

Leadership Roles for Women in the
Eighteenth Century Methodist
Revival, and in particular,
female preaching.

by

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Introduction

This thesis examines and analyses the circumstances that led to women finding more opportunity for involvement in leadership roles in the eighteenth century Methodist revival and considers Wesley's changing views which allowed the evolution of female preaching. The pertinent period concerned is from c.1740 to c.1805 during which time women's involvement in Wesleyan Methodism reached its peak, particularly in relation to 'female preaching', and was summarily quashed by the introduction of a more formal denominational structure in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, Wesley dominated the Methodist movement and as Methodism took shape under his direction, the question of the roles fulfilled by women in the various structures of the movement was one with which Wesley was repeatedly forced to concern himself. Just how much and what sorts of authority and leadership might be properly exercised by women has been a controversial issue up to and including our own century. St Paul's words concerning women, that they are to 'keep silence in the churches',¹ to 'learn in silence with all subjection' and not to 'usurp authority over the man',² have been cited as clear directives for the role of women in the church. Wesley was aware of the Church of England pattern for women to "not only defer to all those higher than herself in the social scale, but also to show, by obedience to and silence in the church, her subjection to male leadership and authority."³ There had been movements in the previous

¹ I Corinthians, 14:34. (King James Version of the Bible - this will be the particular version used for further references.)

² I Timothy 2:12-13.

³ Helen M. Butler, "The 'Pious Sisterhood': A Study of Women's Roles in English Methodism c1740 - c1840", History Honours Thesis, La Trobe University, 1978, p.3.

century which had allowed women to be more active. In Quakerism, female preaching was common but women did not achieve complete equality in the organizational structure of the Society.⁴ Even Wesley's mother, Susannah, had been involved in 'reading sermons' and conducting meetings in the rectory at Epworth while her husband was away at Convocation.⁵ Perhaps it is through her example that Wesley received his first lessons related to the abilities of women to fulfil the role of lay-people in the life of the Church. Wesley's mother continued to have an influence on his life up until her death in 1742.

At the mention of John Wesley and women, distorted images of a series of aborted relationships appear. The bungled romance with Sophy in Georgia,⁶ his tragic engagement with Grace Murray,⁷ and a disastrous marriage to Mary Vazeille⁸ reveal a side of Wesley that apparently does not understand women, or more pertinently perhaps, does not understand his own emotions.⁹ Yet, it is necessary to balance these few well-known cases with his extensive correspondence to and from women who were involved in the Methodist movement, his encouragement of women to participate in prayer,

⁴ J. Telford, *A History of Lay Preaching in the Christian Church*, London: 1897, p. 111.

⁵ Concerned for her children and the incompetency of the substitute rector, Susannah began to read prayers and sermons with her family on a Sunday afternoon as there was no service at church. The numbers attending increased until there were about two hundred assembling and there were good results in the local community. Samuel Wesley received complaints about the impropriety of a woman taking the lead in such matters but Susannah had seen no other course of action open to her. This practice only occurred while her husband was away for two winters. While Samuel was home he fulfilled the duties in the parish.

⁶ G. Elsie Harrison, *Son to Susanna. The Private Life of John Wesley*, Harmondsworth: 1944, pp. 84-98.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 137-180.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 180-190.

⁹ For an interesting discussion of Wesley and women in this regard, see Briggs, J. P and Briggs, J., 'Unholy, Desires, Inordinate Affections: A Psychodynamic Inquiry into John Wesley's Relationship with Women' in *Connecticut Review*, Spring 1991, Vol 13, (1) pp.1-18

band and class meetings, found schools and orphanages, and visit those who were sick or in prison. These examples lead to the distinct conclusion that Wesley's relationships with women were both profound and extensive, and this in part explains the impact that women were able to have on the Methodist revival. Baker, the editor of the *Oxford Edition* of Wesley's letters, comments on the extensive nature of Wesley's correspondence with women and suggests that "the number of these favoured women correspondents, in a masculine world, serves to emphasize the way in which Wesley was sensitive to the feminine mystique, appreciated female achievements and encouraged leadership of women in his societies."¹⁰ Southey quotes from a letter of Alexander Knox Esq. to Bishop Jebb where Knox affirms that "It is certain that Mr Wesley had a predilection for the female character: partly because he had a mind ever alive to amiability, and partly from his generally finding in females a quicker and fuller responsiveness to his own ideas of interior piety and affectionate devotion."¹¹ Therefore, it is obvious that Wesley's relationship with Methodist women is an important element in his future incorporation of them into leadership roles within the Methodist societies.

