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Jonathan David Francis Inkpin
Ph.D thesis, University of Durham, 1996

COMBATTING THE 'SIN OF SELF-SACRIFICE'? : CHRISTIAN FEMINISM IN THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE STRUGGLE: 1903-1918

ABSTRACT

Women's struggle for the vote was frequently perceived as a 'spiritual' and 'religious' cause, as well as a political objective. Yet this religious aspect of 'first-wave' feminism has been largely neglected by both secular and religious historians. This analysis of suffragist newspapers, speeches and personal reflections addresses this omission: demonstrating how Christian story and imagery regularly aided feminist personal-political commitment, helped define attitudes and tactics, and challenged the churches to respond. Indeed, in addition to helping shape the spirit of both the 'constitutionalist' and 'militant' wings, seven religious suffrage Leagues were brought into being, each playing a distinctive part in the suffrage movement, and, in so doing, acting as effective pioneers of Church feminism.

Building upon the paradoxes of revivalist, and other religious, elements in 'first-wave' feminism, suffragists across the movement invested the vote with 'sacramental' as well as instrumental significance, seeing themselves as part of a 'salvific' process, bringing 'justice' for all through 'woman's mission'. Such understandings crucially widened the base of the movement and enabled effective confrontation with contemporary subordinationist ideologies, profoundly shaped as they were by traditional Christian thinking. Redefining what constituted true 'self-sacrifice', this then further advanced women's struggles within the churches themselves. For in addition to contributing to new forms of suffragist 'self-sacrifice' (notably the 'martyrdoms' of Emily Wilding Davison and Constance Lytton), Christian feminists also found themselves increasingly at odds with the institutional Church, leading to (increasingly lively) opposition and to new forms of faith expression.

As a watershed in women's religious and political consciousness, 'first-wave' Christian feminism thus exposed the deep ambiguities of inherited Christianity in relation to women. By recognising its vital part in the history of this era, this study therefore sheds important light on the inner dynamics of the suffrage movement and the development of Christian feminism itself.

Combatting the 'Sin of Self -Sacrifice'?:

CHRISTIAN FEMINISM IN THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE STRUGGLE: (1903-18)

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Jonathan David Francis Inkpin

Ph.D thesis
University of Durham
Department of Theology
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 1
Title page 2
Contents 3

Chapter One Unsheathing the Sword of the Spirit

Introduction 7
Initial definitions 11
Study outline 14

Chapter Two Searching for Justice

Sources and lost coins 18
The Shape of the Modern World: 23
The subordination of women 23
Sources of change 25
The Development of 'first-wave' Christian feminism: 29
I. Religious Revival: 30
Evangelicalism and the call to holiness 31
Anglican Revival 41
Roman Catholicism and the Cult of Mary 45
'Woman's mission' and 'lady soul-wrestling' 48
II. Liberalism 50
III. Socialism and Empire 59

Chapter Three The backbone of 'the Common Cause'

(Christian feminism and the N.U.W.S.S)

I The Character of the National Union: 71
Origins 71
Membership 74
The shape of 'constitutionalist' Christian feminism 91
II. The Spirit of the National Union: 93
Universality 94
Solidarity 101
Service 107
(Self) Knowledge 112
The 'constitutionalist' Christian feminist achievement 116

Chapter Four Combatting 'the Sin of Self-Sacrifice'

(Christian feminism and the suffragettes)

A New Beginning	120
The Call to Service and Sacrifice (the cases of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Constance Lytton)	124
A New Mission	132
The 'Sin of Self-Sacrifice' and the new 'Woman-Soul'	135
Suffragette religious imagery	137
The Women's Freedom League	145
The 'logic' and costs of militancy	151
The militant achievement	158

Chapter Five 'For the honour of the Church'

(The Suffrage and the Church League)

Beginnings	163
Rationale	165
Organisation	166
Branch development	170
Activities	177
The Membership	183
Ecclesiastical character	192
Church feminism and Church socialism	197
Theological outlook	201
Militancy	210

Chapter Six 'The New Nonconformity' and 'The Newer Eve'

I. The Free Church League:

Beginnings	216
Organisation and activity	224
Membership	229
Theological outlook	233
Significance	239

II. The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society:

Beginnings and Rationale	240
Organisation and activity	244
Membership	248
M.A.R.Tuker and the development of Women's Ministry	252
Significance	256

III. The other Religious Leagues:
The Friends' League 257
The Scottish Churches' League 259
The Jewish League 262
The United Religious League. 266

Chapter Seven The True Love of Neighbour?
(Christian suffragism and the 'apotheosis of humanitarianism')
Adult suffragism 270
'The secularisation of religious enthusiasm': 277
Olive Schreiner 280
Edward Carpenter 285
Religious suffragism and the British Left: 290
Hardie, Snowden & Christian socialism 290
The case of George Lansbury 295

Chapter Eight The 'Appeal to God'
(Feminism against the Church)
Spiritual inhospitality 301
Estrangement within the Church 305
Ecclesiastical militancy 310
The 'Appeal to God' - Suffragette 'War' on the Church 314
Prison experiences 319
Religious protest and the apathy of the Church 324
Results? 330

Chapter Nine War and Women Preachers
Christian feminism, pacifism and the war effort: 333
The Church Leagues and the War 336
Pacifism and Christian feminism 340
Continued Suffrage Work 349
Church feminism and the struggle for status: 351
The Church of the New Ideal 354
The Church of the New Age 359
Womanchurch? 360
Women and the National Mission 361
Women and Church Councils 367
Women Preachers and Women Priests. 370

Chapter Ten The End of the Beginning?

Epilogue: 375
The loss of momentum 375
The end of the Church Leagues 376
Conclusions: 379
The Church feminist achievement 381
The Christian feminist achievement 384

Bibliography 388

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Chapter One

UNSHEATHING THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Introduction

> The woman suffrage movement has tapped those deep reservoirs of spiritual devotion and consecrated selflessness from which the world has, from the beginning, drawn its moral and religious strength.

So wrote Elizabeth Robins, the well known actress and novelist, in her *In Defence of the Militants* in 1912. The truth, she asserted:

> is that the ideal for which woman suffrage stands has come, through suffering, to be a religion. No other faith held in the civilised world today counts so many adherents ready to suffer so much for their faith's sake. Why not try to realise what this means?[1]

Why not indeed? Certainly this was no isolated assertion, but rather a conviction held very widely throughout the women's suffrage movement in the early part of the twentieth century. As this study illustrates, such religiosity was intimately related to the nature of that movement in its various forms. Creatively employing key aspects of Christian faith, it in turn affected the Churches, challenging Christian values regarding women and drawing forth both organised support and vigorous opposition. Helping to popularise the very idea of *Christian* feminism, it not only contributed to the gaining of the vote for women, and the manner of its securing, but it also acted as a vital catalyst in the advancement of women's status within the Churches.

Few attempts have been made however to look directly at this 'religious aspect' of the suffrage campaign which so inspired and

1. Quoted in M.Vicinus, Independent Women (1985), pp.261-2.

concerned contemporaries. Yet why did thousands of respectable women risk ostracism and even physical harm in pursuit of the vote? Some historians such as Susan Kingsley Kent have attempted to address the inner dimensions of the struggle. For as she has written, quoting another suffrage historian:

> people do not commit themselves to political action and suffer the scorn, contempt, ridicule and hatred which the feminists were forced to endure, merely out of intellectual conviction.[2]

Kent's work pointed up the significance of the 'sex war' of the era: the efforts made, and often explicitly stated, by suffragists, to overcome the Victorian ideology of 'separate spheres' for men and women. What though, of the religious connections, closely intertwined as religion was with suffragist values? Within suffrage historiography, the religious backgrounds and affiliations of individual suffragists and the existence of religious suffrage Leagues are occasionally mentioned and commented on in passing. Yet, the place of such religious elements has remained hazy, despite the comments of so many contemporaries. Recent church history studies have begun to shed light on the subject,[3] but again this has been both partial and incidental to their main purpose. Just as the religious aspects have been ignored by secular historians, so church historians have largely remained typically unconcerned by this extra-ecclesial struggle. Nearly seventy years on therefore, the suffragette leader Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence's words still have

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2. R.Evans, The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920 (1977), p.39 n.1, in S.Kingsley Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914 (1987), p.4.

3. cf. B.Heeney, The Women's Movement in the Church of England 1850-1930 (1988), esp.pp.105-8 and 111-112 and S.Fletcher, Maude Royden(1989), passim.

resonance:

> It is extraordinary that the spirit of the Militant Movement has been so little understood, and I wonder whether in years to come those who study history will realise the significance of it?

For, she believed:

> It was to my mind the greatest spiritual and moral awakening that has taken place for centuries and has resulted in a kind of resurrection of women all over the country. The bursting of prison bonds has resulted in an immense accession of life to all people.[4]

This study therefore aims to address directly the religious dimension of the suffrage struggle, shedding further light upon the inner determinations of suffrage campaigners. In order to manage what is otherwise an extremely wide and diffuse area of exploration, it focuses particularly on the involvement of the various religious Leagues for Women's Suffrage and their most prominent and influential members. However, it also attempts to to draw out some of the general religious influences upon, and spiritual understandings of, other key suffragists. Thereby it aims to make a small but useful contribution to the religious history of this period, and to a fuller understanding of the spirituality of this stage of the continuing Women's Movement. In doing so, it seeks to identify, and wrestle with, the deep ambiguities of the Christian religion in relation to women, and some of the hopes and hindrances that that form of faith has in the past offered to them. In a later age, when voices within and beyond the Churches sometimes claim that Christian feminism is

4. Letter to Mrs. Solomon 23.10.29, Fawcett Library, Autograph Collection, XX.188.

a contradiction in terms,[5] the origins of this phenomenon deserve attention.

The uncovering of this small part of the 'hidden history' of Christian faith is also intended as a contribution to the enlargement of church history. For, as ecclesiastical historians seek to benefit from the work of social and cultural historians, there is still a great need to reconstitute 'church' or 'christian' history as something belonging to the whole church; i.e as a story not just, or even primarily, of the hierarchy and those connected to it, but also of that greater number of Christians who have 'gossiped the gospel' and lived it out, most of whom have been women in different roles. In writing about Josephine Butler's own crusade for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, Nancy Boyd observed how it stands as an impressive witness to Christian faith. Yet, she said, this remarkable event has tellingly received little attention from church historians:

> It does not fit neatly into the conventional categories. It took place not in the Church but in the world. It was ecumenical and inter-faith. It was led, not by a clergyman, but by a layman. And that layman was a woman.[6]

Although it was much more ambivalent towards established Christian faith, the same can be said of the suffrage movement. This study hence seeks not only to reclaim something of Christian 'her-story' in this period, but also to help provide a fuller rendering of the impact of the Christian 'Gospel' upon contemporary human life, beyond the usual limits of traditional, and especially confessional, history.

5. cf. Daphne Hampson, Theology and Feminism (1990), p.1: for whom 'feminism represents the death-knell of Christianity as a viable religious option'.

6. N.Boyd, Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale (1982), p.60.

Initial definitions

Precise definitions of such fluid terms as 'Christian' and 'feminism' are not easy, and not altogether helpful. As Rebecca West is reputed to have written in this period:

> I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.....

The word 'feminism' therefore is here used intentionally as a broad term including a great variety of different persons and ideas, all contending together for justice for women. For whilst not all feminists of this era were suffragists, this campaign to change the political status of women was seen by most participants as the signal means to challenge the wider subordinate position of women in society. For in so acting, they were struggling against the age-old structures of patriarchy itself: that (in)human ideology which brings about 'the systematic social closure of women from the public sphere by legal, political and economic arrangements which operate in favour of men',[7] creating 'that social order in which women were declared to be the possessions of first, fathers, and later, husbands'[8]

'Christian feminism' is similarly employed here as a broad designation, encompassing those suffragists and suffragist features which, explicitly or implicitly, owed their provenance to Christian life and tradition. As a term, particularly in Roman Catholic circles, Christian feminism was sometimes employed narrowly in this period to try to create an exclusive distinct

7. B.Turner, The Body and Society (1984), p.119.

8. S.Hite, The Hite Report: Women and Love (1988), p.532.

option for Christian women, standing slightly askance of the wider women's movement. It also however properly covers others at the centre of 'first-wave' feminism (such as Josephine Butler and Christabel Pankhurst), even where they were not intimately involved in the church based suffrage organisations. For indeed, these religious Leagues, whose members are designated as 'Church feminists' in this study, were in many ways derivative of the larger body of Christian feminists, of whom they were but the institutional presence.

The contention that the women's suffrage movement was a 'religious movement' is of course in itself a difficult designation to clarify. For it is hard to be entirely specific about an assertion that as much reflected inner feelings and struggles as outer forms and organisations. Furthermore, in a real sense the most immediate problem facing the researcher is not so much discovering material relating to this aspect of the suffrage movement, as in identifying the main lines of religious contributions, and in assessing their character. The religious references are pervasive. However, as P.d'A Jones observed (in his study of Christian socialists) whilst it might be possible to do exhaustive study of individuals involved in such a movement, and to trace whether or where they worshipped etc., it may be that there is no necessary correlation between these two things.[9] Certainly much (especially Nonconformist influenced) religious suffragism is diffuse and difficult to define.[10] As with Christian socialism therefore:

9. P.d'A Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914 (1968), pp.390-392.

10. cf. Jones, pp.306-7.

> its adherents were often as deliberately anti-theological in outlook as some British socialists were deliberately anti-ideological.[11]

Even with groups of suffragists, dogmatic emphases are often difficult to establish, beyond a kind of Christian theism of a unspecific variety. 'Spiritual' rhetoric may also turn out to be not much more than the expression of a strong faith in the promise of a new world, similar to that found in the 'ethical socialist' or missionary phase of the British socialist movement. With the coming of the Vote, and prosaic power politics, much of this would quickly fade and many would withdraw into other fields.

Nonetheless it is abundantly clear that religious motivation was a vital factor in the development of the women's movement, commonly conceived as it was as a 'spiritual' force. To 'orthodox' Christian leaders, such pretensions might often have seemed strained and awkward, sometimes vague and even bizarre, but they were nonetheless influential. The period in question was indeed an age of underlying secularisation, in belief and practice. Yet it was also one in which religious concerns were still very significant in the lives of public women and men, in a way which is easily underestimated in a later age. With a recognition therefore of the problems of achieving precision, it would appear both legitimate and necessary to treat religion as an independent variable in the suffrage struggle. The religious aspects were inextricably linked with the prevailing culture and societal forces. Yet they were nevertheless distinct features in their own right, intimately affecting the culture and forms of the suffrage movement with which they were entwined.

11. Jones, p.307.

Study outline

No attempt is made here to provide a comprehensive outline of the suffrage struggle. The central story in its political aspects has been told many times[12] and space forbids a full retelling. The major concern of this investigation is instead to point up the religious connections as they affected the course of that history and the main elements involved. The focus has also been limited to the decisive phase of the suffrage struggle, between 1903 (the founding of the Pankhurst-led Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U)) and 1918 (the granting of the parliamentary franchise to (some) women). This is not to underplay the vital role of religious factors in the suffrage movement prior to 1903, nor the continued commitment of Christian suffragists to related aspects of women's emancipation after 1918. It is rather to highlight the intensity of such features in this key period, especially the involvement of the seven religious suffrage Leagues which came into being from 1909 onwards.

After an outline of the context and main factors in the development of Christian feminism before 1903 therefore, this study initially seeks to describe the various forms through which religious suffragism was principally manifested. Primarily this is to consider the character of the two main wings of the suffrage movement, generally known as the 'constitutionalist' (or law abiding) and 'militant' (or more popularly, 'suffragette') suffragist sections. For consideration of the largest suffrage organisation, the constitutionalist National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S), displays how important Christian feminism was as the 'backbone of the Common Cause': reflected in both the importance of religious factors in the lives and

12. Notably by participants such as Ray Strachey, The Cause (1928) and Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement (1931), and later historians such as R.Fulford, Votes for Women (1957), M.Ramelson, The Petticoat Rebellion (1967) and A.Rosen, Rise Up, Women! (1974).

motivation of suffragists (notably for key figures such as Lady Frances Balfour) and the creative dependence of mainstream suffrage propaganda upon religious ideas and imagery. This is then further developed in relation to the militant suffrage groups (chiefly the W.S.P.U, but also the Women's Freedom League (W.F.L)), where religious associations are even more evident, deliberately employed as they were to aid the more prominent crusading spirit of this section of the movement. The wrestling with notions of 'the sin of self-sacrifice', 'woman's mission' and a new 'woman-soul' are highlighted here: 'incarnated' as they were perceived to be, in the lives of leading Christian feminist suffragists such as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and the two great suffragette 'martyrs' Emily Wilding Davison and Constance Lytton.

It is within this context that the specific contributions of the Church feminists are best appreciated. Firstly the Church (of England) League for Women's Suffrage is considered, outlining its rationale and scope and assessing its significance as both a helpful expansion of the women's movement and as a political and theological ginger group 'for the Honour of the Church'. The complementary character of the other religious Leagues is then addressed, particularly the notable and distinctive contributions of the Free Church League and the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, expressing as they did their respective visions of a 'New Nonconformity' and a 'Newer Eve'.

The work of the religious Leagues partly mitigated the essential apathy, and occasional antagonism, of the mainstream of British religious life. As an alternative response however, religious suffragist enthusiasm was also found not only among the organised suffragist societies and the religious Leagues but also among influential radicals on the fringes of both. As clearly

Christian or parallel radical religious expressions of feminism the work of 'adult' suffragists (those determined on the vote for all adults) is therefore outlined, together with an assessment of the work of creative individuals such as Edward Carpenter, and, especially, Olive Schreiner (the suffrage 'Muse').

The ambiguous nature of the contribution of the Christian Faith to the suffrage movement is evident throughout. Its restrictive character is brought into more prominent focus however as the suffragette 'war' against the Church in 1913-14 is considered: the 'ecclesiastical militancy' (declared in Christabel Pankhurst's 'Appeal to God') prompted by suffragists' experience of the spiritual inhospitality and apathy of the churches. For by the first world war Christian feminism had begun to issue in new developments. Whilst some suffragists were brought to protest against the established religious institutions, others, helped by the growth of the wider women's movement, began to make real headway in the struggle for women's status and ministry within them. During the war itself moreover, not only were some leading Christian feminists closely associated with the women's peace movement, but the first attempts to create 'women's churches' were made. By the end of the war therefore, not only was the parliamentary franchise secured, but aided by Christian feminism, considerable advances had been made for women within the churches themselves.

The story of Christian feminism in the women's suffrage struggle is thus very complex. A range of questions certainly present themselves immediately. How far, for example, was Christian feminism a conservative force within the women's movement? Whilst gaining credibility and a wider constituency, did it undermine the original liberal feminist approach of the first British suffragists? How far was this, for contemporary

women, a natural, legitimate, reworking of the essential Christian message of freedom and good news for all? To what degree was it an acceptable development of the concept of 'woman's mission' in nineteenth century revival? Or is better seen as predominately a feminist manifestation of liberal Christian influences? Such are some of the key issues to be considered. At the heart of it all was a contest over the very identity and consciousness of womanhood. In this struggle, a variety of religious elements were caught up, used, reinterpreted, or cast aside. For many, Christian story and symbolism acted as a powerful liberating stimulus. For others, the patriarchal nature of that tradition, and its contemporary manifestations, began to appear more as obstacles than vehicles of freedom. For the suffragist 'sword of the Spirit' was nothing if not double-edged. In both cases, religious aspects, though often contradictory and immensely varied, played an important part in securing the Vote, regarded as so deeply symbolic of women's dignity and emancipation.

Chapter Two

SEARCHING FOR JUSTICE

> Our hearts cry out for Justice; our souls are athirst for Justice. Like the Hebrew prophet we are sometimes constrained to exclaim, 'Justice has fallen in the street'.[13]

Sources and 'Lost Coins'

If feminism is understood broadly as justice for women, then the mother of first-wave Christian feminism was most assuredly Josephine Butler. Not only, as outlined in this chapter, did she directly help to give birth to it, but most of the key motifs of the later suffrage movement were present in her proclamations.[14] In her, the three central 'faces' of Christian feminism were united: deep evangelical piety, a powerful liberal commitment to truth and equality, and a radical vision of her self and world. 'Self-government is life', she asserted, 'and life cannot be lived at secondhand'.[15]

Josephine Butler's Christian feminism was built upon an appeal to Christ, over the heads of Churches, Councils, and even St.Paul. An appeal:

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13. J.Butler, Truth Before Everything (1897), p.9.

14. cf. e.g, her belief in the home as 'the nursery of all virtue' (J.Butler, Woman's Work and Woman's Culture (1869), p.xxv) and in the women's movement as a 'cry of pain, a cry of justice' for the outcast and oppressed; the need for women to call one another to 'holy rebellion and war' (J.Butler, Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade (1896), pp.319-320) and to a more 'aggressive and militant virtue'; recognition of wider concerns, including those of class (Butler (1897), p.10.; and the conviction that the women's Cause was a spiritual 'crusade' and would only be won 'by sacrifice and unnerving missionary zeal' (J.Butler (1896), p.395), by women sharing in the Cross of Christ (J.Butler, Recollections of George Butler (1903), p.270).

15. J.Butler, The Constitution Violated (1871), p.157.

> to the open Book.....that, in all important instances of His dealings with women, His dismissal of each case was accompanied by a distinct act of Liberation.[16]

Since, she believed:

> His teaching was for all time.....In the darkest ages of the Church there have been women whose whole lives were a protest against the capricious and various teachings of the Church concerning women.....I know not myself to what rightly to apply the name of Church, if it be not to such a company of faithful men and women who throughout all the ages have reflected the teaching of Christ himself in all its integrity. These all asserted the equality of men and women, and asserted it as Christ's teaching.[17]

Arguably therefore, the sources of Christian feminism lie entwined with Christianity's very beginnings. For biblically speaking, it might be contended (albeit anachronistically) that the first Christian feminist was Mary Magdalene, who (although 'only' a woman) as 'the apostle to the apostles' had the spiritual conviction and courage in herself and her message to voice her belief in the Risen Christ, even though that might not be received at first by the men. Certainly recent scholarship[18] has sought to identify such putative strands of feminist praxis in the early ages of the church.

Such work has uncovered some of the 'lost coins' of Christian women's history, providing links and inspiration for those who in the modern era may less anachronistically be termed 'Christian feminists'. Indeed suffragists, like Josephine Butler, later drew

16. J.Butler (1869), pp.lvii-lviii.

17. ibid, p.liv.

18. Notably following Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (1983).

widely upon the disparate elements within the Christian tradition which gave substance to their claims. Above all, with a new political use of the text, they emphasised the vision of St.Paul in Galatians 3:28, the 'Magna Carta' of Christian feminism,[19] which their forebears had struggled to explore in the past. Hence, although it is historically invalid to suggest a 'golden thread' of feminist tradition within Church history, Christian feminism of the suffrage era must not be regarded as a mere aberration or derivative construct of modernity. Even disregarding the amount of female Christian experience still 'hidden' or irrevocably lost to later generations, such 'alternative' nuggets of thought and action reflect recurrent feminist motifs throughout Christian history.

In tracing the direct historical influences upon Christian suffragism however, it is important not to claim too much. The discovery of 'lost coins' in the early church may be valuable for example, but like the proverbial widow's mite, though marvellous and revolutionary to behold, they are still also a mark of real poverty in the dominant scale of things. Thus for instance, whilst a great deal of freedom for women was found in medieval convent life, this was subject to male authority and supervision. Males also retained their exclusive roles in relation to the sacraments of the faith throughout the first fifteen centuries of the Church. Nor did the Reformation, even in its more radical guises, effect a dramatic shift in either consciousness or practice.[20] Although women were active in the struggles of the day, patriarchalism was shared across Catholic and Protestant divisions. Indeed Protestant 'advances' for

19. Or 'the classical passage', *Common Cause* 19.5.10:90-91.

20. cf. Sherrin Marshall (ed.), Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe (1989).

women (such as the revaluing of secular and married life) were in some ways more than cancelled out by the consequences of what has been called 'the death of two Marys'.[21]

It is to the seventeenth century therefore that one must look for the first direct links to the modern women's movement. The previous history of women in the church was certainly not opaque to later feminists. It would continue to be quarried as an inestimable spiritual and imaginative resource. Indeed the achievements of earlier Christian women were particularly valued as heroic and inspiring precisely because they were wrought amidst the adverse dominant patriarchal mores of the ancient and medieval worlds. Yet whilst privileged (often conventual) pockets of 'orthodox' Christian tradition, together with some alternative and 'heretical' currents, had sometimes demonstrated a propensity to give women new space and status, these had always been short-lived or ultimately reined in by patriarchal control.[22] In contrast, a more drastic and permanent change in women's religious role came out of the maelstrom of seventeenth century revolutionary England, with the emergence of the Society of Friends or Quakers.[23] Within this sect in its first generations, women were encouraged to speak in public and to

21. Merry Wiesner - 'Luther and women: The death of two Marys' in J.Obelkevich, L.Roper, R.Samuel (eds.), Disciplines of Faith. Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy (1987), pp.295-308.

22. cf. e.g, abbesses such as Hilda of Whitby (614-80) and Hildegaard of Bingen (1098-1179), mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, and apostolic workers such as Mary Ward (1585-1645). In recent years their lives and work have been increasingly celebrated (cf. R.A.Tucker & W.Liefield, Daughters of the Church. Women and ministry from New Testament times to the present (1987) for an overall survey Christian history), whilst the greater possibilities laid open to women by non-hierarchical and charismatic groups is now a commonplace observation (cf. Ursula King, Women and Spirituality (1989), p.38; Karen Armstrong, The Gospel According to Women (1986), p.239ff).

23. L.Shiman, Women and Leadership in Nineteenth Century England (1992), pp.16-19.

take decisions concerning matters beyond their conventional sphere of life. In the specifically religious realm, they were regarded as spiritually equal, with the same 'inner light' and religious capabilities.[24]

Such equality should not be overstated. The early Quakers were not advocating a new brand of feminism. Not only were there others who defended women's equality of souls, but they themselves did not seek for example to undermine the doctrine that a husband was 'head' of his wife.[25] Moreover, as time went on (especially with the Toleration Act of 1689) the Society of Friends developed into more of a conventional church. Like their Baptist and Congregational counterparts, some of whom had also earlier been active preachers and organisers, Quaker women then found their rights diminished. The growing prosperity of the Quaker community in the eighteenth century and wider involvement with the non-Quaker world further exacerbated the pressures, as the Society of Friends went through a period of 'quietism'. The founding Quaker vision however, and the historic example of Christian community based on equality, if slightly submerged, remained within sight and knowledge. Like earlier instances of Christian women's endeavour against the odds, this provided a creative legacy upon which to build, both for Quakers and others. More directly, the development of Christian feminism was also presaged by the unbroken involvement of Quaker women in public life. For they continued to be actively engaged in both local meetings and charitable work. With the new society that was developing out of the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment, their experience and their theological

24. See further: C.Trevett, Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century (1991), esp. pp.16-42, and C.Wilcox, The Theology and Ministry of Women in Seventeenth Century Quakerism (1995), passim.

25. cf. G.Fox, The Woman Learning in Silence , p.2, quoted in Trevett, p.14.

ideas of spiritual equality and individual insight were thus once more to make them pioneers of the women's movement in its religious guise. To this would now be added the impact of religious revivals, the influence of liberal religious thought and action, and the development of progressive notions of spirit linked to the movements of labour and of empire.

The Shape of the Modern World

The subordination of women

Excepting great times of turmoil, such as that within which the Quakers emerged, medieval and early modern England remained societies in which the corporate interest was paramount. Men and women were largely defined by their associations, chiefly those of their family, and the interests of their different genders were largely submerged beneath their class, religious or family concerns.[26] In the eighteenth century however, new forces began to mould a new world. The advance of industrialisation and the shift from land to money as the basis of wealth helped break down traditional patterns of life and allegiance. Instead of family and communal bonds and duties, the emphasis fell increasingly upon the individual. A powerful new entrepreneurial middle class emerged in the growing urban areas of England and their 'laissez-faire' political values gradually became dominant. Beneath them in the the social scale there developed a large working class. Shorn from their traditional associations as they were impelled to leave the land to find employment in the towns and cities, such workers found their new conditions both dislocating and, frequently, hard and uncaring.

For women these shifts had profound implications, albeit ones

26. Shiman, p.2.

that affected them unequally according to their class. Least disturbed were upper class women, who long remained in their old pre-industrial framework of life and expectations. To some degree working class women also continued as before, working in their new locations and maintaining kinship networks of support. Yet even these groups of women were to find their lives and aspirations constricted by the new climate of society as the nineteenth century progressed. The emergence of suffragists such as Lady Constance Lytton on the one hand and of working class women's groups (such as the Women's Co-operative Guild and the northern textile workers' unions) is testimony to this in the later period.

The nub of the new situation for women was that whilst men were liberating themselves from the old community bonds, women remained closely constrained by their economic, social and legal ties.[27] As work and home were increasingly marked off from one another, so there developed, especially in middle-class society, marked gender divisions based on the notion of 'separate spheres' for women and men. By the mid-nineteenth century women therefore found themselves excluded from many of the opportunities of English society. Employment possibilities were limited for middle class women, whilst working class women tended to be excluded from the better paid or more satisfying jobs and ignored, or worse, by male trade unions. Girls continued to be educated to a lower level than boys, and the major fields of medicine, the law and politics were closed to females. Within Victorian England furthermore, the division of labour between women and men was underpinned by a bourgeois ideology of domesticity which stressed the importance of a good public image for Christian women, based on the

27. Shiman, p.5.

cultivation of respectability and good manners within the private sphere.

Various pseudo-scientific arguments were employed to reinforce the notion of women's 'natural' physiological inferiority, combining biological determinism and social-Darwinian assumptions to define women as 'essentially' emotional, intuitive, dependent and timid, with their central function being reproduction.[28] To these were added a powerful religious hermeneutic which stressed female subordination as consonant with Christian tradition. Throughout the nineteenth century Christian writers and preachers hammered out this message, which, they believed, arose 'obviously' from the teachings of Genesis and St.Paul.[29] As Bishop Christopher Wordsworth asserted in the 1880s, based on his historicised reading of Genesis chapter two:

> her (woman's) existence was not only subsequent to that of man, but was derived from it. She was after man, out of man and for man.....anything that disturbs that subordination weakens her authority and mars her dignity and beauty. Her true strength is in loyal submission.[30]

Sources of change

It was consequently out of this 'context of subordination'[31] that Christian feminism emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, however imperfectly and often

28. J.F.C.Harrison, Late Victorian Britain, 1875-1901 (1990), pp.158-9.

29. Heeney, pp.7-9.

30. Quoted in Heeney, p.7. cf. S.Gill, Women and the Church of England. From the Eighteenth Century to the Present (1994), pp.77-78.

31. Heeney, Part One passim.

unconsciously at first, it above all sought to test out and overturn this doctrine of female subordination which, it came to believe, had limited and often blighted women's lives. In taking such a stance, as will be explored below, it drew upon specifically religious forces and ideas. These however were considerably shaped by further economic and social changes.

Chief amongst these new factors were continuing technological advances and the complex demands these made upon society. For, with the profound social effects of industrialisation, even in the first half of the nineteenth century woman's place could not be entirely limited to the bourgeois home. Whilst lower class women continued to work alongside their men, albeit invariably in restricted areas and at lower rates of pay, an increasing number of women in other classes were drawn into philanthropic endeavour.[32] Thus, according to Louisa Hubbard, editor of *The Englishwoman's Yearbook*, about 500 000 women were engaged 'continuously and semi-professionally' in philanthropy in 1893: a figure which did not include the twenty thousand trained nurses or five thousand women in sisterhoods or nunneries, nor the great army of part-time volunteers.[33]

The development of women's philanthropic work was itself a product of the same 'separate spheres' attitudes that excluded women from real public significance. Its expansion did not therefore necessarily betoken any dramatic shift in perceptions of woman's nature. Rather it was more obviously an extension of woman's mission in the home, nurturing more widely the private moral values of compassion cast aside by capitalist endeavour in

32. See especially F.Prochaska, Women and Philanthropy in 19th Century England (1980).

33. Figures quoted in Prochaska, p.224-5, where it is noted that only domestic service came near to 500 000 as an occupation in which females were engaged.

the public sphere, and so bringing some balm to its victims. For similar reasons women were able to move into local government and caring professions in the later nineteenth century without great outcry. Indeed the first female Poor Law Guardians in the 1870s were already familiar and well-regarded figures in charitable work, through such bodies as the Charity Organisation Society.[34] Women's professional as well as amateur charitable activity was in this sense deeply consonant with the anti-suffrage viewpoint.[35] Yet the scale and substance of the philanthropic explosion also aided other thoughts. Through their close and far-reaching involvement in the needs of the poor, many philanthropic women emerged with a more focused self-awareness, as well as with immense practical experience and responsibility. This inevitably fuelled growing interest in the rapidly expanding fields of government, administration and the law, together with a rising confidence about women's capabilities in such arenas. Female suffrage societies were consequently natural products of such activity, linked and supported by their existing connections and expertise.[36]

In time, the accelerating technological revolution further opened up new industrial employment possibilities for women as well as scope for moral endeavour. Through late nineteenth century innovations such as the telephone and the typewriter and the expansion of the service sector of the economy, a new range of white-collar, clerical occupations became available to

34. Prochaska, p.226.

35. See B.Harrison, Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain (1978), passim.

36. Prochaska, pp.227-228.

women in rapidly increasing numbers.[37] The communications revolution also dramatically improved the means of transport and networking for women. The bicycle represented a vivid and enjoyable symbol of freedom for the 'new woman' of the 1890s, and the railway, the cheap press and the consolidation of the post office were invaluable aids to effective discussion and propaganda. Indeed, if suffragette 'outrages' later become the most memorable images of the suffrage movement, the most characteristic contemporary features were the female newspaper-seller and the suffragist's interest in and connections with her fellow campaigners.

Such changes were the crucible in which the women's movement was fired and moulded. Out of this came the hard-won advances won, particularly from the 1860s, by the pressure of a small number of dedicated women who helped give effective birth to modern feminism. For it was through their campaigns that important steps were established in legislation, in the areas of property rights and divorce, women's education and employment, prostitution and venereal disease. From the celebrated case of Catherine Norton in the 1830s, which issued in the Infant Custody Act, to the Matrimonial Clauses Act of 1878,[38] to the Married Women's Property Act of 1884 and beyond, women had to struggle for control even in the most personal aspects of their lives: a struggle which brought with it a growing appreciation of their wider economic and cultural bonds. Indeed the vigorous crusade against the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s[39] involved a specific challenge to the Victorian double

37. J.Harrison (1990), p.167.

38. Facilitating legal separation and maintenance for badly-used wives.

39. See below, p.39.

standards in morality, as applied variously to men and women and to different classes of women. Such campaigns and their achievements thus established bridgeheads for the future. In particular, with the founding of institutions such as Girton College at Cambridge in 1869, and of the Girls' Public Day School Company in 1872, the foundations were laid not only for wider female access to secondary and higher education,[40] but also for a more widespread assertion of women's rights. For the opportunity this gave women for a room of their own may have brought an immediate sense of liberation only to a limited number of middle-class single women, but its repercussions were much more widespread. Together with the forces released by the continuing features of the later scientific industrial revolution, new space was now being slowly created for an effective demand for the vote as a symbol of women's dignity and responsibility.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF 'FIRST-WAVE' CHRISTIAN FEMINISM

In her overview of the development of first-wave feminism, Olive Banks defined three broad intellectual currents as most influential: evangelical revival, the Enlightenment tradition and socialism. These were certainly not exclusive to one another or to other influences. Yet they appear as helpful distinctions for analysis. A similar broad classification of influence may be adopted in the specific case of first-wave *Christian* feminism, albeit with similar qualifications and with slightly different emphases. In particular, any close study of Christian feminism needs to include the contributions of Anglo-Catholic and (to a much lesser degree) Roman Catholic revival within and alongside

40. By the 1890s women had also been fully admitted to most universities.

evangelical Christianity. The efforts of Broad Church and liberal Christians must also be noted within the broader impact of Enlightenment notions upon British nineteenth century culture, whilst the religious components of socialist, missionary and imperialist endeavour should be further highlighted.

I. Religious Revival

The religious correlate of the process of gender separation was the phenomenon that has been termed 'the feminization of religion'.[41] As public and political affairs became regarded as 'masculine', so religion like domestic life was seen as 'feminine'. Religion itself thus tended to eschew its forceful and aggressive aspects, and in language and ethos began to become more domesticated, emotional, soft and accommodating. Nineteenth century sermons and hymnody hence reflected a growing stress upon Christ's love and God's mercy.[42] Christ was regularly identified as the sacrificial, saving victim, the exemplar of meekness and humility. Hymn writers, like Charlotte Elliott, in her popular 'Just as I Am, Without One Plea', stressed total absorption in Christ for the believer and the offering up of unworthy bodies and souls.

Such 'feminization' was not accompanied by a shift in power and status for women within the higher structures of the churches. Although, as will be seen, women did sometimes emerge as preachers and occasional ministers of religion, these remained exceptions. The 'feminine' Christ and 'feminised' theology which developed tended to replicate if not reinforce

41. Following Barbara Welter's landmark study - 'The feminization of American religion: 1800-1860' in M.Hartman and L.Banner, Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women (1974), pp.137-157.

42. ibid, pp.140-2.

women's general social and cultural subordination. Yet across almost all churches women tended to be much more involved than men in day to day church activities, resulting in considerable organisational experience. Moreover, the very process of introspection demanded by their religion also allowed women to gather inner strength over time and to assert their independence, drawing upon the feminised imagery of nineteenth century religion.

Evangelicalism and the call to holiness

The ambiguous inheritance of Christian feminism is found most strikingly in the evangelical revival of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For evangelicalism combined a central domestic role for women with a high estimate of women's moral worth and of mission in the world.[43] As a dominant influence in nineteenth century England, suffusing not only church and family but also the wider culture and its models for conduct, evangelicalism thus played a contradictory part in the formation of first wave feminism. As a religion of the heart it stressed qualities that were regarded as quintessentially female: humility and submission, obedience, the breaking of the will and self-denial. As such, women were given a positive role-valuation, yet one which was very clearly limited. On the other hand, the exaltation of the female principle was such that, together with the close association of women in religious and moral endeavour, evangelical religion could also provide a springboard for much more radical action.[44]

Key to the positive contribution of evangelicalism to Christian

43. J.Rendall, The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860 (1985), p.106 and ch.3 passim.

44. ibid, p.73.

feminism was its sense of mission and desire to save and regenerate a fallen and corrupt world. In the initial stages of revival and on the frontiers of evangelical endeavour this legitimated new ways for women to communicate the gospel. In the early years of Methodism for example, women preachers were not unusual, albeit (in John Wesley's view) only on the grounds that these were 'exceptional' circumstances, inspired by the Word of God. Such practice was not enduring, even within the more radical sects like the Primitive Methodists.[45] As the initial charismatic phase of the revival gave way to the more prosaic demands of consolidation, so in almost every evangelical denomination, women's profile was typically diminished with new emphasis falling on organisation and hierarchy. For similar reasons, the sudden reemergence of female preachers within the second great evangelical revival in the mid-nineteenth century was not lasting either, except in the case of Catherine Booth and of the Salvation Army women who were to follow her example. As Olive Anderson pointed out moreover in her ground breaking work,[46] such religious emancipation appears to have owed or given little or nothing to contemporary liberal feminism. Indeed it was often accompanied by the clearest possible rejection of liberal feminist theories of the relationship of the sexes. At least at this point in her life, Catherine Booth for example was still a determined believer in the domestic and social subordination of women. Passionately believing God created men and women as

45. Although founded by Hugh Bourne, a stout defender of female prophesying (on the grounds of Joel ii.28), the Primitives never gave their female preachers equal administrative standing or remuneration and by the end of the nineteenth century these had effectively disappeared.

46. O.Anderson - 'Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: Some Reflections on Feminism, Popular Religion & Social Change' in Historical Journal xii. (1969), pp.467-484..

equal, she also held that Eve's punishment for sin was subordination to her husband.[47] The history of women's role within evangelical religion thus reflected an enduring paradox which it bequeathed to later Christian feminists. Women's place within the evangelical religious sphere was undoubtedly considerably enlarged in the nineteenth century. It was however essentially legitimated in terms which preserved the basics of the anti-feminist position.

The leading contributors to Anglican evangelicalism demonstrate this contradiction clearly. For William Wilberforce, women were:

> the medium of our intercourse with the heavenly world, the faithful repositories of the religious principle for the benefit of the present and of the rising generation.[48]

Whilst, he believed, Providence had granted men the public sphere, women's role was crucial. Always naturally more favourably disposed to religion than men, women's humble service and submissive exposition of the Christian virtues would enliven and preserve the moral order. The vital contribution of women to the 'reformation of manners' was similarly strongly stressed by Hannah More, notably in her *Strictures on Female Education*, where she clearly outlined women's responsibility for the handing on of religious principles within the family. Deeply conservative and strongly opposed to the 'impious' discussion of 'rights' for women, More's popularising of Sunday Schools nonetheless gave women further scope for the exercise of their

47. Anderson, p.483.

48.Quoted in Rendall, p.75.

godly mission.[49]

Several Sunday Schools had indeed been founded before the well-to-do Anglicans took them on. Many of these owed their foundation and later work to women[50] who took an increasing part in the practical day-to-day tasks of religion and moral outreach. Indeed Sunday Schools were just one element in the extensive participation of women in a great range of religious activities which owed their impetus to evangelicalism: from the distribution of tracts and bibles to the raising of funds and the work of a myriad of voluntary associations belonging to the different evangelical denominations.

The new climate of religious enthusiasm in this way not only flowed through all the main streams of evangelicalism but also reinvigorated Quaker women, who once more came to the fore of religious and public life. One of the leading pioneers was Hannah Whitall Smith. Born into the orthodox Quaker community of Philadelphia in 1832, she was to become the matriarch of a great family of active and distinguished women, most notable of whom was her granddaughter Ray Strachey, a leading Edwardian suffragist and author of the famous history of the women's movement *The Cause*. As such, Hannah's story, begun in the U.S.A and completed in England between 1888 and 1911, is a cameo of the effect of Evangelicalism upon mid-nineteenth century Quietistic Quakerism, and of how it became redirected into political feminism.[51] Inspired by the Camp Meetings and Methodist Holiness teaching of mid-century America, she became a popular preacher and religious writer. Impelled by the results

49. Rendall, pp.89-90. Gill, p.50.

50. Rendall, pp.93-4.

51. R.Strachey, The Cause (1928), p.14.

of her philanthropic activity (especially the terrible tales and circumstances of the many desperate women who came to confide in her),[52] she then found herself increasingly drawn into the work of the women's movement, initially through the temperance campaign and her friend Frances Willard, and soon after through suffrage work. 'I am thoroughly roused on the subject', she wrote to her daughter Mary in 1882:

> for I have had so many cases of grievous oppression of men over their wives lately that my blood boils with indignation.....The moment one looks into the subject at all it seems incomprehensible how we women could have endured it as patiently as we have. Literally and truly up to within a few years women have been simple slaves. And some women say they like it! Ugh! It is one of the worst vices of slavery that its victims are contented with their lot.[53]

Hannah Whitall Smith's journey from narrow evangelical concern for her individual soul to political engagement in public life was one taken by an increasing number of evangelicals within and beyond Quakerism. Made more confident by the experience and skills of their defined and specifically religious activities, they were then challenged by encountering the new worlds they had often unwittingly entered.

This shift of consciousness is most identifiable in the years after 1870. Hitherto there were few British equivalents to the feminist awareness of Americans such as Lucretia Mott, the

52. Strachey, p.53.

53. Quoted in Strachey, p.55.

Grimké sisters or Elizabeth Cady Stanton.[54] This is partly explained by the greater importance of the anti-slavery movement in the U.S.A, through which many of the leading feminists were radicalised and in which (unlike Britain) they took an influential part. As with Hannah Whitall Smith, where connections existed between American and British feminism influence was largely from the former to the latter until the emergence of the suffragettes. Before 1870 one or two individuals did make a leap of imagination from traditional religious concern to a fledgling Christian feminism. Thus in 1847 another Quaker Anna Knight published what is usually considered as the first British women's suffrage leaflet. Significantly however, in her case the influence of American feminism is also apparent, especially with the London Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840.[55] The first real stirrings of a specifically evangelical feminist consciousness were not seen therefore until the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts.[56] Although the temperance movement had already begun to organise evangelical women on a public issue, it was Josephine Butler's campaign that first linked moral concern (in this case the plight of the prostitute) with feminist arguments about the position of women and men in society.

Such a linkage represented not so much an overturning as an enlargement of evangelical thinking about women's role. The key element was again evangelicalism's sense of woman's

54. Quakers such as Lucretia Mott and the Grimké sisters were leading figures in the anti-slavery campaigns from the 1830s, closely allied with other religious radicals such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton (editor of The Woman's Bible (1895)) and William Lloyd Garrison.

55. Banks (1981), p.23.

56. ibid, p.16.

mission. In her book *Woman's Mission* (published in 1839),[57] in what has come to be regarded by many scholars as the 'landmark text in the Victorian spiritualization of womanhood',[58] Sarah Lewis presented a vision of woman's purpose under God in sentiments which Josephine Butler would later echo. Through their 'renunciation of self' and maternal love, women were God's:

> missionaries upon earth - the disseminators of his spirit, the diffusers of his word.....The moral world is ours - ours by position; ours by qualification; ours by the very indication of God himself.[59]

Such notions were, as Janet Larson has observed, 'far too slippery, contradiction-ridden, and tendentiously theological to be proved'.[60] Consequently, whilst remaining deeply influential in nineteenth century culture, they were also capable of varied expansion and co-option to more progressive uses. In the hands and spirit of women such as Josephine Butler and the succeeding generation, it led, in Larson's words, to:

> a new kind of holism and a more audacious messianism than Lewis dreamt: woman could not 'regenerate society' until she was fully enfranchised, and nothing was properly outside the agency of her spirit.[61]

57. An adaptation of Louis Aimé Martin's De l'éducation des mères de famille (1834).

58. J.Larson - 'Lady-Wrestling for Victorian Soul: Discourse, Gender and Spirituality in Women's Texts' in Religion and Literature vol.23.3 (autumn 1991),p.45.

59.Quoted in Rendall, p.75.

60. Larson, p.45.

61. ibid.

If the numbers of women in nineteenth century pulpits were miniscule therefore, by the last quarter of the century women began to emerge on public platforms in significant numbers, considerably prompted by the evangelical religious spirit. Such a movement was slow compared with progress in the United States. In Britain the temperance movement for example never played so central a part in the women's movement as the Women's Christian Temperance Movement did in America. Until the 1890s the British Women's Temperance Association grew slowly and conservatively.[62] Yet, like her close friend Frances Willard of the American W.C.T.U, women such as Lady Henry Somerset had already pioneered the way forward by their involvement in this and other morally focussed issues.[63] When the B.W.T.A became the National British Women's Association in 1893, shedding its conservative wing, it then became an influential force for women's emancipation. Particularly closely allied with the wider feminist movement in the north of England,[64] under the leadership of Lady Somerset and her successor Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle, it was an important factor in aiding the rise of women's suffrage to public significance.

The growing feminist orientation of the temperance movement was partly effected by the much wider influence of the social purity campaigns. In one sense these were a continuation of the early evangelical concern for the 'reformation of manners', yet in a more radical form. Again, in Britain women

62. See L.Shiman - '"Changes are Dangerous": Women and Temperance in Victorian England' in G.Malmgreen, Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930 (1986), pp.193-215.

63. ibid, p.208.

64. J.Liddington and J.Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us (1978), p.240.

were slower to engage in the issues taken up by the American Female Moral Reform Society.[65] By the 1860s however, a good number of rescue missions were being founded, at which point the work of campaigners such as Josephine Butler added a new twist to traditional religious concern for the fallen individual. Convinced that female prostitutes were victims, both of women's economic position, and of contemporary sexual attitudes to men and women, Josephine Butler helped launch a campaign against the 'double standard' of Victorian morality, especially against the Contagious Diseases Acts.[66] Enacted in certain places in England to protect the armed forces against venereal disease, these Acts required women suspected as prostitutes to undergo periodic medical examination, and, if necessary, treatment. Opposition drew considerably upon religious motivation as well as upon the growing trade union and feminist movements.[67] For evangelicalism, as in the factory movement, supplied both the bulk of the original leaders of moral reform and their vocabulary, thus allowing effective resistance to male professionals.[68] As Josephine Butler herself reflected, as the campaign for repeal neared victory in 1883:

65. Banks (1981), p.16.

66. cf. J.Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State (1980), and P.McHugh, Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform (1980).

67. Banks (1981), pp.65-66.

68. B.Harrison - 'State Intervention and Moral reform in nineteenth century England' in P.Hollis, Pressure from Without in early Victorian England (1974), p.294. F.Mort, Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830 (1987), pp.7 & 89.

> It is now evident that our Crusade in England is assuming more of a religious, though not of a sectarian character. While preserving our liberty of conscience, and welcoming all who unite in a desire to see the moral standard of our common humanity elevated, we feel we are engaged in one work, and with a profound conviction that it is God's work.[69]

Such convictions lay behind the plethora of social purity campaigns that rose to prominence in the 1870s and 1880s. Women such as Ellice Hopkins founded a number of bodies such as the White Cross Army (for chastity amongst young men) in 1873 and the Gospel Purity Association in 1884. Child prostitution and the age of consent became hot issues, especially after W.T.Stead's sensationalised disclosures in his *Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* in 1885. In this way, through organisations such as the National Vigilance Association (launched after Stead's revelations), important links were enabled to be forged between evangelical conservatives and women's rights campaigners. For, as Brian Harrison observed, the evangelical connection combined with Tory paternalism to ensure that moral reform always enjoyed a following within Conservative quarters, reinforced in the late Victorian period where property had an increased interest in crusades which crossed party lines. At the same time, as moral reform campaigns gradually became less overtly religious, evangelicals were able to link up with utilitarians.[70]

This evangelical advance into politics therefore both advanced and significantly reshaped the emerging feminist movement. Its religious concern helped the cause become a mass movement,

69. J.Butler (1903), p.404, quoted in Boyd, p.60.

70. B.Harrison - 'State Intervention and Moral Reform in nineteenth century England' in P.Hollis, Pressure from Without in early Victorian England (1974), p.294.

activating many women who would otherwise have remained outside and adding a special force to it. In doing so it brought its own emphases into the limelight. Moral concerns came to push aside equal rights arguments as the conservative outlook of the social purity campaigns jostled with the outlook the early feminists had inherited from the Enlightenment. Most importantly of all, evangelical religious fervour bequeathed 'the ideal of female superiority', through which the enfranchised woman might be seen as the saviour of womanhood, the nation and empire.[71]

Anglican Revival

From its tentative beginnings, no sphere of society was to be left untouched by the women's movement. As the predominant religious body in nineteenth century, established by law, the nature and speed of its acceptance by the Church of England therefore offers a significant barometer of Christian feminist development. This is all the more so because nineteenth century England saw a revival, or perhaps more accurately a spiritual reconstruction, of Anglicanism. This is commonly associated firstly with the evangelical movement within the Church of England and secondly with the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement. In both cases the early proponents of Anglican revival simply assumed or, as with Wilberforce and More, actually sought to reinforce the domestic and subordinate role of women. Out of them however emerged important stepping stones for Christian feminism.

For their part, Anglican evangelicals, as has been remarked, tended to share the broader evangelical notion of 'woman's mission' which, through practical endeavour and reflective reappropriation, over time helped provide many religious

71. Banks (1981), p.84 ff.

women with new belief in their power and significance. Anglican women thus began to take on fresh responsibilities, gaining confidence and expertise as major subscribers and organisers of a plethora of Anglican voluntary societies. Drawn into new fields by concern for the poor, new forms of benevolent action also developed, notably from the 1850s with the example of Ellen Ranyard's Biblewomen in London and the foundation of the first district committee of the Charity Organisation Society by Octavia Hill in 1869.[72]

The significance of the explosion of the ministry of women in nineteenth century England was well recognised by the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's committee on the subject in 1919. The 'immense expansion of activity and of efficiency in ministry to the religious needs of the people' was, it concluded, considerably the result of the 'extraordinary amount of good work.....achieved by women' from 1850.[73] The scope of women's ministry had indeed become immense by the twentieth century. Through district visiting, Sunday School teaching, music, parochial clubs, missionary societies, sisterhoods and the deaconess order, study circles, rescue and preventative agencies, as well as through the 'hidden' work of women in clergy families and others in obscurity, women had contributed extensively.

Such public work however was rarely, if ever, prompted by feminist idealism. Rather the largest women's organisations in the Church were conservative in outlook. The three main purposes of the Girls' Friendly Society[74] for example, were, according to its founder Mrs.Townshend in 1874: 'the

72. cf. Prochaska, pp.126-133, Heeney, pp.46-53, Gill, pp.131-145.

73.Quoted in Heeney, pp.5-6.

74. With 1 749 branches by 1914, according to Heeney, p.40 .

preservation of purity'; 'the prevention of moral evil'; and the 'promotion of friendship'. It largely existed moreover to bring working class members under the supervision of the upper class.[75] In the case of the Mother's Union, founded in 1887, the three main objects (established in 1896) were: 'to uphold the sanctity of marriage'; 'to awaken in all mothers a sense of their responsibility in the training of their boys and girls'; and 'to organise every place a band of mothers who will unite in prayer and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life'.[76] Numbering 350 000 members in England in 1913,[77] the Mothers' Union, like the Girls' Friendly Society, massively dwarfed almost all other women's organisations, clinging spiritedly to its defence of 'traditional' motherhood and marriage.

Such developments were therefore ambiguous. Like women's philanthropic work in general, women's ministry in the nineteenth century offered 'a home from home'.[78] On the one hand this was progressive, in reaching out for more power and space for women. On the other hand it was a continuation of women's domestic role, which might even have reactionary effect. Visiting the poor for instance, as an outflowing of the ideology of domesticity, tended to reinforce treatment of social problems on an individualistic basis rather than helping to

75. Heeney, p.40.

76. ibid, pp.43-44.

77. ibid, p.44.

78. A.Summers - 'A Home from Home - Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century' in S.Burman, Fit Work for Women (1979), pp.33-61.

analyse them structurally.[79]

The development of sisterhoods and the deaconess order epitomises this tension within the nineteenth century Church of England. A by-product of the Oxford Movement (itself 'self-conciously a radical conservative response to modernity'),[80] this was in an important sense a rejection of patriarchal evangelical 'family' religion, which explains much of its appeal to women in that era. For, as Florence Nightingale typifies, there was a fairly common struggle of wills and consciences amongst women of her class in mid nineteenth century, pulled between the homes of their birth and the homes of their vocation.[81] Those who joined sisterhoods, and later religious settlements, found a safe 'home from home'. This allowed them greater scope to exercise a Christian vocation, yet tended (not without struggle on occasions) to confirm them in a subordinate status and in dependence upon the male order (albeit the bishop or church visitor, rather than a biological father or husband).[82]

If therefore, like the Evangelical movement before it, the Catholic revival within the Church of England did not offer straightforward bonuses to women, it did however facilitate one crucial development of consequence for Church suffragists. For by the turn of the twentieth century the liberal Catholic movement was closely associated with contemporary concerns for social responsibility and radical change. Influential Anglo-Catholic churchmen such as Charles Gore and Henry Scott-Holland

79. Summers. pp.57-8.

80. Gill, p.98.

81. Summers, p.58.

82. cf. Gill, pp.147-163.

(flanked on the left by the more genuine radicals of the Guild of St.Matthew) consequently emerged as leading advocates of Church self-government and lay participation in church affairs. They thus gave further impetus to a process which had already begun in the 1860s as the Church sought new means to order its life in the face of secularisation (signalled by the abolition of compulsory church rates in 1868 and the subsequent development of secular local government).

With the decision to establish parochial church councils, excluding women as electors, there thus came about 'the first clear expression of Church feminism',[83] as Anglican women protested about this subordination. Signed by 1 100 churchwomen, a petition was duly presented to the Upper House of Canterbury Convocation. Subsequent discussion in the Lower House upheld the bishops' original narrow decision, but the debate would not die away. As discussion took place on the character of the Representative Church Council (before and after its founding in 1904 as a pioneer national Church Assembly), a Church feminist consciousness began to emerge.[84] When the Church League for Women's Suffrage was founded in 1909 it was consequently aided by this struggle, and vice-versa.

Roman Catholicism and the Cult of Mary

Nineteenth century Roman Catholic revival also shared many of the characteristics of Protestant revival.[85] The process of 'feminisation' is identifiable in Catholic as well as Protestant milieux and there was a corresponding expansion of religious,

83. Heeney, p.96.

84. See further Heeney, pp.99-105.

85. Rendall, p.97.

missionary and charitable institutions and associations. After the trials of turn of the century revolutionary Europe, the Church saw a considerable growth for example in the number of women's religious congregations, a phenomenon continued to the end of the century. Nineteenth century Roman Catholic devotion did not however easily provide grounds for the development of a Christian feminism which could offer a transforming challenge to the cult of domesticity. Even more so than Protestant evangelicalism, it emphasised women's duties to the home and family and provided a major bulwark of patriarchal piety. For the many associations which Catholic women joined in great numbers were based on the collective devotion of women within the context of hierarchical Catholic authority, rather than on the pursuit of individual salvation by individual means. Spiritually the emphasis was on elements which stressed trial and fragility, women's consciousness of their own sufferings, in childbirth and sickness, revealed in piety centring on the Sacred Heart, Mary the Mother of Sorrows and Saint Monica the troubled mother of Augustine.[86]

Roman Catholic contributions to the early suffrage movement were therefore few. In Britain and Ireland the Church was not so closely tied to the right of political life as to find, as on the continent, almost any mention of women's rights subversive. Nonetheless its theology and organisation confined women closely to its clearly ordered context. Thereby, as Catholic leaders would later claim, the Catholic Church:

86. Rendall, p.99. cf. C.Atkinson, C.Buchanan and M.Miles (eds.), Immaculate and Powerful; The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality (1985), pp.139-200.

> had done much to emancipate women, to raise her status, and to dignify and ennoble her position.....emphasising the sublime function of one woman as mother of God, by the number of women placed on her calendar of saints, and by the vigilance and care that she lavished on the female communities that devoted themselves to God.[87]

Consequently, Catholic principles could not be easily turned to support the franchise for women:

> not because they are inferior to men, for they are recognised as having peculiar aptitudes and endowments that men do not possess, but because the movement is a retrograde one, tending to supplant their position of real superiority by one of nominal equality.[88]

Nor was this a wholly unreasonable argument in retrospect. As some Irish scholars have underlined, the convent system for example offered a constructive safety-valve for many women. It provided education, a career structure, served as a refuge from the inequalities of the male world and, in Ireland, provided a respectable role for women in a society losing much of its male population to emigration.[89]

The Roman Catholic climate was thus not a sympathetic one for feminists. Indeed liberal Roman Catholicism remained a marginal phenomenon and was not in itself much more congenial for the development of feminism. Yet some qualifications must be added. Above all, although isolated, individual Roman

87. Article in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* Sept 1909:295-303, quoted in C.Murphy, The Women's Suffrage Movement and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Society (1989), p.143.

88. ibid, pp.143-4.

89. ibid, pp.138-9.

Catholic contributions should be noted. Here Charlotte Despard stands preeminent. Her suffragism, highlighted in a later chapter,[90] was intimately linked to her admittedly idiosyncratic Catholicism. Yet, as a convert, she also represents a number of prominent women who felt drawn to the Roman Catholic Church in the Victorian era, finding there more space for their spirit. In her case her religious choice, like that of many Anglican Catholic women, was linked to her Romantic rejection of Protestant family religion. For others also, admittedly working against the grain, the extension of women's role in society was another realisation rather than a reduction of Catholic piety. If St.Bridgid rather than St.Monica was later looked to by Irish Catholic suffragists as the patroness of their movement, they also saw it as a further embodiment of the counsel of the Virgin Mary.[91]

'Woman's mission' and 'lady soul-wrestling'

Re-reading of Victorian women's literature has shown how much of women's struggle for identity took place in the midst of these foregoing religious currents. Together with the High Victorian discourse of 'feminine soul', generated by the work of Sarah Lewis and others, there was what Janet Larson has termed the 'low' female discourse of 'prayer from the depths'. Seen for example in Florence Nightingale's great prophetic essay 'Cassandra', these 'Christian' discourses were wrestled with, producing a new type of female *cri de coeur* which challenged and transformed the received forms. Divesting the notion of 'feminine soul' from its domestic setting (and from the doctrine of God that it presupposed) God's power was then felt as that which would release women from servitude and passivity. As

90. Ch.4, pp.133-5, 146-7, 155.

91. *Catholic Suffragist* 15.12.15:100, 15.9.17:72.

Larson has put it:

> Out of the received forms of prayer, new kinds of female speech can then be wrought: personal confession comes to convict the 'evil' conditions which sacralize women's 'sins' as service to culture; private lament becomes collective complaint; pleas for pardon or deliverance find new voice as public petitions for redress; and prophetic calls are issued to acts of solidarity and responsibility in the world.[92]

Through their private 'soul-wrestling' therefore, several Victorian women were enabled through their writings to begin a process which flowered at the height of the suffrage movement. This imaginative creation drew upon a variety of contemporary elements: from Romantic nature mysticism and classical mythology, to more specifically Christian notions of the Indwelling Spirit and Incarnate God, as well as the tradition of female mystics. Ultimately however it arose from women's own depths. For it was significantly often via biblical motifs such as the theme of struggle in Paul's epistles, or figures such as Jacob and Job, that novelists such as Charlotte Brontë sought to express women's struggle to find a voice for their own desires and for new social relationships. Not for nothing did Josephine Butler see 'the whole question of prayer' as 'summed up' by Romans 8:26 ('the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered').[93] For it was through such wrestling, in and by what might be later named as experiences of the Spirit, that Christian feminism began to be articulated. This was not without flaws, as will be

92. Larson, p.48.

93. A.S.G.Butler Portrait of Josephine Butler (1954), pp.175-6, quoted in Larson, p.57.

shown later. To a modern observer, such articulations were certainly incomplete, distorted by some of the elements with which they sought to contend, and full of rhetorical extremes. Yet, as Janet Larson has identified, through such reworking of the received language the dominant divisions of culture and spirituality (public/private, flesh/spirit, body/soul, secular/religious) were redefined, reconnected and 'creatively confused'. To adopt her analysis therefore, in key Victorian women's texts the major elements of later Christian suffrage religiosity can begin to be discerned: the literary and rhetorical use of biblical story and imagery 'in order to root the "soul's experiences" in the body and nature'; the invoking of 'scriptural ideas about the whole person, Incarnation, and the powers of Spirit to unify and transform'; the putting 'forward of women's social and religious claims at the same time, whilst critically exposing the unholy social, economic and political interests that standard languages of spirituality and gender' served; and the 'wrestling Scripture' 'in order to clarify 'evil' and retrieve regenerating visions for themselves and their culture'.[94] Thus:

> In these conversions of received discourse emerging through women's new words, disembodied Word again becomes Flesh. Angels become prophets, and 'women's spirituality', escaping its domestication, takes up the burdens of history.[95]

II. Liberalism

The second key 'face' of first-wave Christian feminism was that influenced by liberalism. Indeed it was precisely because British (like American) Protestantism took a theologically and

94. Larson, p.51.

95. ibid.

politically liberal turn that significant feminist advance was possible. Elsewhere the growth of feminism was often frustrated by the strength of Roman Catholicism, or where Protestantism (as in Germany) remained socially conservative or lacked the large-scale independent reforming sects of Britain or America.[96] In Britain, where Enlightenment rationalism and Protestant moral imperatives came together in the nineteenth century, a far more effective movement was created. Whereas the equal rights of women had lain largely latent in the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the Protestant belief in the right of everyone to work for their salvation now provided 'indispensable reassurance' and often 'genuine inspiration' to many feminists.[97] Evangelicalism was thus frequently married to political liberalism. For Josephine Butler for example, the women's 'Cause' rested on 'the Bible of the English Constitution'[98] and her commitment to 'Truth before everything' made her wary of the illiberalism of mere 'purity workers'.[99]

The Enlightenment emphasis on reason, law and equal rights had caused fright in many religious circles in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, especially in the light of Revolutionary terrors. Indeed the religious revivals of that period were considerably prompted by resultant anxiety or by conscious opposition to liberalism. Consequently the landmark writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, especially her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (published in 1792), were initially not well received in

96. Evans (1977), p.103.

97. ibid, p.18.

