jesus can make a dying bed feel soft as downy pillows are."[53]

While recognizing that death-bed testimonies were often stylized, and taking into account that they were written so as to encourage, educate, and evangelize, they nevertheless provide insight into what Evangelicals as a whole believed to be a good death: a focus on Christ as Saviour, a denial of earthly concerns and a focus on the peace of heaven. For Baptists, attendance at the bedside of a believer by members of the congregation may have indicated something of the "priestly nature" of the church gathered.[54] Doreen Rosman has suggested that by the end of the nineteenth century, a death-bed testimony had an almost "sacramental function" in the evangelical experience as it provided an opportunity to speak of personal union with Christ.[55] While a death-bed testimony certainly served to witness to personal devotion, and an opportunity to stress commitment to holiness of life, there was also an opportunity to give testimony to the desire to be separate from the world. In fact, as Mary Riso has pointed out, the testimonies included "the basic tenets of evangelical theology (among them the necessity of conversion, the atonement, sanctification, personal experience of God and eternal life) which were and continued to be constitutive elements" of a Non-conformist view of death.[56]

For women, the death-bed testimonies were especially important in that they allowed women to be perceived as proclaimer/teacher and, furthermore, permitted women to transcend the normal church roles by allowing them to be viewed in the role of counselor/advisor.[57] Death-bed testimonies affirmed women as valued members of congregations, though they were also used a socializing force to maintain the traditional roles, behaviours and attitudes towards women in society and within the church, i.e., women

53. *Baptist Magazine* 2, 348–49. The hymn by Isaac Watts says:

Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are,
While on His breast I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there.

54. Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, 87, describes the sacramental nature of the deathbed for Puritans.

55. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 103.

56. Riso, *Narrative of the Good Death*, 14.

57. In the seventeenth century, Adcock claims that there was a denial by Non-conformist men that women were teaching or instructing from the bed when people gathered around them, though clearly this was the case. See Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings*, 87.

should be quiet, useful, patient submissive, resigned.[58] While recognizing the stylized content of many of the death-bed testimonies it may be argued that such testimonies, like a last testament and will, allowed women to bear witness to a faith which demanded that they had "come out" from the world.

Conclusion

This overview of some British Baptist women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has attempted to show that the response to "come out" from the world was inextricably linked to their call to "come together" as a covenant community of faith. For early Baptists the idea of "coming out" of the established church and the world and forming churches was grounded in their understanding that they had been "called out" to holiness of life by God. They did not choose to be a congregation of believers, but insisted that God had taken the initiative and formed them into a fellowship. As a way of giving expression to their calling, many early Baptist congregations agreed on covenant statements that set out the privileges and responsibilities of church life. Although in the beginning Baptist women, on the whole, were not encouraged to preach, in the early period some women claimed prophetic utterances. Others, upon membership, gave testimonies of faith to the congregation. For many, their death-bed became the accepted place of proclamation. Later, as both church and culture changed, British Baptist women witnessed to their faith in other ways too: through preaching, hymnody, teaching, writing, as well as assuming roles in mission and social ministry.[59] At the heart of their response was the belief that life as a covenant people of God was best expressed in "holy living" and "holy dying," too.

58. Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal*, 156.

59. Smith, "Role of Women," 35–48; "British Women," 25–46; "Forgotten Sisters," 163–83.