One major factor which enhanced the development of leadership roles for women in Wesleyan Methodism is the fact that women were numerous in the movement and were found in consistently larger numbers than the men.

¹² Early Methodist societies were, for all intents and purposes, organisations

¹⁰ *The Works of John Wesley*, edited by Frank Baker, Vols 25:87: *Letters I and Letters II*, Oxford: 1980 as quoted in P. W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, Metchen: 1991, p. 39. Footnote 99.

¹¹ Letter printed in R. Southey, *The Life of Wesley: and the Rise and Progress of Methodism*, London: 1864, 2:295.

¹² D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730's to the 1980's*, London: 1989, p. 25.

of women.¹³ In order to accommodate these numbers, Wesley developed a system of bands and classes, partially along the lines of the Moravians but also with his own particular organisational flair. One important consequence of this program of reform was the substantial involvement of women in the first two decades of the revival which was just beginning to exist and the development of new roles for women within the Methodist societies.¹⁴ Within the confines of these supportive structures, early Methodist women felt free to express themselves and exercise gifts in leadership, prayer, testimony and exhortation.¹⁵ Class meetings offered women an opportunity to exercise a kind of pastoral care, lead Bible study, offer extemporaneous prayer and testify to the power of God in their lives. Additional opportunities for service such as visiting the sick, talking to seekers and helping the poor also appeared. Of course, without Wesley's personal encouragement there would have been fewer opportunities for such service.¹⁶ It is not surprising that some women discovered talents for this work, and began to feel called by the Holy Spirit to enlarge their service and received invitations to bring witness to other Methodist groups.¹⁷

It is impossible to understand the phenomenon of women preachers in Methodism apart from the early developments, roles and functions of women in the early societies. Women did feel free to express themselves and exercise their gifts in leadership, prayer, testimony and exhortation and these activities provided an adequate training ground for women preachers.

¹³ *op. cit.*, Chilcote, p. 48.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷ Dale A. Johnson, 'Women in English Religion 1700-1925' *Studies in Women and Religion*, Vol 10, New York: 1983, p.64.

For women to have been accepted as preachers in Methodism was a considerable achievement, in view of John Wesley's High Church principles and Oxford background, and it required a broad reappraisal of the role of women in the Church.¹⁸ Wesley's acceptance of certain principles in relation to women preachers was an evolutionary process. Initially, he gave no acknowledgement to anyone who was not ordained, which of course totally debarred females. But he began to modify his view when he recognised the part that local preachers could play in the revival. The next step was his appreciation of the part to be played by 'pious females' who were able to call sinners to repent.¹⁹ Finally, Wesley's study of the Pauline tradition of the New Testament which he originally accepted and which denied the right of women to preach in public, could also include exceptions or as Wesley called them, 'extraordinary' cases. It was on this basis that Wesley allowed women preachers. Those who had an 'extraordinary' call would be acknowledged as preachers.

There is no evidence that women preached in the Methodist societies in the first two decades, but from 1761, the roles of women in the movement continued to expand in a logical and natural progression, and a small group of women began to emerge as the first women preachers.²⁰ Wesley's correspondence during this time indicates the large part played by women.²¹ It is through Wesley's correspondence that we learn that Sarah Crosby was the first woman to receive Wesley's informal authorisation in

¹⁸ G. Malmgreen, (ed), *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1900*. Bloomington: 1986, p. 68.

¹⁹ Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women Whose Eminent Usefulness and Successful Labours in the Church of Christ, Have Entitled Them to be Enrolled Among the Great Benefactors of Mankind*: London: 1825, I, i.

²⁰ Leslie F. Church, *Early Methodist People*, London: 1948, pp. 55-56.

²¹ Wesley, *Letters*, 4:229-322 as quoted in Chilcote, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

the role of preaching.²² Wesley discreetly approves her action of speaking in public and over the next few years gives clear directives to various women as to what is an acceptable way of conducting services. Wesley tries to accommodate these exceptional women into the pattern of Methodism. Thus, he accepts the 'extraordinary call' as the rationale for female preachers.