98. J.Butler (1896), pp.74-75.

99. J.Butler (1897), p.7.

mainstream religious quarters. A friend of radical freethinkers such as Paine, Priestley and Godwin, her views were beyond the pale.

Yet such arguments were not uncongenial to all religious traditions in the nineteenth century and they grew increasingly acceptable. In particular, as indicated above, many Quakers were pioneers in liberal and equal rights causes. Nor was this incidental, as Dora Mellone observed approvingly of Mrs.Haslam who, with her husband, formed the first suffrage society in Ireland in 1876:

> The Quakers not only have a good record with regard to women's suffrage but are also fondly remembered in Ireland for their role in aiding Irish peasants through their soup kitchens during the Irish Famine.....the Society of Friends is as prominent in the history of the suffrage in Ireland as it is in every other good work.[100]

Another similarly felicitous route into feminism was provided by Unitarianism, itself a product of eighteenth century rationalism and egalitarianism. Believing in the power of human reason and rejecting such theological doctrines as original sin and human depravity, the Unitarians were a powerful force in political reform throughout the nineteenth century. Unitarian commitment to the education of girls was especially significant in the origins of the British feminist movement.[101] A large number of early Unitarian feminists thus emerged, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau (for a time) and Harriet Taylor (later married to John Stuart Mill), whilst amongst men the Unitarian minister William Fox was a particularly committed,

100. *Englishwoman* Oct.1913:1, quoted in Murphy (1989), p.17.

101. Banks (1981), p.32.

if controversial, supporter of equal rights.[102] Furthermore, radical Unitarianism was also the seed-ground of the first organised feminist group in Britain. For the prime movers of the circle later popularly known as the 'Ladies of Langham Place' were Barbara Leigh Smith and Bessie Rayner Parkes, both from influential Unitarian families.

The work of the 'Langham Place Circle' began in 1856 with Barbara Leigh Smith's organisation of a campaign to press home the Married Women's Property Bill. The establishment of the *Englishwomen's Journal* followed in 1858, as a means to ensure wider discussion of the problems of women, added to in 1859 by a Society for Promoting the Employment of Women. Then in the 1860s, with discussion of wider electoral reform in the political air, attention was turned to the question of women's suffrage. With a willing parliamentary ally in John Stuart Mill, newly returned as an M.P, the first women's Suffrage Committee was founded, developing in 1867 into the National Society for Women's Suffrage (a loose federation of the first local groups).[103]

The membership of these first suffrage groups reflects the importance of liberalism at this early stage. Imbued as it was with notions of individualism and with optimism about the value of human nature, education and self-help, Victorian liberalism offered a political creed which could address and link up a range of different issues and interests precious to the middle classes. Members of the early suffrage societies were often united therefore by a common belief in moral progress, which found them associated in a variety of other causes. For as Brian

102. Editor of the Unitarian *Monthly Repository*, Fox' support for the liberalisation of divorce laws, together with his own private life, eventually brought him expulsion from the Unitarian Church.

103. Strachey (1928) pp.102-3.

Harrison identified,[104] nineteenth century moral reform organisations formed an overlapping and interlocking web, its members united by a 'genealogy of reform'. Campaigns, such as that notably against the Corn Laws, introduced many women to political life and tactics and made or reinforced connections between progressives.

Significantly, almost all the signatories of the original Petition presented to Parliament in 1866 shared Quaker or Unitarian principles. As one opponent, Mrs.Samuel Carter Hall, complained:

> I believe that the originators and a large majority of the sustainers of this monstrous project are not members of any Christian Church. A woman without an altar is even more degraded than a woman without a hearth.[105]

The fledgling movement also drew in migrants from Victorian 'orthodoxy'. In their search for and articulation of a new religious synthesis, women's rights began to bulk large. A characteristic example is Francis W.Newman, brother of the Cardinal. Like a growing number of nineteenth century thinkers, his spiritual path led him towards an ethical idealism or moral theism, realised through a multiplicity of crusades. An eccentric in dress and behaviour, he was in the forefront of almost every 'fad' of the day. Unlike his wife (who is reported to have jumped out of a window rather than risk meeting Harriet Martineau!), he gave whole-hearted support to the suffrage campaign (taking up the post of Secretary of the Bristol Women's Suffrage Committee

104. In Hollis, pp.290-321 and 'A genealogy of reform in modern Britain' in C.Bolt & S.Drescher, Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform (1980), pp.119-148.

105.Quoted in Fulford, p.45.

at the inaugural meeting in January 1868).[106]

Such heterodox figures were also joined in the early suffrage societies by a small number of 'Broad Church' representatives of the established Church. For although few churchmen in prestigious posts were initially involved, of particular satisfaction to the first suffragists was the inclusion of Dean Alford of Canterbury on the first provisional London Women's Suffrage Committee in 1867,[107] whilst Dean Stanley and his wife were also early supporters. Their general latitudinarian and liberal sympathies made them willing exceptions to the predominantly disdainful or horrified reaction of the clergy.

A key factor in their support was the involvement of many Broad Church women and men in various educational causes. Women such as Emily Davies, Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale found suffrage a natural extension of their own aims, albeit a controversial one which might undermine support for their efforts. Similarly men involved in educational advance also made common cause, or (as in the case of F.D.Maurice), found themselves further educated in their own understanding of the rights of women.[108] For, if not all mid-century Christian Socialists supported women's suffrage (surprising opposition to Mill's Bill in 1867 included Tom Hughes, as well as the Quaker John Bright), this was a natural step in view of the liberal views they shared with others of their class and age.

106. Fulford, pp.52-3, W.Robbins, The Newman Brothers (1966), esp. pp.96,149-150.

107. Fulford, p.48.

108. Maurice owed much of his interest in women's education to his Unitarian upbringing and the women of his family. In 1848 he helped establish Queen's College for Women, although he was at that stage opposed to women entering *men's* professions, and to women's suffrage. See Strachey (1928), p.168 and (for Maurice's anti-feminism) Mort (1987), p.56.

Thus, in the wake of Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, Charles Kingsley issued his own blast on behalf of women, *Women and Politics*: a book which was the clearest liberal Anglican suffragist statement of the era. Deeply critical of patriarchal interpretations of the Christian tradition, Kingsley declared his firm support for women's emancipation:

> The position of women began in injustice. It began, historically, in barbarous times, out of man's wish to keep woman as his slave. It was carried on in medieval times by an anthropology - I will not disgrace the sacred name of theology by calling it that - which was backed by a whole literature of unreason.....
> .....Religion will not go right, nothing human will go right except in so far as woman goes right; and to make woman go right she must be put in her place.[109]

Kingsley held a Victorian Protestant conviction that Mill's arguments were in the 'soundest and noblest' tradition of English culture.[110] This, he believed, was a creed clouded only by 'Pagan brutalities and medieval superstitions',[111] particularly the 'literature of celibate unreason' developed by the theologians of the past.[112] Contemporary experience of mixed schools and Cambridge local examiners showed, he contended, the intellectual

109. Opening quotations in preface to C.Kingsley, Women and Politics (1869).

110. ibid, p.5.

111. ibid, p.6.

112. ibid, p.4.

capacity of girls,[113] whilst women's employment was 'a just and modest demand'.[114] Meanwhile, women of the lower, as well as the higher classes, suffered the consequences of their men's abuse as a result of their perilous social status. Defending the Victorian spinster ('far from being, as silly boys and wicked old men fancy, the refuse of their sex (they) are the very élite'),[115] Kingsley thus combined his mid-Victorian belief in the efficacy of education with the equally powerful contemporary belief in women's moral preeminence. Women, he declared:

> will always be less brutal than men, and will exercise on them (unless they are maddened, as in the French revolution, by the hunger and misery of their children) the same softening influence in public life which they now exercise in private; and moreover.....the average woman at present is more educated, in every sense of the word, than the average man.[116]

Less muddled by drink, profligacy and mere money-making, they were more open to the influences of religion.

In this way liberalism continued to have an important influence in the emergence of Christian feminists, albeit one (as in Kingsley's case) which was often tangled up with notions of women's mission or moral quality that came from elsewhere. As J.M.Wilson reflected in the 1890s:

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113. Kingsley, pp.6-7.

114. ibid, p.10.

115. ibid, p.21.

116. ibid, p.18.

> I do not say that women are wiser, juster, or better than men. I only say that they are other than men, and it is their 'otherness' which makes their political representation so essential to national well-being.[117]

For Wilson, many subjects (such as the guardianship and housing of the poor, education, sanitation and women's factory work) would be promoted by women's assistance. Fundamentally however, women should have the franchise because of '*prima facie* justice', as a recognition of their 'equal individual ability, equal interests, equal natural rights with men'.[118] This did not detract from the character of women but rather enhanced it. As Quaker experience showed, he maintained, women were:

> equal channels of the divine gifts and graces. And has this equality made Quaker women less charming, less womanly? Has it not confessedly made them more so? And has it not at the same time fitted and inspired them for the discharge of public duties, and made them a powerful factor in promoting the highest interests of the nation ?[119]

Indeed rather than undermining, Christian life:

> It will diminish the sense of subjection, of self-mergence in marriage. It removes what is felt by some of the finest minds as a species of degradation.....It does not weaken the marriage tie, but it makes it the linking of two equals instead of the yoking of a superior and an inferior.[120]

117. J.M.Wilson, Speech to the Annual Meeting of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage (1895), p.5.

118. ibid.

119. ibid, p.6.

120. ibid p.9.

It would increase the common interest of men and women, helping intimacy and friendship.[121]

III. Socialism and Empire

The third 'face' of emerging Christian feminism was animated by a variety of visions of a 'new world', achievable through collective identity and action. These were often closely entwined with the features of Christian feminism already identified, or, in some cases, were the result of a radicalisation or loss of faith in either evangelicalism or liberalism. Yet they also offered distinctive perspectives taken up by many Christian suffragists: outlooks which displayed a common enthusiasm for collective notions, a downplaying of individualism and a stress upon the immanence of Spirit. Their emergence greatly widened the area of support for women's suffrage, making possible the campaigns of the new century.

A notable example of the overlapping of the different faces of feminism is seen in some features of millenarianism. This religious outlook, which held that Christ would soon come and his saints reign on earth, was not new to England, being found prominently in a variety of forms in seventeenth century. With its disdain for the secular and emphasis upon the utter transcendence of God, it could be regarded as the most left-wing expression of militant evangelicalism. Yet it also displayed important differences, notably in the way in which, through its language and imagery, it outlined a vision of the future which would resolve social conflicts, bringing hope of a new world to the oppressed. Certainly after 1780 a new phase seems to have occurred, with a striking number of female leaders and

121. Wilson, p.10.

followers.[122] The best known prophetess of the period, Joanna Southcott, thus identified herself with the 'Woman clothed with the Sun' forecast in Revelation 12 and the bride of the Lamb in chapter 19.[123] As in other sects, the female messiah, Woman-Power, would usher in the millennium.

In Britain such mysticism also found a more secular religious form in association with the socialism of Robert Owen. Communitarian thinkers like James Elishama Smith thus knitted together mystical and secular prophecies about the coming of the great female messiah.[124] Within an organised body, such doctrines then took their most important form in the Communist Church of Goodwyn and Catherine Barmby, between 1841 and 1849. For the Barmbys, who owed something to both the Saint-Simonians and Joanna Southcott, the new society would transform the meaning of both womanhood and manhood, ushering in a new type of androgynous personality, releasing 'woman-power' as well as 'man-power'. Under three headings they therefore demanded women's emancipation: politically, through universal suffrage; ecclesiastically, through women's entry into priesthood; and domestically, through women's economic independence.[125]

Such phenomena were very peripheral and short-lived. Yet the millenarian impulse, if in a secularised guise, surfaced at

122. Rendall, p.101, quoting J.F.C.Harrison's estimate (in The Second Coming. Popular Millenarianism: 1780-1850 (1979), p.109) that women numbered over 12 500 of Southcott's 20 000 believers on her death in 1814).

123. Rendall, p.103.

124. Rendall, p.105.

125. cf. O.Banks, The Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists vol.1 (1985), pp.12-13 and B.Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (1983), passim.

intervals and in different places in the radical movements of the later nineteenth century. Within the later suffrage movement it appeared especially among the suffragettes, notably in the suffragist rhetoric, as well as the later career, of Christabel Pankhurst. In a less dramatic guise, something of the vision was also found widely amongst socialist feminists.

Indeed, if it was less pervasive than evangelical religious concern, and less foundational than liberalism, the 'religion of socialism'[126] was no less critical to the later suffrage movement. Its significance will be considered more fully below,[127] but for the present it is important to note something of its origins and connections. For the striking religious elements of 1880s and 1890s British socialism can be seen as part of a new formulation of religious belief, consequent on the crisis of Victorian faith brought about by science and biblical criticism. As a result, the 'religion of socialism' acted as a means whereby a wide number of men and women, from various denominations and none, were brought together in progressive causes.

The often promiscuous and undogmatic mixing of various religious, ethical and mystical ideas that is found in the later suffrage campaign is therefore not surprising. Like the religious aspects of late nineteenth century British socialism to which it was heir, much suffrage thinking drew upon fresh intellectual currents, seeking to establish a new compatibility between religion and science, and basing itself upon the religious experience of the individual and the collective religious experience of humankind. As such, as G.J.Mayhew sought to

126. A phrase first coined in 1885, according to Robert Blatchford, enjoying considerable currency in the 1880s and 1890s, especially in labour circles. cf. S.Yeo - 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896' in History Workshop Journal no.4 (1979), pp.5-56.

127. See esp. ch.7, passim.

illustrate in relation to contemporary British socialism, this new emphasis on personal spirituality and mysticism not only traversed denominational boundaries, but also employed what were perceived as the common religious features of religious experience in different world religions.[128]

This was not just a product of the crisis of religious orthodoxy in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain. It also linked with the Romantic tradition which, especially through the writings of Shelley, was a powerful source of feminist inspiration. For Romanticism's protest against the dehumanisation wrought by industrial society and its sense of the immanent Spirit were themes continually revisited by suffragists such as Charlotte Despard.[129] In the same way, the religious nationalist vision, as espoused by figures such as Mazzini, also continued to inspire. Mazzini's 'root ideas' bore close comparison with religious motifs in both the socialist and suffrage camps:

128. G.J.Mayhew - 'The Ethical and Religious Foundations of Socialist Politics in Britain: the First Generation and their Ideals 1884-1931', unpublished Ph.D thesis (1980), p.11.

129. For her debt to Shelley in particular, see A.Linklater, An Unhusbanded Life: Charlotte Despard, Suffragette, Socialist and Sinn Feiner (1980), pp.30-32. According to P.Brooker and P.Widdowson - 'A Literature for England' in R.Colls and P.Dodd (eds.), Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920 (1986), pp.116-163, late nineteenth century literary tendencies (such as aestheticism and symbolism) generally helped create a renewed spirit of cultural romanticism and rejection of Victorian values.

> society conceived as a whole, the thought of collective mankind, composed of free nationalities, life conceived as a mission, duty regarded as the fulfilment of a divine law and as being precedent to individual rights, the union of thought and action, faith shown through works, conscience and tradition the *criterion* of truth.[130]

The importance of such an outlook, like that of the 'religion of socialism', was that it allowed the initial liberal basis of the suffrage movement to be extended. For if, as has been outlined, religious revival produced elements which aided the feminist cause, these were only wrought over time. What idealist philosophy and the 'religion of socialism' offered in the last years of the nineteenth century were ways of reconciling formerly 'orthodox' religious backgrounds with new conceptions of the world and of women's place within it. The ethical and mystical ideas of these religious trends not only gave rise therefore to new developments such as Labour Churches, Socialist Sunday Schools and utopian experiments. Within established religious bodies they also helped a range of Christian Socialist and 'Social Christian' groups come into being.[131] Most affected were the more liberal denominations, with significant adherents to such idealism amongst the Church of England and the Congregationalists, as well as within the Society of Friends and Unitarianism. Those who held most closely to the classical tenets of Evangelical religion were correspondingly far less affected. Yet, even from the more conservative denominations, individuals such as Philip Snowden and James Keir Hardie emerged, stressing in their socialism the moral conscience and traditional concerns

130. W.Clarke (ed.), in his introduction to Essays: Mazzini (1887), p.xxi.

131. See further: Jones (1968), S.Mayor, The Churches and the Labour Movement (1967), E.Norman, The Victorian Christian Socialists (1987).

of nonconformity.

Snowden's popular socialist address *The Christ that is to Be* was a powerful example.[132] Calling for a social as well as an individual interpretation of Christianity, it was an appeal to Christ's ethical teachings without necessary reference to dogma. Widely received as it was, the principles outlined were:

> the law of sacrifice, the saving of the individual life by losing the individual life in the common life.....proved by scientific discovery and by all human experience to be the fundamental law of life, the law by which a mother rears her child, the law which holds and binds people together in society.[133]

Again these were notions which were to be central to later religious suffragism. Rejecting many of the cornerstones of earlier Victorian evangelical belief (such as the 'penal substitution' theory of atonement and the doctrine of hell) the strict division between 'nature' or the 'world' on the one hand, and 'spirit' on the other, was removed. What mattered to souls like Snowden's was attention to the affairs of this life, rather than apprehensions of a world beyond. Whereas earlier evangelicals held to a negative role for the state, it was now seen by a growing number of Christians as an instrument for the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The powerful new myth of Evolution seemed to many to further underpin this working out of the spirit of righteousness within history. Harnessed to the Cause, it could offer a spiritual-scientific framework for human progress and women's emancipation:

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132. Given widely on his tours, it was printed several times as an I.L.P pamphlet.

133. Quoted in Mayhew, p.381.

> Now we are looking forward to the Spiritual age, when neither brute strength nor intellect alone will be the dominant force, but when the higher and finer instincts of the spiritual powers we possess will rule the world. Then will be Woman's era, and she who has been so long developing will at last attain her rightful place and wield with Man a beneficent moral sway.[134]

These words, addressed originally to the Fowler Institute, and then to the Women's International Progressive Union in 1898, also linked with androgynous spiritual notions found in such circles. 'I prefer to think', said the speaker:

> of that highest part of our nature, the Spiritual, which is the true self, as being without sex, and above sex, and I cannot help feeling that the highest type of man is the most womanly, and the highest type of woman the most manly.....Witness Jesus Christ...Was *He* less manly because He had the tenderness, sympathy and purity of a woman? Why divide the virtues?.....
> The true Woman will certainly not be a copy of Man; on the contrary, when she asserts her own Individuality, she will be more truly womanly than ever.[135]

'Surely, if anything is certain', observed the future Anglican suffragette Lady Sybil Smith a few years later, 'it is that human nature is plastic and and the human race in a state of transition'.[136] Women were called to assist the evolution of life and growth by their fight against injustice and for liberty.

The cult of chivalry was indeed another important factor in

134. E.Higgs, Woman, the Individual: Her place in Evolution (1898), p.3.

135. Higgs, pp.7 & 9.

136. Lady Sybil Smith, Woman and Evolution (c.1906), p.2.

the background to Edwardian suffragism. As Mark Girouard outlined,[137] whilst not a simple phenomena, it was a significant cultural influence in the formation of 'the English Gentleman', especially through the public schools. In terms of Christian feminism it was therefore a feature of the outlook of several leading male protagonists. In particular, the behaviour of the Christian Socialists:

> can in fact reasonably be described as chivalrous. Not only did they come to the support of the underdog in causes which brought them no worldly rewards, gave them considerable unpopularity amongst most of their class, and in some cases lost them a great deal of money or actively harmed them in their careers; in addition most of them were alive to the concept of chivalry, and regularly used its metaphors.[138]

Influenced by purveyors of the chivalric ideal such as Carlyle, Kingsley thus described himself as a 'joyous knight-errant of God',[139] for whom chivalry was the noble meaning of 'muscular Christianity', which did not exalt the feminine virtues to the exclusion of the masculine. For his disciples, Christian gentlemen were to be heroes, both tough and pure.[140]

Such notions became mainstays of suffrage religiosity. Through Christian Socialism's continued influence in the public schools and Oxbridge, two generations of Christian gentlemen were imbued with the dual ideal of strong personal character

137. M.Girouard, The Road to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman (1981).

138. Girouard, p.132.

139. ibid.

140. Girouard, p.143.

and service of the worse off.[141] Indirectly, as members of the same social class, this also touched women's consciousness of themselves. The common Christian metaphors of battling against the unregenerate world and the temptations of one's own flesh, were easily transposed into their moral crusade, as the desire to overcome perceived social evils and uphold moral purity combined with the required need for conquest of self.

These ideas, as has been seen, were clearly more consonant with evangelical enthusiasm rather than the Enlightenment. Their growing use within feminist contexts towards the end of the nineteenth century thus denoted a shift away from equal rights liberalism towards more 'essentialist' arguments for women's suffrage. Such a development was aided, with the growth of imperialism, by the increased voicing of collectivist notions on the political right as well as the left. For, if the mainstays of the Anti-Suffrage League were to be pillars of the Empire such as the Lords Curzon, Cromer and Milner, by the opening of the new century it also began to be argued that the preservation and advance of imperial civilisation required women's more active assistance. Concern about national and imperial 'efficiency' was deepened by the Boer War, during which army recruitment showed up the poor physical condition of many volunteers. This was further exposed by the report in 1904 of the interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration. Widespread discussion about the 'decline of the race' and the need for eugenicist or social Darwinian reforms then took place.[142]

141. Through masters such as John Percival (later Bishop of Hereford and Church League suffragist) at Clifton College, and dons such as Henry Scott Holland. Girouard, p.250.

142. cf. B.Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914 (1960) and G.R.Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency:1899-1914 (1971).

The effect upon the 'woman question' was to shift the grounds of feminist debate to the right in two decisive ways. Firstly, with increased awareness and discussion of issues such as infant mortality and child health, an ideology of motherhood was promoted by imperialists.[143] Whilst this reinforced the domestic role expectations upon women, it also increased demands for legislation to safeguard the mother, child and family. Women (such as the leading Anglican figure Louise Creighton and the Fabian Imperialist Beatrice Webb) who had hitherto been strong opponents of women's suffrage, then began to consider the vote as a buttress to traditional family and sexual morality.[144] Secondly, fears of national and imperial 'deterioration' reinforced the idea of 'woman's mission'. One sign of this in the early 1900s was the volume of propaganda designed to encourage 'surplus women' to settle in the colonies. Notions of imperial destiny and class and racial superiority were grafted onto the traditional views of refined English motherhood. Like the women missionaries, whose numbers grew dramatically at the end of the nineteenth century, such women were seen as 'invincible global civilising agents'.[145]

From a specifically ecclesiastical viewpoint, Christian women in the new century also had new grounds to support women's suffrage. For attached to anxiety about motherhood and sexual purity, and bolstering moral crusading enthusiasm, came increasing concern for 'church defence'. As one leading member

143. A.Davin - 'Imperialism and Motherhood in History' in History Workshop Journal V. (Spring 1978), pp.9-65.

144. S.Buckley - 'The Family and the Role of Women' in A.O'Day (ed.), The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability 1900-1914 (1979), pp.133-143.

145, J.Mackay and P.Thane - 'The Englishwoman' in Colls and Dodd (1986), pp.203-4.

of the Primrose League, and conservative churchwoman, put it in 1903:

> I do wish from my heart that the Women's Habitations of the Primrose League would give more attention to these questions and particularly that of Female Suffrage.....I am sure we ought to have the mother element in the State as well as the father..... Is the Church to be disestablished and disendowed without an expression of opinion from half its members ?[146]

As far back as 1886, Dorothea Beale had perceived the value of a Church League for women's suffrage. Writing to Ellice Hopkins, she observed how the matter needed to be taken up by bishops and archbishops as well as 'ladies' themselves:

> Perhaps a Church League may do more good, for the effect of such an union will be felt most in what is technically called 'Society'.[147]

By the mid 1900s, this view was more conceivable. The development of imperial and socialist concerns, together with the Christian feminist moral consciousness that had emerged in the last third of the previous century, opened up the idea of the vote to women who were fearful or hesitant about liberal claims. The adoption of the suffrage cause by Louise Creighton and Beatrice Webb in 1906 was a clear signal of this. As Frances Balfour had earlier observed, Mrs.Creighton might have been in favour if she had not thought the claim prevented the gaining of representation within the Church.[148] Now, with the renewed

146. Mrs.Mitchell, Women's Place in Politics (1903), p.2.

147. Letter 22.3.1886, Autograph Collection (General Suffrage) FL.

148. Letter to Mrs.Fawcett 18.2.1903, Autograph Collection FL.

impetus given to the campaign by the emergence of the Pankhurst Women's Social and Political Union, the case was reversed. For a few precious years, if not without occasional tension and contradiction, the several distinctive 'faces' of feminism were able to be brought together in a colourfully complex and effective unity.

Chapter Three

THE BACKBONE OF 'THE COMMON CAUSE'
(Christian feminism and the N.U.W.S.S)

The Character of the National Union

Origins

> The women's suffrage movement is a religious movement because it concerns human life in the heart and essence, human life in what it is, and in what it aspires to be. Yea, the cry of 'votes for women' is a holy cry because life is holy.[149]

As the largest suffrage organisation of the era, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies brought together the bulk of the local organisations, and the mainstream of the suffrage tradition which stretched back to the 1860s. By July 1914 and the eve of war, it included over 500 affiliated societies and over 100 000 members.[150] Unlike the Pankhurst led Women's Social and Political Union, which, as will be seen, bore strong comparison with a religious sect, the National Union was thus sociologically akin to a broad established church. With a wide geographical base, it was a truly *national* organisation, open in character (except to militant methods) and able to seek alliances across a broad front (as it achieved increasingly and importantly with labour in later years).

Its purpose was political, and its methods, organisation and achievements reflect this fact. Yet, as the foregoing quotation indicates, certain noteworthy religious elements influenced its operation. For although the N.U.W.S.S and its constituent bodies

149. The Revd. F.A.M.Spencer, reported in *Common Cause*25.5.11:117.

150. *CC*24.7.14:332.

were primarily administrative campaigning units, they carried with them the cultural legacy of earlier moral and religious campaigns by women. Hence, whilst the N.U.W.S.S was a symbol of the move away from the concept of women's subordination explicit in early Victorian Evangelicalism, it also carried forward the Evangelical bourgeois stress upon woman as mother and home-maker, whose woman-spirit was 'pregnant' with the now significantly feminised Christ. In general therefore, like much of contemporary British culture, it was still suffused with evangelical/liberal protestant ideas and values. This contributed both to the suffrage movement's success (in the obtaining of the vote for some women in 1919) and for its failure to achieve wider feminist gains.

Evangelicalism, even in its broadest application, was not the only significant element in the spirituality of this suffrage body. As was highlighted in tracing its origins, a variety of other streams of reflection and action made their own particular mark. Chief amongst these was the liberal 'idealist' tradition, manifested in the appeal and influence of Mazzini and the romantic ethos of the movement. Furthermore, the very undenominational character of the movement in its religious aspect considerably assisted its successes. As in the United States, this enabled it to avoid suspicions of sectional religious interest which frequently bedevilled suffrage progress in countries such as France and Germany. Yet, by the same token, no such movement could have succeeded, even in such comparatively secularised lands, without utilising the still potent values and imagery born of evangelical revival.

The significance of Christian feminism to the suffrage struggle is therefore evident in both the people and ideas of the N.U.W.S.S. The solid evangelical background of leading N.U.W.S.S members

is apparent for example from examination of its membership and records. Thus executive committee members were generally middle-aged, mostly middle-class, and Evangelical or Nonconformist in religion, with a high proportion of Quakers among them.[151] Eminently respectable, they were often clearly 'insiders', closely connected to the world of Parliament, asking for recognition of their position.

The most prominent of such 'insider' figures was Lady Frances Balfour, the effective second in command to Millicent Garrett-Fawcett herself. As daughter of the Duke of Argyll and Lady Elizabeth Leveson-Gower, and sister-in-law to Arthur Balfour, she was very well connected to the British establishment. Faithful to the Church of Scotland in which she was raised, she was a staunch churchwoman, though non-sectarian in attitude and action. The President of the Scottish Churches' League for Women's Suffrage when this emerged, her political abilities were only partly recognised in 1910 with her appointment to the Matrimonial and Divorce Laws Commission. With her chief passion being politics, and with her 'lively, intelligent and intensely loyal' character,[152] it was certainly the tragedy of her own life to be the continuing victim of the exclusive male franchise. Her story thus mirrors that of many women of her age and background: 'when I first wished to take up some form of work', she observed, 'there was very little in England that was outside the scope of what used to be called "Church work"'.[153] In this she symbolised much of what Christian feminists were contending to change.

151. L.P.Hume, The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies 1897-1914 (1982), p.12.

152. Banks (1985), p.11.

153. F.Balfour, Ne Obliviscaris (1930), vol.11 p.117.

Membership

As has been seen (associated with the caring gifts women were held to possess in their domestic role or sphere), the notion of 'woman's mission' legitimised the advance of women in certain fields. The vast majority of Christian feminists in the suffrage movement were consequently connected to a number of interlocking concerns. Few for example, beyond the great Quaker and Nonconformist names, had any substantial connection with industry or commerce, and fewer still with the military sphere. For these were areas principally within the 'masculine' public domain and more typically produced anti-suffragists.[154] Seven other main arenas of life and work were rather the chief spheres from which Christian suffragists emerged.

Firstly there was social work, much of which was church based, or at least originally influenced by religious considerations. This, as indicated above, was the primary channel through which middle class Victorian churchwomen had been able to move beyond the domestic confines. This widened scope not only employed some of the gifts of the 'surplus woman' (as she otherwise appeared) and raised her expectations, but also made her increasingly aware of the extent of many social problems. Indeed, just as women were able to take advantage of local government opportunities that were opening up,[155] so the scale of the challenges they identified only seemed greater. In order therefore to tackle the problems which their experience

154. The principal Anti-Suffrage supporters formed a roll-call of bankers, coal and steel magnates, according to the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (Lady Chance, The Predominance of Men in the Anti Suffrage Finance and Organisation (1913), quoted in D.Morgan, Suffragists and Liberals: the Politics of Women's Suffrage in Britain (1975), p.116).

155. After 1869, when female ratepayers were granted a local government vote and the right to stand for election for school and poor law boards, and, after 1894, for parish, rural district and urban district councils. M.Pugh, Votes for Women in Britain 1867-1928 (1994), p.20.

revealed, many such women were led to demand the vote. This was not an automatic route to the suffrage campaign. As Brian Harrison pointed out in his study of the Anti-suffragists, Mrs.Fawcett for example missed the mark when she concluded that Mrs.Humphrey Ward was 'a social reformer who has somehow wandered into the wrong camp'.[156] Other active social reformers, such as Octavia Hill (founder of the Charity Organisation Society), resisted the notion of the extended franchise, believing that this would risk a loss of sympathy and impartiality.[157] Yet the scale of urban development problems increasingly drew the rising generation of social workers to the opposite conclusion. Thus it was that Maude Royden obtained her 'suffrage education' through her work at the Victoria Women's Settlement in Liverpool.[158] Although she went on to parish work at South Luffenham, and to University Extension lecturing, she could never shake off her confrontation with the plight of poor women, and its implications. By 1905, the year in which militant tactics began to ignite the suffrage movement once more, she was ready to begin her suffrage career. The leading Church feminist of her day, as a suffrage speaker for the N.U.W.S.S and later as editor of the N.U.W.S.S journal *The Common Cause*, she had few equals. A major refrain of her speeches and writings was this linkage between suffrage and social reform.[159]

Belief in votes for women was also a natural concomitant of

156. B.Harrison (1978), p.22.

157. ibid, p.84.

158. S.Fletcher (1989), p.79.

159. cf. S.Fletcher (1989), pp.78-107.

the cause of Purity, still a potent issue of the age. Indeed it was her revulsion at the double standard of sexual morality that was the final spur for Maude Royden's involvement.[160] Her informed concern led to an almost unprecedented invitation from the Bishop of Winchester, Edward Talbot, to speak about the White Slave Traffic at the Church Congress in Southampton in 1913. In doing so however, as she herself acknowledged in appreciation, she was also following in the footsteps of Ellice Hopkins, whose work thirty years earlier had brought about the Church of England Purity Society and the White Cross Army.[161] 'Votes for Women and Chastity for Men', as Christabel Pankhurst's slogan bluntly put it, were intimately related for many Christians. For them, the franchise was both a powerful means to affirm the values and virtues women had been taught to nurture and, by the same token, another cause through which to attack the 'double standard' of Victorian men. Many who had formerly been engaged in purity campaigns were thus drawn into the suffrage struggle. Some, like the Wesleyan Methodist Mrs.Louie Coade (secretary of the Irish Suffrage Federation in Newry), had worked for many years to prevent the reintroduction of laws for the state regulation of vice. Others, like Mrs.Pennington,[162] went back even further. Still active in her eighties, she had been part of Josephine Butler's original campaign, and was editor of *The Shield* for a time in the 1870s. From the beginning she linked this with the demand for the vote, being a member of the committee of the original London Society for Women's Suffrage.

160. S.Fletcher (1989), p.80.

161. ibid, pp.102-106.

162. Born in 1828, she was the daughter of Dr.Sharpe, Canon of York and Vicar of Doncaster and Brodsworth, and married Frederick Pennington the former M.P for Stockport.

Feminists also entered the suffrage movement by way of Christian missionary activity. By the turn of the century this had itself become one of the leading religious movements of the day, and attracted an increasing number of women into its work.[163] For some, such as Laura Ridding, Mrs.Durand and Mary Williamson, interest in suffrage went hand in hand with promotion of foreign missions at one remove. Others, such as Edith Picton-Turbervill (one of the first female Anglican preachers and later a Labour M.P), were first of all missionaries in the field until they directed many of the self-same skills and energies to the 'saving' of women at home. Margaret Bondfield, a Congregationalist by upbringing, as a 'democratic suffragist' principally directed her efforts for labour and trade union development. One of her brothers worked as an officer in the Salvation Army. Another had worked with Dr.Barnado's for years, searching the streets for homeless children. A sister was a Wesleyan deaconess, and later a matron of war-time clubs and a holiday home. Only one of her family was a missionary: George, who spent forty years in China, and helped greatly to forward the production of the Bible in Wenli and Mandarin.[164] Yet, in a sense, as for similar families of their generation and religious grounding, they were each part of a common cause. Such activities were frequently not so much alternatives as complements to one another.

Temperance campaigners were the fourth main group of

163. The female missionary movement was 'substantially larger than any of the other mass women's movements of the nineteenth century' according to Patricia Hill, The World their Household (1985), p.3, quoted in Tucker & Liefield, p.291. The last decade of the nineteenth century in particular saw a dramatic increase in the number of single women in the field: in the Church Missionary Society alone, from 15 single women in 1883 to 134 in 1893, to over 300 by 1901, Tucker & Liefield, p.315.

164. M.Bondfield, A Life's Work (1948), pp.18-19.

Christian feminists to discern an ally in the women's suffrage movement. By the First World War this cause was past its zenith, like the evangelicalism and nonconformity which gave it its fervour. Yet, as noted above,[165] it had provided much backing for women's suffrage in the second half of the nineteenth century and continued to draw its adherents into active support. It was no coincidence therefore that Bishop Hicks, President of the Church League, was also vice-President and the honorary secretary of the United Kingdom Alliance. Temperance was the main issue to which he directed his energies, and he began his suffrage career by speaking from a temperance platform in the great Manchester procession of October 1908.[166] From the Free Churches, temperance supporters such as Sarah Bonwick were also powerful suffrage speakers over many years. Membership of the British Women's Temperance Association overlapped with local suffrage societies, and joint meetings, as well as declarations of support from local B.W.T.A branches, were common.[167] Like the social purity campaigns, its stress upon the moral character of individuals enabled the temperance movement to act as a bridge for women between the private, domestic, world and the arena of public, masculine politics. Moreover, involvement in such campaigns not only educated women in a wide variety of organisational and practical skills, but also helped generate a powerful sense of 'female consciousness' and solidarity.

Two other main fields in which Christian feminists were

165. Ch.2, p.78.

166. *CC*14.4.10:2.

167. cf. e.g, Church League for Women's Suffrage *Monthly Paper* Feb 1913:172,*Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 12.6.11:2.

involved were still in their first phases. The first of these was education, the development of which for women had been a primary aim of the Langham Place Group and mid Victorian feminists generally. Inevitably therefore, many Christian suffragists were either women who had benefited from the pioneering work of Emily Davies and others, or were women and men who strove for its extension. Several Christian feminists were members of the Women Teachers Franchise Association, whilst among leading academics who lent public support were the Revd.D.S.Margoliouth, Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, and the Revd.J.F.Bethune-Baker, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. At Oxford, St.Hugh's College was a particular stronghold, with Eleanor Jourdain the Vice-Principal, and the tutors Cecilia Ady and Annie Rogers all active suffragists. Together with other women academics, such as Louisa Todd at St.Hilda's, they not only cooperated with local suffrage activities, but also helped initiate and guide the Oxford Women's Student Society for Women's Suffrage and the Church League for Women's Suffrage in Oxford.

Sixthly, linked with education in the first stage of women's advance, was the development of nursing and medicine. Here, as with other main areas in the formation of suffragist allegiances, the implications of the values and models of women in such a sphere were profound.

> The moral and health aspect of the Suffrage Movement are almost synonymous,

wrote Beatrice Kent, an active member of the Women's Freedom League, in the Church League's *Monthly Paper* in February 1912:[168]

168. p.7.

> A finer sense of corporate responsibility is arising in the minds of nurses; they are beginning to see the potential remedies for social evils by cooperative efforts.

She felt that there was a manifest need for legislation to be guided by women like her who experienced at first hand the consequences of social problems. The first wave of women doctors almost universally concurred. For churchwomen such as Mary Bell and Helen Hanson the franchise offered another powerful vehicle for the healing vocation in which they were engaged.

Finally (although not exhaustively), a considerable number of committed Christian suffragists were talented artists of various descriptions. Perhaps the most important of these was Mrs. Florence de Fonblanque, the sister of Mrs. Arncliffe Sennett, who before her marriage had been on the stage playing leading parts. Through her family connections she was influenced, like many others, by the spirit of Italian republicanism. The leader of the Qui Vive Society, she was the inspiration behind the 'Great March of Women' from London to Edinburgh in 1912. As outlined below, this proved a great success, and acted as the precedent and inspiration for the N.U.W.S.S Pilgrimage in 1913.

Such fields of public activity were intimately linked to the 'Common Cause'. Yet Church and Chapel-goers were also influenced by other powerful ties, of which family background, age and political orientation were the most critical. Indeed, as manifest in the lives of many Christian feminists of this era, involvement in such areas of public life was often the outflowing rather than the origin of their feminism. Frances Balfour's feminist commitment for example, like that of Florence de Fonblanque, was not the result of conversion, but the natural

outcome of her upbringing. In this she reflected the importance of family background in the formation of belief and commitment, a factor which can hardly be overstated. Frances Balfour's grandmother and mother were both active in the anti-slavery movement, and she grew up in an intensely Whig environment which befriended such fighters for liberty as Garibaldi and Caroline Norton.[169] She could never remember any date therefore, when she was not at least a passive believer in the rights of women to be recognised as full citizens.[170]

Her Liberal party commitment set Frances Balfour apart from the family into which she married. Most of the Balfours however agreed with her on the suffrage question, as did a good number of leading Conservatives, who coupled their Conservatism and (usually Anglican) religion with support for the vote. Women such as Betty Balfour and Lady Willoughby de Broke were thus N.U.W.S.S stalwarts, committed churchwomen who preached the suffrage gospel in the geographical and social locations in which they lived.[171] The strength of their female friendship helped them work together with their fellow women for their common concerns even when they differed on other questions.

Three women who were wives of bishops were particularly prominent as representatives of this upper/upper middle class brand of Christian feminism. Like Frances Balfour for example, Lady Laura Ridding entered the suffrage campaign as part of a

169. Banks (1985), p.10.

170. Balfour, p.114.

171. Lady Willoughby de Broke was a most active Vice-President of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association and of the Church League. Other prominent Conservative women suffragists included Ellen Chapman, Mary Gordon, Frances Sutcliffe and Mary Williamson.

lifelong commitment to progressive causes. An advocate of women's suffrage for over thirty years, she had also worked at rescue, temperance and nursing work, as Poor Law Guardian and district councillor, on committees and missions. Wife of the former Bishop of Southwell, and, like Marie Willoughby de Broke, a Vice-President of the Church League, she was also instrumental in the founding of the National Union of Women Workers in 1895. In many ways she was thus the type of the well-to-do Victorian woman who helped the women's movement gather momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century, lending to it her prestige and social confidence. Similarly, Kathleen Lyttleton was an active suffragist over several decades, and also engaged in a range of social causes, particularly where they involved questions such as women's labour.[172] In contrast, as noted above,[173] Louise Creighton's importance partly stems from the fact that she represented in herself the shift of attitude towards the suffrage made by many churchwomen in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As 'the leading woman in the Church of England during the first two decades of the twentieth century',[174] this conversion was clearly significant of a

172. Widow of Arthur, Bishop of Southampton. About women's suffrage, opined Henry Scott Holland, 'she had an almost religious ardour'. Although open-hearted in sympathy and tolerance, she 'could not help distrusting a little the moral condition of those who hesitated here': H.S.Holland, A Bundle of Memories (1915), p.291. Like Laura Ridding, she was an effective suffrage evangelist within her social milieu, notably being instrumental in winning over Edward Hicks into active involvement, CC14.4.10:2.

173. Ch.2, p.69.

174. Heeney, p.92.

changing mood.[175]

For the wives, daughters and sisters of clergy had for much of Victoria's reign been vigorous volunteer workers, but largely as an hidden adjunct to the clergyman.[176] Even at the turn of the century they were still pictured in some quarters as sharing a common vocation with the clergy, but in an unpaid and subordinate capacity. The parson's wife 'has a sphere', commented Louise Creighton, 'but it is an entirely subordinate one, more subordinate than that of any other wife'.[177] By this time however, such a role was fast becoming a suffocating anachronism for many, in the same way as it was for Emily Davies as a clergy daughter/conscripted parish worker in Gateshead in the 1850s. For some clerical offspring this may even have been an additional factor in their withdrawal from the Church of their fathers.[178] Whether or not they remained faithful to their cradle-religion however, many now began to pursue their own careers, benefitting perhaps from their family status and education but expecting recognition in their own right. Therefore one finds a striking number of clergy relatives active in the suffrage movement, in a variety of capacities. The

175. Widow of the former Bishop of London Mandell Creighton, Louise Creighton's work for the women's movement was prodigious, within both Church and nation. A regular speaker at Church Congresses and women's meetings at the Pan-Anglican Congress and missionary gatherings, she was a member of the S.P.G Standing Committee, the founder of the Mothers' Union in Peterborough diocese and keenly interested in the Girls' Friendly Society, rescue work and other causes associated with the welfare of women. The only female member of the Joint Committee of the Insurance Commissioners appointed in 1912, she was three times President of the National Council of Women Workers.

176. cf. Heeney, p.22ff.

177. Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton (1904) i.5,8, quoted in Heeney, p.23.

178. cf.Heeney, p.26.

Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who (1913) for example included at least thirty seven prominent suffragists who were the daughters of Anglican clergy or Free Church ministers, in addition to eleven clergy wives. The clergy wives included members of the National Executive such as Edith Dimock, organisers such as Emily Tozer (for the Manchester Federation) and other leading lights such as Jessie Margoliouth in Oxford and Sarah Moore-Ede in Worcester. In several instances, as with Constance Tennant in Huckwold in Norfolk, they were the originator and hub of the local society, often but not always with the full support of their husband.[179] Meanwhile clergy daughters were mainstays of the movement in all its guises, and clergy families as a whole were sometimes deeply involved, as with the Giles' in Lincoln.[180]

Family and faith influences were therefore deeply enmeshed among early twentieth century suffragists, just as Philippa Levine highlighted in regard to Victorian feminists.[181] In most cases, as will be seen clearly in the lives of militant suffragists such as Margaret Nevinson and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, it was from their family and social background, good or ill, that firm Christian feminist orientation was generally created. In the nineteenth century this was particularly true, Levine has suggested, in regard to Nonconformist commitments, notably

179. In Constance Tennant's case, her husband was also a keen member of the Men's League and C.L.W.S.

180. The high involvement of clergy daughters was also related to the increasing appeal of 'public' (as distinct from 'domestic') feminism to women of high social origin. As prestige due to birth declined, so being a daughter, relative, or even wife of a high-status man did not ensure a woman such great personal prestige as formerly. cf. Daniel Scott-Smith - 'Family Limitation, Sexual Control and Domestic feminism in Victorian America' in Hartman and Banner, pp.119-136.

181. P.Levine, Feminist Lives in Victorian England (1990), pp.30-37.

amongst Unitarians and Quakers, where a genealogical 'line of dissent' was created. For kinship and friendship links between such Quaker families as the Brights, Sturges, Peases and Gurneys were instrumental in establishing an enduring 'apostolic succession' of Quaker Christian feminists, of whom Isabella Ford,[182] Henrietta Rowntree and Lady McLaren were outstanding examples in the first decades of the twentieth century. In fact, although both Unitarianism and the Society of Friends were well known for their freer attitude to women's emancipation than most branches of Christianity, in neither religious milieu did women actually come near to practical equality. This paradox, the Quaker historian Elizabeth Isachei has argued, 'sensitise(d) their minds to the relative position of the sexes'.[183] Hence Unitarianism and the Quakers contributed a much higher proportion of active feminists than other denominations.

Age and geographical location also played a part in the formation of Christian feminists, and of their particular suffrage allegiance. As indicated above, the N.U.W.S.S membership was more middle-aged than the militant societies. Younger women were often very active, as with the Oxford tutor Louisa Todd, and Ursula Roberts (who, whilst Rector of Crick's wife, shocked many people by going hatless, and worse, selling copies of suffrage newspapers in the streets of Rugby).[184] Yet the N.U.W.S.S owed proportionately more to older generations of suffragists than other societies. Whereas younger feminists like Emily Wilding Davison articulated a more activist, woman-centred spirituality

182. Brought up in a radical Quaker milieu, she was a committed socialist, pacifist and trade unionist: causes she saw as 'branches of the same tree'. J.Hannam, Isabella Ford (1989), p.4 and passim.

183.Quoted in Levine (1990), p.32.

184. S.Miles, Portrait of a Parson (1955), p.49.

in the W.S.P.U,[185] or began to despair of Christianity altogether, the N.U.W.S.S leadership tended to be more attached to many of the evangelical nostrums of the past. Thus, if they did not fall into so many of the militant pitfalls of spiritual over-exaltation, and of false confidence in a limited range of direct actions, they also arguably risked overplaying the religious aspect of their work, and the evangelical virtues of patience and self-control.[186] Geography also seems to have helped the emergence of active Christian feminists, who were inspired, or otherwise, by others around them. Significant circles of religious feminists were found therefore in the traditional areas of Unitarian and Quaker strength, notably Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Bristol. Such surroundings drew Anglicans and others from more conservative church traditions to the fore, as the involvement of Edward Hicks and Peter Green shows in Manchester.

Denominational influences are complex to unravel. Nevertheless there is evidence to suggest that whilst Anglicans were proportionately slower than Nonconformists to enter the suffrage movement before 1900, in later years this trend was reversed. For in these years whilst a section of the Church of England sought to offer radical challenge to the existing order (notably through the Christian Socialist revival), the radicalism of

185. See ch.4, pp.155-158.

186. Although less likely than many W.S.P.U figures to wear their religious hearts on their sleeves, the depth of faith of many leading N.U.W.S..S members was nonetheless clear. Emily Davies for example displayed an unshowy faith, yet was a clearly determined Christian feminist. Similarly, if Mrs.Fawcett reacted against the fervent Evangelicalism and Sabbatarianism of her upbringing, she was not unaffected by a religious sense, albeit a personal one owing much to the visions of nineteenth century 'prophets' such as F.D.Maurice and Mazzini. cf. B.Caine, Victorian Feminists (1992), pp.201-2.

Dissent had largely spent itself.[187] Thus, as writers in the *Free Church Suffrage Times* bemoaned, the Church of England now sometimes seemed to be 'ahead' in its attitude to the 'woman question', particularly where the attitude of Baptists and many Wesleyans was concerned. With the exception of the vigorous campaigns against the 1902 Education Act, levels of Free Church ministerial involvement in political affairs began to diminish after 1890. The influence of Hugh Price Hughes in particular created a new approach among Wesleyans from the 1870s, but energies were largely poured into philanthropic rather than political activity. If there were voluble and high profile exceptions, the majority were typically quiescent.[188]

The rise of the 'social gospel' movement may then not have appreciably increased the level of nonconformist involvement in the women's movement, at least in its political aspects. Yet it helped shape the changing character of the commitment that was made. Although deeply influential on the contours of early feminist development, Evangelicalism in its classic form had declined in significance by the first years of the new century. Instead, the development of the 'social gospel' within the churches was increasingly important in moulding the thoughts and actions of Christian feminists. Classical Evangelical influences persisted, but predominantly amongst the older generation. Younger suffragists had to wrestle with the implications of scientific theories and of biblical criticism, which were eroding established theological standpoints within all but

187. The celebrated 'Nonconformist Conscience' was largely restricted to issues of personal, traditional nonconformist concern, and (according to John Kent - 'Hugh Price Hughes and the Nonconformist Conscience' in G.Bennett & J.Walsh Essays in Modern Church History (1966), pp.181-205), was in many respects a vehicle of Nonconformist self-assertion.

188. K.Brown, A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1930 (1988), pp.215-220.

the most conservative of churches. Evangelical revival had helped to inculcate commonly held assurances of heaven and hell, and stressed the mechanics of salvation for the individual. Many theologians however now came to emphasise a faith that was more social and this-worldly, realised in ethical service of one's neighbour: a salvific process which could easily be associated with evolutionary or political ideas of progress. This social liberalism therefore, so prevalent throughout the British theological scene by the Edwardian era, may have been a vital connecting link in the involvement in the suffrage struggle of many Christian feminists, who had hitherto been unaffected because of their preoccupation with more classical Evangelical concerns. At the very least, their suffrage commitment was a widening of traditional Evangelical concern, from its main concentration on individual salvation (reflected in concern for temperance and purity) to a broader focus, linked to the approach of the social gospel.

Consideration of the relative feminist commitment of the different denominations of the period provides some evidence for this argument. Amongst Methodists for example, although as has been indicated political activity was still problematic, important voices began to be raised by the turn of the century, bringing something of a change of mood and purpose. The notable Methodist suffragists Ethel Snowden and John Scott Lidgett certainly reflected this change of theological emphasis, with its stress upon ethical realisation of the coming Kingdom. This is most evident however in the case of Congregationalists, the most active exponents of the 'social gospel'. On the practical level, there were few male Christian suffragists as enthusiastic as Charles Fleming Williams, later honorary organiser of the Free Church League. On the theoretical level, few Christian feminists

could match the preaching of R.J.Campbell, at the apogee of his career. In contrast, the Baptists seem if anything to have withdrawn from political activity in this later period. Here, perhaps because of the enduring influence of the disciples of Spurgeon, traditional evangelical dogma and practice had been less altered. This does not mean to say that there were no Baptist feminists active in the suffrage struggle, nor that very much greater waves of support came from other Free Churches. In general, as Kenneth Brown highlighted in his 'Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry', all the Free Churches had difficulty in maintaining or developing their political or communal engagements. Similarly, in her analysis of the social origins of 'first-wave' feminism, Olive Banks rightly indicated that denomination was secondary to broader theological outlooks in its influence upon feminist thought.[189] Active Baptist suffragists such as J.Ivory Cripps, F.B.Meyer and Sarah Bonwick were not any less involved than other Free Church supporters, where they could be found. Yet the tide of political, cultural and theological change favoured the involvement of those holding to a more liberal, or socialist, brand of religion.

This might be expected. For (as indicated in the previous chapter) to a considerable extent the contribution made by Christian feminists was that of enabling connections to be made between various 'faces of feminism': principally between evangelical or liberal protestant religion and the liberal or equal rights tradition, and with various kinds of social and socialist philosophy and action. The religious individualism and moral imperatives of Protestant faith in Britain, at least in theory applicable to both sexes, were thus able to to be married to the rationalist individualism of the Enlightenment, fusing in the

189. Banks (1981), p.14.

creed of British liberalism.[190] This was of profound significance for the women's movement in Britain, contrasting with the experience of France and Germany, and reflecting the progress of women's suffrage in Scandinavia. In Germany Protestantism was not open or progressive, and did not have the large-scale independent and reforming sects found in Britain and America.[191] In France (and Italy and Belgium) feminist movements took on a distinctly anti-clerical character in the face of the hostility of the dominant Roman Catholic Church.[192] In Britain the path of feminism was thereby eased by what Elizabeth Cady Stanton called:

> the Protestant idea, the right of individual conscience and judgment, our republican idea, individual citizenship.[193]

In the nineteenth century Britain witnessed the vigour of Nonconformity instead of anti-clericalism, with corresponding erastian liberalism within the established Church. To the degree therefore that British Christianity, by its historical development, was more liberal than some other forms of European faith, the women's cause was by that extent able to advance more easily, reaching more parts and alienating fewer interests. It was thus possible for elements of British religion to offer feminist campaigners' 'indispensable reassurance', and often 'a genuine

190. Evans (1977), pp.17-18.

191. ibid, pp.103-112.

192. ibid, pp.124-136. cf. for France, S.Hause & A.Kenney, Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic (1984).

193. In 1892, quoted in Evans (1977), p.23.

legitimation' of their efforts and intentions.[194]

The shape of 'constitutionalist' Christian feminism

Certain common factors and themes are thus discernible in the involvement of Christian feminists in the suffrage struggle. The variety of their backgrounds, and the range of other interests and outlooks they held, underlines however that for these religious women it was their feminism itself which was the decisive element that impelled them into activity. Christian feminism in this respect was not just an offshoot of liberalism or any other movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It also stood on its own feet, made its own alliances and helped to make its own history. Churchwomen active in the suffrage movement were so not just because they might be liberals (some were not), social workers, purity campaigners, missionaries, temperance workers, educationalists or tertiary-educated women, doctors, nurses, or artists, or came from any other specific quarter (although they were most likely to emerge from one or more of the above). These were as much expressions of their feminism, just as was the suffrage campaign. As the origins of the various religious branches of the suffrage movement will demonstrate, such phenomena issued primarily from the association of women with one another rather than through extraneous forces or interests.

This does not mean to say that the great contemporary movements of thought and action, notably evangelicalism and liberalism, did not profoundly affect the development of feminist life and thought. Analysis of first wave American fundamentalism has demonstrated how the rise of fundamentalist religion was intimately related to the backlash against the vast changes in gender roles that were currently

194. Evans (1977), p.18.

occurring.[195] So too, it has been suggested,[196] the Social Gospel movement was also concerned to support aspects of the separate-spheres ideology, often speaking of the home as the most sacred and important social institution, and recommending women to stay within its confines. If conservatives sought to stave off gender role changes by aggressive reassertions of past conventions, liberal responses also shared common concerns. The declaration of the churches' role in the public, political world of men, so beloved of liberal protestantism, was also a reaction against the feminization of religion which had given religious authorisation to women. Liberal and conservative churchmen alike stressed 'masculine' emphases such as moral heroism[197] and almost universally staunchly defended the middle-class 'Christian' family. Feminist development within the Christian churches was therefore conditioned by its allies as well as its opponents. The linking, and sometimes supplanting, of 'equal rights' feminism with traditional religious concerns, based on an 'essentialist' view of woman as mother, home-maker and guardian of virtue, enabled eventual success for the suffrage movement. Yet it was not without its contradictions for women. For the 'suffrage spirit' had by necessity to utilise the sympathetic language and symbols of the day, whether this was the rhetoric of Christian chivalry or the images of 'woman's mission'.

195. B.De Berg, Ungodly Women: Gender and the First wave of American Fundamentalism (1990).

196. ibid.

197. cf.title and preface of the Newcastle church suffragist Inskip's autobiography A Man's Job (undated), defending the role of a clergyman as a proper one for a man.

The Spirit of the National Union

Any outline of suffragist ideas and symbols inevitably runs the risk of partiality because of the breadth and variety of the movement. Yet certain key features are identifiable from speeches and writings, and these highlight the religious, or spiritual, aspect of the Cause.

Four main characteristics stood out, according to Una Sanderson, a Canadian delegate at the International Congress of the Young Women's Christian Association in Stockholm in 1914.[198] Firstly, it was world-wide. Secondly, it had emerged because women were realising as never before that 'ye are all members of one another'. Thirdly, there was the theme of service, with the narrow limits of home and family life no longer sufficing. Finally, there was knowledge (of the conditions under which others live), leading to the 'passion ' of women:

> we have entered in a sacrificial way into the touch with the tragedy of other women's lives.....Just as Christ came down into this world to feel its deepest woe, so we too, are allowed to descend and help in the vicarious suffering that redeems men and women.

Militancy was one of the dangers of the movement, said this speaker, yet would have been little in evidence had 'the men in our Churches been with us from the start'. The great wall of resistance that had been met time and time again had led to militant methods.

These characteristics were indeed at the heart of the mainstream suffrage movement. For although such elements received striking profile in the militant campaigns (as Martha

198. Reported in *Vote*3.7.14:176-177.

Vicinus highlighted brilliantly),[199] they were pervasive throughout. Certainly when the recurring keywords of suffrage rhetoric are considered, these stand out as the major theologically loaded concepts of Christian suffragists, as they struggled not only for the vote but also for clearer meaning and purpose for their lives. Generally misunderstood, and often opposed, by institutional Christianity, they represented important aspects of women's search for being (and with this, for religious women, the search for being in the deepest sense). For, as Una Sanderson contended, beside the two major secondary causes of the Women's Movement, education and industry, many felt the great underlying cause to be the Will of God - 'his Spirit like a a mighty stream urging us onward' - requiring both men and women to show forth the character of God.

Universality

Indeed the women's movement was not only geographically world-wide, but also sought to be universal in the identification of its members with aspects of life beyond, or within, themselves and their own times. In the obvious sense of the word, the British suffrage movement sought to exchange ideas with women's movements in other countries, with news of international gatherings and reports from distant lands being regular features of the suffrage press and correspondence. It was a common apprehension however that this phenomenon of the rising of women was no mere modern peculiarity. 'All life is one and indivisible', some women had argued in progressive circles before the turn of the old century:[200]

199. Vicinus, ch.7 passim.

200. Higgs, p.2.

> happy are they who understand the significance of this sacred kinship.....now we are looking forward to the Spiritual age.....when neither brute strength nor intellect alone will be the dominant force, but when the higher and finer instincts of the spiritual powers we possess will rule the world. Then will be Woman's era, and she who had been so long developing will at last attain her rightful place and wield with Man a beneficent moral sway.[201]

For such women, the highest aim for man and woman was to attain to the highest and best qualities of each gender, as witnessed in Jesus Christ, in whom the virtues were not divided.[202] For the present, woman's duty was active participation in the evolutionary process, to 'fight against injustice, for freedom, liberty, room to live, and to grow'. Hence, in addition to strengthening international links, many religious feminists also sought to associate their movement with what they variously perceived as the inner and outer, archetypal and historical processes of spirit, tracing the internal (ultimate) meaning of life and events. For the movement, argued the *Common Cause* , was 'a further evolution of the spiritual forces in man'.[203]

Such idealistic efforts, common to many great human movements, were given particular impetus by the scientific and evolutionary notions of progress then in common intellectual currency. This also linked with the widespread interest in fashionable circles in spiritualism and theosophy. Annie Besant for example was a peripheral but intriguing figure for some, drawing such active feminists as the Quakers Ursula and Esther

201. Higgs, p.3.

202. ibid, p.7.

203. Editorial: 'The Underlying Principle' 15.9.10:367-8.

Bright into her milieu. The 'spiritual dawn' of the women's movement was thus viewed in different, but often complementary, ways. For some it owed much to the renewal of spiritual vision through contact with eastern wisdom.[204] For others it was a sharing in the work of human, spiritual progress traceable in human history through such people as Moses, Buddha, Plato and Christ.[205] For others again the women's movement linked to further 'universal' elements, such as the struggle for liberty within British history, animated by the alert consciences of radicals in each age.

The involvement and interest of women in spiritualist and theosophical activities was partly a means, often unconscious, to overcome the limits of conventional femininity, as well as a way of enhancing personal religious devotion.[206] Like much spiritualist expression, whilst most suffrage-centred religiosity was of a transitional character, its effect could be life-strengthening for those who shared it. Women were thereby able to gain a sense of themselves as powerful individuals, overcoming the passive restrictions conventionally laid upon them. In this way they were part of that element of contemporary British society which revolted against the tendency towards cerebral, activist religion. The romanticism of this revolt contained within it reactionary components, such as wistful longings for aspects of passing ages, but it also allowed stress on non-rational, feeling and intuitional elements in religion which were conducive to, and enabling of, the 'feminine'.

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204. cf. Higgs p.3.

205. cf. C.C.Osler 'The Vision Beautiful' *Vote* 18.8.10:310-311.

206. Alex Owen - 'Women and nineteenth-century spiritualism: Strategies in the subversion of femininity' in Obelkevich, Roper and Samuel (eds.), pp.130-151.

Linked to this search for, and stress upon, inner meaning (subversive of and a source of strength against the external definitions of the (male) world) was the frequent emphasis upon *rediscovery*: seen in the use of female-associated images as the source or key to the renewal of social life. Commonly these were traditional conceptions of woman, or of woman's place, now transposed into a more activist, 'saving' form. Thus in one suffragist's poem 'The Hearth',[207] one character, the man, commands the other, woman, to stay by the hearth - 'For you were priestess born'. In echoes of writers like John Ruskin, he urges:

> Plant lilies for delight,
> Press grapes for healing cheer;
> And man shall turn from spoil and fight
> To find renewal here.

In response, the woman, not denying her duty to tend the 'sacred fires', contends that she 'needs must bless where you have spoiled. And bind where you have fought'. For the house walls are being rent, and 'soot falls amid the flame', and her children fare badly away from the 'peaceful shrine of home'. So woman must follow abroad: 'With food and fire and wine.....Lest, while the hearth we duly guard, The fire itself be dead'. Woman was hence to enter the wider world, not so much eschewing the virtues of her domestic pedestal, as bearing their light down into the darkness to lift up her fellow human beings to her own height. Garnering and harvesting the spirit entrusted to her, her mission was to be widened and deepened, at home, in the nation, and overseas.

Christian feminists occasionally remarked upon how closely suffrage work at home was intertwined with missionary

207. By Maude Goldring, *CC*28.7.10:263.

endeavour, even if the Christian Church in general was indifferent to this fact. The women's movement was a natural sister of the missionary movement, argued Ruth Rouse, in her well received article in *The International Review of Missions* in January 1913. It was, she opined, not only similarly international in scope and ideals, but it also afforded a direct training for the carrying out of the best missionary ideals. An ordinary suffrage meeting, echoed Helen Hanson, will welcome as a speaker 'the feeblest of missionaries solely and only because she *is* a missionary',[208] for the problems of other lands were frequently under suffrage discussion.[209]

This determination of women to carry their mission into areas of life hitherto closed to them led, as in their missionary and welfare endeavours, into difficult physical and literary challenging of the boundaries in which they were set. A great deal of courage was required to conduct even the 'constitutional' campaigning of the N.U.W.S.S. Indeed it was the perils of such activity, especially the violence inflicted upon women at certain demonstrations, which helped encourage others into more militant tactics. Even pavement chalking or speaking at street corners were new, and sometimes personally disturbing, intrusions into (male) public space. Carrying a sandwich board, observed Maude Royden, was a 'really vile job. You cease to feel human when you do it for long'. Giving out handbills was 'not much fun either', and selling a newspaper was 'no joke,

208. H.Hanson, From East to West (1913), p.1.

209. Hanson also repeated a continual complaint that the estrangement of the Church and Mission establishments from the suffrage movement helped produce a lack of sympathy at home, and created difficulties abroad. The continued discrimination against women by the missionary societies, it was argued, was one of the greatest hindrances in missionary work, and a betrayal in deeds of 'the standards of truth and righteousness' which were preached to non-Christians: see e.g, Mary Weston D.D 'The Status of the Woman Missionary' in C.L.W.S *MP* January 1914:148-9.

especially one with the incomprehensible title of *The Common Cause.*[210]

For such active suffragists their involvement was also therefore a journey of self-development. Indeed the saving mission of the women's movement was frequently conceived as a pilgrimage for their own and others' enlightenment. The fullest expression of this was in the great Pilgrimage of 1913: 'the most spectacular single piece of propaganda undertaken by the N.U.W.S.S during this period' and 'probably the most impressive demonstration for women's suffrage ever staged in Britain'.[211] The earlier 'Great March of Women' from Edinburgh to London, had shown its potential. A band of women walking between the two great cities was in itself a startling event for 1912, and it enabled the suffrage issue to be brought to many places hitherto untouched by the suffrage campaign. Christian feminists had prompted it and were deeply involved, responding to the call for it 'to assume more of a religious, spiritual than actual political character'.[212]

The terms of the N.U.W.S.S' 'Pilgrimage of of Grace' reflected this aspect of the suffrage spirit:

210. A.M.Royden, Bid Me Discourse (undated), pp.45-46. Box 224 FL.

211. Hume, p.198.

212. Notice regarding the 'Great March' *Vote* 21.9.12:374. For the close involvement of local Christian feminists, and the journey's excitement, see e.g *Newcastle Chronicle* 23.10.12:8. The Pilgrims commended the high level of sympathy and understanding shown by clergy, which they saw as a tribute to the work done by the religious Leagues, *CC*19.9.13:398.

> If we take up this call as pilgrims, it will be an expression of the spirit that moves us - a spirit very present with all Suffragists, whether Christian or non-Christian, and whether holding a dogmatic faith or not. It is a moving, living sense of the deep, spiritual meaning of the suffrage movement, as well as of high romance. We realise that with the Founder of the Christian religion, with S.Francis of Assisi, with all great spiritual leaders, our movement has come 'to turn the world upside down'; and with something of the gaiety of the early Franciscans, and something of their eternal spring of hope and love, of faith in the world and faith in their own message, we will set out to win the world into our fellowship.[213]

This march, wrote Maude Royden, was only part of 'all the great marches of all great causes, which move onwards and upwards', and the marchers were pilgrims, with Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, Josephine Butler and Elizabeth Fry 'to the same shrine'.[214] The marchers encountered tremendous warmth, and only occasional opposition (notably in parts of the Midlands), and were regularly greeted by local churchpeople, who shared special services with them.[215] The event then concluded with a service in St.Paul's Cathedral, followed by another in the Ethical Church, at which Maude Royden preached on 'The Pilgrim Spirit'.[216] Its practical effect was greatly to enlarge the N.U.W.S.S' impact upon the nation as a whole, and to achieve a meeting with Asquith, who confessed himself impressed by the positive feeling

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213. *CC*9.5.13:67.

214. 'The World's Pilgrim Progress' *CC*18.7.13:247-8.

215. cf. the useful picture of the Pilgrimage through the North East given by Margaret St.John. *CC*27.6.13:191-2.

216. For a fuller, contemporary account see K.M.Harley 'The Pilgrimage' *Englishwoman* 19.9.13:.254-263.

expressed towards the pilgrims, particularly by working men (especially in Liberal areas in the North).

Solidarity

The second great religious theme of the Women's Movement was solidarity, flowing naturally out of universality. Indeed there was a natural ecumenism about the women's cause which usually (except at critical points over militancy) brought otherwise conflicting elements together, and helped them to look outward in their shared mission. Hence, for such reasons, Mrs.Fawcett had seen St.Paul's at the fitting climax to the Pilgrimage: as 'a national temple' (reflecting the importance of the cause), where 'all minor differences of creed or sect may well be laid aside under the mighty dome'.[217] This sense of being 'members one of another' inevitably grew over time, with the experience of common struggle bringing a deeper sense of sisterhood and fellowship.

Most importantly (as reflected in the response of working men to the Pilgrimage), the discovery, or deeper awareness, of the suffering of the poorer classes, and of the disadvantaged in other parts of the world, led gradually to a closer alliance with others struggling for recognition. This was not a new feature in the women's movement, since, as the *Common Cause* editorial for 5 June 1913 put it:

> It was Josephine Butler, surely, who first said of womanhood that it was *solidaire*. She is the patron saint of all international movements, for she taught the unforgettable lesson that the wrongs of every woman are the wrongs of all women, and no woman can be outraged or oppressed but womanhood itself is the sufferer.

217. *CC* 9.5.13:67.

Yet such rhetoric was not met by reality in the early stages of the suffrage movement, where membership and tactics were limited by its middle and upper-class formation. In the new century however, just as the W.S.P.U, out of its I.L.P background, became inexorably more elitist and vanguardist, so sections of the N.U.W.S.S gradually helped to deepen the sense of 'solidaire'. Remarking upon the hooliganism the Pilgrimage faced in the Potteries and some large towns, the *Common Cause*[218] commented on how it revealed the country's large and underpaid population. 'We suffragists', the paper observed:

> are deeply conscious that our Pilgrimage has been a needed act of penitence for a national sin.....in the heart of every Suffragist there is a depth of pity for those who have never been given a chance.

Effective associations with working class women, and with organised labour, were not easy for many Christian feminists. Their typical class background and culture tended to produce different concerns and priorities. Yet if most churches struggled with the challenges of working class lack of attachment to institutional Christianity, it was often their women who enabled links to be made. Not only were working class women in greater numbers than their men within the churches,[219] but a number of prominent Christian suffragists, such as Margaret Heitland[220] and

218. *CC* 1.8.13:287.

219. Sometimes forming a considerable proportion of members, cf. Rosemary Chadwick 'Church and People in Bradford and District, 1880-1914: The Protestant Churches in an Urban Industrial Environment' D.Phil thesis (Oxford 1986), pp.163, 171-3.

220. President of Cambridge Women's Suffrage Association (which she helped form in 1884)), and a member of the N.U.W.S.S Executive. She spoke and wrote freely on women's suffrage, particularly in relation to employment and labour conditions, and was Vice-President of the Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, which she also helped form.

Isabella Ford, were active in addressing employment and labour issues as part of their suffrage work. Most notable of all were two of the most eminent of all N.U.W.S.S activists, Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth.[221] Instrumental in bringing Christabel Pankhurst into full suffragist involvement, they lived and worked in Manchester among the labouring classes, actively campaigning on their behalf; including promoting the cause of textile workers, pit-brow girls, florists assistants, and (a cause of controversy among temperance inclined suffragists) barmaids.[222] Together they were pioneers of the N.U.W.S.S-Labour alliance, which became an ever firmer reality before the war: especially with the founding of the Election Fighting Fund in 1912 (which helped support Labour candidates against Liberal anti-suffragists), the development of the work of Friends of Women's Suffrage, and with the increasing prominence of working class women such as Selina Cooper and Ada Nield Chew.[223]

Such developments were aided by increasing emphasis upon the 'essentialist' case for women's suffrage. The 'argument from expediency' (that women needed the vote to protect their interests as wives, mothers and workers) enabled the movement to capture an increasing number of working women, and male

221. According to the Anglican spiritual writer Evelyn Underhill (not herself a suffragist), Eva, sister of the Countess Markievicz, was 'one of the most distinguished Christian poets of our time: a true mystic, whose work was the outcome not merely of "spiritual appreciation", but of profound spiritual experience' - *Times* obituary 9.7.1926, quoted in G.Lewis, Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper (1988), pp.175-177. Esther Roper, Eva's close friend and companion, was a daughter of the Revd. Edward Roper, a missionary in Nigeria, who had formerly been a factory hand in Manchester.

222. Lewis, passim.

223. See Liddington & Norris, op.cit.

workers also.[224] Not only did male workers and labour organisations feel less threatened, but the N.U.W.S.S also began to stress the argument that the sex and class barrier were due to the same spirit of monopoly and privilege.[225] Not that there were no countervailing trends of of debate within the N.U.W.S.S. A range of different ideas were discussed within its ranks, including Lady McLaren's 'Women's Charter of Rights and Liberties' (which included not only improvements in the law and the franchise, but also wages for housework, recognition of child care as work, and a system of communal services for women). Yet notions that for a woman 'her home is her inalienable sphere'[226] were still common, and discussion of crucial issues of reproduction and of sexuality were extremely limited, with the N.U.W.S.S leadership keen to avoid any accusations of 'immorality'.[227]

Instead of analysis of cultural gender stereotyping therefore (as would be prominent in later feminism), most National Union suffragists tended to emphasise the 'common bond' with the men and children with whom they shared their lives, and the advantages which they contended the vote would bring to all. As Mrs.Luke Paget declared at the Church Congress in 1913:

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224. Hume, p.194.

225. cf. report of the 'Great Albert Hall Demonstration' of February 14, 1914, in which 'serried ranks' of men from labour organisations joined the platform with suffrage leaders, since there was 'one principle underlying all': 'Our Common Humanity' *CC*20.2.14:884-5.

226. *CC*22.8.12:340.

227. L.Garner, Stepping Stones to Liberty (1984), pp.11-27.

> Sex-consciousness used to mean self-consciousness about the other sex. Now it means a realisation of sisterhood and womanhood.[228]

Child, man *and* woman - these were pictured together in the images of the new humanity, the prospect of solidarity for all humankind, that suffragists sought and proclaimed. 'What is the "the Common Cause"?', asked the N.U.W.S.S newspaper rhetorically;

> It is the cause of the uplifting of womanhood, a cause 'common' to men and women, because when the women rise the men rise with them, and the degradation of its women degrades the whole nation.[229]

'Do we ask how the demand for women's suffrage is a religious demand?', asked Frederick Spencer, allying the cause with social purity:

> the lack of the vote for women is a cause for the abuse of sex, for the hampering of motherhood, for the restriction of the power of love. The demand for women's suffrage is a religious demand because sex is sacred, because the child is sacred, because love is sacred.[230]

Like other suffrage papers, the *Common Cause* thus frequently included articles upon a range of social concerns, including the double standards in legislation dealt to women and men. The issue of *Common Cause* for September 8th 1910 for example, was devoted to 'the tragic lament of mothers and babies destroyed',

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228. *CC*10.10.13:454-5.

229. 3.11.10:479.

230. Sermon to C.L.W.S, reported in *CC*25.5.11:117-118.

the social realities that were identified as being faced by many women and their children. With such circumstances, contended Catherine Osler, thousands of women had been aroused to the conviction that:

> passive acquiescence in the existing condition of social morality has become the one unpardonable sin of blasphemy - uttered or unuttered - against the Holy Spirit: that to accept the sheltered privilege of individual protection, at the price of the perdition and agony of others, is a baseness and cowardice on which no judgement can be too severe.[231]

Hence women from different backgrounds and with very different outlooks could be brought together. 'The Spirit of the National Union', observed one contributor to the *Common Cause*,[232] was summed up in the Mass Meeting at the Royal Albert Hall in February 1912: with so many aspects, yet 'in ordered and regular sequence'. 'The general impression', they commented, 'was that of a symphony in which a vast number of notes were harmonised to one accord'. This harmony, they argued, expressed 'the soul of the National Union', reflected in the banners drawn up by the Artists' League, with their:

> millions of stitches.....art, labour, patience and ingenuity, shown in all the infinite gradations of human variety and all tuned to one accord.

Such a positive picture should not obscure the very real tensions in the N.U.W.S.S: over tax resistance, or dealings with the militants; later division of opinion over the war; above all, the terms of an acceptable franchise. Over this last issue, class

231. 'Why Women Need the Vote - IX. The Problem of Social Morality' *CC* 19.5.10:84-5.

232. 29.2.12:795.

interests always threatened to weaken the solidarity of the women's movement and its allies. It was to the N.U.W.S.S' political credit however, that, unlike the W.S.P.U, this sense of solidarity was increasingly enlarged in the immediate prewar years.

Service

Nowhere is the paradoxical strength of the suffrage movement more apparent than in its emphasis upon service as the defining characteristic of women's claim. Linked to the search for wider support, intensified stress was placed, with its religious grounding, upon the need for 'liberty to serve', rather than on equal rights. For as the *Common Cause* expounded (in tackling the 'separate spheres' argument head on), the 'ordinary suffragists' did not deny differences of sphere but saw them in another light. Always women had been healers of the sick, carers for children, makers of homes. Certain great industries, such as sewing, weaving, making garments and food, were also 'in the female line'. These things to the suffragist seemed to have a physiological basis:

> Only she thinks it her 'function' and 'sphere' to serve in these different ways even when they carry her into politics'.[233]

In the development of the missionary movement, women had gradually been accepted into involvement as their perceived gifts were seen to complement male missionaries. 'A missionary without a wife', volunteered Livingstone's father-in-law:

233. Editorial: 'Different Spheres' 3.10.13:442-3.

> .....is like a boat with only one oar. A good missionary's wife can be as useful as her husband in the Lord's vineyard.[234]

Spinster missionaries were also increasingly welcomed since they could enter new territory, often getting closer to the people because of their gender. Similarly, women had managed to obtain self-expression through nursing careers, legitimated, though not without struggle, by the gender-specific talents and supplementation of 'masculine' work that they were felt to offer. In both cases this could be justified as an extension of woman's place at home, and as such the precedents of these nursing and missionary models had enduring importance for the suffrage campaign. The full scope of women's virtues were unrealised within the limited bounds of private life, it was argued, whereas, further utilised, they could also help to raise the standards of public life. 'Effeminate women make effeminate men', argued the *Common Cause*.[235] The vote for women would not remove, but rather strengthen the virility of men:

> first by hardening the women to a finer temper, and second, by abolishing the true causes of national decay.....it is not the tender heart which wrecks a nation; it is vice, luxury, idleness and unpreparedness.

By the late nineteenth century therefore, the suffrage movement was striving not merely for 'entry to a male-defined sphere, but for the opportunity to redefine that sphere.[236] This

234. Quoted in J.Trollope, Britannia's Daughters: Women of the British Empire (1983), p.188.

235. 29.12.10:625.

236. S.Holton, Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918 (1986), p.18.

required the involvement of 'mothering' on the larger scale. 'The social evolution of mankind will be hastened if we concentrate on the mother at the present time', argued Elizabeth Sloan Chesser.[237] Such a call partly reflected contemporary eugenicist concern for the health and size of the population, which led to extra pressures upon women to adopt a maternal role and 'breed an imperial race'.[238] Yet this importance attached to the mother could also be turned to feminist advantage, as the 'characteristic' qualities of women were portrayed as appropriate for wider service. The Christian ideal, asserted Louise Creighton, was lowered by giving the useful qualities of submission and obedience a place among the higher virtues. The Christian virtues of love, hope and faith were active, and had to be realised in service. It was not for themselves that women asked 'for liberty to be their best selves, to give their best service'.[239]

A sense of religious 'duty', particularly arising from the burden of raising the standard of social morality, was therefore widespread. It was reflected in the 'imperfect' photographic reproduction of Botticelli's 'Annunciation' placed on the front of the *Common Cause* of 29 December 1910, with its corresponding verse tribute to 'La Forza', courtesy of Wordsworth. For 'Duty' was the revealed word of the angel here, made incarnate in Mary:

237. 'Mother Protection' *CC*24.10.13:503-4.

238. Davin (1978), p.9.

239. 'The Effect of the Women's Movement on the Education and Ideals of Women' in C.Gore (ed.), The Religious Aspect of the Women's Movement (1912), pp.55-56.

> Stern daughter of the voice of God! -
> O Duty, if that name thou love
> Who art a light to guide, a rod
> To check the erring and reprove;
> Thou who art victory and law
> When empty terrors overawe;
> From vain temptations dost set free,
> And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

This was a picture of true Force or Power, opined the *Common Cause* editorial;

> Vigilant, thrilling with feeling, sensitive and mobile, yet infinitely calm and majestic, raised on her sumptuous throne above the strife which she may have to decide - what a contrast to the brute, unthinking cruelty of force as put forward by the school of blood and iron and acquiesced in, half despairingly, by many who have lost their faith.

The whole movement, declared Louise Creighton,[240] was one from the lower to the higher plane, being part of the age-old struggle 'between the forces of brutality and the forces of the spirit' in human nature. Women sought to enter political life, argued the N.U.W.S.S leadership against its critics, to 'raise the standard' and 'emphasise the dominance of spiritual over physical force'.[241] Such language reflected evangelical self-assurance about woman's virtues and saving mission, together with a romantic idealisation of these 'essential' truths. On the other hand, it was also an argument linked to women's separated, 'alienated' existence, set apart from the practicalities and 'realities' of the public world, which this very spirit sought to change.

N.U.W.S.S commitment to non-violent campaigning followed

240. *CC*20.2.14:879.

241. 'The Underlying Principle' *CC*15.9.10:367.

directly from this. Since, argued Louise Creighton,[242] the woman's movement was winning the world from the domination of physical force, and bringing about the reign of the spirit, 'we should all be desirous above all to fight with worthy weapons'.

> A burning sense of the wrongs of other women, sacrificed in the name of necessity

ought indeed to urge suffragists on to:

> unremitting toil and never-satisfied devotion.....to an austere virtue to which the luxury of anger and violence is denied.
>
> To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
> To endure wrongs darker than death or night;
> To defy power which seems omnipotent;

- this path of patient service and sacrifice would alone bring true freedom.[243] 'Such suffering is victorious', commented Maude Royden, after a particularly rowdy meeting in Hyde Park:

> It is a witness to the faith that is in us.....If victory is delayed, it can only be because we have not yet fought with a sufficiently pure spirit of selfless courage and devotion.[244]

Such a faith was deeply over-optimistic, believing that the cause 'has only to be heard and understood, to triumph'.[245] It was also open to the militant charge that it perpetuated female

242. *CC*20.2.14:879.

243. *CC* 15.9.10:367-8.

244. 'The Faith that is in Us' *CC*23.5.13:99-100.

245. ibid.

self-denial of the wrong kind. Yet it enabled many to be won over who were antagonised by the actions of the militants. Indeed the *Common Cause* confessed that the Pilgrimage was partly designed to change the image of the suffrage movement which had been distorted by the militants:

> to set out once more to convince the world that, in truth, it stands for sweetness and light.[246]

(Self) Knowledge

Fourthly therefore, the spirit of the suffrage movement involved a discovery and development of women's own sense of selfhood, in response to a new awareness of the challenges of their world. Although this was still subject to the powerful cultural norms of the age, it represented an increasing self-assurance and self-assertion. Clad in the romantic and religious ethos of the day, many Christian feminists saw themselves as part of a great crusade, bringing a new sense of chivalry into social relationships. The quest for the vote was thus 'The High Adventure', as Dorothy Lloyd Sulman put it, in her poem of that name.[247] 'O let the days of chivalry/And knighthood come again', she urged, that women might gird themselves in 'new bodies' of Incarnate Love, 'swift and strong and beautiful', until 'Sloth, disease and Ugliness/The triple fiend, be slain.....

> You glorious people yet to be
> I hail you where I stand,
> How will you live! The thought is like
> A lance into my hand
> O come my sister knights. We kiss
> And scatter through the land.

246. 16.5.13:81.

247. *CC*10.11.10:508.

This mood was clearly overly high-spirited and incorrigibly romantic. As the basis for future practical feminist development after securing the vote it also left much to be desired. Such heroic language, which was too easily elided into the growing militarism of the age, was in itself, as earlier indicated, partly a reaction to the feminised Jesus of Victorian piety. A common theme, shared by Christian missionaries and other social reformers,[248] it was also deeply indebted to imperialist currents. The influential champion of Wesleyan 'Social Christianity' Hugh Price Hughes, for example, pictured the Empire as a Knight-errant, redressing human wrongs all over the world. It has truth, commented Henry Scott Holland, not himself averse to such high flown language:

> We can recognise our office as Knight-errants, and we can use high language of a mission from God, but we must be very careful how we use it, and must be tremblingly aware of the standard by which claims of this character are judged at the great judgement bar. Hughes' language is a little too cheery and light-hearted over this aspect of things.[249]

A similar assessment may be made of suffragist imagery, with the qualification that in this quarter, as for low-born missionaries finding new purpose and status in their vocation, it also represented genuine self-achievement and a true sense of adventure. As women emerged into public light through the various channels of the women's movement, they were discovering a fresh identity, with new and wider contributions to

248. cf. A.J. & G.Crosfield, A Man in Shining Armour (1911), a contemporary account of the life of William Wilson, beginning with the Madagascar missionary's life pictured as a spiritual equivalent of the 'Campeador' El Cid.

249. Holland, p.156.

make. Inevitably they made use of available contemporary images. Hence 'woman' was also variously pictured in a range of Christ-like guises, including that of the suffering/saving Mother. In Josephine M.Baretti's words, in her poem 'Woman - the Christ':

> Fast to Thy crucifix, sharp suff'ring's aim
> By woes and weariness of worlds oppress'd
> For sorrows of all times the goal confessed;
> Thou hangst aloft, the synonym of shame
> Born into martyrdom, to hatred, blame.
> Scorn'd, spat at, scourged, reviled, contemn'd,
> distress'd,
> A by-word, mock, the cynic world's great jest,
> Thou art the Christ, the one true saviour name.[250]

In one sense such images were extensions of nineteenth century piety, but they were developed in a more active manner. In employing them, the women's movement could be said to be claiming traditional religious symbols and identity for women, on increasingly, though still limited, woman-centred terms.

Sacrifice, like service, was certainly a religious motif central to the Cause. Votes for women and the Cross of Christ were closely connected, observed Frederick Spencer in his address to the Church League in May 1911. For women's suffrage, he believed, was an outcome and presage of a great movement for the purification and uplifting of humanity by women: a cause which could only be actuated by the spirit of the Cross:

> each and all must pass through her Gethsemane and Calvary.....You have before you, my friends, difficulty, hardship, danger, suffering, self-sacrifice. But though for a while you fail, you will at last prevail.....Believe in your divine work and mission! Ye shall see the travail of your souls and you shall be satisfied.[251]

250. *CC*26.5.10:106.

251. Reported in *CC*25.5.11:118.

To the theme of the Cross were added occasional allusions to Italian republicanism. For Mrs.Fawcett was not alone in quoting Garibaldi's words: 'I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles, death'.[252]

> We have not a little to learn from conduct of this long campaign and the heroism of its several generations of fighters

observed A.M.Allen: from those

> who desired liberty, not as an end, but as a means to the perfecting of human brotherhood.....whose aims were peaceable, not pugnacious, Christian not Roman, of the Mother-spirit, not of the warrior-spirit.[253]

This stress on 'austere virtues' was thus conceived as contributing to the cleansing and regenerating of both self and society. Women will have to defy the false morality of avoiding all contact with evil, declared Frederick Spencer,[254] and of aiming at superficial correctness and excellence. Rather they were to stoop and 'demean' themselves for the sake of the oppressed. Seeing themselves as bearers of light in the darkness of the world, these virtues represented for such Christian feminists the spiritual forces which contended against materialism.

Like others, Frederick Spencer made use of Olive Schreiner's allegories in his considerations upon the women's movement.[255]

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252. cf. *CC*30.6.10:179.

253. *CC*26.5.10:99.

254. loc.cit.

255. In the sermon here, the allegory 'I Thought I Stood'.

Examination of their significance deserves fuller treatment,[256] but for the present it is worth noting how representative they were of the self-consciousness of the suffrage movement at its best. Schreiner's use of scripture and traditional imagery showed how women could use such forms to develop in powerful ways their sense of self and vocation. However such imagery could not easily be shaken free from their traditional oppressive ideological uses. Tellingly, Schreiner's allegories appear as 'Dreams', or in dream-like form. Like much of the Christian feminist rhetoric, this is expressive both of their vivid transitory strength and of the fragile character of new feminist constructions. The allegories and the Christian spirit denoted new beginnings and new visions, but were still largely unrealised elements: helping reconceptualise and reconstruct women's Being, yet still in a stage of Becoming.

The 'constitutionalist' Christian feminist achievement

The obverse of this constructive contribution of Christian elements to the suffrage movement was its tendency towards undue piety and ill-judged rhetoric. In the heat of the conflict this was partly inevitable and partly excusable, but it could also be a diversion from practical politics. Largely it passed unquestioned, except notably by a correspondent to the *Common Cause* in late 1913. Responding to the editorial attack upon militancy in the previous edition, Agnes Catchpool commented that:

256. See ch.6, pp.280-285.

> the tone of the article would have been very suitable to a Christian advocating Christianity, but an organisation existing for a definite political end may and must work on a different plane.[257]

Although not a militant herself, she felt that it should be admitted that it was only when the militants came forward that women's suffrage began to be taken seriously, and that it was such less 'worthy' elements which helped to sway the issue. Against the trend of suffragist rhetoric, she believed therefore that:

> We ought to view all our undertakings from the most spiritual viewpoint we can attain, but perhaps to insist on the spiritual significance of the vote itself might be - may I say a little ridiculous? - in the eyes of present voters, and of some of ourselves.[258]

Observing that John Bright had said, 'A great measure does not pass this House (of Commons) because it is just', she concluded:

> I do not think 'all reformers' ridiculous; but I think we make ourselves slightly so by basing a very definite and limited temporal demand on a semi-religious ground which does not necessarily appeal even to a majority of ourselves, and which I believe would make the average elector start.[259]

This corrective to the over-idealism of the suffrage movement was perhaps insufficiently heard in the din of conflict. Furthermore, from a later viewpoint, it highlights an important limitation of 'first-wave' feminism: namely that this kind of religious element was too prominent, and bore clearly

257. *CC*31.10.13:522.

258. ibid.

259. *CC*7.11.13:546.

anachronistic features for the future of feminism. 'You believe', wrote Agnes Catchpool:

> that a function of Governments is to uplift; and if Governments have this high spiritual significance, so, no doubt, has the vote. But I doubt very much whether Governments or electors take this view.[260]

Achieving the widened franchise partly on the back of such sometimes misdirected religiosity was thus arguably a key contributory factor to the decline of feminism in the post-war period.

The further specific limitations of the 'Spirit of Suffrage', from a later perspective, have been partly highlighted above,[261] but are perhaps best summed up by Brian Heeney's observation:

> Louise Creighton thus represented all that was best in moderate Anglican feminism; she was bold, practical and respectable. But her very virtues demonstrated the limitations of her position and of the Church she served.[262]

Such a verdict, applied to the mainstream of the National Union, is not entirely unjust either, even when all due measure has been rightly given to the spiritual heroism, determination, and developing self-awareness of this section of 'first-wave' Christian feminism.

Yet to judge the 'constitutionalists' achievement in this way is also to point up its success. The historical fortunes of feminism, it has been argued, have been strongly determined by the degree to which it has been able to join forces with other bodies for

260. ibid.

261. Especially the emphasis upon 'right to serve' in regard to service.

262. Heeney, p.93.

their mutual aid. Periods of decline have usually coincided with cleavages between different groups of feminists, and between feminists and other groups.[263] In this way the varied forms of first wave Christian feminism were important sources of connection and inspiration for the success of the suffrage movement. The pages of the *Women's Suffrage Record* and the *Common Cause* frequently featured meetings held in association with churches or church groups, or which were addressed or chaired by sympathetic clergy. These helped both to bring churchpeople into fuller contact with the women's movement, and to give a religious blessing to it. In so doing the movement was given important non-revolutionary respectability[264] and was able to draw powerfully upon fertile, and essentially traditional, ideas and symbols. Evangelical and other Christian elements thus helped the N.U.W.S.S to claim that women who sought the vote were animated by conscience and a desire for moral reform, and were willing to suffer and sacrifice themselves to this end. Faith, perseverance and patience may not have been the most exciting virtues to the more eager suffragette, but they were at least as vital in helping the movement to victory. Meanwhile the sense of solidarity with one another and with others was crucial.

263. Banks (1981), pp.6-7.

264. Murphy, p.160.

Chapter Four

COMBATTING 'THE SIN OF SELF-SACRIFICE'

(Christian feminism & the Suffragettes)

A New Beginning

Apples and horses: herein lies a clue to the unique contribution of the suffragettes to the wider suffrage movement. For the movement had struggled for almost fifty years to gain parliamentary approval before, in 1903, Emmeline Pankhurst initiated the Women's Social and Political Union, the organisation which always remained the largest of all the militant suffrage groups. A long succession of bills had been presented, talked out, or defeated. All means of 'constitutional' agitation had been tried, and the movement was in a lull when a new spark relit the campaign. Thrown out and then arrested for causing a disturbance at a meeting at Manchester Free Trade Hall in October 1905, Christabel Pankhurst and her friend Annie Kenney were subsequently tried and imprisoned. A new spectacular phase in the struggle had begun.

In 1866 the campaign had been instigated by a petition of almost 1 500 signatures. Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett were chosen to take the scroll to parliament for John Stuart Mill to present. At that time however they were intimidated by the gathering of lawyers around Westminster Hall. Consequently, to avoid merciless witticisms, they asked a seller of apples to hide their document under her stall. As Roger Fulford observed in his history of the movement: what a delicious irony!.....

> the petition - the battering-ram with which these spirited ladies hoped to overturn the defences of the male sex - lying among those fruits by which man, through the guile of a woman, was supposed to have damned himself.[265]

265. Fulford, p.43.

With the coming of the W.S.P.U, such diffidence belonged to the past. Knights, dragons, a sense of mission, saving others, and above all the dream of realising true selfhood, these were essential components of the suffragette spirit. Truth, wrote the suffragette leader Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, must be 'incarnated', made 'alive in us':

> No knight in the old time, kneeling at the altar, dedicated body and soul, life and substance, to the service of the Highest more religiously than we must do today.....We sound the call to arms. Come forth, knights and warriors of the truth. Come and take your part in the Crusade.....We are resolved to save the womanhood of this country, and to save it now.[266]

For the suffragettes the Cause was thus a great romantic adventure. In their vision of true relationships, woman was no longer regarded as a beauty or a temptress with a tainted apple, but as a liberated and liberating saviour, riding on a charger.

The patron saint of the suffragettes was hence inevitably Joan of Arc, to whom a heady mixture of piety, politics and group interest had already been attached over the centuries.[267] In the first years of the twentieth century, this religious and political attention reached a peak. A political issue in France in the 1880s and 1890s, and beatified by the Roman Catholic Church in April 1909, Joan of Arc was a constant figure on the suffragette stage. Not that she was confined to the militants. Amongst the 'constitutionalists' Millicent Garrett-Fawcett was herself among those who extolled her virtues, whilst Maude Royden was eagerly received wherever she gave her own excellent lecture on Joan of Arc. It is however amongst the ranks of the W.S.P.U that

266. *Votes for Women* 11.6.1908:232.

267. cf. M.Warner, Joan of Arc (1981), passim.

we find Joan of Arc most exalted. She was the 'archetypal militant',[268] symbolising the women's 'holy crusade', and she became, in Christabel Pankhurst's words, 'our patron saint'. Consequently W.S.P.U processions were typically led by women impersonating her in armour and riding upon white horses.

Such pageantry was partly for show purposes, but also served important ideological functions. For, as Marina Warner and Lisa Tickner have both highlighted, Joan of Arc was a female figure who eluded straightforward categorisation. 'She was and was not a woman', observed Lisa Tickner:[269] offering a challenge from the position of femininity, yet subverting traditional notions by her virginity, transvestism and military vigilance. Precisely because she could never become a clear model for real women, she possessed great power. Her ideological fluidity and historical distance allowed her image to be easily conflated with other fecund associations: whether figures such as Boadicea and Athene, or republican symbols of Justice and Liberty. Most importantly of all, she acted as the 'touchstone that spiritualised militancy'.[270] She linked the new spirit of female assertion with an Evangelical ideal of femininity that accorded women moral preeminence and a moral reforming vocation.

In a light-hearted article in the suffragette paper *Votes for Women*,[271] the writer Evelyn Sharp drew out this point. Reporting a recent W.S.P.U procession, she commented on the response of bystanders to the figure of Joan of Arc on horseback:

268. Description coined by Lisa Tickner, The Spectacle of Women (1987), esp.p.208 ff.

269. ibid, p.211.

270. ibid.

271. 23.4.1909:574-5.

> 'All the winners', said one. 'That's what we are', came back the quick retort. 'Why, its like a bloomin' Salvation Army!' said another. 'It *is* a salvation army!' said a woman from the ranks, and the crowd said 'hooray'.

It was indeed a salvation army, in both organisation and intent. Run autocratically by Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst, the W.S.P.U in some ways paralleled the successful model of General Booth. Although individuals (most notably Emily Wilding Davison) made their own imaginative contributions, direction of the movement lay with the charismatic leaders. In the early days, the W.S.P.U also borrowed some of the Salvation Army tactics, such as recruiting at fairgrounds. Such methods were also the natural product of Independent Labour Party influence, but this too came from the era of I.L.P religious zeal, in the pioneering ethical socialist phase of labour history. Not for nothing therefore did many Free Church supporters regard the suffrage movement as 'the New Nonconformity', a rightful heiress and fulfilment of the 'Nonconformist conscience'.[272] For the W.S.P.U campaign was a religious crusade in its basic tenor. Sylvia Pankhurst, in her history of the movement, in particular stressed 'the appeal for service and sacrifice' made by the W.S.P.U.[273] This was opportune she said, for the energies of the women of the middle and upper middle classes were still largely dammed and prejudice still remained very strong. The remarkable flood of publicity regarding the plight of the lower classes had awakened social consciences from the 1880s onwards: as innumerable reports (official and unofficial), unprecedented press attention,

272. Address of the Revd.E.H.Barson reported in *Free Church Suffrage Times* Sept 1913:51. See below ch.6, pp.235-6.

273. S.Pankhurst (1931), esp.pp.225-7.

and an increasingly vigorous trade union agitation, had highlighted the struggles of the poor. In the face of this, the movement made an instant appeal: not only helping many women to demand a worthier place in society, but offering an outlet from a narrow or purposeless existence, to an active, romantic part in what could be legitimately regarded as the most important work in the world. Through the vote, the energies expended in the home and social work could be extended into public life: a development as much as a break out of the domestic sphere of woman.

The Call to Service and Sacrifice:
(the cases of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Constance Lytton)

Sylvia Pankhurst rightly observed that no-one so confidently voiced this appeal to service and sacrifice as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. Until October 1912, when they split over tactics, Emmeline was the third element in the 'Triumvirate' leadership of the W.S.P.U, alongside Christabel and her mother.[274] With the support of her husband Fred, Emmeline personally supplied a great fortune to the W.S.P.U coffers, was a most effective Treasurer, and an able editor of *Votes for Women*, as well as being imprisoned several times. She was also one of the most eloquent and effective speakers in the whole movement. Her history and her words are therefore an illuminating insight into the suffragette spirit.

For Emmeline's story illustrates the path of many women in these years, moving from one form of evangelical mission to another. Like many suffragists, Emmeline started her public career in Christian social work. Beginning in 1891 as a 'Sister of

274. 'I feel as if the Trinity had broken up, the Holy Ghost seceded, so incredible is the event', wrote Mary Stocks, on hearing of the split. Letter quoted in M.Stocks, My Commonplace Book (1970), p.69.

the People' at the West London Mission, Hugh Price Hughes' Wesleyan Settlement, she subsequently moved on, with her friend Mary Neal, to establish her own Esperance Girls Club. Then came a change of attitude, outlined in her article 'Why I am in Prison' in 1909:[275] a change she saw as a 'conversion'. As a child at school, she had been profoundly stirred by George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and the story of poor, pretty Hetty Sorrel. She was, she said:

> moved by that instinct for chivalry which belongs essentially to the childhood of the individual and the race. I made a passionate resolve that when I grew up I would put myself between the helpless and the wronged and the wicked and the cruel world.

However her experience in London left her increasingly overwhelmed, both by the human misery around her, and by her own political helplessness. Then came the first militancy of Christabel and Annie Kenney. As soon as possible she got in touch. For:

> Gone for ever now was the last vestige of the child's idea. To stand between 'Hetty Sorrel' and the cruel world.....was quite inadequate now.....For you cannot save women one by one from an evil fate. You must put into the hand of woman the power to break the bonds that hold her down.

Emmeline's 'conversion' was typical of the changing consciousness of the suffragist women, a conversion which many saw as guided by a greater hand. As she herself put it:

275. *VfW*12.3.09:429-430.

> I went to prison because the power that has shaped my whole life has led me there step by step.....I went to prison because.....for every new emancipation of the human race, for every possession of truth, a great price has to be paid.[276]

'Where doctrine, precept and example all fail to penetrate', Lady Constance Lytton agreed:

> the spirit of sacrifice, which wakes an echo in all human hearts, will find a way.[277]

Constance Lytton certainly bore the cost in her own body. Born the third child of Edith Villiers, Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Victoria, and of Robert, the First Earl of Lytton and Viceroy of India, she was closely connected to the highest echelons of English society, including the Balfour family into which her sister Betty had married. Yet she became one of the most remarkable martyrs of militant suffragism. For during her first imprisonments in Holloway and Newcastle upon Tyne, she felt she had received preferential treatment, due to her society status. Consequently she dressed like a *Punch* stereotypical suffragette when on a protest in Liverpool in 1909: giving her name as Jane Warton, a working class woman, when she was arrested. Whereas on hunger striking in Newcastle prison she had been properly examined and released because of her heart condition, now, after four days on hunger strike, she was forcibly fed. A near invalid since infancy, since when she had suffered from a weak heart and rheumatism, the experiences of Walton prison left her seriously ill. In 1912 she had a severe coronary attack, never recovered her full health and died an early death in 1923.

276. *VfW* 12.3.09:430.

277. C.Lytton, Prisons and Prisoners (1988 edition), p.137.

Constance Lytton's 'conversion' to militant suffragism began with her stay with Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Annie Kenney at the Esperance Girls' Club holiday home in Littlehampton in 1908.[278] 'I realised at once', she wrote later:

> that I was face to face with women of strong personality, and I felt, though at first vaguely, that they represented something more than themselves, a force greater than their own seemed behind them. Their remarkable individual powers seemed illumined and enhanced by a light that was apart from them as are the colours and patterns of a stained-glass window by the sun shining through it. I had never before come across this kind of spirituality. I have since found it a characteristic of all the leaders in the militant section of the women's movement, and of many in of the rank and file.[279]

This spiritual resonance gave Constance the sense of vocation she had lacked all her life. For as she herself said, she could indeed stand for the 'useless', 'surplus' upper-class woman of the period, 'for the superfluous spinster', for whom life was often one of tedium within 'a gilded cage'. Where:

> the paralysing worship of incapacity dominates life, the chain of limitations and restrictions is but seldom broken, and never overcome save by exceptional force of character or ability.[280]

Even then, she lamented:

278. Lytton, p.9 ff.

279. ibid.

280. ibid, p.41.

> often it is only the beating of wings against unyielding and maiming bars; freedom, if attained, rendered useless by lack of preparation in the competition against trained and privileged beings of the male sex, and the vain ambition ends in a seeming mutiny, nothing more.

'The weakest link in the chain of womanhood', she observed:

> is the woman of the leisured class. Isolated and detached, she has but little sense of kinship with other women. For her there is no bond of labour, no ties of mutual service; her whole life is spent in the preservation of appearances, and she seems hardly ever to probe down to the bone of realities. Child-having remains her glory, the one bit of livedness in an otherwise most arid desert.[281]

In the women's movement therefore, Constance revelled in the life, enjoyment and purpose for which she had longed[282] and discovered new powers of independence and solidarity. 'Lay hold of your inward self and keep tight', she commended others in her 'Dedication to Prisoners' at the beginning of her personal reflections:[283]

281. Lytton, p.135.

282. cf. letters to 'Aunt T.' in F.Balfour Papers, Sept.1908, bundle 337 and Nov.22: 'The Prisoners release was absolutely thrilling. The prison just like a stage....'

283. Lytton, pp.xiii-xiv.

> Reverence yourself. Be just, kind and forgiving to yourself. For the inner you of yourself is surely the only means of communication for you with any good influence you may once have enjoyed or hope some day to find, the only window through which you can look upon a happier and more lovable life.....
> Public opinion, which sent you to prison, and your gaolers, who have to keep you there, are mostly concerned with your failings. Every hour of prison existence will remind you of these afresh. Unless you are able to keep alight within yourself the remembrance of acts and thoughts which were good, a belief in your own power to exist freely when you are once more out of prison, how can any other human being help you? If not the inward power, how can any external power avail?

It was this sense of self-empowerment which set her free from her own chains and allowed her to dare and act. Alongside ran a fresh awareness of common womanhood, or common humanity, and of its potential. As she reflected, seeing the prisoners processing around the Holloway yard:

> I thought of them as beads of a necklace, detached, helpless and useless, and wondered how long it would be before they were threaded together by means of the women's movement into a great organised band, self-expressive yet coordinated, and ruled by the bond of mutual service.[284]

Yet, paradoxically, she who was one of the missioners for women's redemption came to find that it was she who was saved through those for whom she worked, as much as they by her:

284. Lytton, p.134.

> In my ignorance and impudence I went into prison hoping to help prisoners. So far as I know, I was unable to do anything for them. But the prisoners helped me. They seemed at times the direct channels between me and God Himself, imbued with the most friendly and powerful goodness that I have ever met.[285]

Whilst bringing considerable consternation to her high born family and their friends,[286] she was very highly regarded amongst the militants. Imbued with 'quiet wisdom', reflected Henry Nevinson, the 'wisest and gentlest of women, whose sufferings for the Cause, I think, exceeded all'.[287] To Olive Schreiner she was indeed 'like a goddess', someone who 'makes one realise anew the wonder of womanhood'.[288] For, as she wrote in a letter to Constance:

285. Lytton, p.xiv.

286. cf. Various letters in F.Balfour Papers, including F.Balfour to Betty Balfour 2.10.09: 'Con. is quite insane. She asks you to plead against a doubtful "torture", while they are applying a great deal of very real torture to the Asquiths.' For Frances Balfour, Con. was also being used by the militants because of her name and connections, a use of public position that the constitutionalists eschewed, letter 8.4.09 to Betty Balfour).

287. H.W.Nevinson, More Changes and Chances (1925), pp.312, 321.

288. Letter 9.5.1907, bundle 335, BP.

> The thing to me is not that you are winning the Franchise but fighting a free determined fight for it! We might get the franchise by flattery or by guile; or as we shall get it here, if we soon get it here, because one political party believes it will add to their voting strength. It will be a comparatively worthless thing. I am always so glad that I did not die before the Suffragette movement began, because now I know that my highest hopes for women on earth will ultimately be reached.[289]

Against Frances Balfour's perception that the W.S.P.U were using Con's distinguished name, there was also the gratitude of others who saw her doing something they could not do. As one anonymous working class woman wrote:

> Women like ourselves who from force of circumstances are unable to take a place in the fighting line do very sincerely appreciate the noble self-sacrifice and devotion of those like yourself, Marie Leigh, and the other brave women who are ready to face even the barbarous torture of the so-called 'Liberal' Government.[290]

The Christian Commonwealth, in its review of her book *Prisons and Prisoners*, was moved even further. This was, it declared, 'a book to be read, with scalding tears', and she herself was 'an incarnation of the Christ-Spirit, if ever there was one'.[291] Indeed within the suffragette movement, only Mary Leigh, though very different in personality, was regarded as comparable in 'superhuman regardlessness of self' and in being

289. Undated letter (late 1909/early 1910), bundle 339, BP. Olive Schreiner also made a dedication to her in Woman and Labour (1911).

290. Letter from 'a cowardly sympathiser' 24.10.09, bundle 339, BP.

291. *ChC* 1.5.14:523.

'utterly unworldly and unfleshly'.[292]

Like other militants Constance Lytton felt herself elevated into a new plane of existence. As she related to her sister Betty:

> I know there is much about me just now that must seem to you badly biased, excessive in concentration, and enthusiasm even to the point of falseness.
> I don't of course feel it is that myself. But I do feel that one has got into a kind of other sphere, beyond some borderline which separates from past life and non-sympathisers much as death might do in a greater sense. I think this will wear off. I think it is partly due to Holloway. There everything was so acutely vivid and yet so absolutely detached from one's own life, that a sense of unreality and apartness has haunted ever since.[293]

Responding to a traditional sounding call to service and sacrifice, she had found her understanding deepened, her life changed and her sense of self transformed.

A New Mission

The suffragette consciousness was hence both a continuation of the Victorian woman's Evangelical mission, and a dramatic break from it. Christabel Pankhurst herself is particularly instructive here. For in 1913 she launched a great campaign against sexual corruption and men's part in spreading it. Welcomed by a whole range of clergy in a way her other actions were not,[294] the campaign against the 'Great Scourge' (as Christabel termed it) thus stood in the line of Victorian purity

292. Mary Leigh, like her close friend Emily Wilding Davison, was a remarkable 'freelance militant', whose unorthodox actions included placing a hatchet in Asquith's carriage. See A.Morley & L.Stanley, The Life and Times of Emily Wilding Davison (1988), esp. pp.114-121.

293. Letter 12.5.09, bundle 338, BP.

294. cf. the Revd. G.H.Davis' review in *The Suffragette* 16.1.14:311.

campaigns. If woman's moral mission continued however, it was in a different guise. Gone were the struggles to reconcile the duty of service with submission to a separate sphere, so apparent in suffragist women of an older generation, such as Dorothea Beale. Josephine Butler herself was reputed to have remarked that 'tears are good, prayers are better, but best of all is the ballot-box'. Literary and intellectual circles also resounded with discussion of the 'New Woman' in the 1890s, and can be seen as preparing the way.[295] Yet for most women, even at the end of the nineteenth century, religious commitment might lead to a great variety of social endeavour, but rarely to conscious self-assertion. Mrs.Pankhurst herself observed that she had needed to go through years of public work before she could acquire the experience and wisdom to challenge the man-made world.[296] Only when women such as she had worked as Poor Law Guardians, doctors, inspectors, councillors and so forth, had they been truly 'free to gaze into the abyss', as Margaret Nevinson put it: 'to see life in all its horror and degradation, in all its muddle and foolery under uni-sexual legislation'.[297]

With the suffragettes there was hence a new departure, no better expressed than in the words of another great militant figure, Charlotte Despard:

295. cf. D.Rubinstein, Before the Suffragettes (1986).

296. Cited in G.Lennox, The Suffragette Spirit (1928), p.10.

297. 'The Present Position of Women' *Vote* 11.3.11:238.

> Hypnotised (she said) by a false presentation of morality, religion and duty, we women have been cajoled or forced into a false conception of ourselves. We ask for enlightenment. We wish using our own capacities, seeing with our own eyes, and not with the eyes of men, to understand our true position, to see clearly what are our true duties and and our rights.[298]

Mrs.Despard led the Women's Freedom League, a more democratic but smaller militant suffrage society, which split from the W.S.P.U in 1907. Admittedly a highly colourful and individualistic figure, being both a convert to Roman Catholicism and a devotee of theosophy, she also illustrates the shift in consciousness. From her early unhappy childhood, she carried with her a love of the iconoclasm of Shelley, and with other suffragists had a great reverence for the republicanism of Mazzini. Like the vigorous Christian Socialist propagandist and keen suffragist (the Hon.) Father Jimmy Adderley,[299] she represented in herself the strain of romantic revolt in the movement: the very Victorian rejection of Victorian values, of its mere Protestantism and materialism, its political order and patriarchy. Yet for most of her life, until the death of her husband, she was a conventional well-to-do Victorian woman, dabbling in various good causes, such as the Nine Elms Flower Mission ('kind ladies with country gardens who gave flowers to brighten dark houses', as her biographer Linklater put it).[300] Then she gradually immersed herself in labour politics, ultimately becoming a revolutionary socialist and Irish Republican. She found her greatest satisfaction however in the

298. In 1910, quoted in Linklater, p.121.

299. cf. his remarks in *VfW*30.12.10:213.

300. Linklater, p.44.

suffrage movement. For here she discovered a new fellowship', in the atmosphere of women working together, for themselves and by themselves.[301]

The 'Sin of Self-Sacrifice' and the new 'Woman-Soul'

Such a new fellowship could only be established by a new spirit among women. For as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence asserted, in acting as they did during the suffrage struggle, women were overcoming the 'sin of self-sacrifice' to which they were so prone.[302] Great efforts as ever, she reflected, were made to break up the women's movement, by appealing to women's sense of self-sacrifice. Over against women's struggles, she said, there is always something that is urged to be more important, which must come first: always, in the last instance, the unity or welfare of that political party or group to which many women belong. Such self-sacrifice however, though it could be the 'noblest and most heroic virtue', could also be a 'suicidal vice'. 'Self-sacrifice for the race', for the protection of her children, was, she thought, 'eternally demanded of the woman', but 'sacrifice of the female to the male.....would be a sin against Nature', crippling her power to fulfil her sacred trust. Men's laws had been seen to have 'expressly taken away from women the legal possession and guardianship of their own body'.

This kind of argument was obviously partly an extension of a Victorian perception of woman's nurturing and protecting role, moving out from the domestic home to the patriotic or national 'home'. Yet it was also linked to a deepening sense of woman's 'spiritual sex-separation' (to borrow a phrase from the radical

301. Linklater, p.110.

302. E.Pethick-Lawrence, The Sin of Self-Sacrifice (n.d).

newspaper *The Freewoman*).[303] For as the journalist Henry Nevinson discerned, within the W.S.P.U:

> (the vote) is a symbol to you not only of equality but of personality, a distinct and separate personality; and by personality, I mean the power of self-development, of self-assertion, throwing away those old trammels of self-abnegation, self-denial, and self-sacrifice which men have put on you for generations.[304]

Thus the vote had sacramental significance, being 'the outward and visible sign' of woman's inner emancipation and 'equal spiritual being'.[305] Or, in the even more fulsome language of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence:

> it means the release into the world of a new Soul - the Soul of women hitherto held in subjection and captivity.....The Woman's Movement means a new religion, or rather a return to its source - to the sacred Altar of the hearth; to the fount of birth and being. It means the beginning of a new morality, especially of that morality between women and men hitherto determined by the immediate convenience and interest of one sex only.....These great changes may yet not be apparent for generations after women have won the vote.....But without the vote and the equality symbolised by the vote, and the power given by the vote to women to work out their own salvation.....these new powerful impulses can never be given.[306]

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303. Issue 1, 23.11.11:3.

304. *VfW* 29.10.1909:69.

305. Canon Davis in *Suffragette* 16.1.14:311.

306. 'What the Vote means to those who are fighting the battle', *VfW* Jan 1908:49.

For suffragettes militancy therefore involved a moral and religious shift. Women, they acknowledged, were always ready to sacrifice themselves. As Christabel reflected however:

> Sometimes they sacrifice themselves rightly, and sometimes wrongly. When I think of the futile sacrifice which is being made every day we live by countless women, I think how well it would be if all that devotion, all that readiness to give could be directed towards great ends.....our sex is no excuse for submission, for sloth, and for yielding to injustice. The woman who shelters herself behind her sex, and says,'I need not come out to fight because I am a woman, and I ought not to', that woman either has not a woman's spirit, or has not the right woman's spirit.[307]

Therefore militancy was a virtue, for women should possess all human virtues: to be able to be fierce as well as mild. It was not right for women, any more than for men, 'to be incapable of a divine rage' or 'to be impotent to resist oppression'.[308] In such circumstances, as one Scottish cleric put it, women were not so much law-abiding, as 'lust-abiding'.[309]

Suffragette religious imagery

It has been rightly commented that Christabel's own brand of feminism was always religious in its absolute faith and passionate intensity, the secret of her appeal. Certainly the pages of *Votes for Women* and *The Suffragette* reveal constant use of religious, predominately Christian, ideas and imagery. In her Christmas message in 1913 for example, Christabel remarked

307. Report of Queen's Hall meeting, *VfW*31.12.08:33.

308. 'Militancy a Virtue', *Suffragette*10.1.13:186.

309. Alexander Webster, reported in *Suffragette*3.10.13:882.

that in her view the Christ story meant more perhaps to suffragettes than to any others living. Only those, she said, who are taking part in the chief crusade of their day could fully understand the meaning of Christ's life and death. The struggle Christ foretold was still in progress: what would he say to the scribes and pharisees 'who say and do not!?' It was the suffragettes, she asserted, who 'have taken up their cross and are ready to endure the penalty'.[310] It was because of this deep religious commitment that frustration and disillusion with institutional Christianity gradually grew so strong, culminating in Christabel's 'Appeal to God' against the Churches in 1913 and the vigorous actions directed at churches, bishops and clergy in the years 1913-14.[311]

As has been seen, such aspects of the suffrage movement were not exclusive to the W.S.P.U, but they were especially prominent here. For the W.S.P.U in some respects resembles the revivalist sect, more passionate and world-challenging than the established church of the National Union. As with Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Constance Lytton, suffragettes frequently spoke of their initial joining of the Cause in terms of a 'conversion' and one which involved a whole change of lifestyle, perhaps including extreme asceticism. Here the language of service and sacrifice was most boldly taken up in the name of the Cause: life, as for Mazzini,[312] was conceived as a mission, duty regarded as the fulfilment of a divine law, faith shown through works, and conscience was the criterion of truth. As Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence observed to Constance Lytton, as

310. *Suffragette* 26.12.13:250.

311. cf. ch.8, passim.

312. cf. ch.2, p.63.

she took her first steps in militancy:

> I do not know, and am quite content not to know, what it is that you have to do. But the ruler of human destiny knows - you have been led to us, for the fulfilment of your own life, for the accomplishment of your destiny and for the working out of a new deliverance for humanity.....you have been appointed, just as the little working girl Annie Kenney in the factory was appointed, just as we have each with our various experiences and powers been appointed to work out the divine will with regard to a new stage in the evolution of the human race - as I realize this, I am filled with worship and wonder and thanks and joy - for the song of Mary the Mother of the Messiah has been put into our mouths. What does the pain and the sorrow and the labour and the weariness matter? How little it weighs in the sum of things.[313]

It was 'a new gospel of deliverance to humanity that we have to preach' said Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence elsewhere:

> In the words of the Founder of our Faith we might say, 'The harvest surely is ripe, but the labourers are few'.....(let the readers of *VfW*) become from henceforth missionaries of the truth, spreaders of the light, preachers both in and out of season of the new ideal, of the transforming hope, teachers and revealers of the spirit of sacrifice, recruiters of labourers for the harvest, workers, organisers and initiators, makers of paths that shall lead on the human race to a new vision of life and a richer fulfilment of being.[314]

The suffragettes were caught, she believed, 'in the meshes of a Will that we may be used in the accomplishment of its

313. Letter 28.10.09, FL. Autograph Collection vol.20. quoted in Hume, p.55.

314. 'The Spirit of Sacrifice', *VfW* 9.5.12:459.

purpose'.[315] For:

> We then who saw in the Women's Movement the promise of awakening and regeneration for the world, have, in giving ourselves to be channels of it, become ourselves awakened to a new fulness of life, have become ourselves regenerated.....
> The word has gone forth. The rune of the awakening of the Soul of Womanhood has begun and will not end until in the visible world the strongholds of ignorance and materialism have been shaken to their foundations and overthrown, to give place to a new kingdom of the spirit which is to be established upon the earth.[316]

For Emmeline it was through the militant movement that the word thus became enfleshed, the ideal enacted:

> We must look for destruction. The smashing of the glass in West London last March was a symbol of deep significance. It was the breaking through of reality into a dream.....
> To play the game, while conscious that the game is being played through us! That is the essence of militancy.[317]

After the split with the Pankhursts the Pethick-Lawrences' mission went on therefore, driven by this sense of the ideal, 'the transforming Spirit of Illumination', the call to service, sacrifice and 'noblesse oblige':

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315. Speech in Wharncliffe Rooms to 'Votes for Women Fellowship', in *VfW* 20.12.12:183.

316. ibid.

317. ibid.

> According to the high traditions of the ancient militant Christian chivalry, the supreme duty of manhood was to fight the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed, to challenge tyranny in high places, to dethrone cruelty and to right wrong, even at the price of wounds and death.'[318]

Perhaps most striking of all is the language and imagery associated with the crucified saviour. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence once more illustrates the point in her 'Special Message' in *Votes for Women* on November 14 1911, written before leading a demonstration on which she knew she would be arrested. She would take one of her treasured possessions with her, she said: a little old-fashioned Russian cross. On the one side, it bore a crucifix. On the other side, the figure of the Mother and the Child was displayed:

> That seems to me to represent the whole human idea of this movement. It is a fight for the deliverance of humanity - crucified humanity. Not only man crucified, but the Woman doubly crucified - crucifixion on the cross of humanity and crucified also on the cross of motherhood. That is the inspiration at the back of our movement. It is the love of womanhood; love of childhood; love of the human race; love that must have its hands unbound so that those hands may be stretched out to help and minister to all who are in bondage and suffering. That love alone can inspire you to go forward, come what may.

This is on the one hand the culmination of the Victorian notion of woman's superior heroic mission. On the other hand it might be regarded as a form of what would now be called feminist liberation theology: unsystematic perhaps, but worked out with all the passion and rhetorical flourish of the crusading sect.

318. *VfW* 15.11.12:98.

It was also a shift from a nursing model of female service to a missionary and military model of saving womanhood.[319] In the great era of missionary and imperial expansion, it was natural for the most assertive wing of the women's movement to employ these prevailing dominant cultural forms to its own purpose. The mission of empire and the mission of women were closely allied in the minds of many suffragettes.[320] As with the Christian Imperialism of men such as Hugh Price Hughes, here there was the idea of chivalrous knights seeking to bring civilisation and higher levels of freedom to those in darkness. Suffrage workers, remarked Teresa Billington-Grieg, were 'in the true apostolic succession of the great fighters for freedom and progress' who passed down 'the lighted torch' through history.[321]

Military imagery was similarly commonplace in art and society. As Alan Wilkinson observed, in writing of the first world war:

> The public schools had taught their pupils patriotism, self-sacrifice, athleticism, spartan habits and discipline in the name of 'the manliness of Christ'.[322]

At a popular level, the imagery of the Christian life as one of warfare was universally diffused through well-known hymns and memories of baptismal promises. The Salvation Army (parallel in some ways, as has been seen, to the W.S.P.U)

319. I am grateful here to the insights of Anne Summers, passed on in conversation with Jacqueline de Vries Jones.

320. cf. e.g E.Pethick-Lawrence's letter to Vida Goldstein Dec. 17 1911, FL. Autograph Collection; and Ruth Rouse, Foreign Missions and the Women's Movement in the West (n.d).

321. *Vote* 18.2.11:198.

322. A.Wilkinson, The Church of England in the First World War (1978), p.12.

consistently used the metaphors of war. Preachers of all traditions reached all too readily for texts such as Ephesians 6:12 ('we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against.....the rulers of the darkness of this world'). Later, the potent biblical imagery of sacrifice was used to describe the slaughter of war, with some over-eager use of the more pathological imagery of apocalyptic.

In this context, the increasingly millenarian language of Christabel Pankhurst is understandable, as is her vigorous espousal of the war in 1914. Indeed, whilst a few militants took a pacifist line, Christabel was to see the war as a continuation of the suffragette mission, a cause defending the oppressed and purging the world of evil. Her later career as a Second Adventist followed naturally: evil, once primarily the province of males, and later associated with Germany, was then attributed to human nature as a whole.[323] For, as Christabel saw it in her book *The Lord Cometh!'* Christ was now the 'only hope of the world, for, by no human instrumentality can the world be cleansed and healed of its terrible ills'.[324] The white horses of freedom thus became the dark horses of the Apocalypse.[325]

From 1913 onwards W.S.P.U propaganda displayed a growing tendency to see the struggle for the vote as the working out of a dichotomy between the forces of good and evil. The political persuasiveness of martyrdom was over-estimated and the Pankhursts' tactical and objective perception became clouded by the rhetoric of millenarian eschatology.[326] That danger was

323. Rosen, p.270.

324. ibid, p.3.

325. cf. *Suffragette* 16.7.15:front page.

326. Rosen, pp.196, 244-5.

always present. As Henry Nevinson observed of his close friend Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, there was remarkable courage and eloquence, yet:

> To me, with inborn detestation of rhetoric, her speeches often flew too high.....I would murmur inwardly, 'For the love of God, come down. Give us some of that earthly and lowly humour with which your mind is full. Tell us one of those merry or pathetic stories that you have gathered in your long acquaintance with the working women of London. An aeroplane is magnificent, but it makes me tremble lest it nose-dive'.[327]

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence herself never let her advocacy of the militant mission sweep beyond all bounds of reason. On a number of occasions within the pages of *Votes for Women* for example, she sought to adduce the principles and restraints of conscience concerning such actions.[328] Such constraints were loosened however with her enforced departure from the W.S.P.U and as the dynamic of the militant bandwagon unrolled. No other militant leader was ever so convincing in statement of the main principles and the righteousness of the demand, observed Henry Nevinson, nor so influential upon the wealthy and respectable. Yet for all that, he reflected, the majority of audiences at W.S.P.U meetings had always preferred Christabel or Mrs.Pankhurst, since they 'gave a more satisfying sensation of blood', especially for those seeking 'the thrill of vicarious danger':

327. H.W.Nevinson, p.318.

328. See esp. 'Is It Right? Is It Wrong?', *VfW* 24.9.09:1178 and 'Christians, Awake!', *VfW* 27.12.12:194.

> The more violent and dangerous for others the proposals, the more vehemently they applauded.....
> If the Liberal government had burnt one of the leaders alive on the stage, they would have shrieked with indignant delight, and gone home to tea.[329]

The Women's Freedom League

Something more should be said at this point about the Women's Freedom League: partly because its founders broke away to found a more democratic organisation because of the autocratic, crusading character of the Pankhurst leadership; partly because it represented a distinct approach to the struggle, neither strictly constitutional nor unrestrained in militancy; and above all because of its particular links with Church suffragism.

The aims of the Women's Freedom League, as seen by its title, went further than the vote: seeking not only 'to secure for women the Parliamentary vote as it is, or may be granted to men', but also:

> to use the power thus obtained to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes and to promote the social and industrial well-being of the community.[330]

Such wider concerns were not only more actively pursued than by the W.S.P.U, but were also specifically adopted later by the Church League at its foundation. Here the most important influence was the W.F.L member Gertrude Hinscliff. After social work in Nottingham and east London, she had married the Revd. Claude Hinscliff who, as its first hon.secretary, helped found the the Church League with the inspiration and support of his wife and her closest colleagues.

329. H.W.Nevinson, pp.317-318.

330. *Vote* 8.9.09:4.

Indeed a particular stronghold of the Women's Freedom League was in south west London in Anerley, Croydon and Crystal Palace. This was considerably due to a number of dedicated churchwomen, notably the Fennings sisters Ethel, Jessie, Muriel and Agnes, who also built up and worked closely with the Church League after its creation. Another Anerley woman, Miss L.E.Turquand, was also instrumental in the establishment of the Free Church League.[331] In her case she was also much involved in the Tax Resistance League, closely allied as it was to the W.F.L ethos. For although W.F.L members were happy to take part in illegal actions or in deputations which led to arrest and prison, they sought to use tactics which stressed the 'soul-power' of civil disobedience rather than the sensationalism of violence. As Charlotte Despard outlined in early 1914:

> We believe that there have been moments in the history of every nation when laws had to be broken in order to prove that they harked behind the conscience of the people.....
> Therefore we resist taxation, we refuse to submit to the Insurance Act, we make protests in public places against the orders of the authorities.....
> But we use no violence, and we do not, at any time, or in any way, damage private property or inflict suffering and loss on our fellow human beings.[332]

The pages of *The Vote* and the work of the W.F.L thus picked up the religious and spiritual themes already described earlier in relation to the N.U.W.S.S and the W.S.P.U, albeit put into the W.F.L's distinctive expression. Here the most powerful voice was inevitably Charlotte Despard herself. As she wrote

331. See ch.6, pp.216-7, 220-221.

332. 'The Militant Policy of the W.F.L', *Vote* 6.2.14:243. The W.F.L also did not hold with disruption of meetings, seeking to avoid retaliation and valuing free speech highly.

characteristically in the Christmas edition of *The Vote* in 1913:

> One of the most significant signs (of the Son of Man) is the resurrection of woman.....
> That new and wonderful thing (the sign those of old looked to see) is a Social Conscience. It has had its spiritual birth in the sense of unity which marks our age.....
> Herein lies our hope.....the conception of a new mankind.....And - a new religion.[333]

Charlotte Despard was far from the only significant Christian feminist contributor to *The Vote* however, with Beatrice Kent, the co-educationalist pioneer Mrs. Ennis Richmond, Constance Maud and Gertrude Baillie-Weaver (pen-name Gertrude Colmore) making regular offerings.