The eighteenth century was an age of correspondence and for the historian considering women involved in early Methodism, this is of great benefit. Letters of the early Methodists abound with accounts of their conversions, spiritual experiences and the progress of the work of evangelism in which women played a major part.²³ After Wesley had written the story of his own conversion and various accounts of his personal experience, he induced others - converts in the societies - to write their experiences. He also encouraged the early Methodists, and required leaders of the societies, to record their experiences in journals and diaries, for both personal and corporate use.²⁴ At the time, these directives applied particularly to men and most of the material related to women which was printed in the *Arminian Magazine* was recorded by men and may have displayed a male bias. The material includes narrations of the 'experience' of particular women as well as obituaries which report the deaths and give information on the careers of female members of the early Methodist societies.²⁵ These obituaries were written by Mr Wesley, or the local itinerant, or husband or friend of the deceased. Much manuscript material is extant and the diaries, journals

²² Rev J. Beecham and Rev T. Jackson, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, London:1856, Vol XII, p. 329. John Wesley to Sarah Crosby, February 14, 1761.

²³ See Wesley, *Oxford Edition*, 25:80-81 as quoted in Chilcote, *op. cit.*, p.3.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁵ Earl Kent Brown 'Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism' *Studies in Women and Religion*, Vol 11, New York and Toronto: 1983, p. xv.

and pages of the *Arminian Magazine* are the major sources of the lives of many Methodist women, apart from copies of letters to each other, and to and from Mr Wesley and other notable Methodists.

Other sources of information on the lives of Methodist women in the eighteenth century are secondary biographies and volumes of collected biography which were published in the early nineteenth century. Moore's *Life of Mary Fletcher* is a prime example of a published biography, and one from which details will be drawn to present the life and experience of that remarkable woman who not only set up an orphanage and school but also became a notable female preacher. Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher illustrates effectively the types of leadership roles that a Methodist woman could fulfil. The published journal and letters of Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers also provide ample material for comment in relation to a Methodist woman who ably fulfilled her role as a band and class leader and wife of an itinerant preacher. The lives of these two women will be used as examples of the types of leadership involvement available to Methodist women in the eighteenth century but they are not necessarily stereotypes or typical of every female leader. In their separate journal accounts which recount their individual paths to Methodism and subsequent involvement, comparisons may be made of certain details but their responses and experiences reflect quite different approaches and spiritual experience.

It is the contention of this thesis that the circumstances which led to women having more opportunity for involvement in leadership roles in the Methodist revival included the large number of women involved, Wesley's previous experience of women's roles in leadership and his encouragement

of women to participate fully in Methodist societies. Part One will consider these circumstances and also show that the obvious participation of women in various leadership roles led to a natural progression through the Methodist society which became a training ground for future women preachers. Wesley's changing view of female preaching over a period of years and his desire to accommodate some 'extraordinary' women allowed for such a development. Toward the close of the eighteenth century, the public ministry of women seemed to have approached its height. After Wesley's death, female preaching became an issue for debate. At the Manchester Conference in 1803, definitive guidelines were made concerning the ministry of women which basically put an end to female preaching as Wesley had accepted it in his Methodist Connexion.

The use of letters, diaries, the *Arminian Magazine*, and journals as source materials is essential to the study of Methodist women. These will be used to document the changes in Wesley's view in relation to the roles of women in the Methodist revival. In Part Two, the journals, letters and 'experiences' of Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher and Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers will be used to provide case studies which exemplify the types of life, experience and leadership roles a Methodist woman could fulfil.

Chapter One

Influences on Wesley with regard to Women's Roles in the Church.

Originality was not Wesley's special claim.¹ He was a compulsive borrower of other people's ideas but to see his ministry and organisation in terms of this is to underrate his capacity for improvisation and his willingness to respond to pressure from his followers. Wesley was a great innovator and the success of Methodism certainly can be attributed in part to this fact. He was ready to adopt and adapt any idea which might help the church to proclaim the Gospel more effectively.² Therefore, influences in his past and in the early stages of the Methodist revival affected his ideas and actions in relation to women. That there was a ministry to be exercised by women, Wesley did not doubt. The question to be answered was the type of ministry that women could fulfil.

Much of Wesley's early appreciation for women's gifts and the utilisation of these gifts in the life of the church can be traced to the influence of his mother, to his studying and assimilating what he considered to be practices of the early church, to the influence of the Moravians, and the statistical fact that there were large numbers of women in his newly formed Methodist societies. These factors contributed to the development of leadership roles for women in the Methodist revival and to the superintending and appointing of such roles by Wesley himself.