Two other Christian feminist figures, Marion Holmes and Margaret Nevinson also demand particular mention. In the former's case, she demonstrates once again the long haul of the suffrage campaign and the essential stimulus provided for it by the first militant actions. Later editor of *The Vote*, her first years were spent at Dodsworth on the outskirts of Barnsley, where the experiences of death, injury and strikes amongst the mining community made a deep and lasting impression.[334] The beginnings of the militant movement thus tapped a profound reservoir of feeling:

333. 'The Sign of the Son of Man', 24.12.13:144.

334. Autobiographical note in Suffragette Fellowship Collection 60.50/12, Museum of London.

> By that time I was definitely set on the path of feminism. My mother had talked to me about votes for women in my schooldays and I had often heard her defend the aims and activities of Lydia Becker and the other pioneers of the movement. For their strictly decorous agitation was condemned and sneered at by the 'womanly' women and 'manly' men of their day with almost the same animus as the later developments aroused.[335]

Before the turn of the nineteenth century Marion Holmes had already become an active suffragist, forming and presiding over the Margate Pioneer Society, whose aims included female enfranchisement. In 1906, as a result of her encounter with militant workers, she then found herself, as she later reflected, realising 'with some dismay' that her often voiced opinion that 'women would have to go to prison before they would get the vote' had 'come home to roost':

> I had heard my mother say it, and I said it without realising I might be one of the women.[336]

This however was necessary in her eyes. For not only did it help gain the vote, she considered later, but it also shattered so many 'contemptuous ideas' of women's inferiority.

On her part, Margaret Nevinson's story displays the inner struggle and courage required of first wave Christian feminists. For as a gifted individual and devoted churchwoman she had had to battle hard against the dual constraints of domesticity and theology that her age put around her. She possessed, according to one pen-picture:

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335. Autobiographical note, SFC 60.50/12 M.o.L.

336. ibid.

> a ready fund of humour, is intensely sympathetic, and brings to this many-sided question the vast experience of a woman who, in her capacity on the Hampstead Board of Guardians and Education Committee, has had the opportunity of studying the sad side of life at close quarters.[337]

'A graphic and moving writer',[338] Margaret Nevinson was also active in the Women Writer's Suffrage League and the Forward Cymric Suffrage Union, having become one of the earliest members of the W.S.P.U in Hampstead in 1905. Her writings, notably on workhouse reform, were powerful examples of the deep social concern of the W.F.L. A committed peace campaigner, after the war she was also a strong advocate for women magistrates (becoming a J.P herself in 1920). As a keen supporter of women preachers, she also found herself breaking new ground here.[339]

Despite these achievements, Margaret Nevinson had a life-long struggle for self-expression. As a child she was greatly blessed in being the daughter of the Revd.Timothy Jones, a Welsh speaking Welshman, classical scholar and supporter of the Oxford Movement. For whilst her mother upbraided him for encouraging Margaret's education, his love and sympathetic support proved a lasting strength, even after his sudden death plunged his family into comparative poverty. The tension in her experience between her father's encouragement and the discrimination she encountered elsewhere thus appears to have been a continued stimulus to her feminism. Marriage and her own family reinforced this. For whilst her husband was himself

337. *Vote* 9.12.09:76.

338. ibid.

339. M.W.Nevinson, Life's Fitful Fever (1926), pp.284-5.

publicly a committed feminist, Margaret's own feminist campaigning and personal career were considerably limited by the domestic demands laid upon her. Furthermore, although she was a woman of deep religious sensibility, within her Church she always had a struggle to belong. After being exposed to the chill winds of late nineteenth century scepticism during a twelve month stay in Germany in the 1880s, she lost and then gained a purged faith. Neither her powers of reason nor her spiritual sensitivity were ever however properly utilised.

Margaret Nevinson' story therefore highlights many of the strains upon her fellow suffragists. The W.F.L in this respect was more successful than its larger militant rival in identifying with the wider needs of working class women and basing its claim to enfranchisement upon equal rights. Yet it too was constrained by other factors. Not only was much traditional sexual stereotyping unquestioned within its campaigns[340] and measures such as birth control unacceptable (and anathema to the Catholicism of Charlotte Despard), but it was also drawn towards the monomaniac focus of the Pankhursts. Certainly this was the view of a former W.F.L leader Teresa Billington-Grieg, as she explained her resignation in 1911. For there were, she affirmed, two objects of militancy:

> the smaller one was the winning of the Parliamentary vote; the greater one was the woman's right to be herself, the undermining of the custom, habit and convention which bar the way to the real emancipation of women.....(Now) the greater emancipation of women is being sacrificed in the haste for immediate enfranchisement.[341]

340. cf. 'Suffragettes at Home' series, *Vote* March-May 1910.

341. *Vote* 21.1.11, quoted in Garner, p.43.

The 'logic' and the costs of militancy

What then indeed is to made of the great sacrifices made in the struggle?: so many sacrifices, ranging from innumerable costly gifts of time, energy, health, friendship and reputation to the ultimate loss of life itself. Did this religiosity of the militants lead them from one type of self-sacrifice to another?

The militant campaign was certainly crucial in breaking through the publicity barrier. For, as the 'constitutional' suffragist Mary Stocks commented later, the militants offered a new method to the earlier organisations. To this degree, in creating new space to educate, 'the constitutionalists' were 'parasitic' upon the suffragettes (at least, observed Mary Stocks, until 1912). Yet the suffragettes were also 'parasitic' upon the respectability, political experience and contacts of the N.U.W.S.S. Beyond differences of structure and personality, they therefore performed complementary functions: the one building up goodwill amongst the political classes; the other securing public attention, displaying and passion and heroism.[342]

Not that suffragists were so even handed at the time. Frances Balfour, for example, admired the courage and resource of militants such as her fellow church suffragist the W.F.L activist Muriel Matters.[343] By 1912 however, they were, she felt, 'all drunk with vanity, & the love of going a warring'.[344] Even as early as 1909 she was growing increasingly convinced that militancy was 'killing the effectiveness' of the N.U.W.S.S. For all their liberal and democratic inheritance, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were vulnerable to the charge of lack of

342. Stocks, pp.67-8.

343. Letters 14.2.08 and 2.11.12, bundles 337 and 344, Balfour Papers.

344. Letter 4.3.12, bundle 344, BP.

balance, and of creating 'a type of self-subjection'. As Teresa Billington-Grieg expressed it:

> the yoke is imposed by a mingling of elements of deliberately worked up emotion, by the exercise of affectional and personal charm, by an all-pervading system of mutual glorification.[345]

As Brian Harrison outlined, the 'suffragette' was the product of a long sequence of events. Within the W.S.P.U membership, 'an escalating process of commitment' took place, akin to the development of militant religious sect: through a developing insulation from surrounding society; a growth of internal solidarity; a repudiation of the values of the wider society; and an escalation in the types of militancy that were considered necessary.[346]

Militant tactics were therefore no sudden aberration, nor a spasm of madness amongst a few over-excited women. Rather they were the result of the steadfast refusal of men of power to engage seriously with the woman question. Politicians of all parties were most at fault in this respect, but also others, including many leading churchmen. The Press also must take some blame: frequently refusing to cover quiet constitutional or non-violent activities, however large they might be. Nor was it just blindness, wilful or otherwise, that led to the employment of more militant tactics. It was also the experience of violence that women themselves endured, in the face of official incomprehension. Peaceful demonstration commonly brought with it severe harassment. Margaret Nevinson again provides a good example of the courage required even by non-militant

345. 'Emancipation in a Hurry', *New Age* 12.1.11, quoted in B.Harrison, Peacable Kingdom, Stability and Change in Modern Britain (1982), pp.67-8.

346. B.Harrison, p.42.

activity. Like many suffragists, she struggled at first to engage in political activity, such as speaking at street corners:

> I could not overcome my Victorian prejudices; it seemed such a vulgar thing to do, and I shrunk from the rudeness and the violence, the rotten eggs and the garbage.[347]

The several month long W.F.L picket of the House of Commons in 1909 was, she felt, a 'Calvary of Womanhood',[348] in terms of the endurance required. Suffrage demonstrations often brought the worst out of men, both in the crowd and amongst the police. Women were struck, kicked and molested, such was male 'chivalry'. 'Black Friday', November 18 1910, was the worst. Several women were seriously injured in the melée outside the House of Commons, and two died soon afterwards (one of whom was Emmeline Pankhurst's sister).

Nor should too firm a line be drawn between militants and other suffragists. Until 1909 the constitutionalist leader Millicent Garrett-Fawcett appears to have applauded the effects of the W.S.P.U shock tactics, and may herself have considered advocating others to follow suit. The last phase of militancy, with its arson attacks on public buildings, was to put particular strain on more conventional suffrage supporters. Yet even this was not entirely reprehensible in the context of the failure of the all-party Conciliation Bills; the resistance and equivocations of the Government, and its contrasting response to the mutiny of Ulster and aggressive industrial agitation; and, above all, in the face of the continued forcible feeding of suffragette prisoners. So, as the Revd.E.H.Taylor, one of the clergy supporters of

347. M.W.Nevinson, p.212.

348. *Vote* 14.5.10:30.

militancy, put it in a sermon in 1913,[349] there was a logic to militancy, 'the logic of sacrifice.....the most powerful logic there ever was, or will be. It impels, it attracts'. Or as R.J.Campbell expressed it, preaching on Good Friday 1913 at the City Temple:

> The blood of Christ is still being shed in the sufferings of those who give themselves in the service of the ideal good.....These women are in deadly earnest: so much so that.....they would welcome death itself if that would secure the triumph of their cause. It is a just and righteous cause, which, like all other spiritual movements, will enter its kingdom by the Cross.[350]

This spiritualised language of the militants reached its peak, not surprisingly, in accounts of the physical and spiritual struggles associated with forcible feeding. Quite consciously, the suffragettes saw this as the battle of idealism against materialism,[351] of moral force against physical force: literally a contest between the spirit and the flesh. Indeed some saw this as the ironic reversal of Eve tempting Adam,[352] the rejection of the poisoned apple.

Instead of the old Eve, the suffragette spirit looked to a 'Newer Eve', to use the words of Francis Thompson, adopted as the slogan of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society. This Eve was the self-possessed mistress of her own destiny, and the mother of a new creation. As in the writings of Olive Schreiner, so popular with suffragettes, a new paradise would come,

349. Reported in *Suffragette*19.9.13:851.

350. *Suffragette*28.3.13:392.

351. e.g Elaine Kidd in Materialism and the Militants (n.d).

352. Vicinus, p.271.

through the suffering and resurrection of woman. Opponents, observed Charlotte Despard, were very fond of quoting from Genesis: 'Thy desire shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule over thee'. They failed to realise, she contested, that that was given not as a blessing, but as a curse.[353] Like Schreiner in her book *Woman and Labour*, with clear echoes of the eugenic and imperial debates, Mrs.Despard felt that woman's increasing dependence had left her increasingly handicapped to rear a fine race. Now however, the 'great mother-heart' was beating again, and woman was recovering her 'royal gift of independence' which had been lost at the Fall, to the benefit of her sisters (and her brothers). In Schreiner's words:

> We also have our dream of a Garden: but it lies in a distant future. We dream that woman shall eat of the tree of the knowledge together with man, and that side by side and hand close to hand, through ages of much toil and labour, they shall together raise about them an Eden nobler than any the Chaldean dreamed of; an Eden created by their own labour and made beautiful by their own fellowship.[354]

From apples to horses. The story of the suffragette spirit does not end with Emily Wilding Davison, and her death in June 1913 after the incident with the King's horse on the racetrack at Epsom. Yet in many ways this is its culmination. Recent biography has rightfully done much to reclaim her actions from the interpretation of 'suicide'.[355] What has never been in doubt is her Christian commitment and her understanding of herself as following the path of true soldiers of the Cross. Her great

353. *Vote* 1.7.11:128.

354. O.Schreiner, Woman and Labour (1978 ed.), p.282.

355. cf. Morley & Stanley, esp.pp.161-166.

statement of faith is the essay 'The Price of Liberty', published posthumously in *The Suffragette* on 5 June 1914.[356] This clearly identified 'the true suffragette' as 'an epitome of the determination of women to possess their own souls'. Quoting the words of Jesus 'what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?' - Emily claimed that it was 'the realisation of this ideal' that was 'moving the most advanced of the feminists to stand out at all costs'. For, in an explicit criticism of Christian tradition, she asserted that men had withheld from woman:

> that which is above all temporal things, namely, the possession of a soul, the manifestation of the Godhead within.....(Men) have beautified and decorated the shrine, but they have kept it empty of the divinity which gave a significance to the paraphernalia of the shrine.

Such a tendency had been especially prevalent in the early Church, when it had been seriously discussed whether women even possessed souls. 'Sufficient doubt on the subject was raised', said Emily, 'to condemn the sex from that time onward to an inferior position in the community'. To overcome this, the Price of Liberty could only be gained by being prepared to give up the most valuable things of all (Friendship, Good Report, Love, and even Life itself). For 'the perfect Amazon' was she who would sacrifice all:

> to re-enact the tragedy of Calvary for generations yet unborn, that is the last consummate sacrifice of the Militant!

Drawing upon figures of speech beyond those of 'practical

356. p.129.

politics', this, as Andrew Rosen pointed out,[357] was not unlike the classical millenarian vision:

> in which achievement of the 'perfect age' demands of the faithful some kind of ordeal that will magically make them worthy - a difficult journey, the building of a city in the hills, the carrying out of ritual or ascetic purification, or the perpetuation of violence.[358]

Aside from suffrage opponents, her 'sacrifice' was thus not well viewed by some suffragists, perceiving such methods as 'wicked' and injurious to the cause.[359]

Yet such a spirit drew the approval of many who did not necessarily agree with Emily's acts. Tributes were to abound in the suffrage press after her death:

> Something new is with us (said the Free *Church Suffrage Times*)[360] - the love of women for women, and of this new passion, Miss Davison's death is the supreme expression, and perhaps, the price. Although we deplore the passing of an heroic soul from bodily presence among us, the world is richer for a great deed done on it.

Thousands upon thousands of people gathered in London for her service and the funeral procession to Kings Cross, with at least 30 000 more in Morpeth for her burial. As Canon Todd commented at her memorial service at St.George's, Bloomsbury, a year after her death:

356. Rosen, pp.198-201.

358. ibid.

359. cf. Inskip's address to Newcastle Women's Suffrage demonstration, 5 June 1913, reported in Newcastle Chronicle 6.6.13:7.

360. August 1913:26.

> is such devotion so common in this world, is this exaltation of the spirit such a drug on our markets that we can afford to despise it?.....Shall we not thank God, yes in our sorrow thank God, that such things are possible?[361]

The militant achievement

Many criticisms were made then, and can be made today, by those otherwise sympathetic to suffragette aims. Whilst the vigour of language and action is understandable in the heat of the campaign, the militants always ran the risk of losing their strategic objectivity. Inveterate opponents such as Hensley Henson, Dean of Durham, might have been congenitally alarmed by anything smacking of a crusade, but even supporters could see dangers. For in retrospect, the militant woman as a type bore the marks of her age, for ill as well as good. In the great age of Evolution, it was natural for reformers to see themselves as part of a great process of spiritual renewal. The Great War however was to land some terrible blows upon the Romantic/Idealist tradition, just as the emphasis on chivalry marks a passing phase in women's history, after which 'noblesse oblige' was not such a central motivating force. Moreover, although Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence appears to have attempted at various points to work out the conscientious restraints on militant developments, and tried to disdain the language of martyrdom,[362] others were less sensitive. Christabel declared characteristically, 'We care the most', in the first edition of *The Suffragette*, following the ousting of the Pethick-Lawrences. Such spiritual arrogance not only ran the risk of enraging others, but also perhaps of ultimately justifying anything. Other

361. Reported in *Suffragette* 12.6.14:153.

362. e.g in *VfW* 23.4.09:577,and27.12.12:194.

religious suffragists active in the labour movement, such as Margaret Bondfield and Katherine St.John Conway, felt such a charge particularly keenly. They became especially angry at the suffragettes' 'specially made history' and the exaggerated importance they saw given to acts of 'vandalism' over broader women's campaigns.[363] For similar reasons, the W.S.P.U was renamed by some, with much feeling, as the Women's *Society People's* Union Even some militant feminists began to feel that in its latter stages, the suffragettes were turning the vote from a potent symbol into a mere fetish: seeking, in Teresa Billington-Grieg's words, 'Women's Emancipation in a Hurry'. Not all militant self-sacrifice could thus be easily justified. As Mary Stocks later commented, it could also lead to spiritual as well as physical martyrdom:

> the poisoning of mental endurance by those quickly moving years of white-hot excitement, the paralysis of intellectual responsibility by willing subjection to a dominant (i.e Pankhurst) human will.[364]

By August 1914 the suffragettes' political impact was on the wane, despite the continued escalation of tactics. As Lloyd George observed privately in February 1913, '100 000 women in the street would mean something. At present a mere handful and greatly declining'.[365] In which light, it was Mrs.Fawcett's National Union and Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation which by the eve of the war were showing the greatest political acumen: the former with its growing political alliance with the labour

363. J.Ramsey MacDonald, Margaret Ethel MacDonald (1912), p.204. See further ch.7, pp.270-272.

364.Quoted in B.Harrison,(1982), p.41.

365.Quoted in B.Harrison (1982), p.56.

movement,[366] the latter with the potent combination of mass demonstrations and personal martyrdom.[367]

Mary Stocks later justly commented that the outbreak of war in 1914 may have saved Mrs.Pankhurst and the W.S.P.U from an 'ignominious end. It had shot its bolt'. Yet, she also remarked, 'what an effective bolt it had been!'[368] However over-narrow in its aim, over-rich in its rhetoric, and tactically inept in later years, the suffragette spirit was nonetheless creative. For, despite its errors, it also represented joyful affirmation, a moral and spiritual awakening. Indeed, for the Revd. J.Ivory Cripps it was:

> the Soul of Womanhood coming at last to self-consciousness, crying aloud for light and freedom and a place in the sun.[369]

Such a spirit belonged to a particular age and stage in women's emancipation. Just as the labour movement passed through a phase of 'religious socialism', so the women's movement was at this point imbued with religiosity. After the first world war, with memories of its horrors and with fresh opportunities opened to it, the women's movement turned to the more prosaic tasks of legislating change. In the world of the tank and the aeroplane, the age of chivalry was literally gone. In which regard, it might be argued that the suffrage movement

366. cf. Hume, pp.195-7 and Holton, p.6.

367. B.Harrison (1982), pp.55-56.

368. Stocks, p.78.

369. 'The Religious Basis of Feminism', *FCST* October 1913:64.

was to some degree stuck in a time-warp.[370] Its religiosity in this sense was both an expression of women's continued exclusion from the political process and of the persistent vitality of the Victorian tradition of women's evangelical mission. Such religious commitment in no way precluded later political involvement, as the careers of non-militant suffragists such as Edith Picton-Turbervill and Margaret Bondfield attest. The suffrage campaign (especially in its constitutionalist guise) made no small contribution to the education of women in techniques of democratic agitation. Yet the revivalist, sectarian ethos of the militant campaign was perhaps no training ground for the political requirements of the future. Bound to the moral heroism of Joan of Arc, such a romantic spirit almost inevitably demanded ultimate sacrifice and death as the price of retaining its purity, and the primal innocence of its vision and vocation.

Denied access to male public space, it is understandable that women should have placed such stress on conscience and inner psychic space. With the vote obtained in 1918, the feminist spirit had to find other forms of expression within the body politic. Like the cavalry of the first world war, the suffragette 'horses' were thus only too quickly an anachronism. Brian Harrison has also pointed out how skilful the suffragettes were later in creating the myth that it was essentially through their actions that the vote was won.[371] Yet they served their purpose, and in so doing left behind them a great legacy and inspiration which deserves Christian feminist recognition. When Christabel died, *The Catholic Citizen* contained an obituary entitled 'The Girl

370. I am again grateful here to insights of Anne Summers and Jacqueline de Vries.

371. B.Harrison (1982), p.80.

who slew the Dragon'.[372] That was part of her greatness. Campaigning against the great scourge of women's oppression in her day, she did so in the consecrated tradition of Evangelical Victorian religion. Christabel's genius was to take this further. Perhaps that spirit was not entirely balanced in its conviction, too millenarian and too militaristic at the last. Yet, with Emily Wilding Davison, Charlotte Despard and the lesser known lights of militant movement, Christabel and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence represent a great moral and religious leap forward in woman's consciousness.

372. cf. V.Brittain, Pethick-Lawrence. A Portrait (1963), p.206.

Chapter Five

'FOR THE HONOUR OF THE CHURCH'

(The Suffrage and the Church League)

> Why not a religious league for what was clearly a religion to many? Why should not the prayers of the faithful strengthen the hands of those who worked and suffered? Why not a Church League ?[373]

Beginnings

By 1909 the W.S.P.U had clearly established women's franchise as a vital issue in public life, greatly widening the impact of the suffrage movement. Consequently, several sectional suffrage societies now began to emerge,[374] extending suffragist influence into specific areas of society. The Church League for Women's Suffrage (C.L.W.S.) was one of these, prompted on the one hand by mainstream religious apathy and opposition to the suffrage movement, and on the other hand by the enthusiasm of churchpeople already involved.

For hitherto, although many lay people, and several clergy, had played a useful part in suffrage work, no specifically religious organisation had been founded. Individual contributions had sometimes been well publicised, such as notable suffrage sermons and speeches by supportive clergy. Early in the new century for example, the N.U.W.S.S published a pamphlet *Woman's Suffrage. Opinions of Leaders of Religious Thought* (with contributions from several leading churchmen and

373. M.W.Nevinson - 'How the Church League was Founded', C.L.W.S *Monthly Paper* May 1913:217.

374. e.g the Actresses Franchise League in 1908.

the Chief Rabbi)[375] but this was still a collection of otherwise separated views. The Church in general still lagged well behind progressive opinion in terms of support for women's suffrage and no corporate structures had emerged.[376]

Women's voices were however beginning to be raised within the churches, both for recognition of women in church structures and the broader issues that affected their gender. In particular, churchwomen already actively involved in the suffrage movement had begun to feel the need for specific Church action. 'Conscious', therefore, 'of the need for Divine support in a struggle which sorely taxed faith and courage' a little group of such women began to meet in the early part of 1909 for prayer and intercession.[377]

The final trigger for the formation of the first religious League was the long vigil made by the W.F.L pickets outside Parliament between 5th July and 28th October 1909 (a total of 14 000 hours). Like other observers, H.G.Wells found the spectacle:

> extraordinarily impressive - infinitely more impressive than the feeble-forcible 'ragging' of the more militant section.[378]

It clearly had great spiritual effect, a seeming continuation of the religious efforts of the earlier pioneers: as one old Quaker lady,

375.Contributors to the 4th edition (1905) for example were the Bishops of Exeter, Hereford, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Bishop Barry; Canon Barnett and Canon Scott-Holland, Archdeacons Wilberforce and Wilson, the Revd. J.Llewellyn Davies, W.Moore Ede and John Hunter; the Roman Catholic Canon Brenan, the Free Church leaders Scott Lidgett, Professor Lindsay, J.B.Paton and Philip Wicksteed; and Rabbi Adler.

376. See also ch.8, pp.304-5 for McCabe's apposite criticism.

377. 'C.L.W.S. What it is and How it works', C.L.W.S *MP* June 1913:229.

378. The New Machiavelli (1911), p.293.

giving her thanks to Margaret Nevinson on picket duty, reflected:

> I used to help Mrs. Josephine Butler, and now, when I am well enough, I go out at night with the rescue-workers.....All my life I have felt there ought to be better opportunities for women, and I am glad I have lived to see women standing together and demanding justice. We have seen the vision, and where there is no vision the people perish! We shall win, have faith in God - 'he watching over Israel slumbereth not nor sleeps.'[379]

The Revd. Claude Hinscliff, one of the most regular male supporters of the pickets, agreed. Discerning a similar vision, he began to conceive the idea of a Church League. After talking with those pickets who were churchwomen, the idea germinated. An enthusiastic inaugural meeting was then held at the Essex Hall on December 2nd: a meeting which, in Margaret Nevinson's view, drew 'back to the church of their baptism many wanderers from the fold'.[380]

Rationale

Four specific considerations lay behind the new society.[381] Firstly the League saw itself as an outflowing of its founders' perception of women's enfranchisement as being in harmony with the teaching of Jesus. They were suffragists, they asserted, because they were Christians: impelled by the Christian ethic to overcome the subjection of one sex to another, just as they were constrained to promote such causes as temperance and purity. Then secondly, the C.L.W.S thought that the women's movement

379. 'How the Church League was Founded', *MP* May 1913:.217.

380. ibid.

381. 'Why the Church League Exists', *MP* June 1913:228.

was one of the greatest forces of the times, and that its final triumph was assured. To ensure therefore that this brought liberty to women, rather than licence, the League believed it was essential to join the struggle, so as to influence it from within. Thirdly the Church League saw itself as offering the opportunity of corporate communion, bringing strength and refreshment through the power of prayer. Finally, and most significantly, the C.L.W.S saw itself as banding together as Church people 'for the honour of the Church'. For although it felt that 'the debt of women to the Church can hardly be overestimated', the League recognised that the Church was regarded by many as 'indifferent or hostile to women's self-realisation and service': an attitude apparently symbolically enshrined in the woman's vow to 'obey' in the Marriage Service, which enraged many at this time. Hence, the *Monthly Paper* declared:

> if our Church League can do something, and it has already done much, to make it clear that Church people do really care about justice, we may yet be recognised, in quarters whence we are now looked upon askance, as having striven, and not in vain, to retain for the Church the love and allegiance of many who have proved in the past its most loyal and devoted servants.[382]

Organisation

Membership was opened to all who were members of the Church of England, or of Churches in full communion with it. Within these devotional limits however, the C.L.W.S sought:

382. June 1913:228.

> to band together, on a non-party basis, Suffragists of every shade of opinion who are Churchpeople in order to
> 1. Secure for Women the Parliamentary Vote as it is or may be granted to men.
> 2. Use the power thus obtained to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes.
> 3. Promote the moral, social, and industrial well-being of the community.[383]

These objects were adopted at the inaugural meeting, at which the breadth of Christian suffragism was well represented. For, following an address by the London magistrate Cecil Chapman (as chairman), there were six main speakers: Maude Royden (of the N.U.W.S.S), the Revd. Hugh Chapman (chaplain of the Chapel Royal, Savoy), Marion Holmes (editor of the Women's Freedom League newspaper *The Vote*), the Revd. Dr.Cobb (rector of St.Ethelburga's, Bishopgate), Edith Mansell-Moullin (of the W.S.P.U, speaking as Honorary Treasurer of the Church Socialist League) and Kenneth Richmond (representing the Christian Social Union). After these contributions, Dr.Jane Walker and F.P.B.Shipham then moved the actual resolution to set up the League.[384]

Much of the burden of organisation fell to Claude Hinscliff. After obtaining a licentiate in Theology through Hatfield College, Durham in 1896, he had worked in a series of curacies before coming to work with Maurice Bell in Regent's Park in 1909.[385]

383. *MP* May 1912:28.

384. Programme. FL box 396.

385. Maurice Bell later recalled that Hinscliff had placed an advertisement, which 'simply stated that he was "a Socialist and a Suffragist". I believe that mine was the only reply he received!' *MP* March 1918:31.

Perhaps not the greatest of speakers,[386] his enthusiasm for the Cause was however second to none among Anglican clergy. A tireless worker, the continual round of meetings up and down the country eventually took its toll upon him. After the Church Congress in October 1911 he was afflicted with acute inflammation of his heart,[387] a condition which was to contribute to a forced break from suffrage business, on doctor's orders, in 1914, and to his resignation as honorary organiser shortly afterwards.[388]

Hinscliff's energetic drive was supported by several other dedicated suffragists, not least his wife Gertrude. Key figures on the Executive also included Frances Sterling (who brought her experience of the N.U.W.S.S Executive to bear in her role as Chairman), Ethel Seymour Bennett (as honorary treasurer, following Miss J.F.Bell) and Frank Shewell Cooper (as honorary secretary). Other important contributors to the organisation were to be Maud Bell (Press secretary), Lieutenant and Mrs. Joan Cather, the Revd. F.M.Green (editor of the *Monthly Paper*), the Revd. C.Llewellyn Smith (honorary propaganda secretary) and, with Hinscliff's retirement, his successor as organiser Louisa Corben (a previous worker for suffrage in Bristol and Monmouthshire).

Unlike the later Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, men therefore shared prominence with women in leadership and organisation. This was partly due to the C.L.W.S view of the women's movement as a 'humanist', rather than partial 'feminist', cause: a belief owing much to Maude Royden's advocacy. This

386. Edward Hicks' diary, 28 Jan 1914, observed that he spoke 'chaotically'.

387. *MP* June 1912:40.

388. *MP* August 1914:139.

brought practical benefits, with male clergy being particularly encouraged to play a full part, opening up their churches to the suffrage message. It also helped the C.L.W.S to become a not insignificant pressure group within the Church on this and other women's issues. Much larger for example than the Church Socialist League, it was able both to effect a similar kind of campaigning and to extend its support into the ranks of the more influential churchmen. Indeed six bishops were drawn into the campaign: Hicks of Lincoln (who became President), Percival of Hereford, Hamlyn of Norwich, Maud of Kensington, Mounsey of Labuan and Sarawak, and Bishop Powell who had become vicar of St.Saviour's in Poplar. In addition several leading men in other prestigious Church positions gave their name and energies, even though some, like Hicks, sometimes felt themselves to be 'outsiders' within the Establishment.[389]

From the beginning the League sought to be a democratic body. It was governed by a General Council, elected by the branches, which met twice annually (on one occasion electing the Executive Committee). Above all however, the growth of the C.L.W.S was due to the commitment of its speakers on the ground, in meetings large and small, and to the day to day work of ordinary members in sharing their word. In this respect, whatever the publicity value of senior, or even junior, clergy, the League, like other suffrage groups, rested firmly on the deep commitment and shared fellowship of its women. Several churchmen, notably Hinscliff, Maurice Bell, Charles Baumgarten, G.H.Davis, H.K.Hope and W.C.Roberts, like George Lansbury (perhaps the most outstanding of all male Church suffragists)[390]

389. cf. Diary entry 29 January 1914. In Hicks case, he sometimes felt that his Nonconformist and trade family roots were held against him.

390. See ch.7, pp.295-300.

were unstinting in their support. As consideration of branch activities shows however, all but a handful of branch secretaries were female, in addition to the bulk of the membership.[391] The expertise of experienced women suffragists formed the backbone of the Church League: drawn from all quarters, whether from the N.U.W.S.S in the form of women such as Frances Balfour and Louise Creighton, or from the militant bodies, in the case of other tireless workers such as Muriel Matters and Florence Canning. Indeed, only Hinscliff himself in the formative years could match the dedication of Maude Royden, whose knowledge of her subject and power of speech outstripped all within Church circles.

Branch development

Since the origins of the League lay with that particular group of churchwomen who were involved directly in the storm centre of the suffrage movement, most of the first branches were inevitably established in the capital, particularly in north west and south east London.[392] Gradually however, branches were started in most parts of the nation, partly mirroring the degree of existing suffrage activity in each region.

Their location suggests that they built upon strong existing commitments by Christian suffragists. It is not surprising for example, to find Richmond & Kew, Anerley and Hampstead among the very first branches established. At Richmond, Clara, Edwy and their daughter Hilda Clayton were already prominent

391.Of 67 branches listed in the C.L.W.S *Monthly Paper* for February 1913, three had men as secretaries. The evidence (in the *Monthly Papers*) of branch reports and lists of donors, and of subscribers to the Central branch suggests that men formed around 13% of the total membership, about 8% being clergy.

392. Of the first fifteen branches, ten were in London: in Anerley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lewisham, Hampstead, Hendon, Kensington, Regent's Park, Richmond & Kew, and Willesden (C.L.W.S 1st Annual Report (1910), FL. box 396.11B).

in the W.S.P.U, so that Hilda naturally assumed the role of C.L.W.S secretary. Similarly in Anerley, the Fennings sisters were very active members of the W.F.L. In Hampstead there were also several determined Christian feminists, including Mrs. Lilian Hicks (an active feminist campaigner on various issues for many years, and now a militant suffragist), Alice Kidd (later leader of the Suffragist Churchwomen's Protest Committee), Mabel and Percy Dearmer, and other progressive Anglicans associated with St.Mary's, Primrose Hill. Such areas were clearly initially targeted by the Church League, with Mrs. Hylton Dale undertaking to organise branches in south west London, and Mrs. Maurice Bell organising in north west London, in addition to the efforts of Claude Hinscliff and Katherine Margesson further afield.[393]

March 3rd 1910 saw the launch of the first branch at Regent's Park, where the Hinscliffs were based and Maurice Bell was vicar of St.Mark's. Meetings then grew apace. By November 1910 it was clear that the C.L.W.S was to be a successful enterprise, usefully extending the range of the suffrage movement. For as *The Vote* commented, the Church League meeting in Suffrage Week had drawn a:

> large and enthusiastic audience, many of whom were women who have not been gathered into other societies and who feel more at home in a league which is formed under the aegis of the Church.[394]

The London branches continued to grow in number, and even in 1914 numbered over 20% of the total, but the League had by

393. *Vote*23.12.09:105.

394. 19.11.10:39.

then spread into most parts of the country.[395] In England, branches were quickly established in Bath, Brighton, Leamington, Oxford and Southport, and in Scotland Edinburgh also had its own organisation by the end of 1910.[396] Expansion was undoubtedly partly dependent on particular personal commitments. The agency of a sympathetic clergyman and/or his wife (as with the Hopkinsons at Whitburn, near Sunderland) was an important factor in some places. Other branches were consequent upon C.L.W.S campaigning at Church Congresses: as in Middlesborough and nearby Darlington, both formed, with the aid of supportive clergy, after the Church Congress at Middlesborough in 1912.[397] Elsewhere, the presence of existing vibrant suffrage and/or radical traditions were also conducive to Church suffrage organisation. Of the eighteen new branches in 1911,[398] it is thus not surprising to see the names of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Sheffield, alongside that of Worcester (where Dean Moore Ede, a former Rector of Gateshead, was a long time ally of social, educational and suffrage advance).

Perhaps more surprising might seem the number of branches established on the south coast. This however again considerably reflects existing Christian feminist dedication to the suffrage cause, represented by women such as Kate Close (honorary secretary of the C.L.W.S branch, and W.F.L member) and Helen Sprott (a militant suffragist who, amongst other actions, was to

395. Of those listed in the *Monthly Paper* for August 1912, the greatest concentration of clergy members was based in London (35 members), Birmingham & the West Midlands (23), South East London outside London (13), and the North East (11).

396. Annual Report (1910), p.39.

397. Annual Report (1912), p.17.

398. Annual Report (1911), p.11.

lead a vigorous W.S.P.U campaign at the Southampton Church Congress).[399] The only areas of England not to have a significant Church League presence were the north west (beyond Southport) and the south west (beyond Axminster). In Wales, branches were also restricted to Cardiff, Newport and Swansea in the south. Scotland was to have its own particular church suffragist organisation,[400] in addition to C.L.W.S branches in Edinburgh and Glasgow. There were also Church League links with the U.S.A, where the Hinscliffs had intended to visit in 1914, and where (through the agency of Emily Carr of Washington D.C and Ellen Leaf of Philadelphia) it was hoped to begin the establishment of a Pan-Anglican League.[401]

Ireland was a special case, hampered by its particular religious and political climate. Supported by her sisters, Miss M.L.I.Stack nonetheless proved a vigorous Church League organiser after a branch was formed in October 1912. Irish Church suffragists were frustrated in 1913 by the refusal of St.Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin to grant permission to hold a service, despite a petition of some 1 300 names, owing to the C.L.W.S refusal to disavow or disassociate itself from the militants.[402] Thanks however to the work of the Stacks, aided by the support of the Bishop of Limerick (C.L.W.S Vice-President for Ireland) and clergy such as J.S.Carolin and Canon J.Godfrey Day, the League was able to advance. Indeed, unlike most branches, the Irish continued to make good progress during the 1st World

399. *Suffragette*22.7.13:787.

400. See ch.6, pp.259-262.

401. *MP*Oct.1913:304.

402. *MP*Dec. 1913:346.

War. By mid 1917 many churchpeople (including the Bishop of Tuam) had been added to the ranks, helping the Irish Federation to establish three branches, in Belfast, Cavan and Dublin, in addition to a Central branch of over a hundred members.[403] Despite the more strained circumstances moreover, as in Britain the C.L.W.S was often able to cooperate most enthusiastically with other suffrage societies, including the Irish Women's Catholic Suffrage Society.[404]

Some branches were obviously more successful than others. Although Bath for example was one of the very first branches established, it always remained very small, whilst Lincoln's membership remained static at twenty-six during the dramatic year of 1913.[405] In some places the change of a secretary brought a loss of energy, or occasionally complete collapse. In contrast, Birmingham C.L.W.S reached 140 members during 1912, and 150 by the end of 1913,[406] whilst Brighton and Hove was another of the strongest branches, advancing from 82 to 140 members in 1912.[407] Manchester strangely had no C.L.W.S branch until May 1912, although it was in the heartland of the suffrage cause. By the end of that year however, it had already

403. *MP* April 1917:47, June 1917:70.

404. *MP* May 1917:59. For more details and a further assessment of Irish Church feminism see Murphy, pp.138-163.

405. Annual Report (1912), pp.11 and 23. Annual Report (1913), p.24.

406. Annual Report (1912), p.13.

407. ibid, p.12.

acquired 167 members.[408]

Manchester's late development was paralleled by those of Bow and Poplar. These branches came into being with the growing suffrage activity in the East End of London, particularly prompted by the work of Sylvia Pankhurst and George Lansbury. The impact of Lansbury's by-election in 1912 was a factor in Bow, drawing keen feminists such as Mary Sheepshanks and Annie Lansbury into C.L.W.S activity there.[409] In Poplar the foundation of a branch had to wait until 1914, but then took off spectacularly. All five parishes of St.Michael's, St.Saviour's, St.Stephen's, All Hallows and All Saints committed themselves as centres for regular Intercession Services and services of Holy Communion with the intention of the League. After initial meetings in the other four parishes, over 400 people attended the launch meeting in St.Michael's Hall. As in Ireland, work here progressed well during the war, not least aided by the Revd.C.G.Langdon, an increasingly important figure in the League's development. Like other suffragist clergy in this part of the East End, notably Henry Kitcat the Rector of Bow, he was very much engaged in the public life of his community. The suffrage cause thus appeared as a natural extension of his Christian conviction.

Despite the enthusiasm of its pioneers and experienced (mainly female) suffragists, the League had largely begun within the Church:

408. Annual Report (1912), p.25.

409. *MP* April 1913:200.

> in the teeth of either supreme indifference, undisguised suspicion, or intense opposition.[410]

Yet it had advanced swiftly. By October 1913 the Church League had established ninety one branches, with over five thousand members and more than four hundred clergy.[411] This progress would undoubtedly have continued but for the onset of war. During 1913 the central office workers had been stretched to the utmost, receiving at the lowest estimate 8 000 postal packets during the year.[412] New paid Organisers were appointed for the development of the Midlands, Northern and Welsh regions. During June 1914 100 new members were gained, with two new branches and two defunct branches reformed.[413] In July a further four new branches appeared.[414] Even during the opening months of the war, when most C.L.W.S members and branches turned their attention to war work of various kinds, membership increased to 5 700 by the end of 1914, with a further eight new

410. *MP* Oct.1913:300. A particular obstacle was the Press, whose refusal to insert suffrage news severely hit the League, and drove it to exploring other avenues, such as parish magazines, *MP* June 1912:35. The General Council was also constantly exercised by the unfriendly attitude of the Ecclesiastical Press, *MP* Aug. 1912:69, Dec.1913:338-9).

411. End of

1910 (1st Annual Report)	1 050 members (not including the Central branch)	15 branches
1911	2 000 (approx.)	33
1912	3 600	65
1913	5 080	103

(425 clergy/760 Central branch members).

412. Annual Report (1913), p.1.

413. *MP* June 1914:99.

414. *MP* July 1914:119.

and two revived branches.[415].

Activities

The League's declared principal methods were prayer and education. Neither were of course its preserve but their promotion by the League nevertheless helped to take the suffrage campaign into some new quarters, whilst reinforcing and cooperating with existing efforts.

Supernatural references apart, the foundation of the C.L.W.S upon prayer certainly helped strengthen suffragist consciousness and solidarity, and also added to the range of public and symbolic witnesses to the Cause. Members made daily use of the C.L.W.S Prayer, and of special prayers issued at points of crisis. In the manner of the Guild of St.Matthew and the Anglican Christian Socialist tradition, they also came together for Holy Communion on the League's Corporate Communion day once a month, and for occasional Special Celebrations. The C.L.W.S further observed a number of Quiet days, and participated in a variety of other Devotional Meetings specifically associated with the women's movement.

This work of contemplation and intercession helped to alleviate the failure of most Church leaders to urge prayer for the women's issue. In doing so it inevitably encountered opposition. When C.L.W.S members attended services (as for example, the Lincoln branch at a monthly Cathedral evensong) they were usually urged to wear badges or other emblems of their convictions,[416] but the very holding of a suffrage service at all often caught public attention. Within and outside the Church voices of complaint were raised: the National League for

415. Annual Report (1915), p.1.

416. *MP* August 1913:270.

Opposing Women's Suffrage being particularly enraged.[417]

In contrast, such prayerful actions gave fresh heart to many women despairing of their Church. Margaret Nevinson expressed this poignantly, in a fictional account of a suffragist churchwoman's experience of worship on a Palm Sunday: an account no doubt born deeply of her own experience. 'St.Cyril's, Wimblestead', she wrote, was a fashionable church, where nothing ever changed, and people rarely even died. The suffragists 'knew how useless it was to preach the gospel of women's freedom to these women at ease in Zion', for there was 'nothing they hated more than the indecent revelations of Suffragists' speeches'. Why did she come? she wondered. Perhaps because she had strong religious instincts and also liked the liturgy and music of Palm Sunday generally. Yet:

> what did these surpliced priests, these overdressed women, know of the tragedy of that great procession to Jerusalem.....She remembered the horrors she had faced with the rest of the women of her movement.....Yes, they knew Christian England in all its horror.

What a mockery was this worship, how far removed from realities, how ignorant of life! Then she heard a voice

> asking in short, unpolished sentences that 'we should remember before God the troubles in Ireland, the industrial unrest, the unheeded demand for Women's Suffrage'.

It was the new vicar.

417. cf. Elizabeth Metzler letter (c.1912) to Archbishop Davidson regarding Holy Communion services, such as Dearmer's at Primrose Hill. Davison Papers, 515.103.

> As if a bombshell had exploded around, the congregation rustled its plumes and furs in indignant protest; the atmosphere was charged as if with an electric current of wrath at this innovator, but the tired Suffragist felt her faith come back in a warm glow, and at least one genuine prayer went up that day from the fashionable congregation of St.Cyril's.[418]

On a national level, the C.L.W.S was deeply involved in the national Week of Prayer in November 1913, organised by the joint committee of all the religious suffrage societies.[419] It also continued to be significant in supporting parliamentary vigils, poster parades and similar acts of witness. During the debate on the Franchise Bill in January 1913 for example, a wide variety of societies sent volunteers to the picket of the House of Commons. *The Vote* commented warmly on the prominence of members of the religious Leagues,[420] including notable Church League figures such as Edith Mansell-Moullin, Gertrude Hinscliff, Mrs.Cecil Chapman, Letitia Fairfield and Lady Sybil Smith. Such contributions were multiplied at the local level. The Newcastle-upon-Tyne branch in particular were justifiably proud of their first Annual Service in April 1912, held in St.Nicholas':

> the first cathedral that has opened its doors to the Suffrage Cause, except St.Paul's. The Revd. Canon Gough and the Revd. J.T.Inskip (Jesmond) officiated, and the Revd. C.Hinscliff preached to an appreciative congregation of 400 people on 'Our Call to Social Service'.[421]

418. *Vote* 17.4.14:414.

419. See ch.6, p.179.

420. 'Silent Sentinels' 31.1.13:239.

421. *MP* May 1912:29,

On a smaller scale, such devotional occasions were widespread throughout the country.

In terms of education, the C.L.W.S took up most of the means adopted by other suffrage groups, providing its own particular perspective, especially valuable in breaking down resistance based on 'religious' grounds. Campaigns were run at each of the Church Congresses, beginning with Cambridge in 1910. Mission weeks were held, and memorials were issued, both to Church authorities (for women's representation within Church and State) and to the Government. The 'Petition of the Clergy' was the most ambitious scheme. Over three and a half thousand names were collected, urging 'without further delay a measure to confer the franchise upon women on the same terms as upon men'.[422]

Indeed, amidst rising militant frustration with the general response by the Church, C.L.W.S clergy and bishops were especially active in 1913, raising their voices strongly against forcible feeding and the 'Cat and Mouse' Act. In August, despite Asquith's initial refusal to receive them, Lewis Donaldson, together with Baumgarten and A.S.Rashleigh, led a deputation to 10 Downing Street to present a memorial protesting against the Act.[423] Opposition continued, rising to a crescendo in the 'Great Protest Meeting' against forcible feeding at the Queen's Hall on December 5th. Over six hundred and fifty clergy attended the occasion, which *The Vote* declared was 'A Significant Step Forward' for the Church (although 'not too soon, by many a year of waiting'),[424] and which even Christabel Pankhurst saw as a

422. *MP* October 1913:294.

423. *Suffragette* 1.8.13:728 and 15.8.13:769.

424. 12.12.13:111-112.

clear sign of 'The Church Advancing'.[425]

The League was also well represented on most of the major suffrage demonstrations after 1909, beginning with the great 'From Prison to Citizenship' procession of 18 June 1910: where the clergy who led the C.L.W.S contingent in cap and gown were 'received with rather surprising favour by the multitude', and by the cold and impassive gaze of Archbishop Davidson as he watched the procession from the steps of the Athenaeum.[426] With the growth of the League furthermore, a Monthly Paper was begun in 1912, and this considerably assisted its work of education and publicity. Copies were issued to all the clergy to aid the Petition of the Clergy, and distributed widely through the branches and at main events. In addition, a series of pamphlets were published, helping to circulate important articles by Church suffragists and dealing with a range of topics relating to the women's movement. Finally, an area of work outside the immediate discussion, the League was constantly a support and stimulus to women's enfranchisement within the Church.

On a local level, the branches varied in the extent of their educational contribution, and in some cases the Church League was undoubtedly not much more than a pale reflection of prior existing suffrage groups. Yet it clearly widened the constituency of supporters, and in some cases actually enabled the suffrage message to flourish for the first time. As the Irish branch reported at the end of 1913:

425. *Suffragette* 12.12.13:191.

426. *VfW* 24.6.10:629, quoted in Tickner, p.114.

> we hope that, as we have started with a good number of members who belonged to no other society, we may be enabled to advance strongly the cause of Women's Suffrage as a whole.[427]

As reports in the main suffrage newspapers demonstrate moreover, sympathetic clergy were often instrumental in opening doors to suffrage speakers, giving them access both to people and meeting halls. Local work varied depending upon the degree of support and enthusiasm, and the particular circumstances of the branch. Beach services were held at Brighton and Hove for example, whilst in other places occasional outdoor meetings also complemented the usual round of suffrage drawing room meetings. In Cambridge special efforts were made to contact new students, whilst in Sunderland and similar areas speakers such as Maude Royden and Isabella Ford were recruited to reach out to working people.[428]

Close collaboration was established in many places between C.L.W.S branches and other suffrage groups, with frequent exchange of speakers and shared events. One major example was the Joint Demonstration of Suffrage Societies on the Town Moor in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1912, After a great procession and pageant, three platforms were used for speakers: one for the W.S.P.U, one for the N.U.W.S.S and one for the C.L.W.S, addressing in all a total of one and a half thousand people. This followed a similar demonstration in 1911, when C.L.W.S banners and members had been prominent, led by the local shipping magnate and magistrate Axel Ericsson (who acted as chairman of the N.U.W.S.S platform), the Revd. Cyril Hepher and the Revd.

427. Annual Report (1912), p.23.

428. *MP* October 1913:305, September 1912;106.

J.T.Inskip.[429] Anerley branch similarly worked closely with other groups, notably the Women's Freedom League, with whom it held a series of political and social meetings.[430] In addition, as the Newcastle example shows, Anglican feminists were also frequently to the fore in local affairs. Newcastle members included such women as Ida Beaver, an active N.U.W.S.S organiser in the north east, and Gladys Fenwick and Margaret Mein, speakers used to addressing large meetings of industrial workers in Gateshead and of several hundred shipyard workers at Swan Hunters in Wallsend.[431]

The Membership

The membership of the Church League thus paralleled that of the main body of religious suffragists, whose feminism was generally associated with interest or involvement in one or more of the spheres of social work, purity, missionary activity, temperance, education, medicine and the arts.[432] Leading figures were drawn from other walks of life, as in the case of Axel Ericsson in Newcastle, or Emily Vaux (of the north east brewing family), who was vice-president of the N.U.W.S.S and president of the C.L.W.S in Sunderland. These however tended to be exceptions rather than the rule.

Examination of the careers of clergy members reinforces this analysis. A strong correspondence existed for example between

429. *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 8.7.12:7,12.6.11:2.

430. cf. *Vote*5.8.11:192,16.3.12:253,24.1.13:216.

431. *Common Cause*27.12.12:619,23.6.10:166.

432. See ch.3, pp.74-80. In the arts, in addition to individuals, the Church League had a particular gathering of talents associated with Percy Dearmer 'the artists' friend' - including Laurence Housman, Evelyn Sharp, Martin Shaw and Mabel Dearmer. N.Dearmer, The Life of Percy Dearmer (n.d), p.123.

active male suffragism and ministerial experience of urban deprivation. For if the Newcastle branch for example included clergy such as Inskip and Blount Fry from the attractive Tyneside suburbs of Jesmond and Cullercoats, it also attracted others from less salubrious surroundings, such as the high churchmen Perry of St.James, Gateshead and Windley, a very active local suffragist, from St.Chad's, Bensham.

Amongst the most committed of clergy were those from inner urban parishes, such as Frederick Lewis Donaldson of Leicester, who identified with the women's movement's commitment to tackling the plight of the poor. As in the case of Moore Ede, this also partly explains the commitment of those in higher offices who joined the League. This is clear from the careers of Edward Hicks (who had spent eighteen years at St.Philip's, Salford before becoming Bishop of Lincoln in 1910) and of John Kempthorne (who had worked in the industrial north throughout his ordained ministry before becoming bishop of Lichfield in 1913).[433] Above all it is highlighted by Hugh Chapman who, although he was royal chaplain from 1908, had previously lived and ministered in the London slums for over a quarter of a century. 'I do not believe in speaking sentimentally', he told the W.S.P.U audience at the Scala Theatre in 1910:

> but no man can have realised the lives of the women of the working classes without coming to the absolute conviction that women should have an equal voice at the hustings.[434]

Therefore, he declared:

433. From his curacy in St.Aidan's, Gateshead, through livings in Rochdale, Sunderland, Gateshead, Liverpool and Hessle, and as bishop of Hull from 1910.

434. 'An Appeal to Churchmen', reported in *VfW* 6.5.10:511, later published as a pamphlet by the W.S.P.U.

> I have come to speak as a Church of England clergyman.....because I am anxious to try and make it felt that religion consists of a great deal more than mere services and fighting about shibboleths.....because I believe that this movement is essentially a religious movement in the largest sense of the word, whereby I suppose is meant the bringing back of man to God and the restoration of human nature to something of the image in which it is supposed to have been created.

A relative of Elizabeth Fry, of which fact he was greatly proud, it was therefore more than justice that brought him into active support of the women's cause, especially its militant wing. At the back of the movement, for Chapman, was:

> a strong idea of the religious status of woman. A woman does not live merely for the power of charming men. She has an independent entity and is responsible to God alone for her creation.[435]

Thus for most Church feminists the suffrage was a symbol and an instrument of moral reformation. This was perhaps best expressed within the C.L.W.S by Frederick Spencer, in his sermon at St.Mary-the-Virgin, Oxford before the General Council meeting in January 1912.[436] As women gain more control of human society, Spencer contended, so they will effect certain changes. Firstly, he suggested, picking up the conviction of purity campaigners:

435. *Vote* 27.8.10;208.

436. 'The Evolution of Woman', *MP* March 1912:13.

> the physical constitution of woman makes her more sensible than a man normally is of the sanctity of sex. Therefore as women permeate more and more all departments of life, they will purify these in the matter of sex.[437]

Secondly, again developing the 'natural', domestic role assigned to woman in the nineteenth century:

> Women, being by nature lovers of children.....will infuse their motherliness into the relations of the members of the state with one another.

Thirdly, Spencer argued:

> women will develop their own personalities. The preacher, Frederick Robertson, declared that in Christ there were realised both the ideal of manliness and the ideal of womanliness.....Women, in dealing with mankind, so as to transform it into the Kingdom of God.....will develop courage and strength, together with tenderness and intimacy of affection, and so approach to the ideal character of Christ, which transcends any differences belonging to sex.

This third area of change was perceived therefore not just as a mere turning of 'separate spheres' ideological assumptions against themselves. Rather Spencer's viewpoint suggests the beginnings within Anglican circles of a theological attempt to construct a different paradigm of humanity. Breaking out here and there in creative thinkers in the past, he argued, was 'a great mystery, which is being revealed as time proceeds'. It was:

437. 'The Evolution of Woman', *MP* March 1912:13.

> a glimpse of the divine destiny of humanity.....an intuition of the race that male and female are two aspects of one essentially indivisible perfection, that shall be realised when souls put off mortality. Human evolution stretches on into eternal life when death and birth and sex are to be no more. And womanhood, expanding now with pain and joy, through self-sacrifice winning a more glorious life, grows towards that consummation.

The woman's movement for Spencer and other Church feminists was thus

> part of the growth of the Kingdom of God, which is within us now, in the hearts of all who devote themselves in love to redeem and make glorious humanity.[438]

In this sense it was also regarded as a clear manifestation and ally of Christian mission, whether striven for at home or overseas. Not that all Anglicans or moral reform groups automatically supported this aspect of the woman's movement. Women such as Mabel Bardsley in Carlisle and Lilian Barnes in London may well have been enthusiastic suffragists as well as leading speakers for the Mother's Union in their respective regions, but the Mother's Union for example had a strong anti-suffragist element and tried to avoid being drawn on the franchise question.[439] A struggle clearly went on within the National Union of Women Workers and similar organisations in this period (highlighted in a squabble over facilities for the N.U.W.S.S at the N.U.W.W conference in Lincoln in 1910).[440]

438. 'The Evolution of Woman', *MP* March 1912:13.

439. cf. correspondence between Lady Chichester and Archbishop Davidson, DP. 515.209/210.

440. *CC*13.10.10:446.

Nevertheless, Church feminists were drawn to the suffrage as a vital symbol and key to their saving mission. Cyril Hepher for example was involved in Missions of Help to New Zealand in 1910, and Canada in 1912, became a Diocesan Missioner in 1913, and was subsequently a member of the Council of National Mission. For him, as for W.C.Roberts (Principal of Dorchester Missionary College, 1904-09), this was an obvious link to make.

The international dimension of the movement was certainly an important factor in drawing many Anglicans into the suffrage camp. C.L.W.S membership included a great number who had experienced life and/or ministry beyond Britain, and who thereby had a wider vision of their faith and politics.[441] These suffragists, especially those who had worked in Britain's former colonies, were often able to relate what they had seen as the beneficial effects of women's franchise: as instanced by W.A.Newland Hall of St.Philip's, Dorridge, who helped start the women's suffrage society in Stourbridge, drawing upon his experience of ministry in New Zealand.[442] Perhaps most important of all amongst such Church suffragists was Sir John Cockburn K.C.M.G. A former Fellow of King's College, London, he had settled in South Australia, rising to Premier and Chief Secretary, and was a regular representative at Colonial and other international congresses in the early years of the twentieth century. In England he was then able to share this wider experience and add his weight to many gatherings, acting among other respects as president of the Men's International Alliance for Women's Suffrage, and as vice-president of the Men's League

441. Bishop Maud of Kensington for example had spent several years in South Africa as Commissary to the bishop of Pretoria, and as part of the Mission of Help. Charles Baumgarten (Rector of the preeminent 'suffrage church' St.George's, Bloomsbury) similarly had worked for nearly ten years in South Africa.

442. *CC*12.9.12:399.

and Political Reform League.

Such internationalism was often connected with political liberalism. For not only was it unsurprising to find temperance campaigners amongst C.L.W.S members, but other liberal causes, such as the Church of England Peace League, were also well represented.[443] This linkage, as indicated earlier, was important in helping cultural acceptance of women's suffrage. In some countries there were grounds to the argument that to give women the vote was to put power in the hands of the priest or parson. In England this never really took root, and in Scotland, as Frances Balfour reflected, it was never really asserted. Although, she ruefully added:

> if it ever was true, the Church did its best to alienate all thinking women from organised Christianity.[444]

Above all, liberal values interconnected with Church feminism in the concerns of educationalists within the Church. Women teachers such as Mary Moberley, headmistress of Central High School and secretary of Newcastle C.L.W.S, and Mary Gurney, of Newcastle Church High School, were well to the fore in Church League work. Like the strong band of church suffragists in the women's colleges at Oxford, this was a natural aspect of their own commitment to the expansion of women's opportunities.[445] A large proportion of male suffragists were also educationalists, most notably John Percival, Bishop of Hereford. Furthermore, the commitment of suffragist clergy such as Moore Ede and Inskip

443. A body headed by the C.L.W.S member T.J.Lawrence and the bishops of Lincoln and Hereford.

442. Balfour, vol II. p.133.

443. There were exceptions to this rule, following the earlier example of Elisabeth Wordsworth, but they were in a small minority.

was partly linked to their work with women in advancing the cause of education.[446]

Similarly the legal field drew forth male suffragists, including the C.L.W.S secretary Frank Shewell Cooper and the magistrate Cecil Chapman, who made common cause with women in tackling the disabilities of society. For Chapman, the legal system was clearly loaded against women, and this, drawing upon his own court experience, he was able to convey as a powerful argument for the franchise.[447] His evidence to the Royal Commission on Divorce, and his book *Marriage and Divorce,* were further influential pleas for justice for women.[448] Chapman asserted that women's suffrage was the most important of all political questions, and its refusal such a 'gross injustice' that he could not be included 'in those who preached the gospel of patience'.[449] His wife shared this attitude, becoming a principal figure in the Women's Tax Resistance League, leading to the sale of their goods on more than one occasion.[450] For such reasons, other Conservative churchpeople were drawn into vigorous suffrage

446. Inskip, pp.93-4. Inskip, later the second Bishop of Barking, was also a product of his own liberal education at Clifton College, where Percival ('a great headmaster') and J.M.Wilson ('a most lovable man') were his headmasters and mentors. ibid, p.16.

447. cf. his speech at Caxton Hall in early 1910, *Vote*19.2.10:194-5.

448. For his protest within the Church, see also ch.8, pp.307-8.

449. *VfW*29.2.09:385.

450 *Vote* 7.12.12:105, 6.6.13:103, 29.5.14:99. Mrs.Chapman was also President of the New Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage (a small body formed in 1910 which, like the C.L.W.S, did not espouse militant methods itself, but was an umbrella for suffragists of various hues).

campaigning.[451]

Indeed even men in the medical profession could be found among Church suffragists, although like Sir Victor Horsley they were more than a little ashamed of their brethren's complicity in forcible feeding.[452] More representative were the many women doctors and nurses who joined the Church League.[453] For, in Beatrice Kent's words, for many it was:

> the mother spirit in women which gives to many the vocation of nursing, and inspires them with that passion to desire to improve social conditions and uplift the human race.....A nurse who has recently joined the Church League for Women's Suffrage remarked that she had just begun to live! Would that all nurses would do likewise, and come in their thousands, and join this great spiritual movement.[454]

At least a hundred reasons might be given for having the vote, Beatrice Kent contended:

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451. Other notable Conservative Church suffragists included Frances Canning, E.G.Clayton (admittedly a self-confessed 'Conservative of an extremely independent type' *VfW* 28.1.10:277), the cricketer A.J.Webbe, the Earl of Lytton and Lady Constance Lytton.

452. Sir Victor was a chief speaker at the clergy protest meeting in December 1913. Emeritus Professor of Clinical Surgery and Consulting Surgeon at University College Hospital from 1906, he was a keen supporter of all progressive measures, contested the University of London as a Liberal, and was a prospective candidate for Market Harborough until refused support by the officials because of his fervent support of temperance and women's suffrage.

453. The most prominent doctors were Jane Walker, Helen Hanson and Letitia Fairfield, all Executive members. Among nurses apart from Beatrice Kent, Anna Hutchinson was outstanding. A hospital and private nurse, she did church work and visiting in a series of parishes, and suffrage work of various kinds, being imprisoned three times by 1913.

454. 'Why We Want the Vote - the Woman Nurse' *Vote* 26.8.11:220.

> but the one supreme all-embracing reason is this: *We must and will have power in order to uplift humanity and make it purer, healthier and happier.*[455]

Ecclesiastical character

The inheritance of the Evangelical tradition was enduring in the Church League as in other suffrage groups. As Beatrice Kent's language illustrates, it helped shape many suffragist values and assumptions. Yet its influence was on the wane. Within the Church League this is amply demonstrated by the ecclesiastical character of the membership. For whilst many churchpeople were still motivated by evangelical convictions akin to those of Victorian campaigns, their theology and approach to prayer were changing.

Not least this is seen in the prominence of Anglo-Catholics within the suffragist movement. The Anglican Catholic revival of the mid nineteenth century had blossomed by the turn of the new century into the most dynamic force in the life of the Church, as the still potent controversy over ritualist practices attested. Always in some measure a threat to the power of the Evangelical father over his home, its emphasis upon the Incarnation as the central doctrine of the Faith had become rooted by devoted ministries among the poor and disadvantaged. Furthermore, in the hands of theologians such as Gore and Scott Holland, it was sufficiently adaptable to the insights of the new scientific outlook and biblical criticism to allow association with the new emerging progressive movements of the day.

The outstanding church suffragists of the twentieth century were therefore increasingly likely to come from the Anglo-Catholic rather than Evangelical wing of the Church of England. Dr.Cobb of St.Ethelburga's, Bishopgate, was an excellent example.

455. *Vote*31.1.13:227.

Former assistant secretary to the English Church Union, he was sufficiently valued as a W.S.P.U supporter to be called upon by Frederick Pethick-Lawrence as a witness at his trial in May 1912. Significantly he argued, at the special Suffrage service at St.Ethelburga's in February 1913, that the dethronement of women had been sanctioned by the Protestant Church, and that this subtle banishment of women from all worship of the 'mere idea' of the feminine had worked against the spirit of reform.[456] In contrast, the declining influence of Evangelical churchmen was often employed to resist the women's movement. Above all this is seen in the actions of the Bishop of Liverpool, who, following a service in St.Faith's Church, Great Crosby, issued his episcopal censure upon the Church League, preventing it holding services in his diocese without his explicit permission.[457]

This incident suggests however that support for women's suffrage was less a question of ecclesiastical party tradition, as of theological orientation within those traditions. For the main grounds of opposition were reflected in the Bishop of Liverpool's own statement:

> when a clergyman allows his church and pulpit to be used to support the cause of any particular political party, he acts in contradiction to the spirit of the Church, to the principles by which it is guided, and to the detriment of its highest interests.[458]

This inhibition against clergy involvement in 'politics' was one of the League's greatest obstacles. Even when it pointed out that this was not a party political issue, and that its own methods

456. Reported in *Vote* 28.2.13:295.

457. *MP* May 1912:27, reprinted from *The Times*.

458. ibid.

were methods employed by religion,[459] the C.L.W.S was regarded with suspicion in many Anglican quarters, not least in the Church press. 'When I felt impelled to protest in the public press against injustice to womanhood', observed F.M.Green, 'I found that I had transgressed the supposed bounds of clerical propriety'.[460]

The League responded by reflecting on how 'this indifference to moral issues' had been the 'besetting sin of those in high place in the Church throughout its chequered history': seen in episcopal slowness in the past to join the denunciation of evils such as the prison system, the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the old factory system.[461] Such failures were now repeated at the Church's peril:

> 'First things first', says the parish priest as he throws an invitation to a Suffrage meeting into his wastepaper basket.....Does he reflect that his indifference to the claims of womanhood is costing him the respect of many of the most enlightened, the most spiritual women in his congregation, and straining to breaking point their loyalty to the Church of which he is an accredited minister?[462]

For F.M.Green, it was not possible to remain any longer a silent supporter of a cause which was so close to his understanding of the Gospel. 'I stand here', he told the W.S.P.U gathering at the London Pavilion in April 1912:

459. *MP* November 1912:115.

460. Speech to the W.S.P.U: 'For the Honour of the Church' *VfW* 3.5.12:483.

461. *MP* March 1913:185-6.

462. 'An Appeal to the Clergy', *MP* October 1913:297.

> because I am concerned for the honour of the Church.....In the written history of your movement my name can have no place, but I trust that it will be recorded in your hearts, and the hearts of all that come after you, that in your hour of difficulty, in the hour when friendship was still worth having, some of your clergy, of whom I am but the unknown representative, were ready, nay, were proud and glad, to make your cause their own.....'Purely political', say my friends. 'Absolutely religious', I reply.[463]

Such a leap of sympathetic imagination was in many respects aided by theological liberalism, although, as with other party outlooks, this was not the overriding factor. Indeed perhaps the foremost articulate opponent of women's suffrage within clerical ranks was the prominent Modernist Hensley Henson.[464] There were also strong conservatives within the C.L.W.S, as seen in the letters of protest after G.H.Davis' articles on Genesis in the C.L.W.S *Monthly Paper*.[465] Liberal theology and outspoken support for women's suffrage were mostly congenial partners however. This followed the path established by such pioneers as F.D.Maurice and J.Llewellyn Davies, and represented most clearly in C.L.W.S ranks by figures such as J.Bethune-Baker, and by the bishops of Lincoln and Hereford (who within the episcopal ranks staunchly resisted attempts at this time to impose new clerical declarations on doctrine).[466] Furthermore, although the *Monthly Paper* indicated that it neither endorsed nor repudiated views such as

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463. *VfW*3.5.12:483.

464. cf. O.Chadwick, Hensley Henson. A Study in the Friction between Church and State (1983), pp.116-118.

465. Sept.1912:84-5, Oct.1912:84-5, Nov.1912:116.

464. Hicks' diary, 28.4.14.

those of G.H.Davis, the religious Leagues frequently shared speakers with groups such as the Liberal Christian League.[467]

One of the most obvious issues where theological liberalism and new perceptions of women supported one another was in Anglican thinking about marriage, where some useful progressive contributions were made (notably by Cecil Chapman, in regard to divorce laws, and by Maude Royden in her thinking on relationships). The marriage service itself was a particular focus of controversy, with the Prayer Book's promise for women to 'obey' their husbands causing special affront. Bishop Hicks again appears to have made brave efforts to change Convocation minds on this issue, not helped by the tergiversations of episcopal colleagues such as Charles Gore.[468] Whilst change was awaited, aware clergy did what they could. Indeed Hugh Chapman almost appears to have made the Chapel Royal at the Savoy 'the suffragists' (matrimonial) church'. Carrying out a series of weddings of prominent suffragists, he used a modified form of service, and, despite the attention of the press, did all in his power within the law to avoid hurt to feminist feelings. The situation was becoming farcical in the light of women's new consciousness, as was vividly highlighted at Ruth Giles' wedding service, taken by Bishop Hicks in his own chapel. Using 'A Revised Prayer Book', Hicks read the service, omitting 'obey', 'giving away' and other small features. Meanwhile Ruth's father hid in the vestry, returning only afterwards for the holy communion, since alone of the family he still objected to the omission of 'obey'.[469]

467. See further ch.6, pp.233-4.

468. Diary, 20 February 1914.

469. ibid, 2 September 1914.

Church feminism and Church socialism

The League therefore drew together churchpeople of all descriptions, although it is also partly fair to designate it as the left-wing of the Church.[470] Indeed, as indicated earlier, many supporters were, or felt themselves to be, 'outsiders'. Certainly the Christian Socialist strand was a very important one within it, with Church League membership having a large overlap with both the Christian Social Union (of which Scott Holland was a leading figure) and the Church Socialist League, the two main Anglican Christian Socialist organisations of the era.[471] Several Church League members had also been active in Stewart Headlam's Guild of St.Matthew,[472] and were closely associated with labour struggles. Influential members of the Community of the Resurrection, such as Father 'Bertie' Bull and Father Samuel Healey, were also very much involved.

This reflected a long held tendency to support women's advancement within the Christian Socialist movement. It built upon the work and influence of F.D.Maurice and Charles Kingsley, and the Anglo-Catholic tradition which, through the Tractarian sponsorship of sisterhoods, had provided practical assistance and much needed 'space' for women's religious commitment. Theologically, as 'sacramental democrats', most Christian Socialists looked to the realisation of the equality of the sexes, as declared in the doctrine and liturgy of their faith.

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470. Heeney, p.112.

471. Leading C.S.L figures who were also C.L.W.S members included F.Lewis Donaldson, Edith Mansell-Moullin, T.C.Gobat, C.Stuart Smith, George Lansbury, the Revd.A.S. and Mrs. Rashleigh, J.Drew Roberts, Arnold Pinchard, P.E.T.Widdrington, W.C.Roberts and Jimmy Adderley.

472. See further ch.7, p.291-2.

> It is for Church people to see that the equality proclaimed in the Church is carried into the world; that it ceases to be a mere declaration made on Sunday afternoons when the babies are baptized, and becomes an actual fact and law of the kingdom of Christ on earth

opined William Cecil.[473] Such declarations followed in a long line of such commitments, including that of Arthur Stanton.[474] In 1911 this was made even clearer, as the Church Socialist League proclaimed as one of its chief objects, giving 'practical effect to the sex equality proclaimed by the sacraments of the Church'.[475]

Whilst Christian Social Union members were involved in suffrage activity, it was primarily Christian Socialists in the C.S.L who took the lead. Thus, despite the involvement of Scott-Holland in particular, and although it felt strongly about women's employment conditions, the C.S.U as such failed to take any strong stand over suffrage. Active C.S.U reformers such as Constance Smith and Gertrude Tuckwell must indeed have resented the paternalism of the C.S.U leaders towards women's movements.[476] In contrast, leading G.S.M and C.S.L figures were well to the fore in support of women's campaigns. Hannah Mitchell for one was grateful for the support of the Revd. W.S.Moll of Newcastle, when she sought to counter the lukewarm support for women's suffrage among some I.L.P leaders at the

473. 'The Vote - a Matter of Justice', *MP* June 1912:38.

474. cf. J.Clayton, Father Stanton of St.Alban's, Holborn (1913), pp.89-90.

475. I.Goodfellow, 'The Church Socialist League', unpublished Ph.D thesis (1983), p.239.

476. Jones, p.184.

'Coming of Age' conference in Bradford.[477] Lansbury's stand in Parliament meanwhile won warm support from all quarters, and was welcomed by many Church Socialists as the logical and practical expression of their Faith.[478] League members such as T.C.Gobat of Darlington also played an important part in forwarding the cause within the Church. A firm suffragist, member of the C.L.W.S and speaker on platforms, he also introduced women as sidesmen to his church in 1914.[479] C.Stuart Smith even tried to envisage what women's emancipation would be like in a future Socialist society: foreseeing a great development of communal life in his book *The Home in Socialism*, including communal restaurants and kitchens which would lift women's burdens.[480] Woman, he felt:

> will not love her husband less, but she will be his companion rather than his servant, and the wife will in many cases have her own profession just as he has his.....Family life will be modelled less on the idea of a petty kingdom, and more as a section of a great society of comrades.[481]

However even the C.S.L fell short of full support for the women's movement. Two of the five Honorary Treasurers of the C.S.L were women (E.Mansell-Moullin and Miss L.Arnold), as were two of the three editors of *Church Socialist* (Mrs.M.H.Wood

477. D.Mitchell, The Fighting Pankhursts (1967), p.178.

478. See ch.7, p.297-8.

479. Goodfellow, p.239.

480. ibid, p.240.

481. Socialism and Religion: An Appeal to Churchmen, pp.15-16, quoted in Goodfellow, p.241.

and Ruth Kenyon). Louise Donaldson was also a vice-chairman for a time, and there were several female branch secretaries. Yet men dominated affairs even here. Indeed in April 1911, Edith Mansell-Moullin announced her resignation from the Treasurership she had held since 1908. She remained a member of the C.S.L, but her energies were now directed almost exclusively towards women's suffrage, since:

> for some time past it has been borne in on me that the League as a whole (though I am happy to say there are many notable exceptions) does not stand for the Cause for Justice to women, equally with men. As a woman I feel this very deeply and have therefore come to the conclusion that I must concentrate on the Woman's Cause; as the complete outlawry of the whole of my sex is the greatest injustice and most serious obstacle to progress at the present time.[482]

At issue was the inability of many Church Socialists to see the pressing nature of the 'woman question', and also the question of what were the most immediate steps to advance their wider socialist vision. Conrad Noel's position at this time expresses both these aspects. The 'Suffragist objective', he wrote in July 1910, 'is not only distinct from but alien to the Socialist objective':

> Socialism includes, as a fragmentary but important part of its objective, electoral power for all men and all women. In Socialism there is neither male nor female. In suffragism there is no male. Suffragism and socialism are incompatible.[483]

On adult suffrage grounds, the suffragist campaign could be

482.Quoted in Goodfellow, p.247.

483. *Church Socialist Quarterly*, quoted in Goodfellow, p.245.

seen as a diversion, leading only to votes for privileged women, and distracting from more central concerns of establishing industrial solidarity and building up the socialist movement. In response, C.S.L members such as Edith Mansell-Moullin and J.Drew Roberts pointed out that such arguments failed to understand the depth of the injustice felt by many women, and that this political injustice was the very origin of the 'sex-war' which those like Noel so deplored.[484]

Theological outlook

For Hinscliff and his co-founders, the dominant idea of the Church League was twofold. Above all there was the belief that the Cause was in itself good, and therefore pleasing in God's sight. What was good moreover, 'must be good NOW', with no need to await a future 'psychological moment' before concerted Church action was taken. Secondly there was the C.L.W.S pioneers' belief in the Incarnation: that this was a natural outflowing of 'Church work' from the fundamental Christian fact that nothing was in itself 'common or unclean'.[485] Or, as Henry Scott Holland put it, in words which became the C.L.W.S Charter:

> Christianity is the proclamation of the Divine entry into History: of the Divine submission to the historical conditions of human experience; of the Divine sanction given to the things of time and the affairs of earth, to the body, the home, the city, the nation. A kingdom of God come down here, visibly, audibly, tangibly, evidently, manifested on earth - this is its first and last message.

This emphasis, intimately linked to the Catholic revival and Social Christianity of the late nineteenth century, underpinned

484. Goodfellow, p.246.

485. C.Hinscliff: 'The Story of the C.L.W.S', *MP*Oct.1913:299.

the broad perspective of the Church League's work. For like others, the C.L.W.S was at pains to point out that the vote was but one element in the aims of the women's movement: a movement which was concerned for the transformation of all areas of life. Hence the second and third objects of the League were its real goal. As Charles Baumgarten observed, qualifying perhaps the zeal of the militants with whom he had strong sympathy:

> The Vote will not bring about the millennium, but it is also a symbol, and symbols after all, play a not unimportant part in life. It is also a useful bit of machinery by means of which the ideals of men and women for the welfare of their country may be to some extent realised.[486]

With this incarnational principle uppermost therefore, it was the duty of all faithful Churchpeople to seek:

> to realise under the conditions of earth and time the Kingdom of God and of His Christ'.[487]

For the enfranchisement of women and the enhancement of their rights were seen as the long overdue expression in modern circumstances of the fundamental Christian assertion of humanity as being made in the image of God, male and female both. 'The great principles of the Gospel, as declared by St.Paul', said Bishop Hicks,

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486. *MP* February 1914:33-34.

487. F.M.Green, The Clergy and Politics (n.d), p.6.

> are there in the heart of Christianity, and are destined again and again to burst out with revolutionary force, until they find their beautiful expression in Christian practice.[488]

'Like the slaves, women are changing', observed A.E.N.Simms:

> It is too late to apply 1 Corinthians xi.3-16 to the solitary case of voting at Parliamentary elections. Could St.Paul be challenged on his own principle of 'no difference' he would see that for slaves and for women his true inspiration lies in the message 'neither bond nor free, male nor female'. Sex vanishes as a *political* necessity.[489]

The contradictions of St.Paul's teaching were a particular challenge for Church suffragists. For whilst some argued that Christianity in the West had worked for centuries to enable the emancipation of women,[490] others could see this as essentially reluctant accommodation to changing forces.[491] Simms' contended that it was Paul's 'dream of "no difference"' that was vital.[492] For Paul, he argued, the real struggle was the acceptance of Gentiles to full standing in the Body of Christ: 'everything else was incidental", and on other questions he had no time or energy but to follow contemporary standards, as on the parallel issue of slavery. In the increasingly democratic modern age, it was appropriate to realise the fullness of the Pauline Christian ideal, casting aside the 'despotic' arrangements

488. Sermon at St.Peter's in the East, Oxford, in *MP* December 1912:136.

489. St.Paul and the Woman Movement (n.d), p.4.

490. cf. P.Dearmer: 'St.Paul and the Position of Women', *VfW* 13:12.12:163.

491. cf. letter of reply to Dearmer, *VfW* 20.12.12:186.

492. Simms, p.11.

of the past. The spiritual equality of the sexes, whether declared by Galatians 3:28, Genesis 1:27, or by the example of Jesus, was the essential tenet of Christian faith. 'A Principle Obscured', it may have been, but for the Church League it was point one of the Petition of the Clergy.[493]

This idea of the suffrage as a development of basic Christian principles was given strength by contemporary fascination with the principle of evolution. Few followed Frederick Spencer in his bold declaration that 'Christianity makes us see evolution as the working out of the will of God',[494] but it was frequently used to assist the Cause, linking with notions both of secular progress and of Christian perfection. Indeed, perhaps the clearest expression of the theological outlook of most Church suffragists was the speech by Canon J.M.Wilson at Worcester on May 2nd 1913, an address which owed much to contemporary notions of evolution and the respective duties of man and woman. In its religious aspect, Wilson reflected, the woman's movement was so many-sided, far-reaching and profound that even twenty speakers could not do it justice. Yet four principles seemed most fundamental. Firstly he suggested, there was the conviction that human nature, and in particular human ideals, were not fixed and unalterable. Rather they were 'changing, progressive, subject to the law of evolution', like all other works of God. Secondly, after the principle of religious evolution came that of religious duty. For to a certain extent God had given human beings power to understand 'His aims and purposes in the moral and spiritual evolution of man now going on', and 'to the same extent imposed on us the duty both to understand and to work for those aims'. Thirdly, there was the recognition that 'the gifts

493. G.B.Charles, in *MP* February 1914:28.

494. Sermon reported in *MP* March 1912:12-13.

and faculties of women for assisting in this evolution, differ in degree and proportion, if not also in kind, from those of men'. Whilst, fourthly,

> we are coming to see that the fullest freedom for the use of these characteristic faculties of women, as well as those of men, is in our present stage of evolution, essential to human well-being and progress. This is the essence of the woman's movement in its religious aspect, the sense of the need of the full and free use of all women's powers in the service of God.[495]

These four themes - evolution, duty, 'difference', and opportunity for service - were, as highlighted earlier, pervasive throughout the women's movement. Here however they were given their greatest theological focus, and this articulation in turn aided the wider campaign. Constrained as they still were by the ideology of 'separate spheres', and the long patriarchal traditions of Christian faith, they represented a revaluing and affirmation of women within a part at least of the mainstream Church.

Church feminists thus proclaimed a gospel that saw the work of earthly salvation as inseparable from the advance of women, albeit largely because of the domestic virtues of her perceived salvific mission and dignity. 'A new reverence for woman was the result of the Incarnation', Bishop Kempthorne declared at the great meetings held by the Collegium in 1912.[496] For the coming of Jesus, he believed , had brought 'a new hope into being':[497] the recognition of each personality, whether male or female, as of equal value, something which had not been much in evidence in the Old Testament. 'Our Lord', said Kempthorne, 'reverences

495. 'The Religious Aspect of the Women's Movement', *MP* August 1913:264.

496. 'Our Lord's Teaching About Women', in Gore (ed.), p.9.

497. ibid, p.10.

woman: he believes in her capacity; he has for her a ministry and a mission', which were very far from narrowed to the home. Yet:

> Our Lord loves the home. He safeguards it by a strict marriage law. He regards the law of purity as binding both man and woman.[498]

This 'clear and obvious proposition'[499] was, as has been seen, a leading motive for suffragist involvement. As Ursula Roberts put it in 1912, after detailing the need to tackle the existing state of prostitution, venereal disease and the white slave traffic:

> Man has been so dilatory over the task that woman must take the matter into her own hands and set to work at the civilization of his sex as well as her own.[500]

This duty to which women felt called was not just domestic feminism writ large, an extension of the virtues of the Christian woman's home into the State. Such a view was articulated by some Anglican suffragists, as seen in Mrs.Runciman's contribution to the Collegium gatherings.[501] Other leading Anglican feminists also however saw this as a way of overcoming the cultural 'difference' between women and men, rather than as a representation of distinct spheres of life and morality. We stand here, said Maude Royden at the Queen's Hall in 1912:

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498. Gore (ed.), p.11.

499. ibid, p.9.

500. The Cause of Purity (1912), p.10.

501. 'Citizenship and the Home', in Gore (ed.), p.10.

> to affirm the whole ideal of Christ for every human being, man or woman. This is not, as it has been called, a *feminist* movement, but more rightly a *humanist* movement, because we ask for the whole human ideal for all, for purity and gentleness and self-sacrifice in men; for courage, judgement and wisdom in women.....The franchise that we ask is the franchise of the Kingdom of God. We ask for the freedom of all the virtues.[502]

The two sexes principally differed, felt J.M.Wilson, in the degree to which they were respectively influenced by the *will to live* (stronger in man) and the *will to love* (stronger in woman).[503] This helped to explain the 'plain fact' that women were more 'religious' than men, more responsive to the call of Christ to service and self-sacrifice, more prone to faith and idealism than the rationalism and materialism to which men were drawn. In Christ however was found in equal perfection the characteristic qualities of men and women. Therefore the race could not come to 'the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' until women's gifts and talents had been fully welcomed as the 'necessary correctives and supplements' to those of men. 'Lord, when shall thy Kingdom come?', began Mrs.Wyndham Knight Bruce in her contribution to the *Monthly Paper* in June 1912 ('Christ and Womanhood'), answering her question with the frequently used apocryphal saying:

> When the two shall become one
> And the outward as the inward
> And the male as the female,
> neither male nor female.....

502. 'The Ethical Aspect of the Women's Movement' in Gore (ed.), p.43.

503. *MP* August 1913:264.

Such reflection did not lead on to the kind of free philosophical speculation that appeared in circles such as the short-lived journal *The Freewoman*, which in part attempted to begin to work out a more authentically 'woman-centred' spirituality. Indeed, when Earl Percy launched a notable attack on the League in the *Morning Post* on July 24th 1912, the *Monthly Paper* regarded his second charge, that it had welcomed the publication of *The Freewoman*, as 'especially scandalous' (having never been mentioned by the C.L.W.S officially and having been deplored in private conferences). Yet in one sense the C.L.W.S shared a common aim with such feminist debate, for it warmly welcomed Earl Percy's first charge that it encouraged:

> literature purporting to show the injustice of the generally accepted view of the respective moral standards for men and women.[504]

If Church feminists remained forthright in upholding the traditional bonds of marriage and family life, and were generally slow to allow some of the difficulties they often contained for women, they declared themselves as fully determined as any to bring questions of sex into the full light of public, putting aside no area of life as untheological, 'common or unclean'. In doing so, they provided a strong minority voice which helped to broaden churchpeople's understanding of incarnation, and to ensure that at least some of women's concerns were raised within church councils and by church leaders.

The League's published prayers and hymns, like its sermons and writings, inevitably reflect the language of the day: as in the heavy stress upon redemption through suffering and sacrifice, in the emphasis upon the movement as a pilgrimage or holy

504. 'A Shameless Slander', *MP*Sept.1912:89.

crusade, or in the use of military imagery.[505] To a later generation, such Christian feminism might appear strange or even tragically compromised by its association with such conflicting elements. For it may have displayed the moral courage, chivalry and determination against the odds that were expressed in such language and imagery. These virtues however were perhaps too difficult to separate from the militarism, masculinity and narrowness of such symbolism to make a new and lasting feminist synthesis. In this sense Church suffragism did not greatly advance a more explicitly feminist, or inclusive, vision of God. Yet the sharing by Church suffragists in this stage of the women's movement had already begun to sow seeds for the future, and to water the ground for seeds of feminist flowers already planted. Not only were the churchwomen who were lifted into active public and church life forced to reflect upon the implications for their faith, but their very heightened profile provoked questions. for others. As William Temple (not otherwise himself a very advanced suffragist) put it in 1912:

> The raising of woman to equality with man will.....of necessity involve in popular thought about God, the raising of those qualities in which women are most conspicuous to a level with those in which men are most easily conspicuous.[506]

505. cf. 'Thanksgivings and Intercessions' in *MP* March 1913:181: 'For all who have found grace to be Soldiers of the Cross in our holy cause.....That we may be crucified with Him unto the world. That we may be ready to fill up that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ'; and F.M.Green sermon at C.L.W.S Passion Week Service, St.George's Bloomsbury, *MP* April 1913:202: 'Your advocacy of this holy cause will not be without sacrifice.....Yes, this enterprise must cost us dear.....Through all the ages the lesson of Calvary repeats itself anew. Through suffering - only through suffering - we conquer.' Favourite hymns were 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow' and 'Our God our help in ages past' (used at inaugural C.L.W.S service), together with 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and 'Fight the Good Fight' (used at Emily Wilding Davison's memorial service).

506. 'How the Women's Movement may help the Cause of Religion', in Gore (ed.), p.59.

Temple himself did not take this discussion far forward, although he inclined to think that women's greater tenderness to pain might in time lead to a 'less sentimentalised' religion, where God was seen as much more concerned with the plight of the world than existing (male) theology had allowed. The women's movement might also, he thought, enrich religion by greater stress on intuition, the individual and the concrete, and by providing a richer vein of divine analogy. Indeed he also foresaw that women could come to offer the world a fuller 'revelation' of God by their reflections upon the old Earth Goddess and the traditions of veneration of the Madonna. 'We must not turn our backs' on such things, he opined, for it could in time lead to a new balance in Christian teaching and education:

> There is something here which women can give us in our thoughts about the Divine, and about the relation of man with the Eternal which cannot come from elsewhere.[507]

Militancy

Earl Percy's third charge against the C.L.W.S, that it had 'acquiesced in militancy', touched upon the source of greatest tension within the League in later years, a subject deserving separate attention. For the C.L.W.S nationally tried to tread a fine line, to maintain its openness to all varieties of suffragists. Within its ranks, as has been indicated above, there were a good number of prominent militants (most notably Emily Wilding Davison, Lady Constance Lytton, and E.G.Clayton), as well as strong militant sympathisers. Six of the thirteen members of the Executive Committee in 1913 (including the 'deliberately selected' chairman Florence Canning) were supporters of militancy, noted the National League for Opposing Woman

507. Gore (ed.), pp.59-60.

Suffrage;[508] which fact allegedly confirmed 'its preference', showing that 'no division is recognisable' between the C.L.W.S and the W.S.P.U. Indeed it might have further remarked upon the vigorous defences of militancy made by members such as the Revd.E.H.Taylor.[509]

Most League members remained unruffled by such smear tactics, even when they were themselves non-militants. In its first years only the Liverpool branch seems to have struggled with the issue, experiencing a series of resignations after a 'Branch Rule' to exclude 'militants known to be on active service' was ruled out of order, in accordance with the C.L.W.S constitution.[510] Rather the League continued to urge firm condemnation only of the Government, whose members, it declared, were 'the real culprits' for 'the happenings which are a scandal to our civilization and a menace to all order and security'.[511]

By 1913 however, and the onset of arson attacks, including those on churches, some of the hardiest supporters of women's suffrage began to feel the need for the League to distance itself from militancy. Indeed, even by August 1912, Claude Hinscliff had come to regard the 'present aspect' of 'militancy' as 'wholly unchristian', and very different from the form it had taken in

508. In League with Militancy. How Suffragists support Suffragettes (1914), p.1.

509. For over thirty years, Taylor opined, the suffrage movement 'has relied on the logic of argument.....now it rises to the logic of a loftier plane, it sacrifices itself, it is not afraid of death. There is more impelling and attracting power in the sacrifice of blood than in a whole library of academic dissertation.' 'The Logic of Sacrifice', *Suffragette*19.9.13:851.

510. Annual Report (1913), p.24.

511. 'Blame to Whom Blame', *MP*Sept.1912:88.

1909.[512] With the rising antagonism of the W.S.P.U to the Church hierarchy, it became even more difficult for the C.L.W.S to share close links. Therefore, at its meeting on February 9th 1914, the Executive Committee reluctantly passed a resolution removing themselves from 'political' agitation. It was agreed not to cooperate, or allow officials to cooperate, in any suffrage demonstration, with any other suffrage society other than the 'religious' Leagues: a policy which was also recommended to the branches. On March 16th, this was followed by a statement disassociating the Executive from the methods, whether violent or otherwise, of all other suffrage societies founded on a political, rather than a religious basis. This the General Council reaffirmed at its Manchester meeting on July 8th 1914.[513]

Mostly, members regarded this as a sad but unavoidable step in the circumstances, although such a position could not satisfy everyone. The Worcester branch had been particularly incensed by what it saw as the now 'avowedly destructive' methods of the militants, which they felt were 'a violation of the principles which the church exists to uphold'.[514] However its attempt to have the General Council declare opposition to violence, or even disallow the advocacy of violence at its meetings, met with very little support at the meeting in January 1913. As a result the Worcester branch seceded (although it later reformed). This was an uncharacteristic response. Many felt rather that the strength of militant feeling within the League had often been

512. Letter to Archbishop Davidson in DP. 5 August 1912. Hinscliff also asked for support from the Archbishop to 'strengthen my hands and gain confidence' as he sought to distance the League from militancy. Typically, Davidson declined to help: ABC to Hinscliff 7 August 1912. DP.

513. Leaflet, box 396:11, FL.

514. *MP* April 1913:202.

underplayed, and if anything the C.L.W.S had bent over backwards to accommodate more moderate spirits. As W.C.Roberts commented:

> had the Church to choose between the two, it would be far more important that she should consider the claims upon her of the militant than of the non-militant suffragists; there is no doubt as to which of the two is the more likely to find it difficult to keep in touch with organised religion.[515]

For Roberts, the greatest value, and special privilege of the Church League was in its bringing militants and non-militants together on a common platform, and counteracting the tendency of never meeting, and of despising and denouncing one another. Although he was a non-militant, he felt he could not judge the consciences of others, even in the case of Emily Davison's death-dealing action at the Derby: for 'witness to a cause at the expense of life, even though unnecessary, is not dishonour'.

Indeed if the League felt constrained in 1914 to distance itself from 'political' groups in its practical work, it continued to recognise the integrity of the militants and the justice that lay behind their actions.[516] All seemed agreed, observed the *Monthly Paper* in May 1913,[517] that if women's suffrage was wrong in principle no amount of militancy could make it right:

> but, alas! there is no corresponding perception of the truth that, if women's suffrage is right in principle, no amount of militancy can make it wrong.....Where does justice lie? That is the only question we need to ask or answer.

515. Unpublished letter to *MP*, 10 July 1913. Box 396:11B, FL.

516. cf. Editorial: 'The Shortest Way with the Militants', *MP* April 1913:200.

517. 'Yielding to Force', p.216.

If the Church had been more ready to press this case, thought the paper, then the 'present difficulties' would not have arisen. If in standing for the principle of justice, Christian feminists were identified by the heedless with anything alien to them, then this was merely the penalty for past neglect.

Above all the League stood four-square behind the militants in opposition to forcible feeding. From the first the C.L.W.S had expressed its utter abhorrence of the practice, which it regarded as simply a 'loathsome form of torture' and a 'scandal to our civilization'.[518] It was simply 'inhuman.....an outrage upon personality that make sour gorge rise'.[519] Bishop Hicks' view, at the great protest meeting against forcible feeding in 1913, expressed the feelings of most. 'Force is no remedy', he said. Englishmen had been slow to learn this fact. Everyday, in his drawing room at Lincoln, he looked at the portrait of his distinguished predecessor Bishop Saunderson, who had shut John Bunyan in gaol. Without this action, Hicks observed, the world might not have had a devotional masterpiece, but it was not the answer. A less noble, but more worldly, bishop, Parvum, had let him out, discovering that Bunyan was more trouble inside. So, if he himself privately took to heart the words of Jesus - 'they who take the sword shall perish by the sword' - he could not condemn militancy. For the only right and lasting remedy was freedom.[520] 'Waste no time in criticising the militants', he said in November 1912:

518. *MP* May 1913:.216-7.

519. *MP* November 1913:319.

520. *Suffragette* 28.3.13:383.

> pray for them, and see the best in them. Emulate their zeal, though not their methods'.[521]

Ultimately, this was the only honour that mattered.

521. *MP* December 1912:136.

Chapter Six

'THE NEW NONCONFORMITY' & 'THE NEWER EVE'

Spurred on by the creation of the Church League, six other religious Leagues now emerged. In chronological order of formation, these were the Free Church League for Women's Suffrage, the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, the Friends' League for Women's Suffrage, the Scottish Churches' League, the Jewish League for Women's Suffrage, and (formed out of co-operation between these groups) the United Religious League for Women's Suffrage. In each denominational case they served a double function: extending the scope and size of the organised woman's movement, and challenging the apathy or opposition of the body of faith to which they belonged (which in turn helped raise the profile and status of women within that body). Their histories thus further illustrate the variegated nature of the suffrage movement and Christian feminism's role within it.

I The Free Church League

Beginnings

The first steps towards a Free Church suffrage organisation were taken in the second half of 1910, after a letter from Miss L.E.Turquand appeared in the *Christian Commonwealth*.[522] This highlighted the feeling among Nonconformist suffragists that the Church League had stolen a march upon them. For we suffer, said the writer:

522. *ChC* 13.7.10:733.

> the great disability of having no place, except in an alien church, where we can bring our movement in touch with religion. Nowhere in our own body can we receive the joy and inspiration, and calm, and consecration which come from lifting a cause into the presence of God.....But I believe that we have in our Free Churches a much larger body of sympathy. Only it is ineffective. Its presence is unknown. And it is not serviceable. There is no way of making use of it. What is needed is to organise it.

Others immediately concurred. 'The time is more than ripe', wrote 'the Reverend' Hatty Baker in response, reflecting upon her recent experience in the great procession of June 1910.[523] Purposely mixing with the women who had degrees, she had been 'amazed at the quick response to the religious note', even though the majority to whom she spoke did not know her as a specifically religious teacher:

> I was told by many that while Church services (of any denomination) remained in old ruts and grooves, with worn-out stereotyped phrases, it had no message for them, but the religion that grew with the times, that allowed them (women) equal rights and opportunities with men, and that gave them a place and a standpoint of their own, that recognises they have outgrown laws which, perchance, in some past days were good, such religion is needed and would be eagerly responded to. 'In the Church it is always the man's standpoint we hear', said one, which remark was enlarged upon on every hand.[524]

This 'characteristic snapshot' of active suffragist opinion demanded attention therefore, whether or not 'leaders' would come in. 'Are we not equal to forming ourselves?' asked Hatty

523. *ChC* 27.7.10:764.

524. ibid.

Baker, quibbling with Turquand's suggestion that certain ministers might help: 'women of today require neither condescension nor patronage'.[525]

Hitherto, as seen above, Nonconformists of various persuasions had played a part in the women's movement. Notable contributions had been made by Quakers and Unitarians and the mainstream of Nonconformist religion had also provided impetus, not least through the temperance and social purity campaigns. Moreover, whilst the most important Free Churches had closed the avenues to female preaching opened up in their genesis and at times of revival, that tradition was nonetheless still a part of them. The work of Salvation Army women and the founding of bodies such as the Wesley deaconess order (in 1890) gave signs of the continuation of that latent potential. By 1910, with the gathering momentum of the women's movement, this and other broader women's issues were beginning to be raised more frequently at Free Church conferences. In 1909 for example, the Wesleyan Methodist Conference had provisionally resolved that 'the time has come when duly qualified and elected women shall be eligible as Lay Representatives to the Conference' (a matter agreed after submission to the districts). Furthermore, the legislation of 1803 on the preaching of women was revised, removing the restriction of a female only audience, although still maintaining other provisos.[526]

Within the suffrage movement itself some striking contributions had also been made in the years immediately before 1910. A number of Free Church ministers had been drawn in for example. These included the Baptist J.Ivory Cripps, who, according to the *Free Church Suffrage Times*, 'read his first

525. *ChC* 27.7.10:764.

526. Field-Bibb, p.25.

suffrage paper when he was only 16, and was ever after an unqualified feminist'.[527] A W.S.P.U supporter from at least 1908, he went on to be elected to the central executive of the N.U.W.S.S in 1911. A regular speaker at innumerable suffrage meetings from as early as 1902, he helped represent Nonconformity at the great 'Cat and Mouse Act' protest meeting. The Revd. R.J.Campbell, the doyen of liberal Nonconformity, and then at the height of his influence, was also involved. For him, the women's movement was:

> the outcome of a desire for a wider, fuller life and a determination to get rid of the material disabilities which stand in the way of realising it.[528]

Campbell indeed was one of the minority voices pleading for wages for housework to counter what he saw as women's underlying economic problem. For although he gave full credit to institutions such as the Vigilance Society and the mission sisters of Mrs. Price Hughes, a thousand such efforts he declared, 'will never solve the problem, for they do not touch its primary cause'.[529] Economic independence was vital, and not just for women who stayed at home. 'This may sound revolutionary', he opined:

527. October 1913:66.

528. R.J.Campbell, Some Economic Aspects of the Women's Suffrage Movement (1909), p.2.

529. ibid, p.11.

> but we shall have to accustom ourselves to it. The oft-repeated saying that woman's sphere is the home does not necessarily hold good for every woman and it is not fair to assume it.....women have proved themselves capable of competing successfully with men in almost any sphere and the supposed psychological differences between them are more a matter of training than anything else.[530]

As with the Church League however, the principal moving spirits behind the new body were women already heavily involved with the struggle for advancement in both church and society. For Miss Turquand, Hatty Baker and Mrs.Strickland (who also responded quickly to the initial call) were also pioneers in other fields. As such they represent a fair cross-section of the interests and backgrounds of their fellow Nonconformist suffragists.

Jane Strickland brought the authority and position of a leading member of the National Union.[531] A member of the Women Writers' Suffrage League, she was also involved in education (principally through Hastings borough education committee and the University Education Association) and social and peace work (as vice-chairman of the Hastings' Mothers' Institute and Babies' welcome, and committee member of the local Peace and Arbitration Committee). In contrast, Miss Turquand was typical of the activism of the younger generation of suffragists. A Poor Law Guardian in Croydon from 1907, she had also served as secretary of her local Liberal Association and as a School Manager. She was an early member of the W.S.P.U, for whom, as for the National Union, she worked for a time as a branch secretary. She then went on to become a vigorous W.F.L

530. Campbell, p.8.

531. President of Bexhill and chairman of Hastings N.U.W.S.S, she was also to join the Federated Suffrage Societies' council.

suffragette, making a police court protest and having her goods sold as a result of her resistance to House Duty. As F.C.L.W.S Press Secretary, and as editor of the *Free Church Suffrage Times*, she was consequently a key proponent of Free Church feminism.

By far the most outstanding of Free Church feminists however was Hatty Baker, the Nonconformist Maude Royden. As a pioneer of women's ministry she was invited by Louisa Martindale to share the ministry with students from Hackney College at the Congregational hall built by Mrs.Martindale in Horsted Keynes. Women were already serving as deacons in many Congregational churches by this time, but this was a new step and it drew forth discussion in the General Purposes Committee of the Council of the Congregational Union in March 1909.[532] This Council declared that would-be women ministers could be accredited if they both fulfilled college training requirements and received a call to a specific congregation. Hatty Baker had not met and could not comply with the first stipulation. She continued however to exercise a vigorous ministry, albeit unofficial. Moving on to mission work in Brighton in 1909, she then became co-pastor of a church in Plymouth, freely assuming the title of 'Reverend'.

Hatty Baker's ministry went hand-in-hand with her suffrage work. Both, she felt, were aspects of the same women's movement and demanded similar attributes of compassion and courage. In these dramatic years before Anglican women seriously discussed women's ordination, she thus quickly became a symbol of a new religious status and vision for women across the churches. Her own efforts made a great contribution to the

532. For this and further information on Hatty Baker and other pioneers, see E.Kaye - 'A Turning Point in the Ministry of Women:the Ordination of the First Woman to the Christian Ministry in England in September 1917', in W.J.Shiels and D.Wood (eds.), Women in the Church - Studies in Church History, no.27 (1990), pp.505-512.

advancement of women's ministry and she made repeated calls to others to come to help her break down what she saw as the 'artificial barrier' against women in the pulpit.[533] Her most seminal contribution was her book *Women in the Ministry* (published in 1911 and based on a 'remarkable lecture' to the London branch of the Liberal Christian League at the King's Weigh House earlier that year).[534] This, and the subsequent lectures and discussions it produced, were received with 'intense interest' by suffragists.[535] Here she not only argued powerfully for women in the Church's ministry by reflecting upon their ministry in the early church: 'accepted and appreciated by all', she said with Nonconformist feeling, 'until the darkness of the Middle Ages descended upon the Church'.[536] She also contended that equal partnership was necessary to interpret the Divine nature of God to humanity. In every church with more than one minister, she declared, there should be at least one woman minister (as in her own church in Plymouth): for 'we surely need a woman as well as a man to interpret the heart of our Mother-Father God'.[537]

The religious aspect, to Hatty Baker's mind, was therefore no mere subsidiary or incidental part of the woman question. Rather, she enquired:

533. cf. her letter to the editor *VfW* 12.8.10:754 and the welcome responses of following editions.

534. Shiels & Wood, p.510.

535. cf. report of her Essex Hall meeting in *Vote* 4.11.11:17.

536. ibid.

537. Women in the Ministry, quoted in Shiels & Wood, p.510.

> When will women in the Free Churches, as well as the Anglican, rouse themselves to comprehend and to resent the condition of inferiority to which they are tacitly relegated? As long as the higher offices of the Church are closed to women, her cause will never fully triumph.[538]

To insist upon woman's spiritual equality, she argued in her popular pamphlet *A Strategical Outpost for Woman Suffrage*:

> to fight for her right to enter the pulpit as readily as the pew, may not only be the means of another and the greatest reformation in the Church, but may indeed be the nearest way to the poll.[539]

For the Churches themselves she felt the issue was critical. Her own pessimistic conclusion, born of bitter experience, was that the churches were a very long way from recognising women's claims to equality, and the mere notion of women in the priesthood would be looked upon as blasphemy in most church quarters. As a result, she concluded, the suffrage and other movements that struggled for equality had had to make their way outside the churches, and almost in defiance of them.[540] Yet, she insisted, whilst women's emancipation was ruled out from church councils, both men and women were thereby lowered, and 'the Church councils themselves become childish and ineffectual to the minds of progressives of either sex'.[541] Consequently a Free Church suffrage society was a necessity.

538. Letter in *Vote*28.12.12:155.

539.Quoted in *VfW*13.9.12:796.

540. Review in *Vote*9.11.12:28.

541. Letter to *Vote*28.12.12:155.

Organisation and activity

Animated by Hatty Baker as honorary secretary (until her resignation under pressure of work at the end of 1911), the Free Church League (or Federation as it originally began) quickly established branches at Croydon, Brighton, Anerley, Battersea, Worthing and in North London.[542] Indeed by April 1911 it was reported as 'forging ahead', following a very successful meeting at Penge Primitive Methodist Church.[543]

Co-operation with other societies was also effected early, with a F.C.L.W.S contingent on the W.F.L procession to the statue of J.S.Mill in May 1911, and involvement (together with a first banner 'Arise! It is dawn') in the W.S.P.U procession in June.[544] Later, at the formation of the Federated Council of Suffrage Societies the F.C.L.W.S, with the C.L.W.S, took a lead.[545] Members were also swiftly encouraged to help introduce suffrage questions into Literary Societies, Brotherhoods, Women's Meetings and other church associated gatherings.[546] By January 1912 the F.C.L.W.S was becoming well established. Consideration of branches extended well beyond southern England as far as Edinburgh and Wales,[547] and the League was beginning to work closely with the Church League, sharing in its own province the kinds of religious suffrage work that the C.L.W.S had opened up.

542. *Vote*21.1.11:158.

543. *Vote*8.4.11:288.

544. *Vote*27.5.11:64,24.6.11:113.

545. *Free Church Suffrage Times* June 1913:14.

546. *Vote*8.7.11:143.

547. *Vote*13.1.12:144.

The Annual Report of mid 1913 reflected the developing scope of the League.[548] Important new branches had been established in the preceding year at Newcastle upon Tyne, Manchester, Oxford, Ipswich, Hampstead, Paddington and Ilford, with some (as in the case of Newcastle) growing with 'astonishing rapidity'. In other districts, such as Birmingham, 'groups' had also been constituted where there were insufficient sympathisers to form a branch. Hence the League reached a point where, instead of each member voting personally, a system of delegates to the annual meeting was required, as in other societies. Most of all the League's rise was indicated by the launch of its paper the *Free Church Suffrage Times* in April 1913.

Such growth was welcome but not self-satisfied. Rather the reverse. The F.C.L.W.S continued to lag well behind the Church League, with only 18 branch or group secretaries as late as April 1913.[549] The Executive thus complained that, whilst their publications had a 'large and ready sale', they were few in number, with an extremely limited fund available for the purpose.[550] This did not stop it engaging in a range of women's issues. Notable work was done in the Criminal Law Amendment Act campaign, and on the Wilks Case (a celebrated incident where a husband had been committed to prison because his wife had refused to pay taxes on her separately assessed private income). The F.C.L.W.S also linked up with Labour on a number of occasions: helping Lansbury to get in touch with Nonconformists in the Bow and Bromley by-election, and playing a part in the joint woman suffrage/Labour demonstration in

548. *FCST* June 1913:14-15.

549. *FCST* April 1913:5.

550. *FCST* June 1913:15.

Manchester in 1914.[551]

In some places moreover, the work of the local branches matched, and sometimes outstripped, that of the Church League branches. The Newcastle branch was particularly strong, given impetus by the holding of the National Free Church Council Assembly in its city at the beginning of 1913. After its first year of existence it reported a membership of 115, including 11 Free Church ministers ('an unusually large proportion') who evidently took active interest in the branch's work. Ten meetings, including four public meetings were held in its first year, and numbers and activity continued to increase in succeeding months, reaching 178 members on the eve of war.[552] Its campaigning success was clearly signalled in late 1913 by the unanimous decision of the Newcastle Free Church Council to form a Women's Committee, with equal standing to all other committees.[553]

Nonconformist suffragists hence showed themselves as willing as any other religious individuals to shoulder their share of the burden. Indeed on some occasions they appear to have proved even a little over-generous. At the outset of the Women's March, reported the *Vote*,[554] the pilgrims were greeted by a Mrs.Blair and her son, who had driven two miles with hot tea and 'cookies'. Yet only a few yards further on the minister Mr.Green and his wife begged them to come to tea with them at the manse!

As with the Church League, such enthusiasm covered the

551. *Common Cause*29.11.12:587,3.7.14:277.

552. Entries in *FCST* July 1913:28, August 1913:44, November 1913:74, July 1914:87.

553. *FCST* November 1913:79.

554. 26.10.12:454.

suffragist spectrum. If some, such as Mrs.Snowden, were determined constitutionalists, others spoke freely of approval of militancy, sometimes from F.C.L.W.S platforms. Thus at the annual Free Church League general meeting in May 1912, several voices vigorously supported a resolution deploring the Congregational Union's decision to not even discuss women's suffrage. For Ernest Barson this was an amazing negation of the whole spirit of Congregationalism. The men, he said, who greeted the story of Jenny Geddes with vociferous applause were today, for precisely similar reasons, dooming women to solitary confinement and to the indignity and agony of forcible feeding. Mrs.Saul Solomon, not long released from prison, received an ovation. Concurring, she spoke of the need for 'tactics of shock', and drew a parallel with the action of W.T.Stead in 1885 which had hastened the raising of the age of consent.

The death of Emily Wilding Davison consequently brought far more fulsome tributes from Free Church quarters than from Anglicans. Almost certainly, claimed the *Free Church Suffrage Times*, this life was the first that has been deliberately given for the freedom of women.[555] Indeed for Charles Fleming Williams:

> Miss Davison belonged to the spiritual hierarchy, and true to her spiritual ancestry willingly laid down her life as a ransom for many.....(she) will not have died in vain if the open secret of her reckless heroism be read aright by our statesmen and our churches.[556]

Of all the many suffrage societies, it was also only the F.C.L.W.S

555. July 1913:26. See also ch.4, p.157.

556. ibid, p.29. See also J.M.Lloyd Thomas' letter arguing that 'Any high and magnificent expression of moral purpose, though eventually judged to be wrong in form, avails powerfully for good.....The inner spirit is then one with the very Essence of the Moral Life of the Universe, and the intellectual error is cancelled or absorbed by that Life of Life that made the sacrifice possible', ibid, p.290.

which felt the incongruity of Emily Davison's funeral service. Whereas outside, reflected the *Free Church Suffrage Times,* all was entirely feminist, inside (where the ministers, although strong suffragists, were Anglican priests) all was entirely masculine: 'and Miss Davison had died that women should have self-realization'. Only in the last hymn ('Nearer My God to Thee'), written by a woman (Sarah Flower Adams, a Unitarian), did 'womanhood' enter.[557]

Such open support for militancy contrasts with the Church League's wariness in the last eighteen months before the war. This does not necessarily indicate a greater Nonconformist propensity towards militancy, although traditions of civil resistance, latterly revived in the Education controversy, may have overlapped, and some Nonconformists were certainly prepared to be involved in tax resistance. More probably it reflects the diversity of Nonconformist traditions in the F.C.L.W.S. This, by its very nature, had to be a federated society with broader and looser connections of structure and belief. Most importantly of all, although occasional interruptions of services took place, Free Churches never faced the kind of onslaught launched upon the Church of England by the W.S.P.U in these later months.[558] Like the Church League however, the F.C.L.W.S appears to have found a neutral stance on tactics increasingly difficult. The *Free Church Suffrage Times* , at the Church League's request, willingly printed the C.L.W.S statement stressing its concentration on the twin methods of Prayer and Education. 'We too', it added, 'have no part in the work, methods,

557. *FCST* July 1913:33.

558. See ch.8, passim.

or opinions of any Secular Societies'.[559]

Membership

In theory, wide sections of the Free Churches were committed to the equal recognition of women and men. The Congregational and Baptist bodies after all, as the *Free Church Suffrage Times* observed,:

> may at least pride themselves on offering no technical obstacle to women preachers, and we believe that the moral ones, prejudice and custom, will pass also.[560]

Thus the Congregationalist minister Ernest Barson believed that in his Church at least there should be no dispute about woman's position, there being 'neither male nor female':

> She has a vote, and if the members so desire, she may be and sometimes is elected to responsible positions in the Church. A Congregational Church may choose a woman for its minister if it thinks fit, and its action could not be questioned consistently with its principles of Church government.

Hence he declared, 'there ought not to be any necessity for a Free Church League for Women's Suffrage. Free Churchmanship implies free citizenship'.[561] As Lady Spicer observed however, Congregational reality was another thing. Undercutting the value of equal voting there was 'an atmosphere of superiority on the

559. August 1913:93.

560. November 1913:70.

561. *FCST* May 1913:12.

part of men, accepted and agreed to on the part of women'.[562] In most Congregational churches not only did men almost exclusively fill the diaconate and the ministry, but they were mostly the secretaries and the directors of any mixed institutions and fulfilled most of even minor duties such as stewarding or taking collections.

Jacqueline Field-Bibb's study of the development of women ministers in the English churches has rightly highlighted the degree of hierarchy in each church organisation as a major factor in the resistance to or acceptance of ordained females. Yet in relation to the suffrage this analysis falls short. Rather on this issue, whilst Quakers and Unitarians were certainly to the forefront, Anglicans were more 'advanced' than most other Nonconformists. Nonconformist churches generally upheld a patriarchal culture often far more limiting to the development of Church feminism. This was partly due to structure, since the Free Churches lacked the range of alternative spaces found in the Church of England. Partly this reflected the prevailing theological currents in each tradition.

For, as was outlined earlier, by this period the intellectual foundations of Christian feminism derived increasingly from the various currents of contemporary liberal idealist and incarnationalist thought. Evangelical notions, as has been seen, were still central to many women suffragists' view of themselves and their mission. Traditional Christian symbols and maxims were continually reworked in the course of the struggle. They found their converts within the churches however principally amongst those sympathetic to these broad philosophical currents and least attached to traditional biblical 'orthodoxy'.

This is most noticeable within the Free Churches. As

562. *FCST* June 1913:17.

commented earlier, between the 1880s and the 1st World War, there seems to have been a rough correlation between the degree of theological liberalism and the extent of social and political activity amongst different Nonconformist denominations. A similar link may be discerned in relation to the suffrage movement, although its precise configuration differs in some respects. Thus (as with the Church League), although not all Nonconformist socialists were feminists, there was an equivalent connection with Christian socialism. The number of Free Church socialist ministers was not great for example,[563] but from their ranks came a number of influential men such as John Clifford, and above all, Charles Fleming Williams, who was to take over from Hatty Baker as the F.C.L.W.S organiser and driving force.

Complaints about their ecclesiastical press were scarcely less frequent among Free Church suffragists than among Anglicans. Within Nonconformists ranks however, the *Christian Commonwealth* was a powerful supporter of this and other progressive concerns, whilst the *Methodist Times* (following the lead of its former editor Hugh Price Hughes) was also a helpful ally and bearer of suffrage news. In the case of the *Christian Commonwealth* this active support was intimately linked to its role as the voice of R.J.Campbell's 'New Theology'. Both its foremost supporters and its leading ideas bolstered the F.C.L.W.S and the wider movement.

The foundation of the Progressive League (the parent of the *Christian Commonwealth*) on November 16, 1908, was indeed accompanied by a resolution (with only four dissentients) in favour of:

563. The comparative size of the respective Anglican and Free Church socialist and suffragist societies also reflects the greater degree of liberal permeation in some Anglican quarters.

> the equal citizenhood of men and women.....and.....the immediate extension of the Parliamentary franchise as it is granted to men.[564]

Therefore, to list the main churches and ministers of the Liberal-Christian League (into which the Progressive League evolved in May 1910) is to list the most active outposts and speakers of the Free Church League: including the King's Weigh House (and Dr.W.E.Orchard); High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham (J.Lloyd Thomas); and Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool (the Revd.Harry Youlden). *Christian Commonwealth*'s contributors were almost invariably keen suffragists from across the denominational spectrum: from Mrs.Despard and Margaret McMillan through ministers such as J.Mathieson Forson and T.Rhondda Williams to Philip Snowden and George Lansbury. Articles also frequently appeared on all aspects of the suffrage movement[565] and, as indicated earlier, it was through letters in the *Christian Commonwealth* that the Free Church League came into being.

The significance for Christian feminism of R.J.Campbell and his ideas is illustrated by the debt Constance Lytton felt she owed to him. Writing in the *Christian Commonwealth* in October 1910 about the women's struggle, she began with thanks:

> If I have been able to play any part in this war I owe it to him. It was in a sermon preached by Mr.Campbell in the City Temple that he said words which broke down the barriers that released for me the floodgates of enthusiasm.[566]

564. *Christian Commonwealth* 26.10.10:79.

565. e.g 'The Case of Miss Billinghurst: the Barbarity and Futility of Forcible Feeding' by Albert Dawson (22.1.13) and 'How I became a Suffragette' by Olive Hockin (16.4.13).

566.19.10.10:61.

Theological outlook

By no means all Free Church suffragists shared or even welcomed this excitement brought by R.J.Campbell. Within its ranks the F.C.L.W.S also included more sober and orthodox figures such as the Reverend F.B.Meyer, a leading figure in both the Baptist Union and National Free Church Federation.[567] For others too, Christian feminism was an extension of traditional Evangelical and Nonconformist concerns such as temperance and social purity. The support of the *Methodist Times* was symbolic of this, and of the continuing influence of Free Church 'Social Christianity'. Some more conservative women also joined the F.C.L.W.S following their foreign missionary experience.[568] Yet it is easy to see why the new theology should have acted as a bridge into active suffragism for many like Constance Lytton. For the interpretation of central Christian doctrines amongst liberal Nonconformists chimed well with the interests and rhetoric of the leading suffragists. As an examination of 'Our Message' the 'credal' statement of the Liberal-Christian League in 1910, shows,[569] these were notions that were widely articulated by women such as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Christabel Pankhurst and Charlotte Despard.

For to this liberal wing of Nonconformity, God was best expressed as:

> the universal life, 'in whom we live and have our being', the infinite and eternal One.....and sum of all that is worthy to be called good.

567. Meyer was President of the former in 1906 and of the latter in 1904 and 1920.

568. *FCST* July 1913:29.

569. Published in *Christian Commonwealth* 7.9.10:862.

'Man' (in the generic sense) was the 'son of God, "being of one substance with the Father"', and (in imagery regularly occurring in suffragist expressions):

> gradually evolving through struggle and suffering towards God-consciousness, the perfect realisation of what he eternally is'. Hence Christ was 'germinally present in every human soul' and redemption 'the uprising of the Christian man, overcoming evil and bringing every faculty of our being into harmony with the life and love eternal.

'We are glad to believe all this', declared the Liberal-Christian League, in a sentiment and with an intent which other progressives would have shared:

> It helps us in the living of our lives and working for the betterment of the world. Will you come and join us?[570]

If such an outlook was a major feature of Free Church feminism, it was not however the only one, nor did it lack traditional grounding. Rather, each religious League brought its own specific theological emphases into the suffrage struggle.[571] Thus in contrast to the Anglican League's incarnational theology, the F.C.L.W.S tended to emphasise the Puritan idea of respect for personality. As the *Free Church Suffrage Times* outlined in its frontispiece:

570. *Christian Commonwealth* 7.9.10:862.

571. cf. F.C.L.W.S consideration of the attitudes of Bunyan (especially contrasting them with those of Milton) *FCST* June 1913:22.

> We stand for the equal spiritual status and therefore for the equal moral responsibilities of both sexes. We are convinced that if human society is ever to realize its ideal - that fine ideal which has always haunted the noblest souls - it can only be realized through wise, loyal and affectionate co-operation of the man and woman. We share with Christ the belief that humanity is more than sex, and that however sex may differentiate function, it was never meant by the Creator to divide humanity into contrasted halves of inferior and superior values.[572]

The F.C.L.W.S as a body did not therefore seek to overturn all 'separate spheres'. Yet the vote was a crucial symbol of equal honour for those belonging to any sphere. This was consequently a Christian feminism based on a democracy of esteem if not practice. 'According to the Christian Faith', the League declared, 'men and women are equal, with equal moral responsibility, equal right to self realization, equal value as souls'.[573] As Nonconformists it was their duty to take up this issue of concern for individuals, since:

> The state refuses to recognise the personality of women, and is therefore at variance with Christianity, and must be brought in line.[574]

Such a challenge was not unwelcome to Nonconformists, struggling as they were with the need for a fresh identity and renewed sense of purpose. With most of their historic disabilities now removed, only the education issue had given new life to the 'Nonconformist Conscience' in the first decade of the twentieth century. For Free Church feminists therefore, with

572. April 1913:1.

573. Suffrage Annual & Women's Who's Who, p.21.

574. ibid.

its moral concern, spiritual aspirations and anti-establishment zeal, the Cause of women's suffrage had the appeal of 'The New Nonconformity'.

This was the title of the keynote address by Ernest Barson, first given to Hampstead F.C.L.W.S, published as an article in the *Free Church Suffrage Times* in September 1913.[575] The Woman's Movement, Barson declared, may be called 'the New Nonconformity', with its same appeal to the human 'moral consciousness' in social questions and the same 'spiritual passion':

> The fire of its enthusiasm, a like devotion to a cause, a like willingness for self-sacrifice, are unknown elsewhere in our age. Whether or not we approve of all expressions of this passion is not the question.....its nature is spiritual.....for it is impossible that any other force could effect such devotion. Human experience has proved this.

Such sentiments were freely expressed by many F.C.L.W.S members, perceiving God as immanent in the Women's Cause, as 'by far the most evident sign of His Living Spirit that we have today'.[576] For, they contended, pushing this notion to its logical extent:

> None but the Almighty 'Power that makes for Righteousness' could have wrought the miracle of women's uplifting. So we have just as much right to say the God of Mary Wollstonecraft or Mrs.Despard, or Mrs.Fawcett, or Lady Constance Lytton as the God of Isaac and Jacob, and Moses and Nehemiah.[577]

In fact, declared Ivory Cripps, the feminist movement was not

575. p.51.

576. 'The God of the Feminists', *FCST* January 1914:9.

577. ibid.

dependent on any support it might get from organised Christianity:

> It will go forward to victory whatever we in the churches say or do. The thing is not a fad or a craze.....It is a movement of world-wide extent and deep spiritual significance. In the deepest sense it is of God.[578]

Free Church involvement was thus for the honour of the Church, just as Anglican involvement was for the C.L.W.S. 'I want the Free Churches to come in', he said:

> not because the movement cannot do without them, but because it would be quite too dreadful and disgraceful, if they said nothing and did nothing throughout the whole course of the controversy.[579]

The Feminist Movement, he added, was not only 'from top to bottom' women's 'Spiritual demand for self-expression' (for Home and State), it was now also asking when Christians were going 'to realize spiritual and democratic ideals within the Church itself'.[580] Could the Free Churches take up the challenge then, as the Established Church was doing? Or would they, as Fleming Williams wondered, 'lose their place in the van of human progress?'[581] This was the gauntlet thrown down by the F.C.L.W.S.

Commenting on the *Church Times'* announcement that the Southampton Church Congress of 1913 would discuss the 'woman

578. The Free Churches and the Women's Movement' *FCST* May 1913:35.

579. ibid.

580. ibid.

581. *FCST* October 1913:65-6.

question' in all its aspects, the *Free Church Suffrage Times* compared this favourably with Free Church attention. 'A more momentous announcement it is hardly possible to imagine', it reflected, since the Anglican Church was an approved and established institution:

> it stands for what is accepted - so that to find Suffrage therein is to find Suffrage accepted too. Not politically of course - that will come later - but socially: accepted by public opinion. As Suffragists we rejoice, but as Free Church women we feel some bitterness. Our Church has had its own struggle for what it has thought the priceless boon of freedom. Why then have we not been first to champion it in modern days?[582]

The League frequently bemoaned the lack of response to the Woman's Cause by its Churches. Its work, the pioneering efforts of women preachers such as Hatty Baker, and the wider campaign did however gradually alter the the climate. Discussions of women's issues became increasingly evident within the Free Churches. The Baptist Union for example saw encouraging debate, backed by the launch of its Sustenation Fund for women's service.[583] Most significantly of all, undoubtedly prompted by the parallel Church Congress programming in 1913, the National Free Church Council in 1914 gave over an entire session of its annual meeting at Norwich to consideration of the 'Contribution of Women to the Solution of Present-Day Problems'.[584] 'While last May feminism seemed only penetrating

582. April 1913:3.

583. Although not supplying many active suffragists, it was perhaps for this reason that the Baptists were felt to to be the most sympathetic towards feminism among Free Church bodies. *FCST* October 1913:58.

584. *FCST* February 1913:15.

Nonconformity', observed the *Free Church Suffrage Times* in June 1914, 'now it seems pouring in like a flood'.[585]

Significance

As with the Church League therefore, the F.C.L.W.S did much to break down religious apathy and antipathy towards women's suffrage. It played its own part in extending the ranks of the suffragists into new quarters, and in so doing helped provide critical direct pressure for the advancement of women's concerns and opportunities within the Free Churches. The extent of its success may be witnessed by the long manifesto issued on 13 March 1914 by 1 200 Nonconformist ministers, protesting against the introduction of the question of woman suffrage into 'purely religious' bodies. Whilst the size of the protest is testimony to the considerable opposition within the Free Churches, it also indicated the effectiveness of suffrage agitation within them. For the protesters had only a partial point in complaining about 'an emotional advocacy which inflates and perverts facts', and 'of prophecies which experience (as in the case of men in the past) has proved the vote cannot fulfil'. As Fleming Williams characteristically retorted, in his immediate stinging rebuttal in the *Daily News* , it also plainly attested to the raising of Nonconformists' consciences:

585. p.67.

> the whole tone of this singular production (demonstrates) that the manifestants are alarmed at the astounding increase in the number of supporters of Woman Suffrage within Free Church circles. The explanation of this, however, is not to be found in the effect of 'undue pressure', but in the better understanding of the moral and spiritual implications of the woman's uprising by all whose personal experience has familiarised them with spiritual phenomena.[586]

II. The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society

Beginnings and Rationale

The idea for the C.W.S.S arose from a meeting of two young Catholic women, Mary Kendall and Gabrielle Jeffery, at one of the W.S.P.U gatherings to welcome released prisoners outside Holloway Jail. Appropriately enough this was also the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8 1910. Together with another young Catholic Beatrice Gadsby, they then went on to appeal for support in Catholic and suffrage newspapers and to arrange a first formal meeting of the new society on the Feast of the Annunciation, on March 25 1911. Kathleen Fitzgerald was appointed chairman, Monica Whately as treasurer and Mary Kendall as secretary, with the Blessed Joan of Arc the inevitable patron.[587]

The most distinctive feature of the new body was undoubtedly the exclusion of men from full, though not associate, membership, and from involvement in elections to the Executive Committee. Although this was not the result of a radical feminist consciousness it did ensure that complete direction was left to

586. Reported in 'The Free Church - Fearful', *Vote* 13.3.14:328-9.

587. Nancy Stewart Parnell, 'A Venture in Faith': A History of St.Joan's Social and Political Alliance, formerly the C.W.S.S,1911-61 (1961), pp.3-4.

the women members. It may also have contributed to the continuance of the society in another form after 1918. Certainly the very founding of the society, as another pioneer Leonora de Alberti later commented, 'exploded a belief then generally held, that Catholic women could not stand on their own feet'.[588]

It was indeed a marked public step forward both as faithful Catholics and as Catholic women. For the originators shared the contemporary Catholic culture which was still only gradually emerging into the light of English public life. Although the Act of Catholic Emancipation lay as far back as 1829, the English Catholic community was largely bound up with its own concerns throughout the Victorian era. The demands of organisation in the midst of the new industrialising society, coupled with successive waves of Irish immigration and the pervasive anti-popery of Protestant England, reinforced Roman Catholicism's tendency to develop within its own world. Moreover, in relation to the suffrage and indeed the women's movement generally, there were only a handful of Catholics scattered among the existing bodies in 1910. Hence the Catholic contribution only became one of any size and significance with the formation of the C.W.S.S.[589]

The Catholic Society was also a defensive move to limit damage to perceived Catholic 'truth' and social morality. The other religious Leagues also shared such 'family selfish' reasons for existence, but this was particularly striking with the C.W.S.S. 'Catholic participation in the movement for women's enfranchisement', as one leading Catholic suffragist, Elizabeth

588. 'A History of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society', in *Catholic Citizen* 15.10.28, quoted in F.M.Mason -'The Newer Eve: The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society in England 1911-23' in The Catholic Historical Review (Oct.1986) vol.LXXII no.4, p.621.