¹ P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People. England 1727-1783*. Oxford: 1989, p. 245.

² F. Baker, 'John Wesley's Churchmanship', *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 185, 4 (Oct. 1969) :271-72 as quoted in Chilcote, *op, cit.*, p.47.

There were women preachers in the previous century in the Quaker movement but Wesley's Church of England orthodoxy would not brook such a ministry for women in the early stages of the Wesleyan revival nor is there any evidence available to show that any Methodist women would have been in that category. The ministry of women developed to an unprecedented degree in Quakerism and of course, encountered scorn and abuse on almost every side. Quaker women were given the right to speak in public, to participate in decision making processes and to develop and use their gifts.³ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, there was a virtual disappearance of women preachers. In the Quaker movement, there was a marked decline in the activity of women altogether due to the spirit of quietism which pervaded the Society. The emphasis centred on withdrawing from public life and concentrating on individual piety. There were exceptions, of course, but these were offshoots of Quakerism.⁴ In general, the Church of England and the vast majority of Non-conformists, regarded the preaching of women as highly unacceptable.

Initially, Wesley agreed with the establishment in regard to female preaching but he also had the example of Susannah, his mother, who had very ably provided leadership and an almost pastoral role in the rectory at Epworth. In a limited way, she is the precursor of the early Methodist women preachers. Keeling suggests that she is the "Mother of Methodism."⁵ Her carefully planned and executed method of teaching and disciplining her children is well-known. She was an educated woman whose piety and sincere religion were recognised by her children and the local community. All her children received close and affectionate attention but there was a special bond with John whose life had been spared in a fire in the rectory.

³ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, p. 9.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 16. Chilcote mentions May Drummond, a women preacher in the early 1700's.

⁵ *op. cit.*, Keeling, p.11.

John often considered himself 'a brand plucked from the burning', both literally and spiritually. Susannah resolved to "be more particularly careful of the soul of the child that thou hast mercifully provided for, than ever I have been, that I may do my endeavour, to instil into his mind the principles of thy true religion and virtue."⁶

While her husband was away during the winter months of 1710/11 and 1711/12, Susannah was concerned that her children continued to receive proper religious instruction and she organised a time on Sunday evenings for prayer and reading of sermons or other suitable material for the little family at the rectory. The numbers attending this meetings grew rapidly to include two to three hundred local people. There were complaints concerning her impropriety in taking the lead in such matters and her little 'society' in the rectory kitchen came under much disapproval. Susannah saw no other course of action and wanted her husband's 'positive command' to stop. The rector wisely acquiesced to this unusual but highly successful practice of his wife. Wesley could not help but be influenced by this remarkable woman both in his understanding of the Christian faith itself and in the use of a laywoman in the life of the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel.⁷ Her success in these two winters is evident. However, her role did not continue. When her husband returned, he performed such duties. After John Wesley left home, Susannah continued her influence through the avenue of correspondence whereby she gave advice on spiritual matters. In her old age, she lived at the Foundery with John and no doubt gave her counsel on many occasions.⁸ He comments at her death, she was "...in her measure and degree, a preacher of righteousness."⁹

⁶ Susanna Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, May 17th, 1711. as quoted in Chilcote, p. 20.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸ She induced Wesley to accept Thomas Maxwell as a preacher, and here began the lay ministry of Methodism. cf A. Stevens, *The Women of Methodism*, p.4. Earl Kent Brown, p.34.

⁹ Wesley, *Journal*, 3:32, as quoted in Chilcote, p. 18.

Wesley's missionary work in Georgia provided the first avenue whereby he considered the use of women in that colonial church. His controversial practice of the appointment of deaconesses was instituted on the basis of its being part of the primitive church. Later, he published his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, which described the function of such women in the early church: "It was their office, not to teach publicly, but to visit the sick, the women in particular, and to minister to them both in their temporal and spiritual necessities."¹⁰ Wesley appointed three women to exercise these responsibilities in Georgia.¹¹ According to Chilcote, Wesley's two sources for the precedent of using deaconesses came from the Non-Jurors and the Moravians. The Non-jurors based their program for spiritual reform upon the rediscovery of Scripture as the authoritative source concerning the spirit and life of the Christian community, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* were regarded as the authoritative record of early church practice which was universally and constantly received."¹² The *Apostolic Constitutions* had made provision for deaconesses¹³ and another source of Wesley's reading material, Thomas Deacon's *Compleat Collection of Devotions*, actually contains a description of their duties: "...to visit and attend women in the church, and to correct and rebuke those who behave themselves irregularly there."¹⁴ The Moravian women also performed similar duties among their own sex, both in Georgia and in the community in Herrnhut. The women leaders were organised into various orders such as nurses, widows, deaconesses and

¹⁰ Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, Romans 16:1 as quoted in Chilcote, p. 22

¹¹ Wesley, *Journal*, 1; 239-46, 272, 274, 276, 279. as quoted in Chilcote, p. 22.