589. Parnell, p.3.

Christich, put it, 'is the best preventative of its degeneration into irreligious grooves not to be tolerated by Catholics':

> The word 'Catholic' in itself (alleged the same writer) precludes restriction of thought or narrow conception of duty.....The Catholic home is the centre of Christian civilisation. The Church never relegated her women to mere domesticity.[590]

This view was also found among the more conservative women of the Catholic Women's League who represented a distinctly 'domestic feminism' in the public Catholic world.[591] It was also represented more positively in the Catholic Social Guild. For this latter body also specifically sought to define Christian feminism in more strictly 'Catholic' terms, and included on its Executive Committee supporters of the C.W.S.S such as Mrs.Virginia Crawford (Hon. General Secretary of the C.S.G) and Father J.Keating S.J. It is particularly interesting to the present discussion because of the book entitled *Christian Feminism*, edited by Margaret Fletcher, which it published in 1915.[592] Subtitled *A Charter of Rights and Duties*, this sought to distinguish between what, from a Catholic standpoint, was good and bad in contemporary feminism. On the one hand, 'Revolutionary Feminism', outside of Catholic considerations, it saw as founded on a claim to the equality of the sexes and

590. E.Christich, 'Catholic Women and the Vote', in Franciscan Annals and Tertiary Record (May 1916), pp.129.

591. P.Kane - '"The Willing Captive of Home"?: The English Catholic Women's League, 1906-20' in Church History (Sept.1991) vol.60 no.3., pp.331-335.

592. Earlier Margaret Fletcher had published a series of articles on the subject in *The Crucible* (magazine of the Catholic Women's League) under such titles as 'The Catholic and the Feminist Movement'; 'The C.W.L and Contemporary Feminism' and the 'The Evolution of Christian Feminism'. Christian Feminism represents the fullest version of this outlook.

freedom for the complete self-realization of the individual. Everything that seemed to obstruct its path, whether revealed religion or traditional morality, was condemned by it and was to be swept away. In contrast, 'Christian Feminism' was that which sought to build upon Christian principles and which, in conformity with them, attempted to discover for women a wider scope for the development and exercise of their powers.[593] The Woman's Movement, looking as it did for 'a lost inheritance' of life and health, was therefore to a degree 'a revolt against Protestantism, which, it felt, with some justice was represented by that movement as subjugating women'.[594] Hence:

> The problem of modern feminism, with all its aspirations, aberrations, heroisms and follies, is one to which Catholics possess a solution and to which they should therefore bring sympathetic understanding and help. For the claim to moral independence, if divorced from obedience to Christian ethics, is one charged with disaster to the individual and the State. It is then an intense form of Individualism.[595]

The C.W.S.S was more positive about the possibilities of woman's public and political role than the over-domesticated feminism of the Catholic Women's Guild, and was critical of the somewhat restricted range of Christian feminism offered by the Catholic Social Guild.[596] Yet C.W.S.S literature tended to confirm the defensive, protective character of most Catholic feminism. This was indicated for example in its initial leaflet *Why do we*

593. M.Fletcher(ed.) (1915), p.85 and passim.

594. ibid, p.28.

595. ibid.

596. cf. protest to C.S.G on its very limited bibliography of Christian feminism. C.W.S.S Minutes 14.11.19, box 499 FL.

want a Catholic Suffrage Society . Here the first of five aims was firmly declared to be: 'to uphold the definite Catholic teaching on points connected with the position of women legally, socially and politically'. The third aim was also: 'to consider the special needs of Catholic women as regards the vote'. Only at the end came the intention: to bound together the Catholic women who have been working in all the Suffrage Societies since this reform was first started'.

Yet to this extent the C.W.S.S was also firmly motivated by the common religious mission and shared moral zeal of the wider movement. Indeed, its other major leaflet *Why we want the Vote* represented a classic statement of the ethical and social import of the franchise for Christian feminists throughout the movement. Without women's political voice, the C.W.S.S declared, the needs of women and children could never be understood, nor protected from increasing Parliamentary interference with the home. No laws concerning moral welfare would be effective either, whilst women were left at the mercy of her voting competitor in the labour market and were powerless to form effective trade unions. Women's spiritual and temporal welfare were closely connected therefore, just as many women's sweated wages and life conditions were 'a constant source of temptation and danger'.

Organisation and activity

The colours of the Society (blue, white and gold) were unveiled at the public launch in Kensington Town Hall on 10 May 1911. As an early member, Nancy Stewart Parnell, later observed, they symbolised well the character of the new body, combining homage to Our Lady with the papal colours as a sign of allegiance to the Church. In furtherance of these ideas,

members were asked to say one 'Hail Mary' and 'Blessed Joan of Arc pray for us' every day'.[597]

The first branch was Hastings & East Sussex in May 1912, followed closely by Liverpool and District, and then Brighton & West Sussex.[598] By 1913 four more had begun, in Manchester, Plymouth (like Cardiff later a product of work during Catholic Congresses), Wimbledon and Midlothian.[599] Others followed in Birmingham, Wakefield and Stirling. Arguably there might have been more. The Society was permanently troubled however by lack of money, so much so that it struggled to give even a token donation to the United League's 'Week of Prayer' organisation in 1913.[600] Numerically it was also never a large body. The Executive Committee once reported 1 000 members,[601] but in early 1918 there were only 187 subscriptions, according to *Catholic Citizen*.[602] Unlike the Church League therefore, the C.W.S.S was unable to create a proper regional structure of travelling organisers. What it did manage was one full-time secretary in Florence Barry, the driving force behind the Liverpool society. Her work was to prove invaluable for the C.W.S.S and its daughter organisation over the course of the next forty-nine years: a length of service only surpassed by the Liverpool and District branch itself, which has had an

597. Parnell, p.5.

598. Annual Report (1912), p.8-9.

599. Annual Report (1913), p.9.

600. C.W.S.S Minutes 17.7.13 and 17.11.13, box 499 FL.

601. *FCST* February 1914:22.

602. Figures quoted in Mason, p.625.

uninterrupted existence to the present.[603]

The small size and fragile finances of the C.W.S.S inevitably limited the range of its activities. Yet there was active participation in suffrage demonstrations and in the meetings and poster parades of the United League. The C.W.S.S also played a part in the movement against the White Slave Trade and in protests against forcible feeding. In its own sphere, propaganda work was carried out at meetings of Catholic Congresses and with bodies such as the Catholic Social Guild. Efforts were also made to gain access to training colleges and convents to spread the suffrage gospel and Catholic and Irish nationalist M.Ps were lobbied.[604] In addition, misconceptions of Catholic feminism were corrected, as when the C.W.S.S effectively countered the concern in Rome, articulated by Cardinal Merry de Val, that it was publishing immoral literature. Similarly it acted to challenge Catholic declarations such as that in a C.T.S pamphlet on marriage, which appeared to imply the Church expected a higher standard of morality among women than among men. With the launch, delayed by the beginning of war, of the *Catholic Suffragist.* in January 1915 such educational work became even more effective, although it should be noted that *The Tablet* (under Snead-Cox as editor) was always sympathetic,[605] whilst the *Catholic Times* and *The Universe* also helped provide publicity for the Society.[606]

Such efforts did not meet without resistance. For example a

603. Parnell, p.10.

604. C.W.S.S Minutes 20.7.14.

605. Having advocated women's franchise for thirty years or more, according to *FCST* February 1914:22.

606. Parnell, pp.7-8.

number of Masses for the intention of the Society were arranged over the years (usually in the octave of the Blessed Joan of Arc). As at Westminster Cathedral in 1915 however, this request was often refused.[607] Moreover the C.W.S.S and its members ran a constant risk of disapproval from the Hierarchy. As Father Walshe discovered, when in 1917 he was forbidden by the Archbishop of Liverpool from publicly helping the C.W.S.S any longer, such suspicion was not completely dissipated over time.

C.W.S.S disdain for militancy also brought Catholic opposition from a different direction. Cautious in its feminism as it was, the Society took pains to avoid any opportunity to be tarred with the militant brush. Although militants were therefore allowed as members, they were not even permitted to wear C.W.S.S badges at militant rallies.[608] Similar reasoning lay behind the decision not to take part officially in Emily Wilding Davison's funeral.[609] When supporters offered propagandist help, as with Father Northcote's writing of a pamphlet in 1912, the Society insisted on the careful elimination of passages open to militant interpretation.[610]

Such a stance was too inhibiting for some Catholics. The Society continued to enjoy the support of militant supporters such as Alice Abadam, M.A.R.Tuker, Joseph Clayton and Francis Meynell. Others however were more publicly critical. Six resignations were received in March 1912, including two W.S.P.U

607. Minutes 15.3.15 and 28.4.13.

608. Mason, p.621.

609. Minutes 13.6.13.

610. Minutes 14.5.12.

activists and the aforementioned Father Northcote.[611] Their viewpoint was outlined in an article in the *Suffragette* in early 1913 - 'Should Catholics be Militant ?' - where a Roman Catholic correspondent reflected upon the history of the Roman Catholic church in the preceding century.[612] Beginning with quotations from Sydney Smith ('As long as the patient will suffer, the cruel will kick') and from Thomas Aquinas, the article laid out militancy as a 'just' tactic for Catholics. There had been, it pointed out, no condemnation by Roman Catholic authorities for incidents involving workers in the Dock Strike. Many Irish priests had upheld those who had fought for Home Rule, whilst it was not fifty years since the Pope had fought for his temporal power. Hence:

> We should have thought that a Church which has suffered so much persecution and misrepresentation would have learnt to hesitate before judging others, especially seeing that their whole history is one of militancy. Indeed we have even felt surprise that the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society should have so definitely declared itself non-militant, considering the name of their patron, for presumably Roman Catholics do not believe that Joan of Arc was inspired by heaven to do acts inherently wicked.

Membership

Despite such disagreements, the C.W.S.S included a fair mix of Catholic suffragists with different outlooks. It was inevitably heavily drawn from among middle-class Catholics, certainly in its leadership.[613] However even then some opportunities were

611. Minutes 22.3.12.

612. 14.2.13:279.

613. Mason, p.621.

created to reach out beyond these bounds, as through the agency of John Scurr in Poplar in 1913.[614]

In view of the youth and inexperience of the early leaders, the Society was certainly indebted to the support of a number of more distinguished Catholic women, amongst whom Alice Meynell was the most welcome and significant.[615] Amongst the younger, more 'advanced' Catholic feminists, the C.W.S.S also had the benefit of the brilliant speaking of Alice Abadam. Further useful contributions were made by such women as Christopher St.John (a later Executive member), notably through the banner she presented to the Society in June 1912, showing St.Joan herself riding into battle. This was designed by Edith Craig (the daughter of Ellen Terry), who counted the C.W.S.S proudly amongst the eight suffrage societies to which she belonged - 'and when I think', she said,'when one considers all the cause means, one cannot belong to too many'.[616]

Very few senior Catholic clergy however found it possible to belong even to this Catholic society. Consequently the C.W.S.S seized eagerly on any crumbs of support that were offered by them. The reported opinions of the late Cardinal Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster and of the American Cardinal Moran

614. Minutes 30.5.13.

615. Others included Leonora de Alberti, Mrs.Virginia Crawford, Marguerite Fedden, Dr.Agnes Maclaren and Mrs.Whately. Pioneers such as Mrs.Chapman of Worthing (one of the first women mayors), Vera Laughton (later Dame Vera Laughton Mathews) and the C.W.S.S chairman in Scotland, Mrs.Hamilton More Nisbett (a great campaigner for women police) were also closely involved.

616. Quoted in L.Whitelaw, The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton (1990), p.80.

were most welcome therefore and were circulated widely.[617] In its first year the C.W.S.S was also glad to win the support of one of the leading visitors to the Newcastle Catholic Congress, Monsignor Giesswein. A distinguished Hungarian priest and member of his country's Parliament, he went on to make a well-received contribution to the Congress of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in Budapest in 1913.[618] Amongst the men involved with the work of the Society in this generally unpopular activity however, the outstanding contribution was that of Monsignor T.J.Walshe of Liverpool (whose sister was the chair of the Liverpool branch).[619] Until he was prevented by the Archbishop of Liverpool, Walshe was a regular speaker at C.W.S.S events and a constant encouragement.

Walshe's views were highlighted in his lead article 'Apologia Pro Clero' in the *Catholic Suffragist* of 15 March 1915. This was a clear statement of Catholic suffragism as it might appeal to fellow Catholics and another example of the conservative mission of mainstream Christian feminism. For in paying 'admiring testimony' to the women of the C.W.S.S for 'their zeal and enterprise', Walshe confessed the grounds on which he was so proud to be associated with their crusade:

617. cf. the N.U.W.S.S pamphlet 'The Tablet' on Women's Suffrage & Expressions of Opinion on Women's Suffrage (1909) The same approach was adopted by the C.W.S.S with a letter from the Archbishop of Hobart, and in 1919 after Annie Christich returned from being received by Benedict XV. Her article - 'Yes, We Approve' in *Catholic Citizen* (15.7.19) began with a quotation from the Pope: 'We should like to see women electors everywhere'. This was subsequently soon circulated as a pamphlet.

618. Parnell, p.7.

619. Others included Abbot Macdonald O.S.B (later Archbishop of Edinburgh), Fr.W.H.Kent, Fr.Mathew Power S.J., Fr.Philip Fletcher, Fr.Joseph Keating S.J., Fr.Fennell of Cardiff and Monsignor Brown (later Bishop of Pella).

> I have not hesitated to say publicly both in London and Liverpool, that I am an advocate of Woman Suffrage *because I am a priest.* To me, as to many of my clerical brethren, the question of Woman Suffrage is essentially a moral question - a movement which aims at the safeguarding of Religious Education, the virtuous upbringing of the child, the stability of the marriage tie and the sanctity of the home.[620]

To advocate this claim was therefore 'not only a privilege but a sacred duty'. To oppose it was 'not merely an outrageous anomaly, but an outrageous blunder'.[621] Look, he said, at the way in which it was the invaluable energies of Catholic women which (especially through the great meetings in the North) had helped defend Catholic Education against attempts to crush denominational schooling, and which were the mainstay of missionary work in the large towns. All this, he claimed, was 'owing to the conservative temperament of women in matters of religious import'. Why then did the Bishops and the clergy not openly advocate the measure which was such 'a barrier to the flood of licentiousness which is devastating society'?[622] 'Truistic statements' such as "the home is woman's place" were not relevant. Nor was militancy a reason for opposition, since all good causes had 'imprudent advocates'. Rather women's weight in the councils of men could avoid the barbarism into which Europe had plunged, for:

620. 'Apologia Pro Clero', *Catholic Suffragist* 15.3.15:18.

621. ibid, p.17.

622. ibid.

> The reign of the King of Peace will come when the rights of *all* His children shall receive their just recognition.[623]

M.A.R.Tuker and the development of Women's Ministry

Such defensive arguments were common currency. Yet even in Catholic circles there were voices which, by reworking the Church's tradition, also articulated a religious feminism which opened up new space for the liberation of women from their supposed 'distinctive' sphere of life. Above all this can be seen in the work and influence of M(ildred).A.R.Tuker. A first class scholar as well as a firmly committed W.S.P.U supporter and generous backer of the C.W.S.S, she had lived for many years in Rome with Miss Hope Malleson, with whom she wrote the well regarded *Handbook to Christian and Ecclesiastical Rome.* A member of the Pontifical Academy of Arcadia in Rome, she also became a Lady Justice of the Order of St.John of Jerusalem. Her standing, and more importantly her writings in these last critical suffrage years, acted as a tremendous inspiration to women seeking to change women's status in their churches.

Her feminist articles, particularly on the place on the place of women in the early church, were contributions to a number of suffrage papers, including *The Vote* and the *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review.* On their publication they brought her a flood of letters of appreciation and enquiries for more information from women of various denominations.[624] Indeed she played a considerable part in helping Hatty Baker find material for her pamphlet *Women in the Ministry.*[625]

623. ibid, p.18.

624. cf.Tuker Papers, FL. passim.

625. Letter from Hatty Baker 30.12.12, Tuker Papers.

Particularly welcomed was her book *Ecce Mater*, published in 1915, which, in tracing early Christian history, made a powerful contemporary case for the opening up of church ministries to women. As a fulsome tribute in the *Sussex Daily News* suggested,[626] it was for many readers:

> a new book which would have made a stir in the land but for the public's absorption in the great struggle of the nations.....its day will come, for it is one of the strongest and most persuasive pieces of literature which the feminist movement has called forth.....profound in thought and extraordinarily forcible in its logical grasp.....The statement of the case from Christ's teaching would alone suffice to make 'Ecce Mater' memorable.

Tributes came in from many quarters. 'We owe you so much', wrote Emmeline Pankhurst in gratitude:

> for showing so clearly the real place of women in Christianity. I have always thought St.Paul the first politician in our sense of the word. Last Sunday I went to the Temple Church but much as I loved the beautiful music.....I felt hurt all the time by the knowledge of how women are shut out from participation. How can thoughtful women bear it ?[627]

Other leading suffragists such as Mrs.Despard made wide use of the book in their speeches and requests for precise references and further information increased.

For what was especially useful about Tuker's work was its scholarship. As even the *Church Times* conceded,[628] in reviewing her article in *The Nineteenth Century and After* in 1916:

626. 13.3.15:23.

627. Letter 11.3.15, TP.

628. 9.12.16:28.

> Miss M.A.R.Tuker's article on Women Preachers is a more serious attempt than Miss Turberville's to defend this argument. With a great array of learning, she illustrates the extent to which the ministry of women was recognised in the earlier ages of the Church.

Hence, as Mary Richardson concluded:

> I felt I should write.....and say how I, and I know other militants, appreciate all you do in your writings for the movement. I know no one else who can help in this way and it is so needed now.[629]

Significantly however, more conservative Church feminists worried whether her work might rock the boat. More 'advanced' Catholic women like Alice Abadam might consider that women's status within the Church was intimately linked to resistance to enfranchisement, and might even plead with M.A.R.Tuker to consider a new translation of the critical parts of the Scriptures.[630] Others saw such endeavours as too threatening, if not to themselves then to weaker brethren. For this reason Alice Abadam found that the C.W.S.S turned down her suggestion of 'Miss Tuker's *Ecce Mater*' as a title for one of speeches. 'I was begged not to speak on the subject', she reported,' as it was too controversial'.[631]

A good statement of the conflict between these different versions of Christian feminism is provided by a letter to M.A.R.Tuker from the C.W.S.S press secretary Blanche Smyth-

629. Letter 10.1.15, TP.

630. Letter 30.10.17, TP.

631. ibid.

Pigott.[632] It reveals both the restrictions within which Catholic women suffragists had to work and the tensions present within Christian feminism as a whole. Inviting M.A.R.Tuker to lunch, Blanche Smyth-Pigott said that she had been thinking a great deal about the interesting visit she had paid to her:

> But I am still of the opinion that the task for the Catholic Suffrage Society is that of defending the Church and not exposing it especially to outsiders.....in the case of us Catholics one must be so absolutely certain of our facts which is not always possible. One has to be on guard against one's own colouring of prejudices, for a time at any rate we must convince the priests rather than turn them all against us, and finally there is always the responsibility towards the weak narrow unintelligent people who count so much in the affairs of this life by their sheer bulk and weight.

'Our Society', she went on, 'is meant to attract the Catholics not discourage them or still worse scandalise them'. So, she pleaded:

> Do let me only remind you how head and shoulders you are above the average Catholic, and that unless you step gently your influence and your prestige and even your noble motives may be wrongly interpreted to their own hurt by the stupid, at present embittered regarding suffrage, and on the other hand by bigoted enemies of our Faith.

When the Society came to publish its newspaper, the editor Leonora de Alberti and Alice Meynell wanted to take the title of 'The Newer Eve' after a line in Francis Thompson's poem:

> Daughter of the ancient Eve
> We know the gifts you gave and give
> Who knows the gifts which you shall give
> Daughter of the Newer Eve.

632. 30.12.12, TP.

The rest of the Executive Committee thought it too provocative however, although the verse was kept as a masthead.[633] The debate and its conclusion formed an apt symbol of their feminism.

Significance

In one sense the specific contribution of Catholics was not as crucial to the women's movement in Britain as elsewhere. Here the soul of the struggle was with the Church of England as the Established church, and the subsidiary nature of the Roman Catholic presence helped avoid strong opposition based on the perceived influence (especially through the confessional) of priests upon women. Nevertheless the Catholic contribution was not insignificant. Apart from its small addition to suffragist energies, it also helped to enable the English Catholic Church to take cognizance of women's claims, avoiding the isolation found on the continent. For as Leonora de Alberti argued:

> when well-meaning critics appeal to us to remember that the woman's movement in Catholic countries is in the hands of atheists, instead of hauling down our colours.....we reply, if that is the case, shame on the laggard Catholics who allowed this tremendous force.....to be lost to Christianity.[634]

The Society's idea that it could indeed offer valuable help to women in Catholic countries by its efforts and example (as they argued in application for membership to the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in 1918)[635] also has some grounding. Apart from great demand for its literature in Ireland for

633. Mason, p.625.

634. Woman Suffrage and Pious Opponents (n.d), p.4.

635. Minutes 5.12.18.

example, orders came from as far away as Newfoundland and New York. Above all, its woman-led organisation bequeathed a small but valuable continuing tradition of Christian feminism, as 'the first significant Catholic feminist group in the world'.[636] For the C.W.S.S became the St.Joan's Social and Political Alliance after the vote was gained, an organisation still active in the 1990s.

III. The other Religious Leagues

The four remaining religious Leagues were even more derivative of the Church League's example than the F.C.L.W.S and C.W.S.S. Their influence was considerably less, whether in terms of spreading the suffrage gospel or of long-term effect upon their religious sphere. Nevertheless each played a small but useful part in the suffrage movement and highlight further notable religious aspects of the struggle.

The Friends' League for Women's Suffrage

The existence of a Friends' League ought in theory to have been unnecessary. For from their origins, Quaker belief and practice so pointed in the direction of support for women's emancipation that the suffrage commitment of Friends' might be thought to have been inescapable. Indeed, as has been seen, from the start of the organised women's movement, Quakers had been well to the fore. Yet not all Quakers agreed with the suffrage movement and those who did so often did so passively. In response to this gradual realisation, the Friends' League was therefore set up: for 'the definite object of bringing before Friends' the special claim that the movement has on our Society.' 'Possibly', opined the F.L.W.S:

636. Mason. p.638.

> it is the very fact of unquestioned equality which Women Friends have always enjoyed, that makes them slow in realising the needs of many others who have not that equality.[637]

Such efforts were the conclusion of a growing recognition of the need for suffrage support and education among Friends, beginning in May 1910 with a Conference on Women's Suffrage at the Women's Meeting House in London. Presided over by Lucy Morland and led by addresses from Lady Gibb and Mrs.Arthur Gillett, this took place at the time of the annual Meeting of the Society of Friends' and attracted a large audience of over two hundred.[638] Shortly afterwards a Friends' Council for promoting women's suffrage appears to have come into being. Out of this evolved the Friends' League, organised by Alice Clark, with Roger Clark as its honorary secretary and Gulielma Crosfield as President.

By the summer of 1913, the Friends' League had made good progress. For in May 1913 its efforts were rewarded in the London Yearly Meeting, a body made up of representatives from all parts of England, Scotland and Wales. Observing that almost everywhere womanhood was seeking a fuller recognition, and a larger sphere of service, the epistle issued from the Meeting called upon Friends to help:

> We, as Friends, both men and women, are called upon to bear our share in bringing this movement to its full fruition, and in saving it from the serious dangers with which it is threatened.[639]

637. F.L.S account of itself, in *FCST* November 1913:72.

638. *CC* 19.5.10:88 and 2.6.10:120.

639. Reported in *Vote* 18.7.13:194.

As with the other religious societies, the work of the League therefore further heightened feminist consciousness and generally assisted women's activity within its own religious boundaries.

The Scottish Churches' League for Women's Suffrage

In contrast, the Scottish League did not so much reflect a particular failing within its own constituency as the strength of national feeling amidst the denominational differences of Scottish Church feminists. The creation of the Scottish Churches' League thus betokened the tremendous degree of unity and sense of co-operation shared by Christian feminists of different backgrounds, which was so much more important than the distinctions between them. Purposely the League, as an undenominational body, set out to be 'open to those who belong to any of the Scottish Churches'.[640]

The League's existence is also a conclusive argument, if one were needed, against the suggestion that British Church feminism was largely a product of southern or suburban England. The first branches of the church Leagues were mainly established in such areas, essentially because of the inevitable focus upon London and Parliament. Yet feminists in other parts of the British Isles had been actively working for suffrage well before this. In March 1911 for example, a joint service for woman suffrage had been held in the Synod Hall in Edinburgh, led by the Revd.James Ferguson of the Church of Scotland and an Episcopalian the Revd.A.J.Gadd, and with a United Free Church preacher the Revd.James Black speaking powerfully on the text 'Ye are all

640. *FCST* December 1913:86.

one'.[641] The occasion also saw the first rendering of the Scottish Church feminist hymn, composed by Katherine Loudon, which (as its third verse shows) made the familiar contemporary Christian links between morality, mission, patriotism and the vote:

> Sin and suffering, shame and sorrow
> Need and want against us stand;
> Open ills and shrouded evils
> Breathe their poison o'er the land:
> Lord, that we may serve our country
> Put the weapon in our hand.[642]

In Scotland such suffrage work had been led by Frances Balfour. Not surprisingly, as a proud member of the Church of Scotland,[643] she thus became a most active President of the Scottish Churches' League on its formation in March 1912, ably supported by the honorary secretary Annie Ferrier.[644]

No records exist concerning its precise size and character, but entries in the suffrage press indicate that a good number of Scottish League meetings were held and much educational work conducted. Its most impressive event was its great meeting held

641. *VfW* 14.4.11:462. Black came under heavy fire for his support of the suffragettes. Warned intimidatingly about presiding at a W.F.L gathering in Edinburgh in March 1913, he responded typically that it was because he was a minister of Christ that he believed in the Cause, appealing as it did to right, justice and truth. *Vote* 14.3.13:334.

642. Full version in *CC* 30.3.11:837.

643. Among Anglicans it was figures like Dick Sheppard and Bishop Barnes ('He speaks like a man not an ecclesiastic') that she rated highly. 'How thankful Scotland sh. be of its Church of reason, and freedom of ritual', she later exclaimed during the Prayer Book crisis. Letter to A.Balfour 24.10.27, Balfour Papers.

644. Vice Presidents included the Revd.C.M.Black, the Revd.Robert Craig and the Revd.R.J.Drummond of Edinburgh; the Very Revd. P.McAdam Muir and the Revd. John Hunter of Glasgow; the Revd.C.M.Grant of Dundee; Mr.Cargill Knott, Miss S.E.S.Mair and Lady Ramsay of Edinburgh; and Miss Lumsden LL.D of Aberdeen. The honorary treasurer was Mr.Sterling Craig of Edinburgh.

in St.Cuthbert's Hall, Edinburgh, which, like the Collegium gatherings in London the year before, considered 'the Religious Aspect of the Women's Movement'. The League also lobbied all Scottish M.Ps and members of the Cabinet.[645] and issued a collection of addresses in pamphlet form entitled *Freedom for Service* .[646] In addition, during the National Week of Prayer in 1913 the League coordinated a host of meetings throughout Scotland.[647]

The extent of the Scottish League's influence is hard to judge. The Scottish Churches however do not appear to have been appreciably any more or less forward than the English in their support for women's suffrage or for women's ministry. As the W.F.L activist Miss A.B.Jack of Edinburgh confessed at the Florence Nightingale Commemoration meeting in April 1915, although she had a great desire to enter a pulpit, it was her keen regret that although Scotland had led the way in many reforms, women still lacked an adequate voice in church administration.[648] Women such as the Revd.Olive May Winchester, the first (American Pentecostalist) woman pastor in Scotland were startling exceptions.[649] The impact of the suffrage movement was therefore important for the reception of Church feminism in Scotland also. The work of Church feminists certainly seems to have been successful enough to seriously

645. *Vote*13.7.12:216.

646. *FCST* December 1913:89.

647. *Vote*21.11.13:55.

648. *Vote*23.4.15:582.

649. Treated as a joke by male students on entering Glasgow Divinity Hall, she turned the tables on them by winning the gold medal and several other honours. *Vote*24.4.14:9.

concern the Scottish League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. Disturbed by the growing success of campaigns to win over the support of Presbyteries to the Cause, it sent a letter of protest to all Ministers in Scotland in January 1914.[650]

The Jewish League for Women's Suffrage

The Jewish League, by definition, was not an element in Christian feminism. Yet it deserves consideration here, sharing freely as it did in the work of the United Religious League and being a product of similar forces. For although immigrant (*shetl*) communities admittedly shared a different outlook and scope for women's lives, the long established Anglo-Jewish community had long since been integrated into English society.[651] Strongly middle-class, by this period Anglo-Jewry was as attached to English mores and institutions as it was to Jewish affairs. Therefore, unlike the *shetls* primary distinction (problematic for feminists in other ways) between sacred and profane (to which sphere women were relegated), it shared the conventional precepts of Victorian domestic ideology. Consequently, similar religious notions of women's place and capacities were found within it: ideas such as that of woman's innate spirituality (which allowed some progress, as in the gentile world, into philanthropic work in the late nineteenth century), as well as of subordination in communal worship and synagogue affairs. As in the Christian churches, by the height of the suffrage campaign, a number of Jewish women were becoming dissatisfied with the position

650. 'The Church Fearful', *Vote*9.1.14:187.

651. See R.Burman - '"She Looketh Well to the Ways of Her Household": The Changing Role of Jewish Women in Religious Life, c.1880-1930' in Malmgreen, pp.234-259.

accorded them and had begun to challenge accepted wisdom.[652]

The J.L.W.S thus arose out of the liberalising demand amongst some Jews in the first decade of new century. Indeed the development of Liberal Judaism in itself, as attested by Lily Montagu (a founder of the Jewish Religious Union in 1902), was partly linked to the resistance of Orthodox Judaism to feminist demands. From the start Liberal Judaism gave women and men equal congregational privileges, although not those of leading services or preaching.[653] Some Jewish women were also already active suffragists, notably the Australian Inez Bensusan. Daughter of a noted mining expert, a professional actress and author of several plays, she was for two years the organising secretary of the Actresses Franchise League.[654]

Begun in November 1912, the J.L.W.S (the youngest of the religious suffrage Leagues, apart from the United League established between them) thus sought not merely to secure votes for women, but also (like its sister Leagues) to raise the status of women in its own community. As the *Free Church Suffrage Times* observed,[655] the core of the League's expressed concerns were those shared by others and its leaflets 'might have been ours': 'Woman Suffrage is the cause of justice and liberty', declared the J.L.W.S, and these are 'Jewish ideals'; women's emancipation would 'further the progress of civilisation by combating the doctrine that physical force is the basis of government'; Jews should respond to their duty of serving 'our

652. Burman, pp.238-9.

653. ibid, pp.240-1.

654. Suffrage Annual & Women's Who's Who, p.181.

655. January 1914:10.

country with our spiritual heritage, as well as with our material and intellectual endowments'. For the J.L.W.S therefore, the meaning of the women's movement was laid out in its motto - 'The Joy of the Righteous is to do Justice' (Proverbs xxi.15).[656]

The League had observed that the organised support of the other religious bodies had helped to emphasise the religious and moral basis of the struggle. Hence, whilst a large number of Jewish men and women had been involved in the movement, a Jewish Society was seen as an obvious and invaluable boon. Moreover they felt strongly that the justice of the demand for women's emancipation ought to appeal especially to Jews, who had often been disenfranchised and still were in many countries.[657] Certainly in German speaking countries Jews were frequently found to be the most dedicated campaigners within the women's movement.[658] The demand for justice was also one to be taken into the Jewish community. Hence moves were made to effect resolutions at the annual meetings of the Boards of Management of United Synagogues. These led in May 1914 to the passing of resolutions enfranchising women seat-holders in the Great Synagogue, and the Borough, North London, Hammersmith and Hampstead Synagogues.[659]

Within the suffrage campaign the League followed the pattern of other religious organisations, establishing itself as:

656. J.L.W.S leaflet reported in *FCST* Jan.1914:10.

657. J.L.W.S Annual Report (1914), p.9.

658. cf. Mary Sheepshanks' report of her tour of Germany in 1913, in S.Oldfield, Spinsters of this Parish. The Life and Times of F.M.Mayor and Mary Sheepshanks (1984), pp.154-6.

659. J.L.W.S Annual Report, p.13. It was building upon attempts made as early as 1899 to enfranchise at least widows and single women. Only in 1954 however did all female members of the United Synagogue (as distinct from individual synagogues) finally gain voting rights.

> a non-party organisation formed to demand the Parliamentary franchise for women on the same terms as it is, or may be, granted to men, and to unite Jewish Suffragists of all shades of opinion for religious and educational activities.[660]

It carried out similar propaganda, particularly stressing 'the need for women's emancipation to secure the effective co-operation of men and women in combating social evils'.[661] The League also joined with other suffrage societies in constitutional action, notably on the issue of forcible feeding.[662] It affiliated to the Council of Federated Women's Suffrage Societies, joined fully in the activities of the United Religious League and sent its own representative (Mrs.Auerbach) to the International Congress of Suffrage Societies in Budapest.[663]

By the time of its first anniversary meeting the J.L.W.S, under its President Morris Joseph, had gathered together a good number of influential members of the Jewish community.[664] By mid 1914 it had a membership 'considerably over 300.....though it met with some opposition at first it has now proved, undoubtedly, the utility of its existence'.[665] Particularly active was the East End Committee, chaired by J.H.Taylor, whilst leading speakers included Dr.Hochman, Winifred Elkin, Horace Samuels

660. 'Objects and Methods' in Annual Report (1914), p.3.

661. ibid.

662. C.W.S.S Minutes 1 and 30 May 1913, box 500 FL.

663. Annual Report (1914), p.16.

664. Speakers included Rabbi Walter Levin, Mr.A.M.Langdon KC, Miss Dora Laznick and Mrs.Herbert Cohen, *Suffragette* 26.12.13:263.

665. Annual Report (1914), p.16.

and Bernard Steinemann. Even the Chief Rabbi Dr.Hertz (though not a member) was also impelled to express himself favourably to the League's cause. Somewhat illogically opposed to the extension of of the vote to women in America, he nonetheless acknowledged that in Britain women had very real grievances. Why not a Jewish League then, he said, if there were already other denominational societies ?[666]

The United Religious League for Women's Suffrage

Christian unity was often assumed by all in this matter of vital importance. Indeed the women's issue pointed for some to a divine unity which crossed the boundaries of Christianity itself. This was certainly the view of those who gathered for the first great meeting of the U.R.L.W.S at the Caxton Hall in November 1913. Amidst 'historic antipathies' reported the *Free Church Suffrage Times*:[667]

> Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Friend, Anglican and Nonconformist declared their sense of union in divine consciousness. "Have we not all one father", said the Jewish speaker appropriately, and this was the general sense.[668]

Particular prejudices were also challenged, as when the C.W.S.S speaker, Miss Smyth-Pigott made her contribution to an earlier meeting. For she alone', so it was reported, 'ventured a criticism of "the clergy of all denominations", so delivering a powerful

666. Account of meeting with J.L.W.S deputation 11.7.13, Annual Report (1914),p.10.

667. December 1913:84.

668. For another fuller account of the meeting cf. C.L.W.S *MP* December 1913:333.

shock to Protestant notions of priest-ridden women'.[669]

The United League thus acted as a definitive symbol and as a late yet welcome religious celebration of the fellowship of spirit that women from different religious backgrounds had for years found in their work together. 'Everybody' was indeed said to be present at the first great meeting which acted as a rallying point for most of the leading Church and Jewish feminists: foremost figures such as the Mansell-Moullins, Cicely Hamilton, Edith Craig and Miss Hicks enjoying together the reception laid on by Mrs.Strickland, Claude Hinscliff and Alice Meynell.

The work of the United League also further demonstrated the usual disinterest amongst the establishment press in the suffrage movement, except where militant sensationalism was involved. The Caxton Hall meeting on November 6 had not only been 'historic and unique'[670] but, as the *Vote* commented, it was 'one of the most impressive ever held in a hall famous for its suffrage meetings'.[671] Furthermore, the National Week of Prayer organised by the Leagues between November 1-8 had been warmly taken up in most parts of the country. All the religious Leagues held extra meetings for prayer and other groups, such as the Spiritual Militancy League,[672] also held special gatherings. In view of this powerful expression of unity, the religious suffragists were therefore deeply disappointed to be reminded that it was militancy not prayer that made for copy. Yet the impetus of the League was not reduced. A series of poster

669. *FCST* November 1913:72.

670. *FCST* December 1913:84.

671. 14.11.13:33.

672. See further ch.8, pp.313-314 and 327.

parades were mounted in 1914, together with an impressive joint demonstration in Hyde Park.[673]

Such expression of common purpose had not always been possible. In March 1912 for example, several hundred representatives of the Free Church League and the London Ethical Societies had marched together from the Embankment to Trafalgar Square, 'with the object of presenting the suffrage movement in its ethical and religious aspects'. The original intention of joining with Anglican and Roman Catholics bodies was unsuccessful however:

> owing to needless apprehension of disturbance.....the former, instead of going to the square, proceeded to Westminster Abbey, and attended Evensong, while the latter withdrew altogether.[674]

Fleming Williams then took the obvious opportunity of proclaiming from the plinth of Nelson's Column the fearlessness of *his* Church in the face of any circumstances! Similarly a joint demonstration fixed for June 22nd 1912 did not happen, owing to a misunderstanding between the societies regarding the giving of notice to the police. On this occasion, whilst the F.C.L.W.S held a meeting in Hyde Park regardless, the C.W.S.S retreated to more satisfying communion at the Criterion Restaurant.[675]

Such denominational differences and point scoring were unusual. For all the considerable divergence of belief and practice, some aspects of which deserve later recognition (notably the pioneering woman-led approach of the C.W.S.S), the outstanding feature of the work of the religious Leagues, like

673. Again most favourably reviewed in *Vote*26.6.14:154.

674. *Vote*23.3.12:266.

675. *Vote*29.6.12:177.

that of the movement as a whole, remains the remarkable complementarity in unity. For these brief years at least, linked by a definable common goal, they were also informed by a common spirit. Whilst this might quickly break down into its various denominations, it nonetheless expressed a common struggle towards a new vision of humanity under God. As such, it deserves at least a footnote in the history of ecumenism and inter-faith relations, as well as within that of the women's movement itself.

Chapter Seven

THE TRUE LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR ?

(Christian suffragism and the 'apotheosis of humanitarianism')

In tracing the origins of Christian feminism the significance of 'the religion of socialism' was noted. The previous chapters have also indicated a number of ways in which it touched upon the main sections of the later suffrage movement, particularly in its influence upon specific individuals. As an important phenomenon in this period however, it demands further attention. Partly this is because of its significance in the lives and outlooks of those feminists who, whilst firmly committed to women's emancipation, were also often critical of what they saw as the limited aims of the suffrage movement. More generally, such discussion also helps address the question of the nature of suffrage religiosity, and of the Christian feminist strands within it.

Adult suffragism

Most suffragists, and almost all their organisations, were content to struggle for the parliamentary vote 'as it is or may be granted to men'. A few however contended for the vote for every adult, male and female. Whilst usually playing some part in the suffrage campaign, such 'adult suffragists' were keen to promote this wider aim and the interests it represented. As the struggle grew to its height, and especially with the intensification of militancy, they then found themselves needing to safeguard the broader vision of their movement. Without this, they felt, the vote was a mere totem rather than a 'sacrament': an achievement of status equality for a few without any effective shift towards real equality for the many.

One important representative of such an outlook was Margaret MacDonald, the wife of J.Ramsay MacDonald. A keen advocate of women's suffrage, and active in the movement from at least the late 1890s,[676] she became distressed at the direction many suffragists took in the mid 1900s. For whilst not being allowed to vote was an insult to her, she sought 'real rights' rather than merely nominal ones.[677] Hence for her, militancy was wrong in both method and the narrowness of its developed intent. Committed to the cause of progress through the exercise of reason, she saw militant enthusiasm as distorting the case and true course of the movement. As she remarked with foresight, militancy would come to be overvalued in the history of the struggle:

> these people will claim the credit for everything that happens now, and people do not trouble very much to go below the surface, and they will agree that when the advertising began, the work began also.[678]

The misrepresentations and emotionalism consequent on militancy were however, nothing she felt, compared with its deleterious narrowing of the minds of women. Especially pernicious, she declared, was the belief that every interest of women should be put on one side until the insult of the voteless woman was redressed. 'I agree that it is an insult', she maintained, hitting out at the more well-to-do women of the W.S.P.U:

676. MacDonald, p.202.

677. ibid, p.200.

678. ibid, p.203.

> and those of us who have been wearing ourselves out helping women in their home conditions, have a much better right to feel that insult than those of you who have been living comparatively useless lives. But I consider it to be a far greater insult to me and my fellow women that our most sacred qualities should be put to economic uses, decorated for the delectation of vulgar and sensuous eyes, and that those of you who are so outraged by the minor insult aid and abet in the continuance of the other.[679]

The vote might be an important badge but other activities should not cease or be unduly relegated beneath it. This was to exaggerate its ability to bring radical economic and social transformation. Like other adult suffragists, she was much more sober about its possibilities:

> we shall use it just as badly as men have used it, and in getting it I am not to help women embark on methods which are naturally not their own, which will damage them in their own eyes as well as those of the public, and which are the worst possible preparation for their duties as citizens.[680]

Whilst remaining a member of the National Union committee therefore, Margaret MacDonald also pursued other avenues for women's emancipation, chiefly through her espousal of the Women's Labour League.

The Women's Labour League[681] brought together working class women, including several leading adult suffragists who were prompted by similar Christian feminist sentiments. In

679. MacDonald, pp.205-6.

680. ibid, p.206.

681. See C.Collette, For Labour and Women: The Women's Labour League (1989). Its first public meeting (over which Margaret MacDonald herself presided) was held on 9 April 1906.

Margaret MacDonald's case, her father, John Hall Gladstone, was a founder of the Young Men's Christian Association, and she retained from her upbringing a devout and practical religious faith. Involved, like so many in her generation, in a variety of social work,[682] by 1890 she had moved towards a religious socialist position, influenced by the Christian Socialists and later the Fabians.[683] As she herself expressed it:

> the Women's Labour League has been born in the springtime - in the springtime, that is, of the people's movement, the springtime of the awakening of the masses to all that is meant by Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality, the awakening of the classes to all that is involved in the divine precept, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.[684]

Dr. Ethel Bentham, a descendant of Jeremy Bentham, was another leading feminist involved. One of the first women magistrates, and later a Labour M.P between 1929 and 1931, she was a Quaker convert from Anglicanism. Active in women's suffrage, she became president of the Women's Labour League.[685]

Other adult suffragists led the way in comparable organisations. The Women's Co-operative Guild for example owed much to Margaret Llewellyn Davies, who was the Guild's general secretary from 1889 until 1922. Niece of Emily Davies, she was the only daughter of Mary Crompton (of a well-known

682. e.g as secretary of the Hoxton and Haggerston Nursing association and a C.O.S visitor in Hoxton.

683. Banks (1985), pp.116-119.

684. MacDonald, p.212.

685. Banks (1990), pp.17-19.

Unitarian family) and the Revd. J.Llewellyn Davies. Llewellyn Davies, like other Broad Church clergy of his generation, was a 'good friend of the women's movement' himself,[686] serving two spells as principal of Queen's College for Women, and being a member of the councils of the London School of Medicine for Women and the New Hospital for Women, as well as a supporter of women's suffrage and of Elizabeth Garrett in her work.[687] This background appears to have sustained his daughter well. Indeed, from 1889, when her father moved to Kirkby Lonsdale as vicar, until her father retired in 1908, she ran the Co-operative Guild office from a room in his vicarage. Through her work the Guild came into closer collaboration with the Women's Trade Union Association and Women's Industrial Council and moved to the forefront of campaigns for mothers and children.[688] She also gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Divorce Law in 1910, seeking to carry forward the Guild demands for equal divorce laws, cheaper divorce and the right of women to sit on juries.[689]

The young Ellen Wilkinson was another characteristic representative of the democratic suffragists. *Pace* her biographer Betty Vernon,[690] it is not at all surprising that she

686. Banks (1985), p.57.

687. For S.Mayor, he was also 'an interpreter of Maurice to the many who found him obscure'(p.183) and 'a fore-runner of twentieth century Liberal Modernism'(p.186).

688. cf. the Guild publication Maternity, Letters from Working Women (1915).

689. See Banks (1985), pp.57-59. Dictionary of Labour Biography I. pp.96-9 and papers in L.S.E library.

690. Betty Vernon, Ellen Wilkinson (1982), p.23.

was a keen 'constitutional' rather than militant suffragist. Franchise reform was for her part of a broader vision of genuine equality between all men and women. Joining the I.L.P at the age of 16 she had found in it an effective training ground for her religious socialism, which caught up and extended her religious upbringing. For Ellen, as for Margaret Bondfield,[691] her nonconformist roots brought independence of mind and social commitment:

> We took our religion very cheerfully. God was somehow part of the household, not an awesome Presence but friendly and understanding.....A fellow worker in a reasonable universe.[692]

She never lost her Methodism therefore: 'you can never get', she said, '.....its special glow out of your blood'.[693] Yet, like Margaret MacDonald,[694] this religious foundation was now being extended by new streams of thought. 'By the time I was 14', she later observed:

> I was reading Haeckel and Huxley and Darwin with my father. This never upset my faith in my friend God but it produced a queer philosophical mix-up when my father added Bergson's Creative Evolution on my 16th birthday. I didn't get this fuzzy mess sorted out until I discovered Karl Marx in my early twenties.[695]

691. See ch.3, p.77.

692. Vernon, p.18.

693. *Methodist Recorder* 16.3.1939, in Vernon, p.19.

694. For whose equivalent intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage see MacDonald, pp.44-63.

695. In Margot Asquith (ed.), Myself When Young, pp.402-11, quoted in Vernon, pp.18-19.

Most importantly of all however, the young Ellen Wilkinson was moved by encountering pioneer I.L.P women such as Mrs.Bruce Glasier, Katherine St.John Conway. Given leave one Sunday night by her father to hear her, rather than attend chapel, she later observed:

> Rows of men.....filled the platform.....But my eyes were riveted on a small slim woman.....her hair simply coiled into her neck, Mrs.Bruce Glasier. (She was speaking on) 'Socialism as a Religion' and to this undersized girl in the gallery this woman, not much bigger than herself, seemed the embodiment of all her.....secret hopes. To stand on a platform of the Free Trade Hall, to be able to sway a great crowd.....to be able to make people work to make life better, to remove slums and underfeeding and misery just because one came and spoke to them about it - that seemed the highest destiny any woman could hope for.[696]

Later this same figure encouraged her own first steps in politics. 'We need young women for socialism', she remembered being urged on, 'they are all going off asking for votes and forgetting the bigger things'.[697]

As Stephen Yeo suggested, Katherine St.John Conway's own experience may be taken as typical of many such 'conversions' in her generation:

696. Myself When Young, pp.412-5, quoted in Vernon p.20.

697. Vernon, p.21.

> I had been drawn into the High Church movement of the day and was at church in Clifton, when in they came.....lassies out on strike against starvation wages and for the right to combine.....The church was crowded with a fashionable congregation.....I had been praying for a fuller consciousness of the Presence, and there they stood, sister-women, if the 'Our Father' were true - ill-clad, wet through the driving rain, hungry.....'They stand between me and the Christ', so the thought smote me; so I see it still. Never shall any human being, so long as the world suffers wrong, know one moment's real communion with the mind of the Master till they have actually thrown in their lot with the poor and the oppressed. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it or not done it '. For the first time in my life I heard and began to understand.[698]

'The secularisation of religious enthusiasm'

Several other examples of leading women who moved from 'dynamic evangelicalism' into a more 'secular and cooperative' creed[699] might be quoted (notably Mary Sheepshanks and Isabella Ford).[700] Indeed, according to S.Mayor, the phenomenon can be seen most clearly in self-conscious (and vocal) converts from Evangelical Christianity such as Beatrice Webb (albeit not an active suffrage protagonist):

698. Samson Bryher, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol' (Bristol 1929), II. p.29, described by Katherine Conway frequently in her life and quoted in Yeo, p.12.

699. Rendall, p.107.

700. cf.Oldfield (1984) and Hannam (1989).

> In many ways she is typical of her time - the late Victorian age: in her wrestlings with doubt; in her extremely Protestant flirtation with Catholicism; in her deliberate adoption of a life of social service as a psychological and ethical substitute for religion; in her easy assurance that the world would be a much better place fairly soon; and not least, though perhaps paradoxically, in her regret at the passing of a set of beliefs and a way of life she did not herself accept.[701]

As G.J.Mayhew attempted to show, the ethical idealism of the late nineteenth century was certainly shared amongst the greater variety of British socialists and progressives, from the more specifically Christian groups and Christian Socialists within the churches to mystics and agnostics.[702] This common outlook was the result of the new social and philosophical trends of the late nineteenth century. Building upon the clash of 'Biblical' Christianity and Science in mid-century, this rested upon an appeal to human religious experience over against the dogmatic assertions of traditional religion. Advocates of British Socialism thus saw themselves on a great spiritual pilgrimage, with altruism, service and fellowship as their watchwords.

Snapshots of this characteristic spiritual journey among progressives is provided by the double issue of the *Christian Commonwealth* of 9 March 1910. Two influences were paramount, concluded the major article 'What Brought Me Into the Progressive Movement', summing up the many letters received on the subject:

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701. Mayor, p.264.

702. Mayhew, passim.

> The first is an intense sympathy with the needs of the people. The second influence.....has been the educational one of contact, chiefly through books, with men of strong intellect and large sympathies..... The 'soul adventures' related are very largely the struggles from the bonds of a narrow creed - the doctrine of Eternal Punishment and all that logically went with it, the Substitutionary Atonement, and so on - against which the inward convictions of the writers more or less consciously rebelled - or from the stultifying vagueness of a timid pietism which endeavoured to suppress the eager inquiries of a mind waking up to the realities of life.[703]

Within the women's movement these influences were manifested in a wide variety of overlapping viewpoints. In which respect, Beatrice Webb, though typical in holding such ideas, represented but one option. For whilst she was led into a definite Fabian agnosticism, others flirted with a myriad of more religiously flavoured philosophies. A promiscuous mixing of religious, ethical and mystical ideas took place, as many strove to find a new compatibility between religion and the claims of science. A new emphasis was placed upon the religious experience of the individual and the collective religious experience of humankind, including that of the different world religions now being 'discovered' by the West.[704]

Numerous autobiographical accounts of this quest abound. Among the preeminent influences they cite are those of the American Transcendentalists (Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman), British idealism (especially through T.H.Green and also Carlyle and Ruskin), eastern mysticism and theosophy, and the ethical

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703. p.49.

704. Mayhew, p.11.

secularism of reformers such as Blatchford and Trevor.[705]

Olive Schreiner

Of all the influences upon the suffrage movement however, the two great prophets of this 'secularisation of religious enthusiasm' or 'apotheosis of humanitarianism' were Olive Schreiner and Edward Carpenter. Both were writers who threw off the traditional Christian orthodoxy in which they were raised (and in which, in Carpenter's case, as an erstwhile curate of F.D.Maurice, he had for a time actively worked).[706] Yet, in different ways, as proponents of the 'new life',[707] they strove to articulate a holistic approach to life, drawing upon and developing their own religious inheritance. For both, freethinking informed by mysticism replaced Christian dogma, a feeling for nature and particular forms of pantheism.[708] 'Socialism' for them was not only the conception but the living out of the new life, not waiting for someone or something else to bring it into being. Thus, as Liz Stanley has observed, for Olive Schreiner, as much as for later feminists, 'the personal is the political'.[709] In which regard, as well as for the widespread interest in her writings, she was truly 'the muse' of the suffrage

705. For a discussion of their particular contributions see Mayhew, pp.16-109.

706. cf. ECarpenter, My Days and Dreams (1921), pp.52-60 for his clerical career.

707. The subject of discussion in the 1880s and 1890s among the progressive circle which included Havelock Ellis and Olive Schreiner, and in the associated group of that name, the Fellowship of the New Life.

708. For Schreiner, see R.First and A.Scott, Olive Schreiner (1980), pp.52-54.

709. L.Stanley - 'Olive Schreiner, New Women, Free Women, All Women', in D.Spender, Feminist Theorists (1983), pp.229-243.

movement.

Best known for her *Story of an African Farm* (1883) and *Woman and Labour* (1911), her collection of short allegories published in 1890, entitled *Dreams*, were even more central to the suffrage spirit. Drawing upon her South African landscape, these were often 'replete with Biblical images', reflecting the intensity of her German Free Church Missionary upbringing[710] and the visualising of a new world:

> I dreamed a dream.
> I dreamed I saw a land. And on the hills walked brave women and brave men, hand in hand. And they looked into each other's eyes, and they were not afraid.
> And I saw the women also hold each others hands.
> And I said to him beside me, 'What place is this?'
> And he said, 'This is heaven.'
> And I said, 'Where is it?'
> And he answered, 'On earth.'
> And I said, 'When shall these things be?'
> And he answered, 'IN THE FUTURE.'[711]

Such writings had considerable impact upon feminists before and during the first world war. They were frequently read and discussed at suffrage meetings and Schreiner herself was held in great esteem across the movement[712] and in Co-operative and

710. First and Scott, p.182.

711. *Three Dreams in a Desert*, in C.Barash (ed.), An Olive Schreiner Reader (1987), pp.107-8.

712. cf. J.K.Jerome, who declared her one of the three women who had influenced him most (the others being Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot) *Vote* 2.1.14:154.

labour circles.[713] The most telling reflection of her importance was that given by Constance Lytton, recalling a reading of *Three Dreams in a Desert* by W.F.L suffragettes in Holloway prison one evening. No longer an allegory at such a moment:

> The words hit out a bare literal description of the pilgrimage of women. It fell on our ears more like an ABC railway guide to our journey than a figurative parable.....We dispersed and went back to our hard beds, to the thought of our homes.....to the groans and cries of organised women - content.[714]

Schreiner's writings also encapsulated the tensions faced by the more radical feminists in the context of their culture. As Rebecca West, never afraid to criticise muddled socialist and feminist (as well as conservative) thinking, observed in 1912, though often inspiring, Schreiner's philosophy had a tendency to a 'so simple' attitude.[715] *Woman and Labour*, West maintained for example, was 'slow and vague, though its heart was in the right place; *The Story of an African Farm* 'a good novel spoilt by an illicit attempt to improve the reader's morals.' More generally, Schreiner's thought tended 'towards the most undiscriminating asceticism'. So for example, West argued, in *Three Dreams in a Desert*:

713. First & Scott, p.185.

714. Lytton, pp.156-7, quoted in First & Scott p.185.

715. *The Freewoman* 12.10.1912:132, reprinted in J.Marcus, The Young Rebecca West (1982), p.73.

> The extremely depressing career of Woman, who left the garden of Pleasure because Duty with his white, clear features came and looked down at her, and who decided to seek the Land of Freedom down the banks of Labour through the waters of Suffering, seems to be planned by use and wont rather than by the findings of an inquiring morality.....so women try to earn their salvation quickly and simply by giving their souls up to pain. It may only be a further development of the sin of woman, the surrender of personality.[716]

More recent critics concur about the ambiguous values in Schreiner's work. For Laura Chrisman, they are intimately related to the inevitably taut, constrained character of her writing, consequent upon the tight restraints of the culture in which she lived.[717] Unlike Edward Carpenter for example, whose *Towards Democracy* otherwise offers a parallel to Schreiner's *Dreams*, she was unable to express a free romanticism. Schreiner's use of allegory (redolent of biblical parable in diction and technique) was thus symptomatic:

716. *The Freewoman* 12.10.12:132, reprinted in Marcus, p.73.

717. 'Allegory, feminist thought and the Dreams of Olive Schreiner', in Tony Brown (ed.), Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism (1990), pp.126-150.

> Allegory is, like labour itself, in Schreiner's theory of value, the activity of freedom, the site of the struggle for the realisation, or freeing, of origins. But it is a freedom that is, in many respects, indistinguishable from oppression. Realisation can only be at the cost of reification - reification of the original matter, of the producing agent. The allegories are not the less important for the impasse that they enact, however; it is on the contrary because of their contradictions that they remain significant. They suggest the very limits of possibility for feminist discourse of that time.[718]

Thus examination of the form of *Three Dreams in a Desert* shows woman always remaining:

> on the one hand an effect of history and on the other a means of history, never reaching meaning in and for herself.[719]
> .....the woman becomes one part of a biological machine, guided by instinct rather than reason, prepared to surrender her freedom to provide that of 'the entire human race'. [720]

Rebecca West's observations about the limitations of the religiosity of Schreiner's thought were even more cutting when directed at *The Freewoman.* For whilst she welcomed the candour and feminist achievements of that short-lived radical paper (to which she herself contributed), she also felt that the paper 'was coming to an end psychically when it came to an end physically', its psychic death:

718. Brown (ed.), pp.148-9.

719. ibid, p.141.

720. ibid, p.143.

> due to the fact that Dora Marsden (the editor) started on a train of thought which led her to metaphysics.....She began to be sceptical of modern civilisation and this led her to preaching a kind of Tolstoyism which would have endeavoured to lead the world back to primitive agriculture'.[721]

'Dreaming', was indeed for radicals 'a way of transcending pain'[722] and re-envisioning life and experience - but it clearly had its difficulties.[723]

Edward Carpenter

Similar assessments can be made of Edward Carpenter. By posterity he has certainly been both ridiculed as a simple mystical utopian faddist:

> Besides Cambridge dons and students, the Glasiers, the Salts, and Olive Schreiner, 'all the lunatics of the world seemed to come to see him'[724]

and recently reclaimed as a pioneer of a more holistic libertarian socialism. Sidney Webb's view is judicious: if Carpenter's head was in the clouds, he declared, or in the woods of distant

721. In *Time and Tide*, quoted in Marcus, p.6.

722. First & Scott, p.183.

723. In Schreiner's case however, it is important to note how realistic she was. As Edward Carpenter observed:

> in the consciousness of the sufferings of Woman the iron has entered into her soul. If she had only been content - like some of the wilder spirits of the movement - to unload on *men* the vials of her wrath, and to saddle on *mankind* alone the responsibility for these sufferings, her strain in the cause would have had more of the delight of battle in it. But she was too large-minded not to see that if there is to be any blame in such a matter, the blame must be accepted by Woman herself just as much as by Man. (Carpenter, pp.230-1)

724. R.Hawtin, Edward Carpenter (1930), p.6, quoted in C.Tsuzuki, Edward Carpenter 1844-1929. Prophet of Human Fellowship (1980), p.4.

Concord, his feet were planted, 'for all the world a Fabian', on the Town Hall steps.[725] As a modern observer has commented, Carpenter like others of his generation was drawn towards mysticism and utopianism 'as the means to express a tissue of alternative values'.[726] Whilst clearly set in the romantic-idealist tradition, he remained engaged with socialist and progressive causes.

Carpenter's 'diffuseness' and mysticism, it has been argued,[727] resulted not so much from 'intellectual dereliction or vacuity on his part' as from 'the power, density, and historical specificity of the cultural hegemony which he and his contemporaries confronted'.[728] Carpenter was thus a preeminent example of the tendency among contemporary progressives to utilise religious sensibilities in the construction of new worlds. This was partly a reaction against nineteenth century scientism and hyper-rationalism. Whilst drawing upon nineteenth century romantic and idealist traditions however, Carpenter and others sought concrete advance towards a fully democratic society. Their religious sense not only gave life ultimate meaning and purpose, it also, in so doing, legitimated the struggle for socialism in the here and now, celebrating community and connection and showing the way to live.[729]

The person and work of Carpenter, only slightly attached to

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725. In *Socialism in England*, quoted in Brown (ed.), p.18.

726. K.Nield - 'Edward Carpenter: The Uses of Utopia', in Brown (ed.), p.26.

727. ibid, pp.17-32.

728. ibid, p.26.

729. cf. C.E.Shaw - 'Identified with the One: Edward Carpenter, Henry Salt and the Ethical Socialist Philosophy of Science', in Brown (ed.), pp.33-57.

the suffrage campaign, were far less important to the women's movement than those of Schreiner. Yet his efforts and example reflected the mood of many, as Charlotte Despard observed, when she first invited his direct cooperation in the suffrage struggle:

> What we are fighting for is much more than the vote. It is Freedom - women's Freedom - to live and act and express that which is in her - that which when it finds expression, will help the sad world along. And it is right that I should specially rejoice in your sympathy and understanding because you have been an inspiration and a hope to me in many a dark hour.[730]

For others, such as the young Fenner Brockway, he was indeed:

> the greatest spiritual inspiration of our lives. His *Towards Democracy* was our Bible.[731]

Thus he was representative of many of his generation: in his case, progressing 'from Christian Socialism to a more radical though romantic challenge to the ethos of the age':

> firmly convinced that there has been slowly emerging through the ages a World Religion that is destined to supersede all other religions; that this will break down the barriers between race and race, and class and class; and free men's souls from the fetters that have hitherto bound them.[732]

On the fringe of religious orthodoxy, Carpenter found himself

730. 17.2.1908, MSS.386.147 Carpenter Collection, Sheffield City Library, quoted in Tsuzuki, p.161. Carpenter found Despard herself similarly 'splendid' and 'miraculous'. Carpenter, p.263.

731. F.Brockway - 'A Memory of Edward Carpenter', in *New Leader* 5.7.1926 p.6, quoted in Brown(ed.), intro. p.1.

732. Mayor, p.265.

regularly speaking to meetings of Theosophists, Ethical Societies, and later R.J.Campbell's Progressive League, to all of whom his insistence on the mystical and ethical core of religion naturally appealed,[733] and from all of whom suffrage support was natural.

Carpenter's most important work was *Towards Democracy*, which had sold sixteen thousand copies by 1916. In this he articulated his quasi-mystical view of 'true democracy', a possibility built upon the fact, for Carpenter, of the immanence of God in humanity. For underlying the material world he saw a universal mind or spirit, the source of all human notions of truth, beauty, goodness, justice and love. A human being was made aware of their existence in moments of intense feeling through the immanence of the universal Spirit (God) within their own self. Through 'a change of heart', human beings might rediscover their lost unity with the universal Spirit and the rest of creation, so finding the health in mind and body, society and world, which 'civilised' human beings so clearly lacked.[734]

The attempt to find a coherent activating metaphysic, consonant with modern life and science, and drawing upon European idealist and Eastern philosophies, is seen in other progressives closely linked to the suffrage movement. Something has been said above about the outlook of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. In the case of her husband Frederick Pethick-Lawrence these characteristics are scarcely less prominent, albeit tempered by the realism of a practical man of action. Like Carpenter, he was animated by a sense of and search for Oneness, of what Roger Fulford termed his 'conscious unity with the entire sentient creation':

733. Mayhew, p.238.

734. ibid, pp.245-55.

> For years (he wrote in his later essay *If I Had My Time Again*) I sought in vain for this sublime thought which would satisfy at the same time my reason, my emotions and my consciousness of a spiritual world behind the world of sense. I find it now in contemplation of the wonderful universe around me and of my own essential union with the Central Fount of Life which is at once its source and its substance.[735]

Later in life his natural mysticism was intensified through contacts with India, expressed in his poetry entitled 'A Cosmic Hymn' (published in *The New Statesman and Nation* in 1949).[736] During the suffrage period he was inspired by a great sense of God's immanent Spirit working in and through history:

> We look forward (he said in an early speech) to the continued existence of improvement, till every creature which God in His infinite power has created, shall be won over to God by His infinite Love, and as ages pass away shall nearer and nearer to the time of infinite perfection, holiness and love.[737]

Like Rebecca West, there were other prominent suffragists who felt that overly spiritual concerns made no sense, and were potential distractions from the Cause. Teresa Billington-Grieg, arguably one of the clearest and most radical feminists of her day, thus had little time for religious fancies. Her mother had been educated in a convent school, and was given to what Teresa saw as 'an unhealthy absorption in prayer and meditation'. An elementary school teacher, secretary of the Ancoats University Settlement, and a member of the I.L.P before involvement in the

735.Quoted in Brittain, p.210.

736. cf. ibid, pp.210-11.

737. Quoted in Brittain, p.19.

W.S.P.U and W.F.L, she herself was driven on by her firmly held beliefs in Socialism and agnosticism.[738] Most suffragists however found that it was not a question of either/or, a religious sense or a political commitment. Rather the two went hand in hand. Thus for other socialist feminists such as Hannah Mitchell, spiritual life and suffrage strengthened one another, just as they had been brought together in the Labour Churches in the 1890s, where there had been attracted:

> a type of Socialist who was not satisfied with the stark materialism of the Marxist school, desiring warmth and colour in human lives: not just bread but roses too.....If our conception of Socialism owed more to Morris than to Marx, we were strengthened by the help and inspiration of the weekly meetings held in these Northern towns.[739]

If this was part of a stage in the secularisation of the British mind, it was nonetheless a potent element in the suffrage cause.

Religious suffragism and the British Left

What then was the import of these strands of religious socialist and immanentist thought within the suffrage struggle?

Part of their significance can be gauged by considering two of the most prominent male suffragists, James Keir Hardie and Philip Snowden. For their I.L.P outlooks bore some definite similarities to the 'Nonconformist Conscience'. This is not surprising. Both were originally nonconformist lay preachers (Hardie for the Evangelical Union, Snowden as a Wesleyan Methodist). Whilst Hardie especially became disillusioned by the hypocrisy and lack of social concern in institutional Christianity,

738. Rosen, pp.44-45.

739. Mitchell, p.116.

they both remained deeply affected by their religious roots. Hence they displayed keen concern for issues such as drink and emphasised the importance of 'character'. Using much of the traditional evangelical language of sin, salvation and personal regeneration, their Socialism was presented as the practical application of Ethical Christianity to society. Appealing to the ethical teachings of Christ, quite independently of any specific dogmatic beliefs, it expressed progressive notions which, as has been seen, lay at the root of much religious feminism.

This ethical and religious socialism, linked with other streams of immanentist thought, also issued in a number of short-lived progressive groups which brought together like-minded individuals from different backgrounds. These provided networks of men and women who later collaborated in such campaigns as franchise reform. The Humanitarian League for example, instigated by Henry Salt in 1891, included most of the later progressive suffragists (including George Lansbury, Dr.Stanton Coit, Dr.Clifford, Francis Newman, H.W.Nevinson, Laurence Housman, Margaret MacMillan, Katherine Bruce Glasier and Edward Carpenter). Salt himself, like Carpenter, had moved away from Christianity. Many of his basic philosophical convictions however (such as his continual emphasis upon 'Love' and his belief in the kinship of humanity with creation) showed the strong influence of the Platonism of the early Christian Socialists, mediated in his case by the Revd.C.Kegan Paul, a close friend of F.D.Maurice.[740]

The direct Christian Socialist influence in the suffrage movement has been remarked upon earlier.[741] Its impact was also diffuse and long standing. Stewart Headlam's feminist

740. Mayhew, pp.285-6.

741. See ch.5, p.197.

involvement for example went back to at least the 1880s. He was active in helping set up women's trade unions and sought to keep women's issues linked to the wider vision of his Christian Socialism. Thus for example, when the *Pall Mall Gazette* launched its 'revelations' entitled "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' in 1885, Headlam and the Council of the Guild of St.Matthew declared that the concern about vice should not isolate the sexual issue to the expense of the vicious economic and social circumstances. Amongst the duties urged upon churchpeople was that of supporting 'such measures as will give women a voice in the making of the laws under which they and their children live'.[742]

Headlam's Guild of St.Matthew was initially set up to counteract secularism. Yet it is clear from its own *Church Reformer* and from other Anglican Christian Socialist utterances that the wider ethical socialist immanentist outlook was already influential in such quarters from at least the late 1880s. For Charles Marson indeed, replying to an attack by Edward Aveling:

> religion involves no belief in the supernatural whatsoever, but it is a belief in the ideal, realised at least once in history, often partially realised, and never wholly absent from any man: so that to realise this ideal is the one and only end of human life.[743]

The growing phenomenon of the sharing of pulpits and platforms by progressives of different backgrounds was also an undoubted factor in, and clear sign of, the linking of hands and ideas. By the beginning of the twentieth century therefore, three

742. *Church Reformer* 15.8.1885:186, quoted in M.Reckitt (ed.), For Christ and the People (1968), p.83.

743. *To-Day* Feb.1884:125-133, quoted in Mayhew, p.68.

main strands may be discerned:[744] the creation of various religious and ethical bodies (such as the denominational Christian Socialist groups) which saw in Socialism a religious or ethical ideal, as the social fulfilment of their principles; the development (especially in the circles of 'New Liberalism') of a wider movement to a more just, but not necessarily economically equal, progressive society; and (especially in the moralism of labour's nonconformist working class advocates) identification with Socialism of traditional Liberal issues such as Temperance and the moral regeneration of character. Crossing old boundaries, these allied trends thus allowed new collaborations across party lines.

Not least was this important in establishing bridges between feminism and socialism. For, as Richard Evans illustrated:

> of all the divisions within the camp.....of women's liberation, the deepest, most obvious and the most long-lasting was this division between feminism and socialism.[745]

In continental Europe this was deeply marked. With the startling exceptions of women such as Clara Zetkin in Germany and Madame Pelletier in France, the two movements not only conducted their struggles apart from one another, but also viewed each other with distrust, even hostility.[746] The socialist movement was profoundly wary of a movement led by middle class women, imbued at its root with liberal individualism. The feminist movement for its part, sought the softening, not exacerbation, of class issues and feared the social stigma of too

744. Mayhew, p.140.

745. Evans (1987), p.3 and chs.2 & 3, passim.

746. ibid, p.37.

close alignment with socialists. Hence, in Evans' words:

> it is not enough for historians just to celebrate the labour movement's advocacy of female suffrage and applaud the rediscovery of the mass suffrage marches.....It was precisely on the left that many of the serious doubts about the value of the vote for women arose.....
> the controversies over the waging of serious campaigns for women's suffrage surely demonstrate that women had to fight for equality and independence within the labour movement just as much as they did in any other part of society.[747]

The relationship between socialism and feminism in Britain was somewhat different by virtue of British labour's distinctive history and culture. Yet here too considerable tensions were apparent. The small Marxist left, in the form of the Social Democratic Federation and its leaders H.M.Hyndman and Belfort Bax, was opposed outright to women's suffrage. Even amongst the larger reformist Left it was often unpopular, with the adult suffragists frequently held back by the contentious nature of the issue within labour circles.[748]

Meanwhile in British suffrage circles socialism was often regarded as tasteable only with a very long spoon. This helps to explain the slowness with which Mrs.Fawcett and the N.U.W.S.S leadership moved towards the tactical necessity of their alliance with labour. Indeed, on the militant wing relationships became increasingly strained, despite W.S.P.U origins in the I.L.P. Although radicals like Hardie and Lansbury fought for clearer support, the W.S.P.U became increasingly intolerant of Labour

747. Evans (1987), p.90.

748. To some degree for example, the Women's Trade Union League took refuge in this. M.Pugh, Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-1918 (1978), p.19.

leaders who seemed to be helping to keep the Liberals in office. During the second week of October 1912, the I.L.P chairman W.C.Anderson found himself heckled by suffragettes at a 'War on Poverty' meeting, a treatment hitherto reserved for Liberals and anti-suffragist Tories. Subsequently even good friends of suffrage such as Philip Snowden faced the same treatment.[749]

Alongside the growing awareness of the need for tactical alliances, the religious and ethical socialist connections of the period were therefore a helpful factor in easing the conflicts between socialism and feminism. Such common ground allowed vital linkages which were impossible in the more divisive ideological landscapes of France and Germany. In which context George Lansbury was a pivotal figure. A radical socialist who lived his entire life on the left, he emerged as the most celebrated male suffragist in the years immediately prior to the first world war, whilst still remaining a member of the established Church. Indeed his personal spiritual journey is almost a microcosm of the general maelstrom. Losing his early religion at about the same time as he found socialism (c.1890), through the aggressively anti-religious S.D.F and Mrs.Ward's *Robert Elsemere*, he became an agnostic under Dr.Stanton Coit's influence, and then rediscovered Christianity with the support of the Revd. Fenwick Kitto at Whitechapel (and later W.C.Roberts at Bow); remerging this in a new synthesis with socialism (and subsequently absolute pacifism); whilst remaining open to other philosophical currents (including the Theosophical Society, which he went on to join and value very highly).

It was Hardie, rather than Lansbury, who was the foremost male suffragist throughout the 1900s. Lansbury only became actively involved in 1906, after his unsuccessful parliamentary

749. cf. *Suffragette*17.10.13:12.

election in Middlesborough. Thanked for his efforts (including his outspoken support for women) by the vigorous local labour and suffrage organiser Marion Coates Hansen, he was also upbraided by her for his reticence in offering to speak on suffrage platforms.[750] Lansbury was a natural ally. From the 1880s onwards he had been an active supporter of feminist causes, struggling against the economic as well as the political oppression of women. From an early date, he was involved as chairman of the Day nurseries for the Children of Working Mothers, which helped initiate day nurseries in London.[751] Lansbury's feminist commitments were intimately bound up, like his socialism, with his Christianity, particularly his belief that men and women were equal in the sight of God and therefore, no sex should be superior. Reflecting upon merely one of the starving women who knocked at his door, seeking to avoid the workhouse, he observed realistically:

> I can't find it in my heart to say to her that she is my sister in the sight of God.....so she passes on, indifferent to our creed which to her is meaningless.....To me the most important question for the Christians of England to consider is this condition-of-women question.[752]

Lansbury's sense of outrage boiled over in the face of forcible feeding. On 25 June 1912, infuriated by the response of Asquith to questions about 'torture' of suffragettes:

750. Letter 24.5.06, vol 2. Lansbury Collection, L.S.E.

751. Bob Holman, Good Old George (1990), p.65.

752. In G.Haw, Christianity and the Working Classes (Macmillan 1906), pp.171-2, quoted in Holman, p.66.

> I rushed down the House in a white heat of passion, shouting to him that what he was saying was exactly what every tyrant said who had put reformers in prison; that he knew perfectly well none of these women, because of their creed and faith, could submit to the conditions which he lay down.[753]

Ordered to leave by the Speaker, he was subsequently suspended from the House of Commons. Such behaviour brought condemnation from the establishment and criticism from senior Labour figures such as Ramsay MacDonald. Moved however by the torrent of support and thanks from suffragists and other well wishers,[754] he then impetuously resigned his seat in order to stand as an Independent Labour candidate for women's rights, hoping to win and thus encourage the Labour Party to support his tactics.

His resignation proved unwise. The by-election was lost by 731 votes, despite (or rather partly perhaps because of) the active campaigning of W.S.P.U members in Bow and Bromley. His wife Bessie, a strong supporter of votes for women, articulated the problem. According to son Edgar, even as a supporter, she:

> resented their coming into Bow and sidetracking the enthusiasm of the growing movement for Socialism into an agitation for votes for women, which in her view was a subsidiary issue.[755]

Fellow Christian socialists rallied round and congratulated him for his stand. 'Your magnificent fight and protest', wrote Edith

753. G.Lansbury, My Life (1928), p.118.

754. Amounting to 427 pages in the Lansbury Collection - 'Nothing he ever did produced such a flood of letters and telegrams' - according to Holman, p.67.

755. E.Lansbury, George Lansbury. My Father (1934), quoted in Holman, p.71.

Mansell-Moullin:

> has done untold good.....What my husband and I feel about it is impossible to put into words. Your noble deed will prevent thousands of women losing their respect for the manhood of this Country.[756]

Other friends were less positive. 'I am not going to condole with you or offer you any sympathy', wrote Marion Coates Hansen:

> You acted with open eyes.....
> a more unhappy time I have never lived through as far as my political situation is concerned.....

From the women's side, she added pointedly, the wilderness was not any greater, with just a few steps to retrace. From the Socialist side:

> you know I think you all wrong. I <u>am</u> a keen suffragist but I am a <u>keener</u> socialist (that is why I am a keen suffragist).[757]

Lansbury's sacrifices for the suffrage cause did not end there. At a huge Albert Hall rally on 10 April 1913, he implied in the heat of his speech that militant destruction of property was acceptable, providing no life was put at risk. Under an obscure law he was convicted of seditious speech, ordered to find two sureties of £500 and bound over to keep the peace for twelve months. After refusing, he was sent to Pentonville prison for

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756. Letter 27.11.12. cf. also other letters, including those from W.C.Roberts, Gertrude Francis (on behalf of Bath Church Socialist League), and C.Stuart Smith, in vol.6. Lansbury Collection.

757. Letter 27.11.12, vol.6. Lansbury Collection.

three months.[758]

Lansbury's conduct, at least in regard to his parliamentary resignation, was definitely misguided at this juncture. Yet, as one biographer has argued, it is possible to see in his behaviour an attempt to 'recast the British left'.[759] Lansbury's actions show a conflict with the 'Labourist' outlook which historians have attributed to the modern British working class movement. Neither Fabian 'gradualness' nor trade union 'knife and fork' issues were the heart of Lansbury's socialism. Rather socialism was 'a new way of life, a new gospel, indeed a new religion'.[760] In this sense, at least at this point, Lansbury represented that alternative strand of British socialism, linked to the new religious and ethical stirrings of the 1880s and 1890s.

After his imprisonment and as militancy increased in stridency, Lansbury moved away from the W.S.P.U. By the end of 1913 he was linked to new groupings on the left: the United Suffragists, his own Herald Leagues (support groups to the *Daily Herald*) and Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation of Suffragettes. With the United Suffragists (formed in 1912 by the Pethick-Lawrences after the W.S.P.U split) he thus found himself allied with that group of progressives, headed by the Pethick-Lawrences, who were most committed to a similar combination of feminist and socialist goals (influenced as they were by the same stirrings of *fin de siecle* religious change). With Sylvia Pankhurst and the E.L.F.S, such an alliance carried

758. There he entered on hunger strike. Rebuked by the chaplain for 'defiling the temple of the Holy Ghost', his body, Lansbury reminded him of Ridley & Latimer, who had also allowed their temples to be destroyed rather than submit to unjust laws: whereupon 'the young man cleared out without saying another word!' Lansbury, p.123.

759. J.Schneer, George Lansbury (1990), p.123.

760. ibid, p.24.

the beginnings of real political weight. Perhaps, as Jonathan Schneer suggested, in these links may be discerned 'the nucleus of a socialist, feminist, left.'[761] If so, this was one of the fascinating outcomes of the 'religion of socialism' . Whatever the case, the interaction of these religious strands, with feminism on the one hand, and socialism on the other, provided further creative twists to the configurations of each movement.

761. Schneer, p.128.

Chapter Eight

'THE APPEAL TO GOD'

(Feminism against the Church)

So far this study has outlined the constructive use of Christian themes and motifs and highlighted the close involvement of active churchgoers in the suffrage movement. Yet this participation was always from a minority, whose Christian feminism frequently bewildered or enraged others. Such disappointing responses then increasingly led to frustration among Christian suffragists: especially within the W.S.P.U, where feminist feelings were turned upon the churches with a vengeance from 1913.

Spiritual inhospitality

In early 1913, as women's suffrage amendments to the Reform Bill were being debated, a number of special days of prayer were held by suffragists in Westminster Abbey and St.Paul's Cathedral. All day long, commented *Votes for Women*,[762] resplendent in their badges, militant and non-militant suffragists, went in and out. Organised ecumenically by Archdeacon Wilberforce, Dr.Clifford, Mrs.Bramwell Booth, Countess de la Warr and other leading Church feminists, these occasions (culminating in the special day of 'meditation and intercession' in Westminster Abbey on St.Bride's Day, 1 February 1913) were intended to create a spirit of positive reconciliation for acceptance of legislative change.

This was a more helpful response to the suffragists than that formerly given by these church authorities. As Frances Balfour reported to her sister Betty in February 1909:

762. 10.1.13:220.

> We wanted to attend Westm. Abbey as an organisation the day before Parlt. meets. The Dean in the curtest way has refused to reserve seats for us, tho' the unemployed had them reserved. We shall go en masse all the same.[763]

Yet the hospitality of early 1913 did not last much longer than the Reform Bill, since its women's suffrage amendments were soon ruled out by the Speaker. As an eye-witness (Annie Somers) contended, following the march to Westminster Abbey from the East End on 22 March 1914:

> For years the English Church has lamented its failure to attract the bulk of the people to itself; latterly it has even had to deplore the falling away of its women workers, yet only last Sunday it deliberately refused one of the greatest opportunities ever offered to it of becoming indeed the Church of the people.[764]

Sylvia Pankhurst had planned the march to end in prayer at the Abbey as an appropriate, 'symbolic', act on that 'Mothering Sunday'.[765] She had written to the Dean in the hope that the evening service might be appropriately adapted but no response was received. The march went on, drawing together strong contingents from the Welsh Suffragists and the Men's Federation, as well as from Sylvia's own East London Federation. Led by the Revd. C.A.Wills, dressed in his cassock and white surplice, the procession was directed by the police to the side entrance of the Abbey at St.Margaret's Church, only to find the gates being shut in its face. Undeterred by the proffered explanation that the Abbey was full, Wills declared that 'then we will pray where we

763. Letter 8.2.09, bundle 338, BP.

764. *VfW* 27.3.14:393.

765. S.Pankhurst, pp.531-2.

stand'. To the consternation of the clergy within, he then led an impressive open-air service outside.[766]

Wills was the foremost suffrage 'martyr' amongst clergy supporters. He stood alongside the East London Federation through all the tumultuous processions of 1914, even when other good friends were reticent. As such, whilst earning great respect within the movement, he put his livelihood on the line.[767] Others also did not enhance their careers by outspoken support of the women's movement, especially if they were also socialists.[768] In Wills' case however, his advocacy led to his sacking by his vicar, endorsed by the Bishop of London. The immediate cause of this was a sermon preached on January 25th 1914, entitled 'Thou shalt do no murder'. Declaring against forcible feeding, Wills had read out statements of leading medical men against the practice, together with the Bishop of Kensington's reply to the Deans of St.Paul's and Durham in *The Times*. Protesting against his dismissal, he repeated his argument:

766. See accounts in *VfW* 27.3.14:393, *Christian Commonwealth* 21.3.14:464.

767. cf. S.Pankhurst, p.566.

768. cf. Ursula Roberts' observations on the damage done to her husband's prospects by his own views and hers: 'He was already scorned in the diocese as a supporter of women's suffrage, and as a socialist.....I hated standing in his way. I knew that but for my peculiar ideas he might have been offered a canonry or some such.' Letter 18.8.16, Autograph Collection FL.

> I am not now pleading for Woman Suffrage, or against; or for militancy, or against. To do would be making the pulpit into a Coward's Castle, and that is a very sorry thing to do. The question is simply this, and it is one we must all, as professing Christians, face and answer for at the bar of God: 'Is forcible feeding just and Christian?' If it be, we must support it; if not, we must do all we can to abolish it.[769]

As noted earlier, from 1895 onwards, in several editions, a significant collection of views on women's suffrage was published by the N.U.W.S.S. Entitled *Women's Suffrage - Opinions of Religious Leaders,* it sought to demonstrate support in high quarters across the churches. Yet, despite some leading names, as the publicist (and former Catholic priest) Joseph McCabe pointedly observed in his book *The Religion of Woman* (published in 1905), the very need to publish such statements only served to show that 'the conservative defence was largely based on the religious conception of "woman's sphere"'.[770] Indeed, he said, the repeated publication of the book:

> assumed that there is still a widespread feeling among Christian women that the clergy object to their having a voice in the appointment of the administrators of their country.[771]

Rather than showing much favour, argued McCabe, the Church in England had been the 'chief impediment' in the way of moderating the injustice towards women, although not as powerfully or bitterly as in the United States of America:

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769. *VfW* 6.2.14:286.

770. McCabe, p.55.

771. ibid, p.51.

> In spite of the fact that for years now educated clergymen have known the far from supernatural source of those Old Testament ideas and practices which occasioned the injustice, few of them have helped to remove it. The agitation for its removal, especially in the earlier years, was so purely secular and practically anti-clerical as to present a distinctly heterodox character. All honour to the memory of those clergymen who, like Kingsley and Farrar, protested against the injustice to the full extent of their ideal of womanhood. But their lives do not redeem the sin or apathy of the Churches; they do not heal the bruises or undo the suffering of those many religious women who were torn between their allegiance to their beliefs and to their sex and humanity. The clergy never discovered any injustice to woman; and only one in a thousand could see it when it was pointed out.[772]

Estrangement within the Church

As outlined above, from 1909 onwards a number of specifically religious suffrage societies were established. Acting as ginger groups within their denominational spheres, their work was useful in broadening the base of the suffrage movement and in meeting religious objections. Yet, whilst they also acted as spur to feminist advance within the churches, their existence at best only mitigated the growing estrangement felt by many religious women. Clear evidence for this is found in the increasing complaints raised against the Church in the correspondence of Archbishop Davidson, especially in the years 1912-14 when suffragette militancy reached its height. For there was, claimed the churchwomen Alice Kidd in the first of her series of letters:

772. McCabe, p.59.

> an ever increasing unrest and dissatisfaction, amongst our best women, at the position of their sex in both Church and State. It is a dissatisfaction which can only be allayed in one way, because it arises from a truer and wider conception of duty, responsibility, and power, which is artificially restricted and unacknowledged.[773]

This, she maintained, was seriously damaging the Church, with many of her best workers 'being alienated', and 'drifting here and there like ships without a rudder'. The Church was 'failing her women at a time when, of all others, she should be their guide and support'. Therefore, she insisted:

> The Church must and can precede the State in coming to the rescue before it is too late. We must remember that it is not a political question in its essence. The 'Woman's Movement' is a moral, intellectual, and spiritual upheaval.[774]

The occasional voice of concern came from the opposing camp, asking for the archbishop's support, or complaining about the detrimental effect they perceived in the church suffragists' association with a movement that (according to the Committee for Opposing Female Suffrage) sought to 'cause vulgar gossip, and fill our girls minds with wrong thoughts'.[775] Yet by far the majority of correspondents on this subject were fervently supportive of Alice Kidd's viewpoint. 'It is true', wrote another Anglican woman:

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773. Letter 25.3.12, in Davidson Papers, 515.111.

774. ibid.

775. Letter 17.12.08, DP.515.15; letters of Edward Winter, Rector of St.Andrews and Griselda Chapman 7.3.11, DP.515.72 and 74.

> there is a Church League for Women's Suffrage - I thank God for that - but that is not the same thing as the Church acting as a whole in the matter. Is it not a blot on the Church that she should come in after the event so to speak, as she certainly will - when women have worked out their own salvation by fair means or the reverse?[776]

Such feeling was certainly not confined to the younger generation of more radical churchwomen. As a respected contributor to church debate on the position of women, Gertrude Bayley, reflected sadly:

> During my 35 years of active work in this parish I have always received.....the friendliest consideration: but, practically, I am not a 'member of the Church'; neither is any woman, and I have known and heard of a very great number who, in consequence of this, have quietly withdrawn from the Church altogether.....It is a grievous loss on both sides, but surely the greater blame attaches to the rulers of the Church who, because the question is large and difficult, have set it aside, generation after generation.[777]

The senior London magistrate Cecil Chapman complained to the archbishop in similar terms. Whilst, he said, considering their services, politicians were unchivalrous in refusing votes to women, the Church was worse than unchivalrous in the 'absolute indifference' its leadership had shown to 'the cause of women'. For the Church:

776. Letter of Henrietta Spens, 'a member of the Church', 5.3.14, DP.516.79.

777. Letter 30.12.12, DP.515.198.

> knows so well the enormous part which women play in social and religious work and the crying necessity for strengthening their hands by some measure of political power if they are not to be for ever defeated in their fight against the selfish and brutal forces which dominate the world.[778]

So strongly did Chapman feel that he included his resignation from the Central Church Committee for defense and education. Others evidently felt even more vehemently. For as the *Free Church Suffrage Times* commented in its editorial in January 1914:

> 'I cannot call myself a Christian', said a girl lately,'I can't help it, but I care so much for what is fair and just.' Nonsense, of course, the two are bound up. But it is sad that it can be said.[779]

What particularly annoyed Church suffragists was Randall Davidson's studied attempts at remote neutrality on the issues raised, and his refusal, despite frequent requests, even to issue a general prayer regarding the controversy. As Dorothy M.Davis saw it, writing as early as 1908, referring to the Hyde Park demonstration to be held in June of that year, at which the Prayer of St.Chrysostom would be said by all:

778. 31.3.12,DP.515.118.

779. p.6.

> We are certain that God is blessing this movement. But if He is, will not the Church take part with us in this Crusade against injustice and immorality? Could not Your Grace make a prayer to be said in every Church throughout this land on that same Sunday June 21st?
> I am not asking Your Grace to give your personal support to this movement, but to put the matter (as one which will have far-reaching and incalculable effect on the nation either for good or for ill) publicly before God.[780]

Even when suffragette militancy only involved the interruption of meetings, Davidson's response was extremely restrained. As he replied to Agnes Gardiner in March 1907:

> I am on the whole in favour of the extension of the suffrage to women, provided some clearer and more consistent scheme can be devised than I have yet seen in print, but I am absolutely clear that this is not the moment when I could give my name in favour of that cause or even move a finger on its behalf.[781]

He was, he said, alarmed by the mode of action adopted by a great number of suffragists. For this he believed to be 'fraught with the deepest danger to the general tone and morale of English public life'. The effect of expressing support therefore might be seen to be:

> encouraging a line of conduct which is absolutely fatal to the fundamental principles of ordered progress and constitutional lines of action.[782]

780. Letter 4.3.08, DP.515.12.

781. Letter 1.3.07, DP. 515.3.

782. ibid..

The most accurate verdict on his position was therefore Mrs.Fawcett's:

> after our conversation I cannot say whether you approve of Women's Suffrage or not, but only think that you are making a careful enquiry into the facts (bearing upon it).[783]

Ecclesiastical militancy

Towards the end of 1912, as the first suffragette hunger strikes led to forcible feeding, and in the wake of window smashing and letter-box damage, exasperation among churchwomen also took a new turn. Led by Alice Kidd (who, like her husband, was associated with Percy Dearmer's church at Primrose Hill in London), a Suffragist Churchwomen's Protest Committee was formed. By October 1914 this had collected and sent to the archbishop four instalments of Anglican signatures to its petition:

791. Letter 26.3.09, DP. 515.27.

> We protest (they declared) against the entirely un-Christian Spirit shown by the Bishops, Priests and Deacons of our Church towards women, and their neglect to offer public prayer in the Churches.....for God's guidance.....and for a speedy and righteous settlement of the women's agitation. We declare this movement to be a great moral and spiritual upheaval, and its aim to be the uplifting of the Nation and the furthering of truth, purity and justice throughout the world. In testimony of our belief, and as a protest, we resolve in future not to attend the Services of any church, work for any church, contribute to the funds of any church, where the incumbent is not (1) a sympathiser with the women's movement and (2) willing to prove his sincerity by requesting the prayers of his congregation on at least one Sunday in every month, until such time as women shall have equal voting rights with men both in the ecclesiastical and in the political world.[784]

Such tactics were generally deplored by Church suffragists. The Church League for example, explicitly disavowed the policy of boycotting non-suffragist clergy: declaring itself as seeking 'to convert rather than to constrain', and being unwilling to welcome any recruits gained through such pressure.[785] Alice Kidd responded by asserting that the protest was neither a threat nor a boycott, but was simply aimed at breaking down what she saw as 'the terrible apathetic indifference of the clergy.....causing them to *think*'. Such clerical apathy was extremely dangerous to the whole religious life of the nation, she believed, and the Protest, begun only after much serious consideration, would at the very least necessitate some thought regarding the cause of such perturbed feelings.[786]

784. DP.516.295-301.

785. *MP* November 1912:115.

786. *MP* December 1912:133.

Whether such ecclesiastical militancy was either justified or effective, it was a precursor of the broader suffragette attack upon the Church in 1913. This was undoubtedly the most dramatic full year in the whole history of the women's suffrage movement in Britain. It marked the high point of suffragette militancy, with widespread attacks upon property and damage to empty buildings, together with the dramatic events of Derby Day and its aftermath. In response, the Government's coercion reached its apogee. Open-air suffragette meetings were prohibited (although this repression was soon successfully defied), raids were made on the W.S.P.U headquarters, and, above all, the Prisoners' Temporary Discharge Act was introduced. This measure, better and more (in)famously known as the 'Cat and Mouse Act', allowed the release of hunger strikers, and their re-arrest when they displayed signs of recovery of health. In doing so, it appeared to intensify what many regarded as the 'torture' of forcible feeding. It only seemed horribly to postpone, rather than avoid, the increasing likelihood of the death of a hunger striker.

Such events, which had already been well heralded by the end of 1912, still did not impinge upon many churchmen's consciences. Rather, as Alice Kidd rightly remarked, the attention of the churches was very difficult to draw to such matters. For as has been noted earlier, like the national papers, with isolated exceptions such as the *Christian Commonwealth*, the ecclesiastical journals were generally only interested in novel suffragette outrages (an outlook which further contributed to the suffragette belief that this was the only way for such women to gain any attention for themselves). Instead the main concerns of the Church of England at this point were centred very largely on the three key issues identified by Archbishop Davidson in his

New Year's sermon: namely, Home Rule for Ireland, Disestablishment of the Church of Wales, and the Peace Conference. Ironically, as the suffragists perceived it, the archbishop observed that it was:

> an act of grave irresponsibility to stand carelessly aloof when some great thing, affecting for years the well-being of our own or other nations, is in the making. If we ought to be caring or acting, and we are not, we do not thereby escape responsibility, we increase it.[787]

Hence suffragists sensed that a double standard was being applied, with men's militancy regarded in a different light from their own. Irish unrest in particular gathered attention in high establishment quarters (and sometimes approval or nodding at), and Ulster and industrial disorder had at least gained public prayer from the established Church. Occasional broadsides had been launched upon the failure, as the suffragists saw it, of the churches as a whole to recognise and give support for their cause. Now this grew towards a full-scale assault, signalled by the creation of the so-called Spiritual Militancy League in early 1913. In its call to the clergy of all denominations, this group remarked upon how, although clergy by tradition did not introduce questions of social or political orthodoxy into their sermons, there were times when a specific or general wrong (such as the white slave traffic or the exploitation of child labour) raised 'an issue not only of policy but also of conscience'.[788] Organised by Mrs.Stanton Coit of the Ethical Church, these women, clad in their distinctive black and orange scarves, committed themselves to peaceful protest in the

787. *Record* 3.1.13:1.

788. *VfW* 21.3.13:359.

churches.[789]

The 'Appeal to God' - Suffragette 'War' on the Church

The real declaration of the feminist attack upon the Church however, came with the lead article in the *Suffragette* of August 8th 1913, entitled 'The Appeal to God' (an article subsequently widely distributed as a broadsheet). In this Christabel Pankhurst outlined the central source of complaint against the Church. Some of the finest of the clergy, she commented, would be going to Downing Street at this time to petition on the militants' behalf against the Government's coercion of women prisoners. Unfortunately the Church as a whole was not associated with the action. Many times violence had been used in church history in the name of religion, yet still many ministers of God tried to sit in judgement on the suffragettes. The heads of the church were seen 'to strain at a gnat and to swallow a camel'. For they showed themselves afraid to encourage the destruction of property, but there was no cry 'Thou shalt not kill' from the archbishop of Canterbury when the Government seemed intent on destroying women's lives. The Church was thus 'degraded into the lackey and hanger-on of the Government'. When Church property and worldly status were threatened, she alleged, there was an outcry (as with the Welsh Church Bill) and the Government was denounced:

789. cf. the incident at St.Margaret's Westminster, where a group left immediately before the sermon, as a protest against the refusal of the preacher to mention the women's movement, *VfW* 25.4.13:425.

> But when the Government are oppressing women and denying their human equality.....and when women are being murdered by politicians, then the Church is compliant.....At this crisis in our national affairs, when women are offering up their life as the price of other women's redemption from misery and degradation, the heads of the Church have fallen into every error condemned by Christ.....The Church is the heritage of women as well as of men, and if men let the Church fail in her mission, then it is for women to assert themselves. Christ is their Saviour as well as the Saviour of men.....Worldly justice is not as yet given to women, but Divine justice is theirs, and if the recognized ministers of religion will not ask it for them, the women will ask it for themselves. The appeal they make is from men to God.

Henceforth the W.S.P.U was therefore 'at war' with the Church. Interruptions of services became commonplace, and were regularly reported in the *Suffragette* under such headings as 'Woe unto you, ye hypocrites',[790] 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you',[791] 'Faith without works is dead',[792] and 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'.[793] Usually, although not exclusively, in churches where incumbents were hostile (or at least refused to offer prayers themselves), suffragist women would interrupt the liturgy at various points, to offer up their own prayers for the women they regarded as suffering in prison for the sake of liberty. Not that such actions were limited to Anglican churches. The women's movement was nothing if not ecumenical. Interruptions were also made in a number of Free Churches,

790. 24.10.13:28.

791. 19.12.13:231.

792. 2.1.14:278.

793. 27.2.14:448.

including the City Temple,[794] and in one or two Jewish synagogues.[795]

For those women involved these were partly acts of new bravado and attention-seeking, and partly natural expressions of a duty the Church had refused to perform. Furthermore the suffragettes were also conscious of the way in which they were breaking new ground in these invasions of not only public, but also sacred space. There were earlier precedents. In the seventeenth century English Revolution for example, especially during the Commonwealth period, there had been women who not only declared the word of God, but who also 'harangued prelates and country priests, tore down altar rails, smashed stained glass windows and cut up surplices with their sewing shears'.[796] Similarly women's revolutionary fervour elsewhere had often displayed vigorous anti-clericalism.[797] Suffragette claims to being the first women to offer up public prayer from an altar in England,[798] may not have been entirely accurate therefore. What was certainly new was the scale of their interventions and the political weight of their movement.

In response, some clergy assisted the demonstrations. The

794. *Suffragette* 17.10.13:6.

795. As at St.Petersburg Place, Bayswater Road in October 1913, where women prayed aloud for Jewish members of the Cabinet, since Herbert Samuel and Sir Rufus Isaacs were regular worshippers there. *Suffragette* 17 October 1913:7.

796. Dorothy Ludlow - 'Shaking Patriarchy's Foundations' in R.L.Greaves (ed.), *Triumph Over Silence* (1985), pp.93-123, quoted in Trevett, p.6.

797. cf. e.g K.Jones and F.Verges: '"Aux Citoyennes!": Women, Politics and the Paris Commune of 1871' in History of European Ideas (1991) vol.13 no.6, pp.711-732.

798. *Suffragette* 17.4.14:8.

East London Suffragettes in particular found much sympathy and little opposition (except for a beating at one Roman Catholic Church in Poplar).[799] However several leading clergymen pointed out the deeply alienating effect such acts, and militancy in general, had on many. 'To my own mind', said Archbishop Davidson:

> the outstanding feature of the controversy is the deep pathos of seeing splendid energy and self-devotion distorted and mishandled by a little group in a manner so mischievous that it results inevitably in harming the very cause which it is meant to further.[800]

Some were driven to more aggressive condemnation. Dean Inge of St.Paul's, although not actually opposed to the idea of women's suffrage as such, was particularly forthright. In an open letter to the *Times*, published on 22 November 1913, he excoriated the Bishop of Kensington's opposition to the 'Cat and Mouse Act' as the championing 'of a criminal anarchist'. The Dean of Durham, Hensley Henson, a definite opponent of women's suffrage, was but a little more moderate in his dismissal of such ecclesiastical sympathy. I cannot sign your clergy protest, he wrote in an open letter in the *Times*:[801]

799. S.Pankhurst, p.510.

800. Address at Canterbury Diocesan Conference 20.6.14, reported in *Suffragette*3.7.14:226.

801. 21.11.13:18.

> because I am quite unable to suggest any better means of treating those unhappy women, who are in prison convicted of deepest crimes, who cannot be let loose on society, who will keep no faith and obey no rules.....It seems to me very unworthy of a good citizen, and *a fortiori* of a good Christian, to embarrass the Government in the fulfilment of its primary duty - the suppression of crime.

Sometimes the church protests involved violence towards the women. In a celebrated incident in St.Paul's Cathedral in October 1913 for example, vergers dragged a number of the women out, one woman was struck in the face with a long silver stick (perhaps a churchwardens' wand) and her dress was badly torn. The fracas, which lasted for about half an hour and resulted in the arrest of two suffragettes, prompted cries of 'Shame', and led, according to the *Suffragette*,[802] to fifteen Americans leaving in disgust. Whether this was because the habitual worshippers had by now cultivated stronger stomachs than the tourists was not reported.

Responding to such incidents and criticism of them, the Catholic scholar M.A.R.Tuker reflected on another occasion at Brighton parish church, where one official had said to a woman who made her petition for the hunger striker Rachel Peace, 'you ought to get your necks rung'. This is 'religion', she commented:

802. 24.10.13:33.

> as she is presented to us by males after 2 000 years of the Gospel. the men have shown us their cupboard bare of religion, of faith, of charity. Perhaps nothing more startling in its irreverence, and in the real negation of God, can be imagined than a clergyman leaving out the prayer for the sick and the captive lest Rachel Peace should be prayed for.....We have heard the tragedy of great men born a hundred years before their time; but this is nothing to the tragedy of deans born two thousand years later than was at all necessary.[803]

Most serious of all were the attacks, rumoured and very real, upon church property. During 1913 alone, among the most serious of those attributed to suffragettes, the churches of St.Catherine's, Hatcham and Rowley Regis were burned down, others at Hampstead Garden Suburb and Liverpool were also fired, and those of St.Anne's, Eastbourne and Penn badly damaged, whilst the windows of Lambeth Palace were broken. In 1914, there were explosions in Westminster Abbey and St.George's, Hanover Square, in St.John's, Westminster, St.Martin-in-the-Fields and Spurgeon's Tabernacle. Considerable damage was done to Birmingham Cathedral and the ancient churches of Breadsall, near Derby, and Wargrave were destroyed.

Prison experiences

Why did the disillusionment with the Church issue in such deliberate provocation and rage, and why was the Church made such a target (although far from the only one)?

The answer lies partly in personal experiences, especially those of the suffragette prisoners, whose particular religious sensibilities were quickened by Holloway and other jails. For on the creative level, as reflected in several suffragette testimonies, the experience of the struggle and its sufferings led some to an

803. 'Dean Inge and the Clergy', *VfW* 28.11.13:126.

heightened sense of themselves and their perceived mission. This was commonly phrased in the language of the Christian faith. The first time she went into the prison chapel at Holloway, remarked Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence for example, she saw six or seven hundred women there, and could not pick out the suffragettes. It was a revelation, she said:

> No claim left, no sign of education left, no distraction of any kind - everything swept away, except humanity and womanhood.....I felt like a wave in a great sea, the sea of Humanity - great, restless, infinite, unfathomable! Oh how I longed in that chapel to get up, just as I was, in my prison clothes.....I knew I could have made them understand the Gospel. It was a wonderful sight! That congregation clothed in the dress of shame. There, over the altar, the picture of the human God, executed as a criminal between two thieves; I knew perfectly well that the drama of the Cross and Passion, infinitely less in degree - as I felt very deeply during those Passion week services we had in church - infinitely less in degree, but the same drama, was being worked out there.[804]

Prison was not therefore without its spiritual consolations. As Olive Walton's diary during her imprisonment in Aylesbury prison shows, the time to talk and reflect together as women could be turned to good effect. As she noted in her entry for 12 May 1912:

> Not so hot. Church twice. Sit about outside and listen to experiences and interesting arguments in theology.[805]

804. *VfW* 23.4.09:568. See also accounts of the spiritual sustenance found by hunger strikers in their Christian faith and the prayers of others, e.g in Lytton, pp.193, 276 and M.Richardson, Laugh a Defiance (1953), p.147.

805. Suffragette Fellowship Collection, 50.82/1131, Museum of London.

Thus the prisoners gave a new name to the place:

> Agricultural, Physical Culture, Vegetarian, Theosophical, Social Reform & (above all) Simple Life Summer School.[806]

Suffragette sentences were also occasionally lightened by such visitors as Fred Hankinson, the Unitarian minister of Kentish Town, who acted as an unofficial chaplain to the militants. Raised in an Unitarian atmosphere, he became as a result, he said, 'without knowing it a Suffragist.' Brought up amongst seven sisters (one of whom was a close friend of George Bernard Shaw, to whom Shaw dedicated his play St.Joan), and educated in a mixed school at first, 'Hank' remembered startling his mother at an early age by proclaiming that women ought to have the same rights, or otherwise travel free on the railways! A committed suffragist, and also an enthusiastic supporter of women preachers, he was a very welcome visitor to Holloway and other jails between 1907 (or 1908) and 1913, until he was caught allegedly passing unauthorised information to prisoners. Testimonials in his papers witness to the deep warmth and appreciation that his visits brought to the suffragettes.[807]

The greater part of the prison experience however, was miserable and sometimes horrendous. In this religion was occasionally used as a means of punishment, with chaplains acting as accessaries. According to Katherine Marshall for example, one of a number of clergy daughters imprisoned in Holloway:

806. Entry for 10.5.12, quoted in Vicinus, p.273.

807. Hankinson Papers, passim.

> the first Governor had to retire. He wept and told my husband that the women were nearly driving him mad. We were not allowed to go to Holy Communion for the first few weeks because we were so wicked.[808]

This issue was taken up by Helen Sprott, a W.F.L member who was also the Church League branch secretary in Brighton. She wrote to the archbishop of Canterbury after having had great difficulty, along with sixteen others, of receiving communion in Holloway.[809] In particular she complained about a letter from the chaplain which had stated that:

> while recognising that we committed these unlawful deeds from what we held to be good motives, we were nevertheless being justly punished for our wicked deeds.

The chaplain, she added, had also led her to believe that she should make restitution for her window-breaking, although this, she asserted 'is a duty owed by a wrong doer to an injured party.' What was the purpose of chapel and prison chaplains, she asked, for:

> those who started the Hunger strike were forbidden chapel (not on account of weakness as they were ordered to remove their baggage, unaided, from one part of the prison to another at some distance, up and down many steps) - but apparently as a punishment.

The archbishop replied that he had indeed written to advise prison chaplains facing these 'peculiar' difficulties, hoping to facilitate rather than hinder the receiving of Holy Communion:

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808. Suffragette Escapes and Adventures, in M.o.L 50.82/1132.

809. DP.515.147. See also Mrs.Miles' prison testimony in *Suffragette* 7.3.13:327.

> by ladies, who, though they seem to me to be misguided and unbalanced in opinion and consequently in conduct, may yet reasonably be regarded as meeting the requirements set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

He had advised the prison chaplain, he said, to direct such ladies:

> to what the Prayer Book says about such requirements, and then to leave to them the responsibility.[810]

Such an eirenic spirit was difficult to maintain. Certainly some felt that this still missed the point. As other correspondence in Davidson's papers shows,[811] the archbishop also received rulings from canon lawyers, indicating that the suffragettes, being impenitent about their actions, therefore should not be admitted to holy communion. Above all, the chaplains themselves were at a loss as how to minister in the face of the vitality and determination of the suffragettes, and their reported actions do not show them in a good light. As Jane Terrero recorded:

> At one time, so lately as last May, the atmosphere in the Chapel was such that people used to faint in all directions during service, and one Sunday, one of the wardresses fainted and had to be carried out. It was only after a threat to smash the Chapel windows that the Chaplain was induced to have 16 panes of glass taken out.....I may add he was only just in time.[812]

810. Reply 20.6.12, in DP. 515.158.

811. Letters from Edmund G.Wood (proctor in Convocation for Ely) and Athelstan Riley, DP.515.184 and 187.

812. M.o.L. 60.15/13. See also Constance Lytton's telling comments on the chaplains she encountered, Lytton, pp.120-1, 192-3, 229-230, 265-266, 284-5.

The Manchester suffragette Miss Edmée Manning hence summed up the feelings of many when she related her prison experiences to fellow workers in the Women's Freedom League:

> The religious instruction at Holloway seemed to be chiefly directed to impressing us that we were all miserable sinners - (laughter). Every Wednesday we had the Commination Service. I had never seen or heard of it before. The chaplain told us that the very best thing we could do was to sit down during our busy lives and think - (laughter) - and it seemed to me we had reached the best place to do it.....
> If any of you should go to prison the best advice I can give you is: Be cheerful, meek, a vegetarian, and a Nonconformist. You can be cheered by a Nonconformist minister twice a week.[813]

Religious protest and the apathy of the Church

Personal experiences apart however, the attacks upon the Church arose from a mixture of tactical, moral and religious convictions. For the leadership of the Church of England was an obvious and inevitable target because it represented, and was so much a part of, the British establishment as a whole. Indeed its leading bishops sat in the House of Lords and were thus responsible for legislation, or the lack of it. Still at a high-point of its power and influence, with signs of its twentieth century decline not yet clearly recognisable to many contemporaries, it was an obvious concern to political radicals. It also offered a 'soft' target. For, as contemporary, and subsequent, critics have suggested, the later leadership strategy of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst did not match their earlier tactics. For several years from 1903 they had brilliantly and surprisingly put the suffrage issue back onto the political agenda from its low ebb at the turn of the century. After the failure of the cross-

813. Newspaper clipping in Hankinson papers (unattributed, undated).

bench Conciliation Bills of 1910/11 however, they became hypnotised by the allure of militant direct actions to the detriment of establishing other necessary approaches. Finding it increasingly difficult to confront the key political decision-makers directly, the Church therefore partly offered a convenient alternative.

Such a direction was also partly forced upon the Pankhursts by the character of their movement. For as has been indicated above, the women's suffrage movement, at least in its most militant guise, represented an alternative religious fellowship, offering important elements of spiritual comfort and symbolism, a strong sense of companionship and an intense feeling of moral purpose. These, owing so much to the Victorian values espoused by the Church, were always likely to make relationships difficult with the male leadership of institutional Christianity. On the one hand, all allowance having been made for the exuberance of their rhetoric in the heat of battle, many suffragettes could be viewed as struggling towards a new ideal of Christian womanhood. As R.J.Campbell commented, in his Easter sermon in 1913:

> You may blame this or that on the part of individual adherents. You may get angry with them, but assuredly you cannot stop this incoming tide of divine life; for where the spirit of sacrifice is in the service of a high impersonal end, you behold something of the redeeming work of Christ.[814]

In women such as Emily Wilding Davison, a rebel yet faithful Anglican to the end, this new ideal was personified. For as Christabel Pankhurst argued:

814.Quoted in *VfW* 9.5.13:459.

> It is not right for women, any more than for men, to have characters of tepid milk and water, to be incapable of a divine rage and to be impotent to resist oppression.[815]

On the other hand however, the suffragette attack on the Church was also a culmination of, as well as a radical break with the Victorian traditions of womanly self-sacrifice and moral leadership. 'We have got past the Victorian ideals.....past the Victorian woman', remarked Canon G.S.Davis of Hereford, referring to several of Christabel Pankhurst's utterances in 1913.[816] Like a number of other clergy he welcomed Christabel's writings on venereal disease ('The Great Scourge'), and her demand for 'chastity for men' to accompany 'votes for women', made in a new outspoken manner. Yet, although these might in some ways be regarded as progenitors of later feminist concerns with male violence and pornography,[817] they also stood in the tradition of the campaigners against the Contagious Diseases Acts, and earlier vigorous agitations for social purity.

The attack upon the Church in 1913 was not so much primarily motivated by liberal and secular demands for 'equal rights' therefore, as by powerful moral and religious feelings, many of them very traditional in character and issuing in deep-seated frustration with their assumed standard bearers. This was above all the ground upon which the Church was judged, and found wanting. Suffragists of all hues were deeply dissatisfied with the Church's leadership on a whole range of issues of

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815. 'Militancy a Virtue', *Suffragette* 10.1.13:186.

816. *Suffragette* 24.10.13:35.

817. A point made - from two wholly contrasting perspectives - by Mitchell, p.319 and Elizabeth Sarah - 'Christabel Pankhurst: Reclaiming Her Power', in Spender, pp.271-2.

importance to women. Clergymen's deeds fell far short of the ideals and moral values they preached. Therefore, said the Spiritual Militancy League:

> We feel that there is little hope of securing the vote for women or preparing them for a moral and spiritual use of it so long as the 50 000 preachers throughout the nation by silence and neutrality create the impression that none of the higher issues of life are involved in the suffrage movement.[818]

In defence, it should be said that the greater part of the Church of England may have been out of step with the women's movement, especially its most controversial activists, but that this largely reflected the way in which it kept pace with the British establishment. Randall Davidson for example, was no more unhelpful to the suffragists than many leading male figures of his day. Much more than he, a number of leading liberals, socialists and progressives viewed the women's cause as at best a distraction, and at worse an obstacle, to what they regarded as the 'real' issues of the day. Like many others, including some determined women reformers,[819] a great number of churchpeople remained unconvinced that the vote would bring about the women's movement's goals, or were suspicious about some of its tendencies. Thus as the Dean of Canterbury (Henry Wace) argued in his regular column in *The Record*,[820] if women had the vote they would share in the 'very masculine and rough game' of politics, and would 'of necessity aim at developing the

818. *VfW* 21.3.13:359.

819. Such as Elizabeth Wordsworth, first Principal of Lady Margaret Hall and founder of St.Hugh's, Oxford, cf. G.Battiscombe, Reluctant Pioneer. The life of Elizabeth Wordsworth (1978), esp.pp.156 & 186-7.

820.17.1.13:105.

masculine qualities', thereby weakening their feminine qualities, bringing in competition with men instead of gentler and calmer influence, and so injuring human nature as a whole. Similarly, Lucy Soulsby, in her address to the Church Congress in 1913, warned of dangers in the new ideals of woman:

> I do not think that the woman of yesterday was personally, and individually, more true to her ideal than the woman of today.....her leaven worked secretly.....The old ideal of duty lent itself to this mutual work in a way impossible to the new ideal of rights. The individualistic ideal of rights has indeed power to 'shatter this sorry scheme of things' but it is the old ideal of relative duties which has the power, slowly but surely, to 'remould it to our heart's desire'.[821]

Others found more alarming signs. As one correspondent to the *Church Times* put it:

> there are appalling wrongs that call aloud for redress.....But there is a large class (of Suffragists) tainted with the idea that all that is good is feminine.....These women demand a special 'Women's Bible' and a mutilated marriage service. Permeating it all there is Socialism in its wildest, crudest form.[822]

More common was the traditional argument for avoidance of controversial issues:

821. Reported in *Record* 3.10.13:941.

822. H.Airey Watson, 1.8.13:141.

> Christian truth, with which the clergy have to deal, is Divine and eternal; the question of granting parliamentary votes to women is solely mundane and ephemeral.[823]

Such views failed to recognise the symbolic significance placed by suffragists upon the franchise, as well as the (admittedly often unrealistic) power they saw in it for addressing some of the more troubling social and moral issues of the day. When the W.S.P.U conducted a whole series of interviews with the nation's Anglican bishops in the early months of 1914, they thus exposed the lack of even basic knowledge that many had about the women's movement and its concerns. Few were properly aware of the issues at stake and, where they were not strongly opposed to the movement (as with the bishops of Liverpool and Chichester), even acquaintance with the matter seldom led to much more than an expression of regret (exceptions here being the bishops of Durham and Southwark, and, eventually, the bishop of London).[824]

This increased frustration. In writing on Davidson's response to the first world war, Alan Wilkinson observed that the archbishop's cautious temperament had its drawbacks in a period of crisis.[825] In a similar manner, his emotional and critical reserve failed to recognise the deep theological and ethical significance of the women's movement, a struggle from which it was unfortunate to merely sit apart. By ignorance, or by misconceiving the weight of the matter, the Church leadership

823. Robert Cust in *Church Times* 1.8.13:141.

824. cf. the series of deputation reports in *Suffragette* Feb-August 1914 and Mary Richardson's account of her 'conversion' of and dealings with Winnington-Ingram, in Richardson, pp.44-48, 58-67, 155-6.

825. Wilkinson, p.7.

seemed to display a lack of conscience. Most seriously of all, with notable exceptions, objections to forcible feeding were not made. For if Davidson was to emerge more creditably from the controversy over conscientious objectors during the first world war, at this stage it was left to the likes of George Bernard Shaw to declare forcible feeding 'the denial of everlasting life'.[826]

Where there were well meaning efforts at involvement by senior clergy, even these tended to miss the mark. After the success of the 1913 Church Congress in Southampton for example, Edward Talbot, Bishop of Winchester, issued a call for a 'Truce of God' between the Government and the suffragists. This was roundly rejected by all sections of the suffrage movement, and demonstrated the gulf of misunderstanding between it and the bulk of clergymen. For as Christabel Pankhurst's close lieutenant Annie Kenney explained:

> as a Churchwoman and a militant Suffragist, I would ask the Bishop.....Where is the Church in this crisis of the Woman's Movement? It is not enough that the Church Congress shall discuss the women's position with sympathy: mere sympathy does not take us very far.....What we want is peace coming after the vote is won. 'Prospects of success' will not satisfy us. we have had that before.....Does a soldier lay down his arms because he under fire?[827]

Results?

The feminist attack upon the Church in 1913 and 1914 was not a sign in itself either of an emotional feminist 'lunatic fringe', or of the putative collapse of Britain's limited liberal

826. S.Pankhurst, p.451.

827. *Suffragette* 31.10.13:51, in a letter refused by the *Times*.

democracy.[828] It was in many ways desperate and ill-conceived, but also intelligible. In addition it brought some success. For if Davidson and a number of other senior clergy remained unbending, others such as the Bishop of London were in 1914 at last brought around to outspoken, albeit pragmatic support for women's suffrage. 'I was prejudiced against the movement', Winnington-Ingram confessed in his speech in the House of Lords (on 5 May 1914), 'partly by acts of militancy'. After all, he said with a smile, placing a bomb under his throne in St.Paul's Cathedral, was not the most tactful means of persuasion. However, 'why have two Ulsters on your hands?' he asked:

> A woman's sphere, we are always told, is the home.
> So indeed, all of us here believe

but housing laws, support for children, women's working conditions, criminal prosecutions applied equitably, and many other issues - all these could not be settled properly until women could exercise some pressure on those who governed them.[829]

The women's movement as a whole also immensely aided women's struggles within the Church. This had been seen in the achievements surrounding the Church Congress of 1913, which gave unprecedented space to the voices and broad concerns of women. This influence (as will be indicated below),[830] further issued in the adoption of an equal franchise for Church councils, in the albeit stormy development of women preachers, and in the *Ministry of Women* report of 1919. The suffragette challenge as such certainly cannot claim direct credit for these

828. *pace* G.Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (1966).

829. Reported in *Suffragette* 22.5.14:113.

830. See chapters 9 and 10.

developments, for they were also the product of the hardy band of Church feminists, and of the wider women's movement. Yet by the same measure it can be seen as the most aggressive expression of that great creative force, or, alternatively, as the sharp tip of a slowly moving iceberg.

Chapter Nine

WAR - AND WOMEN PRIESTS ?

The onset of war in August 1914 shattered the dynamic of the suffrage movement. The normal course of political life was suspended and patriotism dominated. In the intense fervour and propaganda of the early war years almost all active suffragists joined vigorously in the new common cause. Only a few brave souls developed their feminism along pacifist lines, whilst specifically suffrage campaigning was placed on a very low light. Christian feminists and their associations did not significantly differ from this general picture. Yet a number of notable steps were taken which deserve attention, pointing as they do not only to the gaining of 'votes for women' in 1918 but also to the further enhancement of women's status within the churches.

I Christian feminism, pacifism and the war effort

At first many leading suffragists reacted to the European conflict with pleas of opposition or neutrality. On 31 July for example, a carefully worded manifesto, drawn up by the Hungarian suffragist Rosika Schwimmer, Millicent Fawcett, Chrystal MacMillan and Mary Sheepshanks, was presented to the Foreign Office and to London embassies. Signed on behalf of twelve million women, it expressed the 'apprehension and dismay' felt by 'the mothers of the race': who, having no power to shape the fateful decisions needed, called for no method of conciliation to be left untried to avoid the impending deluge of blood.[831] Instigated by the Women's Co-operative Guild, the National Federation of Women Workers and the Women's Labour League, and urged on by the International Women's Suffrage

831. Quoted in J.Liddington, The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820 (1989), pp.77-8.

Alliance, a great women's protest against war was then held in the Kingsway Hall on the 4th August, with Mrs.Fawcett as the principal speaker. At two days notice, 2 000 assembled and several stirring speeches were made, with contributors from all quarters of the women's movement, excepting the W.S.P.U.[832]

Most of this opposition however melted away quickly in the summer sun. Helena Swanwick's carefully crafted speech at the Kingsway Hall had already made it clear that judgement had not yet been made. Whilst suffragists were, by their general line of approach and thought, essentially against the arbitrament of force in the place of reason and might, the National Union, as a union, she declared, had taken no line on this particular war.[833] With the formal declaration of war, almost all suffragists rallied behind the Government. 'The greatest crisis in all our national history is upon us', the *Common Cause* proclaimed somewhat speciously in its first official statement.

> As long as there was any hope of peace most members of the National Union probably sought for peace....But we have another duty now. Now is the time for resolute effort and self-sacrifice of every one of us to help our country.[834]

The 'Spirit' of the National Union was thus clearly to be employed in the service, though not directly the practice, of belligerence. For it was 'the vocation', argued the *Common Cause*, of all women, 'to be foremost' in defending their country, 'not by arms, but by moral force', setting an example of virtue, through steadfastness, unselfishness, cheerfulness and good sense. Thereby women

832. Through the objection of Mrs.Pankhurst: Liddington (1989), p.78.

833. *CC*7.8.14:377.

834. 7.8.14:376.

would show themselves 'worthy of citizenship', even though that claim remained unrecognised.[835]

The 'Suffragette Spirit', more conducive to the acceptance of martial action, concurred. Indeed, by an outwardly astounding reversal of former years, the W.S.P.U now proved the darling of the Liberal Government. With the outbreak of war Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst brought their campaign to an immediate cessation. Directing their considerable powers of rhetoric and organisation to war mobilisation, they then became some of the best 'recruiting sergeants' in the land. Yet this was no mere surfacing of their 'elitist, racist and conservative thinking',[836] amply and vividly though this was betrayed by the vehemence of their attack upon Germany and their dismissal of the moderation of others. It also represented the culmination, in another guise, of their lifelong struggles for liberty, their distinct conception of which was all too often apotheosised and made absolute above other considerations. 'There is one flag supremely dear to the true Suffragist and that is the flag of freedom', contended Christabel, rejecting the 'prattling' claims of other women to be 'keeping the flag flying'. The crucial fight for human liberty, and for women's share in it, now took place in Belgium not London. For 'what would votes for British women be worth.....under the menace of German guns?'[837] Thus for the W.S.P.U the Suffragette was rightly transformed into

835. 7.8.14.

836. Garner, p.56.

837. *Suffragette*21.5.15:87.

Britannia.[838]

This suffragette stance (shared by all but a few W.S.P.U members) was also prompted by their crusading ethos. After all, was not Jeanne d'Arc, clad in armour and wrapped in the flag, 'The Great Patriot', the mightiest symbol of the struggle against the eternal 'Prussian' oppressor?[839] For Christabel at least, the hand of God and woman's corresponding duty was therefore still manifest:

> This great war....is God's vengeance upon the people who held women in subjection, and by doing that have destroyed the perfect human balance....Let us in everything strive unceasingly that the World may learn from the tragedy.....that for the sake of the human race, for the sake of the divinity that is in the human, women must be free.[840]

The Church Leagues and the War

The overwhelming majority of Church feminists also joined in full support of the war, albeit with various degrees of enthusiasm and regret. For some, such as bishops Hicks and Percival, it was with great heaviness of mind and soul.[841] Deeply involved in the various peace movements of the preceding years, they were both outspoken opponents of the Boer War and struggled to ensure Britain's neutrality right until the crunch. At the beginning of August for instance, Percival, who had earlier protested 'against the mischievous utterances of our jingo press',

838. A shift declared by this new name of the W.S.P.U paper from the end of 1915.

839. Notions developed frequently in the *Suffragette* in 1915.

840. *Suffragette* 7.8.14:301.

841. Wilkinson, pp.24-27.

urged priests to hold prayers in church and to call meetings of parishioners to send to the Prime Minister resolutions urging neutrality and efforts for peace.

As Alan Wilkinson has shown however,[842] the official conduct of the Church of England during the 1st World War was not distinguished by such moderation or by spiritual sagacity. Some of its leaders, notably Bishop Winnington-Ingram, were outspokenly jingoistic. Other Church feminists, such as Father Bull of Mirfield, a former military chaplain in South Africa, had also long espoused the virtues of Christian chivalry and imperialism, to which militarism was so easily conjugated. In comparison, Hicks was a dying representative of an influential tradition of Victorian liberalism which had long since been covered by new concerns and language. As Clyde Binfield observed in relation to Free Churchmen, Christian feminists should not have been taken by surprise by the Great War. It was rather a logical conclusion not only to decades of rearmament, but also to the language of warfare in Christian preaching, hymnody and prayer.[843] If 'Fight the good fight', so beloved by Emily Wilding Davison, took her to her death at Epsom, it was to take others to the fields of Flanders.

Even Dr.John Clifford, the 'prophet of nonconformity', came around to support for the war. Leader of the Boer War opposition, like Hicks and Percival he was finally moved by the plight of the small nations involved and the sight of their oppression.[844] In the last days of peace he returned from the Churches' Peace Alliance conference in Germany, with its

842. Wilkinson, p.24.

843. C.Binfield, So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity (1977),p.246.

844. Wilkinson, p.31.

statement 'in favour of a rigorous abstention from joining in the war'.[845] Convinced however that the Government had done all it could to preserve peace, he then came to see the War as being as much a religious duty as opposition to the Boer War had been.

In common with the N.U.W.S.S therefore, the religious Leagues (with the exception of the C.W.S.S) saw their main task at the beginning of the war as assisting the war effort, although (unlike the W.S..P.U) without complete abandonment of suffrage campaigning. 'At this crisis in the history of our nation', declared the special meeting of the C.L.W.S Executive Committee on August 10 1914,:

> we feel that we must abandon in great measure our Suffrage work, and place our organisation at the disposal of the authorities to render any service for which it can be utilized.[846]

The offices of the C.L.W.S (except for one room) and its headquarters (except for one clerk) were consequently put at the service of London bodies dealing with distress caused by war. The local branches responded in like manner.[847] League members took up a variety of war work. Some prominent supporters were involved directly in the conflict: whether, like Lieut. Cather, as servicemen; like Percy Dearmer in Serbia, as chaplains; or, as in the case of Dr.Helen Hanson (who gave distinguished service in Belgium and Serbia with Mrs. Clair Stobart's hospital), in nursing and auxiliary work. Reports of their activities (including Cather's surviving the sinking of his

845.Quoted in A.Marwick, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (2nd ed. 1991), p.73.

846. *Monthly Paper* Sept.1914:159.

847. cf.*MP* Sept.1914:170.

ship 'The Goliath' by torpedo) then added spice to domestic news. Most worked closely with relief agencies at home, notably the Women's Emergency Corps, the National Food Fund and the League of Honour for Women and Girls.[848] In general C.L.W.S members therefore viewed the war as a 'true appeal to patriotism and humanity', and their efforts as a natural but unwanted extension of the suffrage call to service.[849] At the same time, in addition to low-key suffrage work, the League, prompted by Henry Scott Holland, also initiated a series of monthly Intercession services, beginning at St.Martin-in-the-Fields in December 1914. .