¹² *op. cit.*, Chilcote, p. 22. Wesley was introduced to this group while at Oxford and had made a particular study of their writings. cf. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, pp. 30-34, 348-90.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 23. (See chapters 2.57; 3.15,16; 8.19,20. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*)

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 23. cf. Thomas Deacon, *A Compleat Collection of Devotions, Both Publick and Private* (London; n.p., 1734), pp. 244, 240-46.

eldresses. There is no doubt that Wesley learned much about the Moravian's inclusion of women in the church during his visit to Herrnhut.¹⁵

After Wesley's return to England and his subsequent experience of 'heart religion', the Fetter Lane Society was formed. Wesley placed great value in the involvement of women which can be seen in his response when attempts were made to exclude women from some of the society's activities. He exclaimed: "I do exceedingly disapprove of excluding women when we meet to pray, sing and read scriptures."¹⁶ During this period other societies were formed in Bristol and these were under Wesley's direct supervision. Eventually such societies rapidly evolved into a vast network and became the building blocks of the Wesleyan revival. He intended, through the forming of such groups, to introduce people to God and to provide a supportive environment for sincere people to "realize their life of faith working through love leading to holiness of heart and life."¹⁷ Such supportive structures were important in providing a place for women to develop their leadership roles for they felt free to express themselves and exercise their gifts in prayer, testimony and exhortation. The first two decades of the Methodist revival saw the substantial involvement of women in the newly formed societies.

Many contemporaries were alarmed at the high profile of women in early Methodism. Women outnumbered men by two to one in some Methodist societies and while the proportions of male and female membership varied from region to region, it seems clear that women were everywhere in the forefront of the Methodist revival.¹⁸ On Sunday, November 11th, 1739,

¹⁵ cf Southey, pp. 115-125. He discusses various topics concerning the organisation of the community at Herrnhut which Wesley had noted.

¹⁶ John Wesley to J. Hutton and Mr Fox, November 24th, 1738, Wesley, *Letters*, 25:588, as quoted in Chilcote, p. 24.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, Cupples, p.36.

Wesley preached his sermon in the ruins of an old foundery in London and he noted in July, 1740 that "Our little company met at the Foundery, instead of Fetter Lane. About twenty-five of our brethren God hath given us already, all of whom think and speak the same thing; seven-or eight-and-forty of the fifty women that were in band desired to cast in their lot with us."¹⁹ Two years later, in April 1742, Wesley drew up the first list of the Foundery Society's sixty-six leaders. In this group, women outnumbered the men forty-seven to nineteen. The Select Society members list in February, 1744 reflects a proportion of fifty-two women to twenty-five men.²⁰ The two to one ratio of women in the Foundery Society is typical of early Methodism as a whole both in its beginnings and throughout the eighteenth century.²¹ Malmgreen noted a fifty-five percent female membership in the Methodist societies of Manchester and Stockport by the end of eighteenth century.²² It would appear from a statistical viewpoint that more women than men were involved in the Methodist societies. Wesley needed to respond to the situation which presented itself and adapt some way of providing nurture for women. It was a task no doubt challenging to his organisational genius and he gradually provided a framework which allowed the development of female leadership in the Methodist revival. The earlier influences on his life and ideas provided the concept for women's leadership roles but he was yet to face the controversial question of female preaching which would eventually present itself.

¹⁹ Wesley, *Journal*, 2:371. as quoted in Chilcote, p.48.

²⁰ cf George J. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel, London, and Its Associates*, London:1872, pp.28-29 as quoted in Chilcote, p. 49. The Select Society members had received remission of sins and their faith had been tested and proved. The bands at this time composed of six or seven members, and were separated into groups of single men, married men, single women and married women. Fifty-seven of the eighty five leaders of bands in the list of band leaders for June 1745 were women.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 49. See also Footnote 18 in Chilcote for further ratification of the numbers of women involved in various societies but the general impression is that of a large female majority in the membership throughout the British Isles.

²² *op.cit.*, Malmgreen, p. 10-11.

Chapter Two

Leadership Roles for Women

There is no doubt that women helped to make the Methodist revival of the eighteenth century a powerful religious movement of enduring significance.²³ Abel Stevens, writing in 1876, went so far as to say that "Wesley's incorporation of the female agency in his practical system had been one of the most effective causes of the surprising success of Methodism."²⁴ Women played a key role in the survival of the local Methodist societies, and for that matter, in the revival as a whole. Such factors as Wesley's evolving view of women and ministry and the sheer numbers of women involved in the Methodist societies, created a climate which was conducive to the acceptance and empowerment of women in leadership roles.

Women fulfilled a variety of roles in the Methodist revival. Not all of these were necessarily in a position of leadership in the sense of appointment to a specific task such as the leader of a band or class meeting. It is necessary to first acknowledge the contribution of some of these women in roles that were advantageous to the cause of Methodism. Of more significance than the preponderance of women in membership of societies, is the fact that women were pioneers in establishing prayer groups and societies on the basis of their own initiative. In this way they propagated and maintained

²³ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, p.24.

²⁴ Abel Stevens, *The Women of Methodism. Its Three Foundresses, Susanna Wesley, the Countess of Huntingdon, and Barbara Heck: with sketches of their Female Associates and Successors in the Early History of the Denomination*, New York: 1866, p.13.

the faith.²⁵ Some women were involved in inviting and hosting preachers in their local area, actually forming societies with no other authority than their own determination and sense of calling, and in some cases, wealthy women committed their resources to building chapels.

Several years before Wesley's first visit to Macclesfield, Mary Aldersley opened her home, Shrigley-fold, for religious services and met with her friends for prayer, the reading of Scripture and religious conversation. Elizabeth Clulow, together with George Pearson secured a small preaching house for this infant society and when a larger chapel was required, Mrs Clulow paid for its construction.²⁶ At the formative stages of this and other societies, women were involved. Perhaps the most well-known patroness is Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, who followed Wesley when the Fetter Lane Society broke with the Moravians. She encouraged Whitefield and Wesley to resolve their controversy in 1750 and went on to set up her own Connection based more on Calvinistic theology rather than Wesley's Arminianism. Nevertheless, she had previously advised Wesley regarding his need to visit Newcastle which later became the northern anchor of his connection. Wesley did maintain contact with such pioneers and patrons of early Methodism who were also greatly respected within their societies and their involvement no doubt profoundly affected his general attitude to the place of women in the movement. They functioned as pioneers and sustainers of the Methodist cause.²⁷ These women had taken the initiative and performed a particular role, and one which was significantly different from any previously experienced in the Church of England.

²⁵ *op. cit.*, Chilcote, p. 49.

²⁶ B. Smith, *The History of Methodism in Macclesfield*, London: 1875, pp.45-46, 149-50.

²⁷ *op. cit.*, Chilcote, p. 52. See also pp.49-52. Chilcote cites further examples of these pioneers and patrons of early Methodism.

Women in the Church of England had a clearly defined position. They "attended services, listened to sermons that men preached, prayed for their sons, husbands and for their own needs, nursed and cared for the ill in the parish and gave alms for assistance of the poor. A select few were minister's wives.²⁸ These were not leadership roles. The Methodist woman was a member of the Church of England and continued to fulfil these requirements but she also was able to involve herself in ministries that were remarkable both in type and diversity. It appears that various women began to see religion as action and were not inhibited by the religious 'ideal' that had previously made women observers of life rather than participants in it.²⁹ The Methodist woman functioned as an active participant in the sphere of the Methodist societies and in whatever ministries her gifts could contribute.

By the mid 1740's, the basic structure systemised by Wesley had three well-defined levels. At the top of the leadership ladder was John Wesley with a small group of ministers, beneath them were the laypreachers, the 'helpers' and 'assistants' who devoted their full-time energy to the supervision of societies and the spread of Methodism into unevangelized areas. The third level, and by far the largest group, included the local or non-itinerating preachers, leaders of small groups, sick visitors, stewards and housekeepers.³⁰ It was in this last area that women found their greatest opportunity to take part in a leadership role, and in particular, the offices of band and class leader, and sick visitor.