Although the C.L.W.S therefore shared a common suffragist view that such a war would have been impossible had European women been enfranchised for a generation:

> We are no visionaries who refuse to look facts in the face. The doctrine 'rights for the strong' is a doctrine of evil. The future of civilization depends upon its overthrow.[850]

Most Free Church suffragists took a similar line, although the F.C.L.W.S newspaper steered a course amenable to pacifism without declaring for it. The F.C.L.W.S' 'Manifesto to Members' at the outbreak of war for example, committed the League to 'continue to work and pray for the time when men and women, working together, will render war no longer necessary', in addition to support for war relief (especially through the Women's Emergency Corps) and to special services 'of strength

848. *MP* Nov 1914:191.

849. cf. editorial 'Pro Patria', *MP* Sept.1914:159.

850. 'I can therefore I may', *MP* Oct.1914:180.

and comfort to the suffering womanhood of the country'.[851] In November 1914 it published Maude Royden's anti-militarist article *Suffragists and War*, followed by favourable reports of meetings relating the 'religious aspect' of the women's movement to war and peace.[852] Pacifist speakers such as Maude Royden and Dr.Orchard were favoured, and in June 1915 the *Free Church Suffrage Times* regretfully reflected upon the May meetings that 'so much incense was burnt to Mars and so little to Peace'.[853] F.C.L.W.S links to the peace movement may also explain why the Pethick-Lawrences became vice-presidents in 1915. By August 1915 the League had certainly already been accused by the national Press of working for a 'premature peace'.[854]

Pacifism and Christian feminism

If war was not desired by suffragists it was questioned by very few. Indeed for many women the war offered life-enhancing possibilities as well as death-dealing family tragedies. For a select number, the early days of war presented irresistible opportunities for combining excitement and travel with self-giving and patriotic service.[855] Many more found themselves in

851. *FCST* Sept.1914:103.

852. *FCST* April 1915:31.

853. p.55.

854. *FCST* Aug.1915:72.

855. Liddington (1989), p.61.

new employment in Britain.[856] Others found themselves involved in a flowering of voluntary organisations: from the Red Cross Society through the great number of patriotic funds and guilds to the Women's Institutes.[857]

Against this overwhelming mainstream of opinion and enterprise, those opposed to the war swam with great difficulty. Pre-war links between feminism and anti-militarism became muted and individual women, conscious of friends or relatives at the front, were particularly constrained from voicing dissent.[858] Gradually however, organised opposition appeared, helped by assistance from suffragists in the United States. A great meeting of anti-war suffragists was held at The Hague in April 1915, for which, after some difficulty, permits were obtained for twenty-four leading British women. Winston Churchill at the Admiralty then closed the North Sea to shipping. Unfortunately for him, three women, Chrystal Macmillan, Kathleen Courtney and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence (who was with the American delegation), had already arrived.

The Hague Congress helped set up the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (W.I.L) which, though never very large,[859] was nevertheless still a significant achievement in the

856 Official Board of Trade statistics show an increase of 1 659 000 women employed between July 1914 and July 1918 - an increase of 50.6%. The most important area of women's work - domestic service - was excluded however, and the significance of the figures should not be over exaggerated: most of the working-class women were, or had been, already employed outside the home. M.Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959 (1992), pp.19-21.

857. First established in Anglesey in 1915, and numbering 760 branches and 50 000 members by 1918. Pugh (1992), pp.14-15.

858. Liddington (1989), p.87.

859. 2458 members in 34 branches in Britain, rising to 3 687 members by 1918. W.I.L Annual Report, in Pugh (1992), p.10.

patriotic climate of the 1st World War. It showed that the rhetoric of internationalism, and of sisterhood leading to the making of peace, still represented a reality for some feminists. Furthermore it again displayed the outstanding moral courage that had motivated and continued to shape the women's movement, even in the face of desperate odds.

These developments in the women's peace movement led to divisions among suffragists, most significantly within the N.U.W.S.S. For from this body in April 1915 eleven leading members resigned, following the N.U.W.S.S Council's refusal to participate in The Hague meeting. In practical terms this shifted the National Union slightly to the right, weakening the Election Fighting Fund strategy with Labour[860] since their political allegiances (which allied with their pacifism) were largely Labour or radical Liberal. Arguably however, their schism also partly represented other undercurrents of a religious character within contemporary feminism. Certainly it reflected tensions in the women's movement which were not only political but which stretched back at least as far as the Boer War.[861]

For, as Jill Liddington has highlighted,[862] the three major strands of anti-militarist feminism may be identified as maternalism, equal rights, and maleness as equalling violence. At least the first two of these, deeply intertwined as they were, can be seen as linked and coloured by aspects of the Christian feminist tradition. For it was not for nothing that Rose Macaulay parodied the typical W.I.L woman, Daphne Sandomir, in *Non-Combatants and Others* as a bishop's daughter 'lately.....gone

860. Pugh (1992), p.10.

861. Liddington (1989), ch.3, pp.43-58.

862. ibid, p.88.

down from Newnham'. As Liddington observed, there are allusions here to Maude Royden and Mary Sheepshanks amongst other Church feminists, as well as to Mary Sargent Florence.[863]

Such connections should not be overstated. The religious aspects of the women's peace movement were far more clearly evident in the lives of middle-class women such as Maude Royden, than they were for example in the more working-class Women's Peace Crusade, which began in Glasgow in the summer of 1916. Even there however there were notable contributions by Christian feminist speakers such as Ethel Snowden and Muriel Matters. Several leading pacifists were also agnostics, like Olive Schreiner, or disinterested in religion, like Sylvia Pankhurst. Much of the religious colouring of feminist pacifism can also be regarded, like that of much suffragist rhetoric, as largely instrumental and part of the passing development of feminist ideas and motivation. Yet for all that, it still appears as a significant contributory factor in this dissenting movement, in at least two important ways.

For firstly, as noted above, the women's peace movement had amongst its most vocal activists several of the most influential Christian suffragists. With Maude Royden and Charlotte Despard for example, their religious, suffrage and peace campaigning were each integral to the other. Similarly for Ethel Snowden and Isabella Ford, their distinctive upbringings and experiences, shaped by a religious vision, provided both the outlook and resources for their pacifism. Others, such as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, and Eva Gore-Booth, less clearly attached to any specific religious affiliation, also found their pacifism a natural outflowing of their religious sensibility. Their presence amongst the ranks of the W.I.L (like that of others such as Margaret

863. Liddington (1989), p.106.

Bondfield and Margaret Llewellyn-Davies) was thus not surprising on this score, although this was of course not always a central factor. Amongst the list of 156 original members of the British General Committee for the Women's International Congress at The Hague for example, there are several Christian suffragist names, listing women such as Mrs.Strickland and Mrs.Spence Watson.[864] The former was clearly a dedicated Christian feminist to whom her religious faith was a crucial element of her being. The latter however is perhaps better regarded as another example of that strand of equal rights Victorian Liberalism, which had led her into many associated campaigns, and latterly into the presidency of her local suffrage society in Gateshead. Yet that very equal rights Liberalism was also an offshoot of and sustained by her Quakerism. The influence of Christian feminism on 1st World War feminism was thus much wider than specifically Christian pacifist groups such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which also began in the New Year of 1915.[865]

For secondly, Christian feminism was also evident in the arguments of the peace movement. In particular, as Liddington has observed, the maternalist strand in 1st World War pacifism owed much to the work of women such as Frances Hallowes.[866]

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864. *Fawcett Archive*, FL.

865. Initiated by the Presbyterian minister Richard Roberts, with strong Nonconformist and Quaker backing and with Lansbury, Dr.Orchard and Maude Royden amongst its leading members. See J.Wallis, Valiant for Peace. A History of the Fellowship of Reconciliation 1914-1989 (1991), Part One, pp.2-34.

866. Probably (according to Liddington (1989), p.90) a missionary's wife in northern India, she was president of a local Indian women's suffrage society, and an occasional contributor to the F.C.L.W.S newspaper - cf. her article 'Women Preachers and their Restrictions' in *The Coming Day* Oct.1916:89.

Known best for her *Mothers of Men and Militarism* (published in mid-1915 by Headley Bros.), she had already made her mark in Britain through her pamphlet *Women and War: An Appeal to the Women of All Nations.*[867] Woman, she argued there, 'bears the brunt of war', yet, lacking citizenship, is neither responsible for it, nor (like men) benefits from it. Significantly she then went on, the Church colludes in war, and women, being two-thirds of its membership, must therefore appeal to it to work:

> hand in hand with the mothers of mankind in this crusade against war.....Christianity demands of women this crusade of peace!....Mothers, wives, daughters, sisters! Go forward - .....God wills it'.[868]

The role of mothers in wartime aroused strong feeling amongst a number of Christian feminists. The suggestion mooted publicly by churchmen such as Fr.Bernard Vaughan that mothers should produce sons for the army met particularly strong opposition. In a typically heartfelt lead article in the *Vote*,[869] Margaret Nevinson rejected the call, revealing the feelings of many Christian pacifist women. 'Christianity seems to be almost as dead in England as in Germany', she declared, backing up her assertion with the 'more Prussian than Prussia' treatment exercised by the Conscientious Objectors' tribunals. Many like herself, she said, who had tried to remain in the communion of their churches, had been driven away by the recruiting sermons, the jingoism and hate preached in the pulpits. They had been forced to seek Christ in the quiet of empty churches or in the healing silence of the Friends' Meeting House. 'Many women are

867. Also printed in *Jus Suffragii* 1.9.1914:167.

868. Quoted in Liddington (1989), p.90.

869. 14.4.16:992.

heart and soul with the war', she admitted, continuing less accurately but no less personally:

> They have addressed recruiting meetings and urged men to fight, they have distributed white feathers freely to men in mufti; but the bulk of the motherhood of the country hates the war as they did in the time of Aristophanes and Horace, and no wonder they hesitate before giving children as *chair au canon.*

Maternalism, whilst not incidental (especially in drawing upon the work of Olive Schreiner), was not however the dominant argument in the pacifist campaigns. More popular was the transposition of other elements of suffragist rhetoric which also drew upon religious associations. Here Maude Royden again stands preeminent. For her, 'to work for peace was to work for the woman movement, and to work for the woman movement was to work for peace'.[870] In a pamphlet *The Great Adventure: The Way to Peace* (1915) she urged this alternative vision.[871] The preparedness of soldiers to face death and to sacrifice was indeed heroic, yet there was a 'mightier heroism.....not of the battle but of the cross; the adventure not of war but of peace'.[872] Peace 'demands a martyr nation' she had written at the beginning of the war.[873] The sacrifice of risking crucifixion, not suicide, was the true path for the nation to take, 'a distinction all

870. *FCST* May 1915:43, also quoted in S.Fletcher (1989), p.125.

871. See also her article 'War and the Woman's Movement' in C.Roden-Buxton Towards a Lasting Peace (1915), pp.136-7, selected excerpts in L.Byrne, The Hidden Tradition (1991), pp.70, 91-2.

872. p.7, quoted in S.Fletcher (1989), p.126.

873. *The Challenge* 21.8.14, quoted in S.Fletcher (1989), p.111.

Christians should understand'.[874]

In so framing pacifism as 'the great adventure' and 'the glorious romance', Maude Royden voiced the views of many former N.U.W.S.S pacifists, imbued as they also were by equal rights feminism. This was indeed 'the spiritual claim of women's suffrage'.[875] Often at much personal cost and denigration, such women in their suffrage work had nurtured the virtues of what they saw (and sensed) as 'spiritual', 'moral force', over against what they considered the 'brute force' of the modern masculine dominated world which issued in materialism and war. They had espoused and articulated the international spirit of 'solidaire', which they had found in the world-wide rising of the women. Logically for them therefore, this spirit stood over against the barbarity and blindness of man-made war and had the power and potential to overcome it. 'Christianity has not failed', wrote Charlotte Despard in her Christmas Message in 1914:

> It is we who have failed to grasp its meaning. Do not lose heart. The Woman's Movement is bound to go on until it merges into the human movement, which will lead us out of war and into the 'most great peace'.[876]

A fighting spirit was needed, she observed later in her reflections upon the 'Mother of Nations', but it was that of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' (separated from a false martial connotation).[877] Courage, fortitude and daring would always be needed to help the weak, by those 'who would draw down to

874. *South Wales Daily Post* 8.3.17, in S.Fletcher(1989), p.126.

875. S.Fletcher (1989), p.126.

876. *Vote*25.12.14:438.

877. *Vote* 3.3.16:944-5 and 10.3.16:952-3.

earth the Kingdom of God'. Yet the old ideals of bigness (fortunes, material achievements, conquests, personalities) and Physical force must pass. Hitherto lesser ideals must replace them: service, compassion (including training armies not to destroy, but to save), justice, character, beauty and order.[878] In a classic Christian pacifist call she concluded:

> Emphatically it is the business of women - yes, and of men, with the love-principle behind them - to form within themselves and to diffuse abroad ideals of life and conduct in accordance with the religion so many of us profess.[879]

If romanticism was present in such a vision, this was no mere armchair sentimentalism. Christian pacifist women were prepared to risk much more than the vitriolic barbs of the jingoistic press. In particular, the caravan-tour which followed the Fellowship of Reconciliation's first conference in July 1915 displayed the great risks and the considerable courage that was required. Hostility was aroused in several places as the party (including Maude Royden and Constance Todd, the first woman 'ordained' in England)[880] moved through the Midlands. Then at Hinckley came disaster. The pilgrims' tents and van were set ablaze and the F.o.R members were mobbed until they gratefully escaped into the custody of local police.[881]

878. *Vote* 10.3.16:952-3.

879. ibid. p.952.

880. See below, p.370.

881. See Wallis, pp.13-15 and S.Fletcher (1989), pp.129-132, using the later eye-witness account in *Reconciliation* Feb.1964.

Continued Suffrage Work

The challenges of war and peace-making inevitably dwarfed the suffrage campaign. Yet the importance of continued loyalty to that Cause was stressed by a number of suffragists, concerned that the demands of wartime would lead the movement away on false scents. The W.F.L in particular was keen to uphold the stability and unity of the suffrage course, notably attacking the International Women's Suffrage Alliance's paper *Jus Suffragii* for its obsession with pacifist articles. Suffragists should have no more distinctive concern for peace propaganda than for the spread of Esperanto, wrote Nina Boyle:

> There is a marked tendency of late to secure the support of suffragists for a number of mushroom growths, on account of the well-known energy and organising ability so constantly displayed in our public work; and we cannot too carefully guard against this insidious danger.[882]

Such reasoning (which led the C.L.W.S activist Kate Raleigh to successful resistance to the National Registration Register)[883] was even more a distinctive feature of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society during the war. For the C.W.S.S largely left support and relief of the war to other Catholics, being concerned to maintain a 'vigilant watch to safeguard women's interests'.[884] The publication of their own newspaper the *Catholic Suffragist*, which first appeared on January 15 1915, highlighted the success of this intent.

Not that the Society was oblivious to the wider issues of

882. *Vote* 15.10.15:784.

883. *Vote* 26.11.15:833-4.

884. C.W.S.S Minutes 28.9.14, quoted in Mason, p.624.

wartime: rather the contrary. In addition to initiating its own services of intercession (including a monthly Mass for 'Peace and for those killed during the War'), the C.W.S.S took up a more openly feminist position.[885] Together with other suffragists (including Hatty Baker, who was very active in Plymouth), the Society protested against attempts to reenact the Contagious Diseases Acts. They also joined in opposing other measures deleterious to women (including the notorious Regulation 40D)[886] and supported the efforts of suffragists to campaign for improved systems of international diplomacy. Unlike any other church League moreover, in March 1915 the C.W.S.S decided to sponsor a delegate (Mrs.O'Sullivan) to the International Women's Congress in the Hague.

Such continued efforts were now to bear fruit. For by 1916 it had become abundantly clear that a new Franchise Bill was required for the future, simply because the old electoral registers were now redundant. Optimism rose in suffragist ranks, symbolised by the *The Coming Day* as the new title (from January) for the *Free Church Suffrage Times*. On 14th August Asquith himself conceded the claim of women, followed in October by the appointment of a Speaker's Conference on electoral reform. With the chief pre-war barrier of electoral arithmetic now altered, the key issue now was only how far the franchise would extend.

Here the adult suffragists lost out. Some progress had been made during the war, urged on by Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation, and by the persuasion of some members of the United Suffragists. By late 1916 a formal National Council for

885. Mason, p.626.

886. War Office regulation making it a punishable offence for a woman suffering from a venereal disease to solicit or have intercourse with any member of the armed forces. ibid.

Adult Suffrage had been formed, including the Free Church League. Dr.Clifford, Bishop Percival, Dean Moore-Ede, and the Pethick-Lawrences were all closely involved. Like others, the Church League was also seriously considering adult suffrage, pondering that it might be as well to settle the suffrage controversy once and for all.[887] Yet the campaign foundered as most suffrage bodies (not excepting the National Council itself, including even George Lansbury), accepted the partial offer that was made. For as Sylvia Pankhurst observed later, it was comparatively easy to secure pious expression that the franchise should be based neither on sex nor on property.[888] Practical adoption of adult suffrage was another matter, since those who had served other societies remained willing to accept, and to expect, the narrowest form of the franchise. Yet, as she herself conceded,[889] the limited Suffrage[890] nonetheless crucially breached the sex barrier and gave approximately six times as many votes to women as had been fought for under the pre-War Conciliation Bills.

II. Church feminism and the struggle for status

War thus destroyed many lives and dreams but it also acted as a crucible for the shaping of new forms. This was as true for feminists within the churches as it was within the state, even though in both cases the initial impetus soon lost energy as it

887. 'Adult Suffrage', *MP*Nov.1916:122.

888. S.Pankhurst, p.599.

889. ibid, p.607.

890. Granting the Parliamentary franchise to women over thirty who held land or premises of not less than £5 annual value, or who held university degrees.

encountered the new post-war realities. Conflict with institutional Christianity continued to be a feature of the women's movement, but it also brought important gains.

The principal positive by-product of the war for Christian, and especially Anglican, feminists was the ending of suffragette hostilities against the Church of England. This did not mean that feminist disillusion with the churches was swept away. As with Margaret Nevinson, such feelings might even be exacerbated by the churches' response to war. Yet she and fellow pacifists were isolated figures and for most suffragist churchwomen the war provided an opportunity to work together in patriotic service without the pull of conflicting allegiances. Indeed, if clergy were often guilty of promoting over-propagandist images of the war, many women's groups were not far behind. Just as Winnington-Ingram told 2 000 women at Church House in October 1914 that they must say to their men: 'Go with my blessing'; so the Mothers' Union published a pamphlet in the same year entitled 'To British Women, How They Can Help Recruiting'.[891]

Nevertheless shared patriotism could not gainsay continued misunderstandings between Church authorities and Anglican women suffragists. Early in the war the C.L.W.S Executive had to take speedy action to ensure that women could join in a Twenty-Four Hours Watch in St.Paul's Cathedral. A regulation had forbidden women to enter after 9 p.m, an hour only agreed after earlier pressure. As a practical suggestion to avoid future mishaps, the *Monthly Paper* merely noted that the Evangelistic Council might be strengthened by the inclusion of some women.[892] Yet such ideas were rarely acted upon.

The Nonconformist climate had not drastically improved

891. Wilkinson, p.94.

892. Jan.1915:11.

either. Reviewing the situation in the *Suffragette* at the end of 1913,[893] Hatty Baker had been typically forthright. Unitarianism continued to uphold the equality of women and men, she noted, had more than one woman minister in England, and, through J.Estlin Carpenter's assistance, held open the doors of Manchester College, Oxford to women. Elsewhere the position was bleak. The closeness of the Church of England and the State inevitably ensured that the position of women in both would be similar. What shocked her most however was the extent of prejudice she had encountered from Nonconformist ministers during her extensive lecturing tour for the W.S.P.U (speaking on such subjects as 'Women in the Churches', 'Women and the Christian Ministry' and 'Women and Christianity'). 'A woman in the pulpit', one minister had said to her, knowing that she preached every Sunday, 'is as incongruous and offensive to the public as a black man in the same position'. At the heart of opposition she had clearly discerned the key issues of authority and economics - 'covetousness, jealousy, selfishness' - as well as often better hidden bigotry.

There was a more positive note however. For what she also discovered, in score after score of letters, was an ardent desire amongst women for a church based on the new ideals which she had helped to voice and personify. 'What we long for', wrote one typical correspondent, 'is a church presided over by a woman minister, run on entirely new advanced lines.' 'Building a church for a *resident* woman *only*', Hatty Baker thus concluded, was what had to be aimed at:

893. 19.12.13:225.

> Wherever the opportunity occurs I point out the need for women ministers, and advocate this. Men ministers either ignore women altogether in essentials, or praise and encourage them in things which do not in the least matter nor help them to develop a true self.

All these letters 'point the trend of the future', she declared ominously, 'and the Church which ignores such will suffer'.[894]

The Church of the New Ideal

A practical response to these feelings was not far off. For in March and April 1914 notices appeared in a number of the suffrage newspapers advertising the start of a Women's Church in Wallasey.[895] This was the result of meetings held there in January and February, which had drawn together local churchwomen who felt the impossibility of continued church work 'under such cramped conditions', alongside others for whom no church had ever appealed but who nevertheless felt the need for Christian fellowship.[896]

Explaining the new venture to the wider suffrage movement, one of the initial spokeswomen, Miss M.Hoy, reaffirmed how for years women within the churches had increasingly felt frustrated. Allowed by men to do so much of the Church's work, they had had so little voice in managing the interests that affected the spiritual welfare of women and children. In the

894. *Suffragette* 19.12.13:225.

895. *Vote* 20.3.14:355, *Common Cause* 20.3.14:976, *VfW* 27.3.14:399, *FCST* April 1914:43.

896. Letter of invitation from Amy Brand, in *Wallasey News* 24.1.14:9.

meanwhile, the clergy, with rare exceptions,[897] had proved 'entirely unsympathetic' to those matters which offered such fuller and freer life to so many women within their congregations. In consequence:

> To many the Church has seemed like a cage, and at last many women have come away in sheer disgust at the attitude of the clergy towards the things which to the women are dearer than life.[898]

The radical character of this leap of faith was laid out in the Women Church's 'Official Statement of Aims and Methods'. This deserves a lengthy rendering, since it provides an eloquent summary of the outlook of the wider body of the most progressive of Christian suffragists.:

897. Such as the Revd.F.A.Screeton of St.Paul's, Seacombe, who was closely involved with Wallasey & Wirral W.S.S at this time, *Wallasey News* 24.1.14:9.

898 *Vote* 20.3.14:355.

> Women (the founders asserted) are naturally moral and religious beings, yet when they have essayed recognition of themselves and their needs in the churches, they have been met with refusal. The Anglican, the Roman Catholic, and the Nonconformist churches (with a couple of honourable exceptions) refuse women any share in conducting their church services. As a result of this exclusion, the interpretation and practice of Christianity has suffered, and the general progress of humanity has been delayed. Thinking women of all sects find that the needs of women have been ignored, for in the religious as in every other sphere of life no one sex can include the other.
>
> The Church of the New Ideal fulfils, spiritually and historically, the teaching explicit in Christianity, that there shall be neither male nor female in Christ: a teaching not yet put into practice by the established religious bodies. It is the aim of the new church to make good these deficiencies, by providing an organization in which women shall have the right of access to any position whatsoever of church activity, and in which the special needs and outlook of women will be dealt with. Its chief aim is not dogmatic, but practical: devotional, rather than theological.
>
> For the present the church will be conducted entirely by women, though its services will be open to both sexes: but after a short period it will enter upon its full work of providing for the religious needs of a complete humanity.[899]

Laying claim to be the first church in the country to be organised and officered by women, the Church of the New Ideal held its first services on Sunday 29 March at the Liskeard Concert Hall. The opening preacher was rightly Hatty Baker, who at the morning service outlined the aims of the movement. Women, she said, wanted a church where God's glorious ideals would not become worn out and where stability of character

899. Letter from Margaret E. Cousins ('on behalf of the Committee'), in *Wallasey News* 21.3.14:8.

would be the pillar of the church. There had always been good results where women had shaped the will of men. They were great dreamers and would be heard, their visions crystallising into realism. Perhaps they would have to endure persecution, laughter and ridicule, but they had to do away with male bias. For this was just the beginning of a great work and they would win through.[900]

On the inaugural Sunday, Hatty Baker also preached to an evening service for women only. Taking the subject of 'God, our Prior Mother', she outlined the underlying theological challenge and promise ahead of them. In the growth of new thought, she observed, human beings continually gained a new conception of God. The Church of the past had been almost entirely of man's dominance, government and ideas, and women had been content to follow meekly in the way, thus receiving second-hand conceptions of God. Now some women were beginning to awake to their own potentialities and to recognise that first-hand views of God were offered to them, one of which was the equal recognition of the feminine aspect of God (the masculine had been with them all the time). Hints in the Bible showed that this conception was not really new. They were simply re-awakening to the existence of that which had been there all along. Yet she was aware of the extent of the challenge. It would cost women something to give up the Church of their fathers, not least because church life was such a feature in the life of women. Nevertheless they must have something higher than they had had in the past. In the kingdom and in the Church of the New Ideal, they wanted to see women and men side by side, absolute in equality, one the complement of the other. For man's portrayal of God was good and helpful, but woman's portrayal of

900. *VfW* 27.3.14:399.

God was wanted with it.[901]

The Church of the New Ideal undoubtedly expressed the longings of many progressive Christians up and down the country. The *Free Church Suffrage Times* for example warmly welcomed the new enterprise, observing pertinently:

> Unthinking people will probably smile, but after all, there is nothing novel in the idea of a Church governed by *one* sex only.[902]

For the F.C.L.W.S, the ideal of all suffragists was the co-operation of men and women on equal terms in all areas of national life. Whilst men were unwilling to admit women as co-partners in their undertakings, it was therefore not at all surprising that progressive women should establish institutions of their own.

The new church met with initial success.[903] Services continued to be held each Sunday, involving many well known suffrage names as speakers. Drawing room meetings were also held during the week. By the end of its first year it had fifty-eight members on its roll, with an average attendance of forty, numbers which increased during its second year. Funds had also already begun to be forthcoming for the erection of a suitable church building by the end of 1915, although this project was postponed due to the war. Holding to the watchwords of 'Justice, Love and Service', the Church seems in these first years to have held effectively to its original aims. Certainly it reflected the suffragist ability to transcend denominationalism, with seven different denominations (including Anglicans and Friends), represented in its management.

901. *VfW*27.3.14:399. *Wallasey News*25.3.14:3.

902. April 1914:43.

903. cf. *FCST*May 1915:42:, *The Coming Day*Sept.1916:79.

The Church of the New Age

The Church of the New Ideal was not alone in actualising the visions of many religious feminists. Another small scale pioneering venture began during the war in Manchester, where a 'New Thought' school and church was set up which helped the ostracised wives and children of conscientious objectors. This was run by Constance Andrews, another woman who had been influenced by Eva Gore-Booth. A pacifist, theosophist, and a Minister with a licence to perform weddings, her work was reported approvingly in the radical journal Urania. For as Gifford Lewis accurately identified,[904] the Church of the New Age represented the common linkage in suffragist circles of feminism, pacifism and mystic sympathies, also associated with vegetarianism and (as here, as with Charlotte Despard and Eva Gore-Booth) a working-class base.

Based in a set of offices at 19 Brazenose Street in the centre of Manchester, the Church of the New Age placed great stress on themes of peace, love and reincarnation. It had its own a 'Healing Room' and held a five minute silence each week for concentration on Peace, Love and Health. At the heart of the Church however was the conviction of the dawning of a New Age, when men and women could stand together as human beings possessed of divine souls. For to the Church of the New Age, as to contributors to *Urania*, women and men had been imprisoned by false, materialised and romanticised conceptions of sex. What had not been understood, said Constance Andrews, was that both men and women had the power, not only of physical generation, but of spiritual creation.[905] Christ, she taught, had

904. Lewis, pp.166-169.

905. See New Age Teachings, quoted in Lewis, pp.167-8.

reiterated 'the mystic universal truth of all ages - the Kingdom of God is within you'. Therefore, she maintained:

> If the real meaning of sex were understood and appreciated, men and women would be able to develop the higher part of their nature. It is because in sex there lies a wonderful meaning, that it has become the most thought of thing in the world.....
> .....When St.Paul used his intuition, and thus brought forth the soul knowledge within him, he said, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.'[906]

For Constance Andrews, only the false male ideas of the natural subservience of women therefore barred women from priesthood and ministry. The Church of the New Age, in demonstrating the female capacity for these roles, was thus intended to help open the doors to equality in the spiritual as in every area of life.

Womanchurch?

Such enterprises did not make a lasting impact. Deprived of the power and force of the suffrage struggle in which they were created they gained few convert sisters. It might be easy therefore to regard them as mere curious epiphenomena of this stage of women's movement. Like the Labour Churches of the 1890s they could be regarded as staging posts for their members, as they moved out from one set of religiously defined allegiances to others based on secular political categories, whether of class or gender. Yet that would also be to mistake their anticipation of the efforts made in a later wave of feminism for the construction of 'women-churches', or for communities of faith founded upon a spiritual conception of equality. For if the

906. ibid.

organisers of the initial meeting of the Church of the New Ideal wondered whether it might 'prove to be the drop that will by and by swell into a vast ocean',[907] they were perhaps wrong more about timing than about spiritual need. As small-scale experiments in this period however, they were perhaps inevitably destined to fade away with the roar of the wave that had borne them forth.

Women and the National Mission

In terms of scale, the Church of England's National Mission of Repentance and Hope made a much bigger impact upon wartime England. Mounted in the autumn of 1916, as part of the Church of England's efforts to respond to the spiritual needs of the nation, it never fulfilled the high hopes of its chief proponents. Yet it helped initiate a climate of change in the Anglican Church, reflected in the five Committees of Inquiry that developed from it and the 'Life and Liberty' group that also followed. Unfortunately however, even these developments could still not touch the same nerves of hope or engagement amongst Christian feminists as did contemporary suffrage developments.

The chief obstacle, as Maude Royden saw it, was the crucial inability of the Church to be a true 'fellowship.' Rather, she observed with feeling, it too often seemed obsessed with the definition of 'orthodoxy', or with getting people to 'come to church' as if it were a musical concert.[908] Even the efforts of the 'Life and Liberty' group were, she felt, too cautious and narrowly

907. *Wallasey News* 24.1.14:4.

908. A.M.Royden, The Hour and the Church (1918), pp.69-70.

focused on the establishment.[909] As she had discovered to her cost in controversy involving the Principal of Cuddesdon, even as the only woman on the 'Liberty' committee she was still dispensable.[910] The chief problem, she said, was that it was no more possible to 'create an atmosphere' where reforms could grow than it was to create fellowship by wishing it so. Both were only born 'of a great endeavour made in common', as could be seen by comparison with the 'live' movements of the day:[911]

> To pass from a gathering of Labourists or Suffragists to one of, for example, 'National Missioners', was like passing from warm life to chilly death .....
> .....At the one, all was staid and middle-aged, cautious and polite with the extreme and chilling politeness of people who are too kind and nice to want to hurt one another's exceedingly sensitive feelings, even if, in order to avoid this, it was necessary to avoid saying or doing anything to the purpose. At the other, all was alive and gay, hopeful and young. We were not afraid of hurting one another's feelings, for we were all too much set on a great purpose to be thinking of our feelings at all.[912]

The 'hallmark of the living movement', she concluded, was not asking people to subscribe to the writings of J.S.Mill, or to recite a number of beliefs about the enfranchisement of women which only participation in the movement could in fact bring home to

909. Royden (1918), p.61.

910. S.Fletcher (1989), pp.169-171, provides the best account of this. Principal Seaton objected to Maude Royden sleeping at the college during the 'Life and Liberty' council held there in September 1917. This followed her growing involvement with the City Temple, including her officiating at a christening service.

911. Royden (1918), p.75.

912. ibid, p.76.

them. All that was asked was acceptance of the 'aims and objects'. In terms of the way of Christ: 'Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ?':[913]

> Would it be safe ? No, of course it would not be safe.....[914]
> we are afraid of such risks, afraid of such a terrible victory (as Christ's).....We treat the Church as one long accustomed to ill-health. Do not open the window! Do not bang the door! You cannot take risks with an invalid. Step lightly, speak softly. At any moment the poor thing might die![915]

The National Mission thus came under heavy fire from some Christian suffragists. Charlotte Despard's attack was characteristic.[916] She accused the Mission of exclusiveness, which could only bring discord rather than required reconciliation. Firstly, it risked stirring up sectarian controversy by excluding the Free Churches (actually a charge without substance, since they were kept well informed and sent their good wishes).[917] Secondly, and more tellingly, it had weakened its attractive force by excluding women as messengers. Thereby it had forfeited its claim to the term 'national'. In fact, she declared, true reconciling messengers could only be:

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913. Royden (1918), pp.77-8.

914. ibid, p.79.

915. ibid, p.81.

916. 'A Real National Mission', *Vote* 1.9.16:1160-1.

917. Wilkinson, p.72.

> men and women, many of them young, who in the bitter smart of their own living flesh and blood, or through that Divine compassion which takes up and bears the woe of others, have reached a knowledge that neither a liberal education nor a theological training can give.....
> .....Not from bishops' palaces or priests' houses or peaceful rectories or churches or cathedrals will the bells of the new dawn ring out, but from the hearths and homes of the people; and so only can we have a true national mission.

The failure to employ fully the talents and experience of women in the National Mission was an obvious insult to the women's movement and must be seen as an important factor in its failure. Henry Scott Holland, like other Church feminists, had expected better in the circumstances of war and with the particular tasks and gifts required. 'We rely on the women', he wrote in May 1916, 'if the mission is to do its work'.[918] Even in August enthusiasm was high, with the Central Council of the National Mission having passed a resolution urging the Church 'to secure the adequate representation of women on her councils', and encouraging the bishops 'to give directions about women speakers'. 'The tide has turned', declared Maude Royden, 'and a great movement is now surging through our beloved Church'.[919]

The tide soon ebbed however in the face of opposition led by that successful Canute Athelstan Riley, representing the English Church Union and ultra conservatives in the Church. The bishops of London and Chelmsford now infamously limited their approval of women messengers to certain narrow limits: to be heard exclusively by girls and women; not to speak from pulpit, lectern or chancel steps; and their licence to be extended only for the

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918. 'The National Mission', C.L.W.S *MP*, p.61.

919. Editorial in *MP* Aug.1916:92.

period of the National Mission. The Church League, whilst deploring the exceedingly restricted terms, initially felt that they should be accepted 'loyally'. It would, said the *Monthly Paper*, be particularly difficult for 'just those women who would best serve the Church in this hour of crisis'. Yet the Mission ought not become 'an occasion for strife and disunion'.[920]

Others were understandably less generous. From the front page of the *Vote*, the Catholic scholar M.A.R.Tuker declared it as a classic example of the 'millinery' aspect of male-dominated Christianity: 'the straining after the very petty and ineffectual while barely permitting the great and spiritual'.[921] As she had pointed out elsewhere, so here, she said:

> sex considerations take precedence over theological, and.....even bishops are males first and bishops afterwards, so that customs are wrongly dubbed 'Christian' tradition, which are really masculine tradition.

The Vote followed up with an attack upon Archbishop Davidson for his 'extraordinary outpouring' at the opening of the National Mission, which revealed it alleged, 'something of the contempt in which Churchmen hold women'.[922] Not only had he acquiesced in, and practically blessed, Athelstan Riley's banning of women,[923] but he then told women how much depended on them for the success of the Mission. If there were a chance of him listening, said *The Vote*, we should advise him:

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920. Sept.1916:100.

921. 29.9.16:1190.

922. Editorial 6.10.16:1201.

923. Davidson himself restricted his Archbishop's Visitors' to the clergy.

> to shoulder his own burden, and not to try to make women responsible for the duties, and failures, of the gentlemen of his cloth, who have for so long kept the offices of the Church as their sex and class monopoly to the exclusion of the women who, he now owns, must be the deciding factor in the spiritual conditions of the future.

For different reasons Conrad Noel dubbed it the 'Mission of Funk and Despair'.[924] It was becoming a fitting title. For by this time the bishops of London and Chelmsford had even withdrawn their very limited permission for women messengers. The Church League in response reaffirmed, as part of its 'fundamental faith', that if the ministry of word was to be entrusted to laymen it should also be to laywomen. Indeed practically speaking, it pointed out that there was more case for laywomen preachers, since through their specific experience as women they would add more to the ministry of priests than laymen.[925] Suggesting that the matter might have been best dealt with by the Episcopate as a whole rather than individual bishops, the League nevertheless claimed to wish not to accentuate the bitterness caused. Yet, it said, the bishops should know that they had purchased the support of the malcontents at the price of the acute distress and disappointment of devoted women in their dioceses, in addition to the despair and antagonism of others.

The C.L.W.S as a body was always more conservative when it came to church politics and its cries of 'foul' were restrained. It was not surprised, but could not support, for example, the idea that then emerged of a 'Society of Women Preachers', which had reported intentions of taking a hall and preaching sermons

924. Wilkinson, p.78.

925. *MP* Oct.1916:110.

'quietly and unobtrusively at present, but later on more extensively'.[926] Maude Royden and other radical members might contemplate such a step, just as other Anglicans had welcomed the Church of the New Ideal, but the *Monthly Paper*, as the C.L.W.S mouthpiece, reflecting the more moderate views of Louise Creighton and others, always kept itself from such a position. Laywomen preachers ought to be properly qualified and authorised it felt, so that adequate instruction in the Catholic faith might be ensured. Yet, although concerned about the dangers of a new sect, it also saw the reasons that could lead to such a tragedy:

> Will the Church never learn, even by the bitter lessons of experience ? In the eighteenth century we lost the spiritual forces of Methodism by alienating one of the noblest, if not the most balanced, sons whom we had ourselves nurtured, John Wesley. Shall we in the twentieth century lose the spiritual force of feminism by a folly less excusable and fraught with far more disastrous possibilities ?[927]

Women and Church Councils

For Church feminists the key issue was not just the place of women in church administration but the underlying attitude of the Church to women. This, said the C.L.W.S, was what most needed clearing up:

926. *MP* Oct.1916:110.

927. ibid.

> When a priest refuses to let women approach the altar nearer than the sanctuary rails; when all the men in a church communicate before all the women; when it is suggested that although women-singers are 'obviously better' than boys, yet they must be permitted only where boys cannot be got - are we to suppose (questioned the C.L.W.S) that such is the orthodox attitude of the women towards them?.....Are they discountenanced and rebuked by the bishops, as excessive ritualism and liberalism are discountenanced and rebuked?.....We surely have a right to know.[928]

What for the League had been particularly disappointing about the National Mission were what it saw as concessions to 'a reactionary force' after it had initially raised hopes about understanding the women's (and the Labour) movement. The Central Council of the National Mission had after all declared that underlying the Woman's Movement were:

> moral and spiritual elements which demand the frank recognition and close sympathy of the Church, viz.....a new moral consciousness concerning the personal and social status and conditions of women's life.....
> .....the substance of this new moral consciousness may be defined as the spiritual awakening of both women and men to women's need of greater freedom and opportunity - (a) for self-realisation and self-development; and (b) for extended labour and service in the community, i.e., in both Church and State.[929]

Church feminists might have lost most of the battle over women messengers, but (as indicated by the Central Council statement) through the struggle other issues were slowly

928. *MP* Jan.1917:1.

929. Text reprinted in full in *MP* Aug.1916:98 and Jan.1917:7. It should perhaps be noted however that Louise Creighton, Maude Royden and Emma Paget, amongst other women, were all members of the Central Council.

beginning to turn their way. Indeed, as the Free Church League noted ironically, such controversy helped release a flood of Christian feminist activity:

> the embargo of bishops on women in pulpits has done more than any advocacy to further our cause. Our enemies are become our footstool.[930]

Already in July 1914 women had won the right to vote for and be representatives on parochial church councils, a limited concession which was undoubtedly a result of feminist pressure in the face of fierce opposition in the Representative Church Council.[931] In 1917 such efforts were increased as the C.L.W.S Executive Committee, supported by the League's Conference in February, committed itself to take 'immediate steps': to promote women's franchise for all church assemblies; to educate opinion to secure all offices open to laywomen that were open to laymen; and to support the 'formal explicit re-admission of women to the Diaconate'.[932] In at least the first two of these campaigns they were then considerably aided by pressure from the Life and Liberty movement (which began in March 1917) and the Central Committee of Women's Church Work (a semi-official body whose vice-chairman was Louise Creighton).[933]

The results of this Church feminist drive did not fully arrive until 1919. Further account therefore lies beyond the present discussion. It should be noted however that the *Reports of the*

930. *The Coming Day* Dec.1916:105.

931. See Heeney, p.104 ff. for a fuller account.

932. With the functions for which 'Primitive precedent' existed, or were 'compatible with the natural development of Catholic custom' in the new conditions. *MP* Jan.1917:7 and Feb.1917:15.

933. Heeney, p.110.

Archbishops' Committees of Inquiry (which followed the National Mission) all recommended in 1919 that women should participate far more in the work, worship and government of the Church of England. The Fifth Report, in discussing 'The Industrial Employment of Women', also urged not only 'equal pay for equal work', but also equal freedom in the choice of occupation, equal justice and consideration, and an equal voice regarding conditions of employment.[934] Most importantly of all, Church feminists helped gain full lay rights for churchwomen in the Enabling Act of 1919. The intimate relationship this success bore to the wider women's movement is clear. As Bishop Kempthorne observed:

> It would be an anomaly that women should be considered eligible for the Parliament of the nation and not be eligible for the Representative Assembly of the Church.[935]

Women Preachers and Women Priests

The most striking instance of the beneficial effects of the suffrage struggle upon Church feminism was the boost it supplied to women preachers. The pioneering work of Hatty Baker has been mentioned. By 1918 however she was far from alone. Notably she had been joined in 1917 by Constance Todd, who became the first fully ordained woman in England on September 17 1917, beginning a joint ministry with her husband Claude alongside Dr.Orchard at the King's Weigh House.[936] Suffrage papers frequently reported the keen interest shown in women preachers in various churches, welcomed contributions

934. Wilkinson, p.93.

935. *Guardian* 6.3.19, quoted in Heeney, p.111.

936. See Kaye article in Shiels and Wood (eds.), pp.507-512.

such as Hatty Baker's pamphlet *Women's Ministry: A Strategical Outpost for Women's Suffrage*, and highlighted the career of other such figures as the Revd. Anna Shaw (President of the National American Women's Suffrage Association) and 'Scotland's first woman pastor' the Pentecostalist Olive May Winchester (who first officiated at a wedding on April 6 1914 in a Glasgow hotel).[937] For as Constance Coltman Todd amongst others maintained, Galatians 3:28 was 'the Magna Carta' of the spiritual rights, not of women alone, but of humanity: the foundation not only of women's ministry, but of democracy, freedom and lasting peace. On this, it was argued, hung the supreme worth of very soul, the supremacy of the spiritual over the material, and (the basis of Coltman's pacifism) the superiority of the whole armour of God over the arm of flesh.[938]

Within the Free Churches, women's preaching was to some degree a revival rather than a novelty. Development within the Established Church was therefore a particularly significant breakthrough. Here the National Mission was not all loss. Bishop Gore of Oxford was one of those who took the opportunity to establish a permanent organization of Women Messengers within his diocese after its close. Other such as Bishop Hicks in Lincoln also helped so to further women's ministry.[939]

In this way the religious insights and experience of suffrage speakers were gradually allowed platforms within the Church. For it was no coincidence that the ice-breaking Anglican women preachers were women active in suffrage work, such as Edith Picton-Turbervill (also of course a former missionary) and

937. See e.g *Vote* 9.11.12:28, 7.12.12:100, 24.4.14:9.

938. Quoted in Byrne, p.28.

939. See e.g *The Lincoln Diocesan Magazine* Sept.1916:130-2, reference from Graham Neville.

Margaret Nevinson.[940] Maude Royden led forth, beginning with her acceptance of a regular pulpit at the City Temple in 1917.[941] She was not (as she was careful to point out) the first woman to have spoken there, for Catherine Bramwell-Booth had that distinction. Yet she was roundly denounced in many quarters as a triple horror: a woman, a pacifist and an Anglican! For others however her speaking was profoundly moving. After she had preached on her first Sunday evening (March 18), she herself admitted to the bishop in attendance, to having had a 'severe shock' in her 'Anglican soul' about pronouncing a benediction in his presence. The great man in question, Edward Hicks, merely replied: 'it was the best blessing I have had since my mother died'.[942] Indeed, said the Church League, it was 'impossible to measure the regret felt by churchpeople' when they had to go to a church outside their communion to hear the message one of their fellow workers assuredly had to give.[943]

The story of the 'ecclesiastical militancy' led by Maude Royden which furthered women's preaching in the Anglican Church again goes beyond the present discussion.[944] That development must nevertheless also be recognised as another offshoot of the wider women's struggle, informed as that had been in turn by the growing confidence of Christian feminists such as Maude Royden. Indeed the most provocative move of all was now being made,

940. For Edith Picton-Turbervill, see Heeney, p.122 and ch.6. passim for a fuller discussion of the whole question.

941. See S.Fletcher (1989), ch.8. pp.156-184.

942. Bid Me Discourse, p.105, in AMR Papers. FL.

943. 'The Laywoman's Outlook', *MP* April 1917:43.

944. Admirably related in S.Fletcher (1989), ch.9. pp.185-211.

with calls for the ordination of women as priests.

This initiative appears to have emerged with Ursula Roberts in early 1913, with her circular letter to leading Church feminists proposing a small society for study of the question. Of her 150 or so approaches, she met with thirty or forty favourable replies.[945] The characteristic grounds of opposition were all indicated: there was no precedent in dominical or apostolic tradition; the Church of England could not take unilateral action within Catholic Christendom; the time was not 'ripe'. Even Maude Royden was wary:

> Experience has shown me, what no doubt it has proved even more abundantly to you! - that there is no subject which puts people into such a fever and alarm as this one. The vote is nothing to it![946]

As a result of the war, and of such cautious well-wishing, the proposal for a conference and a society was therefore not realised until 1917. Yet it was a logical and integral step in the view of many Christian suffragists. For as Gertrude Francis commented in approving the design, it was really important that such a movement should come:

> from <u>within</u> the Church The awakening, as it were, of the soul of the Church, to a great reality.....which could heal some of the overstrained relations which the women's movement has caused to come to the forefront.[947]

945. S.Fletcher (1989), p.143. A representative sample of these, for and against, are found in *Women in the Church*, <u>Autograph Collection</u>, FL.

946. AMR to Ursula Roberts, 24.7.13, *Women in the Church*, also quoted in S.Fletcher (1989), pp.143-4. The W.S.P.U militant Florence Canning also declared herself 'most decidedly in favour' of the object, but advised caution whilst the issue of representation on councils was settled.

947. Undated letter to Ursula Roberts, *Women in the Church*.

Thus if the little society was formed, it might:

> do much to make many women understand better the spiritual impulses underlying this movement of which they are so dimly and so vaguely half-awake.....
> (whilst, she added) the limitations within the Church, its lack of vision regarding the present great movements and the issues involved
> - all this is very real to us women who are trying to keep a hold on our faith.

This issue was nevertheless to shatter the unity of the Church League in the new post-war world. Indeed, when the League (now of 'the Church Militant') finally formally adopted challenging 'the custom of the Church of confining the priesthood to men' in April 1919, it signalled the end of the suffrage consensus, a new stage in the development of Christian feminism and the reappearance of more usual divisions.

Chapter Ten

THE END OF THE BEGINNING ?

Epilogue

The loss of momentum

By 1918, as highlighted in the last chapter, the force of the suffrage movement had already long abated. Although the suffrage campaign reemerged after 1915, the war had put an end to its dynamism, whilst its complex unity had unravelled in several directions. The eventual grant of the franchise then further exacerbated feminist disarray. Not only at the end was this achievement considerably effected by changed political circumstances rather than direct suffragist pressure,[948] but this very success now brought division concerning future directions. The extension of the franchise to women under thirty hardly seemed a great rallying call and some quickly grew complacent now their main symbolic aim was secured.[949] After an unsuccessful attempt to achieve success for Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst's Women's Party, the militant tradition certainly finally ran aground. This, as indicated above, had already been evident long before however, and Christabel's flight to America to proclaim her new Adventist faith only sealed the issue. Whilst the Women's Freedom League continued to seek its wider aims, and some former militants were involved in the feminist magazine *Time and Tide* and the Six Point Group, they now took a constitutionalist and 'equal rights' path.[950]

948. Particularly the need to extend the male franchise, cf. Pugh (1992), pp.34-42.

949. ibid, p.43ff.

950. ibid, pp.47-50.

For in the new post-war world, many of the values of the women's movement were questioned. On the one hand, new visions were required, with women now having to engage in the more unspectacular tasks of using the openings which the suffragist generation had created. This required a change of strategy and tactics. Amongst the main suffragist groups therefore, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies changed its name and focus to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship. With others, it then tried to work within existing channels of influence, stressing welfare rather than 'sex-war'. On the other hand, new visions were increasingly unwelcome. The lively Church feminist Alice Abadam may have pleaded shortly after the franchise was gained for the use of *The Feminist Vote*,[951] seeking 'emancipation' rather than mere 'enfranchisement'. By 1930 however, an 'anti-feminist reaction' was in full swing. For the post-war climate favoured femininity rather than feminism, the status of housekeeping and motherhood was elevated, and demobilisation and economic depression forced women out of the labour force in favour of men.[952]

The end of the Church Leagues

Christian feminism similarly splintered and spluttered after the war. Within Church circles, in addition to those mentioned above, further immediate feminist advances were made: notably at the 1920 Lambeth Conference, where the bishops appeared ready to concede that the order of deaconesses was part of the ordained ministry. In 1930 however, the Conference Committee on Deaconesses explicitly ruled this out, indicating a loss of

951. cf. her pamphlet of that name.

952. Pugh (1992), ch.4. pp.72-100.

Church feminist momentum (not really regained until the 1970s, with the renewal of the women's movement itself).[953]

The passing of the Representation of the People Act in January 1918 certainly brought to a climax this great phase of the women's movement. Celebrations duly followed, with the religious Leagues joining the other societies in the great gathering at the Queen's Hall on February 21. In addition, the religious societies also held their own services of thanksgiving: the most notable being the service at the City Temple on Sunday February 10. Organised by the F.C.L.W.S, it was appropriately led by Constance Coltman and Mrs.Bonwick, with Maude Royden as preacher.[954]

By the end of 1917 however, it had already become clear that the first part of the C.L.W.S' objectives was on the eve of accomplishment, and debate had begun about the future. In fact the Church League had already diversified, mainly owing to the demands of war work, but also through involvement in the National Mission, and through the struggle to improve women's voice, standing and representation within the Church. For some, such as C.G.Langdon, the work of the League had only just begun. Writing in the League's *Monthly Paper* in December 1917, he outlined the areas into which he felt that the League should move.[955] Firstly, he declared, the C.L.W.S had to work amongst women and girls to help them use their dignity and God given

953. Heeney, pp.130-134.

954. *The Coming Day* Feb.1918:15. The C.L.W.S held their own Day of Thanksgiving and Dedication the Saturday after the Royal Assent was given, with special services in St.Martin-in-the-Fields. The bishops of Stepney and Willesden, and Dr.Lyttelton gave addresses, with Maurice Bell presiding at the choral eucharist. The C.W.S.S shared in a High Mass in Westminster Cathedral, processing afterwards to the shrine to Joan of Arc and there placing a laurel wealth.

955. p.134.

powers to make the franchise the blessing it ought to be. Secondly, more light needed to be shed upon the social and religious problems which particularly concerned women. This he felt could be done by Christian teaching of Political Economy, the 'evils of Individualism' and the need for united action through Trade Unions and the 'work of the Body'. Most importantly of all however, the League had to work for the bringing about of sex-equality in the Church, which would involve not only ensuring the Church franchise for women on the same terms as for men, but also 'equality in the opportunities for Service'. This would include not only opening all lay offices to women, but also restoring women preachers and deaconesses, and with an openness to the Holy Spirit beyond this.

Such an attitude, particularly in relation to the development of women's ministry within the Church, was not shared by all. Indeed that particular issue proved a ground of vigorous controversy for succeeding generations. When the League changed its name with the gaining of the vote, its child, the League of the Church Militant, adopted women's priesthood as an aim, and so precipitated an exodus of members. Even Hicks, close to his death, felt he must resign the presidency (although Maude Royden always felt he might have taken the issue on, had he lived).[956] By 1930, the League had disbanded, succeeded by far less activist and politically-conscious groupings.[957] This ending of the Church League was to some large degree inevitable however, whatever policies had been adopted. Whereas the vote was a clear, unifying aim, the other objects of the C.L.W.S were always ultimately a matter of political and ecclesiastical

956. S.Fletcher (1989), p.188.

957. Heeney, p.134.

disagreement.

The other religious Leagues generally encountered similar disintegration. Among these, the Free Church League also attempted to survive with new purpose. In 1916 it had already changed its newspaper's name to *The Coming Day* in hope and recognition of a breakthrough for the women's movement. In 1918, it announced new aims:

> (1) to emphasise the spiritual aspect of social reconstruction
> (2) to foster the spirit of Internationalism among the Free Churches
> (3) to work for the equality of men and women
> (4) to establish the recognition of freedom of conscience.[958]

Yet at the end of 1919 it announced closure, completed with a last edition of *The Coming Day* in June 1920. Only the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society made an effective transition into a new form, preserving (an admittedly less high profile) Christian feminist continuity into the modern age through the St.Joan's Alliance.

Conclusions

What then of Christian feminism in the women's suffrage struggle? After recognising the complexities traced above, what general conclusions can be drawn about its significance?

The answer, in relation to securing franchise reform, partly depends upon how important the suffrage movement itself is regarded, a point on which historians have been divided. However, even if the degree of its direct political influence is questioned, its role in helping to create the scope and climate for change was crucial. Partly this was through its successful

958. *The Coming Day* Oct-Nov.1918:69.

combination of direct political action, with success in extending its influence through less dramatic campaigns, which brought a great variety of different groups and interests onto its side. In both areas it can be seen that Christian feminism was influential. An inspiration behind key figures in the movement, its rhetoric and organisations helpfully extended the very boundaries of the movement. Even if it is held not to be directly crucial to the winning of the franchise, it thus contributed to a culture of liberation within both the Churches and the wider society to which they were still closely attached.

For the significance of Christian feminism in the suffrage struggle was much wider than the Vote, and lay above all within the religious and symbolic realm. As has been illustrated above, within religious circles themselves, women's status was considerably advanced. Those who were more strictly Church, as well as Christian, feminists were clearly central to this process, but (as the immediate post-war period highlights), they would not have moved very far without the wider movement. In so doing, they arguably achieved far more than opening a few doors to a few women in their own day. For, from the religious feminist viewpoint, what was at stake was not only women's political, social and economic status, but also, more fundamentally, their spiritual position. It was this awareness that gave force to the passion of the Christian feminists, which sometimes turned them (occasionally bitterly) against their Churches, and which also explains the degree of resistance against which they railed. For as Maude Royden observed soon afterwards:

> When women have won their victory nearly all along the line, even in the matter of government, it seems at first sight strange that the Church should hold out against them. I discount the easy but deceptive retort that 'organised religion' is always conservative, for one has only to look at the history of Christianity to see that organised religion has often been a revolutionary force in order to realise that it may easily become so again. I seek the explanation in something deeper than the easily assumed perversity of religious people; and then it does not seem so difficult to understand why the *spiritual* equality of the sexes should be harder to admit than their political, social, or even economic equality.
> The spiritual nature of Man is the last, highest product of his evolution: religion, after all, the deepest and most unconquerable of his interests. Naturally therefore, in whatever other matter he may admit equality with those he has been accustomed to regard as his inferiors, in this matter his reluctance will be greater than all.[959]

In this sense, the women's suffrage struggle saw a breakthrough for Christian feminism, passing on a legacy and example for others to follow.

The Church feminist achievement

The extent of the Church feminist legacy and example is perhaps best illuminated by recalling the Church League's achievements. For any radical Anglican campaigning body which comprised nearly six thousand members deserves recognition. This is all the more the case when within its ranks were supporters of all varieties of suffragism, including the two foremost 'martyrs' of the suffragette struggle, the leading parliamentary advocate of women's suffrage, and several other notable figures. As a vigorous minority voice within the Establishment, both in terms of the Church, and to a lesser

959. The Ministry of Women, League of the Church Militant leaflet, n.d.

degree British society as a whole, the C.L.W.S was a significant element in the conflict.

In relation to the women's movement, its influence was valuable and constructive, albeit largely derivative and late in coming. Speakers such as Florence Sterling sometimes commented on the number of churchwomen who were 'family selfish', and whom the League thus sought to bring into the movement.[960] Early in the League's life, its usefulness had been similarly illustrated to Miss Hicks at an open air meeting in Hornsey, where Y.M.C.A members were able to have their questions addressed.[961] In a variety of such small but not unimportant ways the C.L.W.S thus helped to widen the constituency of suffrage supporters and propaganda, and provided a meeting place for suffragists of all descriptions. In doing so, whilst highlighting the scale of the conflict between them, it enabled fruitful dialogue to continue between feminism and the Christian Church. Reducing the level of disillusionment felt by many churchwomen, it provided them with continuing meaningful religious fellowship and support.

Similar achievements can be seen to have been made by the other religious Leagues, with each adding their own distinctive contributions. In particular, the pioneering work of Hatty Baker and her close allies in the Free Churches broke much new ground. Not only was women's preaching established in a number of places, with official ministerial recognition coming with Constance Coltman, but new feminist space was created (whether through the widely received writing and preaching of Hatty Baker herself or remarkable new signs such as the women's Church of the New Ideal). In a slightly different vein,

960. *Vote*4.2.11:183.

961. *Vote*30.7.10:163.

the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society accomplished comparable feminist markers. In itself it represented the emergence of a radical woman-led Christian organisation, and within it it contained individuals (such as M.A.R.Tuker) who were only slightly less prominent than Maude Royden and Hatty Baker in promoting their own brand of Christian feminism.

Within Church and Synagogue, the religious Leagues hence acted as the main campaigning groups for the recognition of women's gifts and status. In general they thus contributed to spreading a missionary spirit abroad, open to change and renewal from various quarters. Furthermore, as the cradle of women's ordination in Britain, and as a space within which some women at least began to seek feminist religious expression, their vision is still unfolding.

Edith Clarence's response to Ursula Roberts' suggestion for a campaign for women's priesting indicates the long term value of radical Christian feminist efforts, even if they came to little by 1930. Although, she said, the vote needed to be settled first (and hence her own energies were for the present with the W.S.P.U), she wished the scheme every success, since:

> pioneers in every movement have had to break new ground before they (or those who followed) could tread on it.

She also however added a prophetic note:

> I am every day becoming more and more convinced that by the time public opinion has been sounded in the matter, spiritually minded women and those specially fitted for the priesthood, will find the Church inadequate for the exercise of their gifts, and for their interpretation of the Church as the Kingdom of God on earth.[962]

The Christian feminist achievement

Edith Clarence's words highlight the tensions present within Christian feminism throughout the suffrage struggle. At times, as here, Christian feminism appeared to speak and act for a select liberal minority. Using the old, inherited, patriarchal, constrained tradition, it yet looked onward to the realisation of new forms of incarnated love, faith and ministry, walking together with and learning from other feminists. However, on other occasions it was deeply conservative, drawing upon its manifest social purity and evangelical religious feminist links: and in this way, particularly through the Church Leagues, enabling women to be involved who would have been alarmed by earlier (and later) liberal feminism.

In fact, as this study has described, three 'faces' of Christian feminism may be discerned within this complex mixture. Firstly, there was the conservative stream, found across the suffrage movement, but especially within the ranks of the Church Leagues (although less so perhaps among the Friends'). By 1914 this was the most powerful element within the movement, and certainly the most numerous. Drawing strongly upon the example of the 'apostolic succession' of Christian women moral crusaders, the suffrage campaign was seen as the preeminent 'woman's mission' of the age. Gaining support from the more conservative Christian quarters, this was able to make links with right wing concerns

962. Letter 10.5.13, FL. Autograph Collection, *Women in the Church.*

for empire, motherhood and social welfare. It was reflected strongly in both the 'character' and 'spirit' of the 'Common Cause'.

Secondly, there was the progressive stream within Christian feminism. This was not so numerous but was at least as articulate and proportionately more to the fore in leadership. The significance of this was especially in relation to nonconformist suffragism, particularly in individuals such as Isabella Ford, Keir Hardie and the Snowdens and the influence of R.J.Campbell. It has also been observed however within other quarters, not least in the persons of Maude Royden and other Anglicans such as Percy Dearmer. Closely associated with forms of ethical and Christian Socialism, it enabled (as reflected above all in Lansbury's career) useful links between the women's movement and the idealistic British Left, sometimes imbued with the religious humanism of figures such as Olive Schreiner. It was also the religious ally of the 'equal rights' tradition within the women's movement.

Thirdly there was the radical stream. This, like the other two faces of Christian feminism, was not separate from the others, with which it was often (or rather, usually) deeply entwined. As seen especially within the militant groupings, it was nonetheless distinct in placing particular stress upon the discovery or 'evolution' of woman's sense of self, and by its more forthright critique of patriarchal structures. Insofar as it drew upon evangelical, or 'Victorian', emphases, it tended towards the Right (as, above all, in the case of Christabel Pankhurst). Insofar as it looked to the emergence of new ideals, such as the new 'woman-soul', it linked more easily with the Left (as seen for example in Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence). In both aspects it sought to encourage women to reject the 'sin of self-sacrifice' and realise their Christ-like vocation to save themselves and their world.

Each of these three 'faces' or trends within Christian feminism were deeply dependent on their contemporary context and the leading ideas and values of their age. As such, this 'first-wave' Christian feminism appears as both highly paradoxical and as unsuitable in various respects as a basis for a later Christian faith. Yet this also points up the nature of its achievement, both for the contemporary women's movement and for Christian faith. For the greatest suffragist difficulty was perhaps not merely the getting out of Egypt (i.e gaining the vote as such) as getting Egypt out of Israel (i.e spiritual liberation). Political, structural emancipation was the main goal, to aid wider social or moral emancipation. For this to be achieved however, a certain degree of spiritual emancipation was required, and this last was a specific contribution of Christian suffragism (especially perhaps in its suffragette guise).

To achieve the necessary spiritual emancipation, a new sense of self was required. This did not necessarily need an external referent or source of dependence in a traditional religious sense, but a wrestling with Christian symbolism was necessary in the circumstances of this era. Within much of the Christian feminism which has been traced above therefore, there was this soul struggle: the finding of a new sense of woman-self derived from something outside of its existing world, articulated through Christian symbolism. In this way, God became for the Christian feminists what Daphne Hampson has expressed as: 'the one who allows us to come into being.....that which hears us into being.'[963]

The spirituality of the suffrage movement reflected this inner 'soul' struggle (as well as the outer 'political' struggle). This largely took place within Christian terminology, since (despite its

963. In R.Harries (ed.), Reinhold Niebuhr and the issues of our time, pp.57-8.

patriarchal expressions) Christianity also offered accessible resources for the struggle as well as restrictions and boundaries. Here women were still not free from 'separate spheres' thinking and its accompanying spirituality, but some creative steps had been taken, struggling with the angel (like Jacob). Since Christian feminism had several 'faces', it was inevitably a highly paradoxical element of the suffrage movement. On several levels it was struggling to bring itself to birth. Yet together these different 'faces' were a powerful force assisting the women's movement to some part at least of its goal.

From the viewpoint of the Christian Faith, it may be noted that its specifically Christian or Church feminist achievements only came as a result of interaction with the wider women's movement, just as present-day Christian feminism is linked with present-day feminism. The fruits of that interaction were mixed, with dismay and rejection on both sides alongside new perspectives and empowerment. Yet such encounter was not to be avoided. Rather, as Maude Royden herself reflected, Christian feminism, like Christianity itself, was only really found and enacted through living fellowship with others. This, the Christian feminists believed, was the risky living out of the 'faith that is in us': a faith which, for those who share in it, goes beyond mere words (even the greatest words of the Bible or Christian rhetoric); which transcends even the most courageous and life-giving deeds to which it gives birth; looking, as it does, to a dream that is never really lost in the darkness of the night, but which is found in a world in which women and men may indeed 'walk hand in hand and not be afraid'.

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