Wesley had divided the Methodist societies into small, homogeneous groups of four to five people of the same sex and marital status. The main

²⁸ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, pp. 3-4.

²⁹ *op. cit.*, Johnson, p. 65.

³⁰ Baker, *History of the Methodist Church*, 1:213-55, as quoted in Chilcote, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

purpose of bands was intense personal introspection coupled with a mutual confession for those who were pressing on to perfection.³¹ Wesley had drawn up rules of Band-Societies in 1738³² and admission to these cell groups was dependent on an earnest desire to be saved. Leadership of bands was based primarily on one's ability to empathise with the spiritual and temporal struggles of the members. Wesley aimed to appoint leaders from the members of that group and often the person secured was the person who had gathered the others. These small groups helped to pave the way for women to actively be involved in the rank and file of leadership for Wesley needed female leaders to cater for the large number of women's band meetings.

The second important sub-division of Methodist societies was the class which he introduced in Bristol, on February 15th, 1742.³³ The class contained about twelve members and was composed of both sexes. The group met weekly and members told of God's dealings with them during the previous week, sang hymns, prayed and considered their spiritual improvement. Holding a class ticket was the official sign of membership of the society. The class-leader was an important figure in the local society and was expected to supervise the weekly meetings, reprove backsliders, visit the sick or truant members, give advice to those in trouble and generally care for the group.

³¹ On the nature of bands, see Davies and Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church*, 1:189-91, 218-25 as mentioned in Chilcote, p. 68.

³² See Jackson, *Works of John Wesley*, 8:272-73. Also see footnote 19 regarding the segregated groups. There are five questions that were to be asked at this meeting. Briefly, they were: 1. What known Sin have you committed since last Meeting? 2. What temptations have you met with? 3. How was you delivered? 4. What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt, whether it be seen or not? 5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

³³ *ibid.*, 2:528.

Consistent with Wesley's acknowledgment of 'deaconesses' in the church in Georgia, he now found participation for women in every circuit and society as band leaders and class leaders. Most women involved in leadership would have done so as a band leader but it is doubtful that as many women were class leaders, because of the family oriented nature of the class. No person would have been given oversight in any of these groups unless it was evident that the person had a clear understanding of God's saving grace and the way of salvation was experiential in their life. The person had to be trustworthy and without reproach. In 1742, at the Foundery, Grace Murray was appointed a leader of a band. She writes, "Mr Wesley made me *Leader of a Band*; I was afraid of this undertaking it, yet durst not refuse, lest I should offend God. I was also appointed to be one of the *Visitors of the Sick*, which was my pleasant work." ³⁴ In October, 1742, she was appointed as one of the first class leaders of the newly established society at Newcastle.

"Mr Wesley fixed me in that part of the work which he thought proper; ... soon also, people were again divided into Bands, of small select societies; women by themselves and men in like manner. I had a full one hundred in Classes which met in two separate meetings and Band for each day of the week. I likewise visited the Sick and Backsliders. We had several societies in the country which I regularly visited; meeting the women in the daytime and in the evening the whole society. ..." ³⁵

She also travelled with Wesley and visited several of the northern counties and Ireland to meet and regulate the female societies. It is easy to

³⁴ Bennet, *Memoirs of Grace Bennet*, p. 11, as quoted in Chilcote, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

³⁵ *ibid.*, *Memoirs of Grace Bennet*, pp. 13-14, as quoted in Chilcote, p. 74.

understand why Wesley wanted to marry such a remarkable woman, but that was not to be. Grace Murray could be seen as a model of the Methodist woman, especially in the early stages of the revival. After her marriage to John Bennet, she continued using her gifts but her husband eventually disassociated himself from Wesley, and this prevented her from continuing her leadership involvement with Wesley's Methodism.

Visitation, as Grace Bennet has intimated, was not a casual activity in the life of the early Methodists. Visiting fellow members of societies, and prospects for society membership were considered important and were regarded as a special ministry for persons who felt a particular call from God. There were several kinds of calling involved and men and women took the responsibility for such activities. Callers would have a dual purpose - to carry comfort and the word of the Lord to those in need. Calling on the sick and backsliders were the main examples of this type of role but some women³⁶ were also involved in calling in the prisons. Wesley had begun this tradition when he was at Oxford and others had taken up the idea. Visitation was part of the role of band and class leadership but was not restricted to only those leaders. Many women came into their own in this leadership role. In a letter to Reverend Vince Perronet in 1748, Wesley describes the office of sick visitor:

"It is the business of the Visitor of the sick, to see every sick person within his district thrice a week. To inquire into the state of their souls, and to advise them as occasion may require. To inquire into their disorders, and procure advice

³⁶ Hannah Ball was involved actively in prisons. The Countess of Huntingdon visited prisons and loaned funds for debts. Wesley published a memoir of Sarah Peters who regularly visited Newgate Prison. *Arminian Magazine*, 1782, p.128.

for them. To relieve them, if they are in want Upon reflection, I saw how exactly, in this also, we have copied after the primitive Church. What were the ancient Deacons? What was Phebe the Deaconess, but such a Visitor of the sick?"³⁷

Wesley's sermon, 'On Visiting the Sick' makes a radical statement that

"...may not *women*, as well as men, bear a part in this honourable service. Undoubtedly they may; nay, they ought; it is meet, right, and their bounden duty.... You, as well as men, are rational creatures. You, like them, were made in the image of God; ..you too are called of God, as you have time, to 'do good unto all men.' Whenever you have the opportunity, do all the good you can, particularly to your poor, sick neighbour..."³⁸

This undertaking of visiting the sick produced immediate results, such as saving lives, healing of sickness, prevention of pain and the removal of want and gave countless opportunities for discussion about the life of faith and for evangelising through casual conversation and encouragement. Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers in her long manuscript journal reports on her sick visits as well as visits to backsliders. But Wesley recognised that she had a particular vocation for class and band leadership. She gives several descriptions of such meetings. One shows something of her method:

³⁷ *op. cit.*, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:263.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 7:125-26.

"I opened the Hymn book on that precious hymn, 'O for a Heart to praise my God' and in singing it, was filled indeed with the Divine Presence and love unprintable. Prayer was as a gate of Heaven, and I sensibly felt the words given me to speak were not my own. I think I never was so entirely led out of myself and influenced by a divine power--while the dear people seemed as melting wax before the fire." ³⁹

Miss Roe's skill as a class leader came into its own after her marriage to Mr Rogers and their move to Dublin. She regularly met three classes each week of thirty members each. In Cork, she had two classes under her guidance. These classes became both spiritual growth groups for new converts and centres for evangelisation as well.⁴⁰ In her funeral sermon Dr. Coke recalled,

"After her marriage... Mr. Rogers.... would give a very few to her care, desiring her to complete the class out of the world and soon by her conversation and prayers and attention to every soul within her reach, would the number spring up to thirty or forty: and then[her husband] would transplant all the believers to other classes, and keep her thus continually working at the mine." ⁴¹

³⁹ *The Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers: with a Sermon preached on the occasion of her death, by Rev Thomas Coke. L.L.D. also an Appendix, written by Her Husband together with Extracts from Her Journal*, London: 1866, p. 394. August 30th, 1781.

⁴⁰ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 49.

⁴¹ *op. cit.*, *Experience of Hester Ann Rogers*, p. 206. Dr. Coke's Sermon.

In Wesleyan Methodism, the life of Hester Ann Rogers was for many years offered as the model for women to imitate in their public activities.⁴² Her husband also indicated her sphere of influence was "to visit the sick, to teach her own sex in private, and to pray, whenever providentially called upon, whether in public or private..."⁴³ Mrs Roger's journal reveals how active the demands of the society kept her. As well as leading classes and bands, (she even led the preachers' class meetings on September 17th, 1784), she mentions a steady stream of requests for private interviews and endless breakfasts and teas. As a minister's wife, she would not meet one class less than when she was Miss Roe, rather, it carried new responsibilities for service.

The role of preacher's wife as a leader in the society developed gradually.⁴⁴ These women found themselves involved as help-mates and support persons for their husbands. The various memoirs that appear in the pages of the *Arminian Magazine* refer to the active, supportive, loving and serving wife who is totally committed to serving true religion. Mr Wesley recognised, no doubt influenced by his mother's example, that women had roles to play in serving God just as well as men. The role of minister's wife in Methodism was of a more active, participatory nature in partnership with her husband's ministry. The Roger's ministry was a joint ministry. There were others in the same category. Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher and her husband were partners in a similar manner. Both led classes and bands, both shared in the pastoral duties of calling, counselling and service, both worked together and divided the labours.⁴⁵ Wesley has provided another

⁴² J. Telford, *A History of Lay Preaching in the Christian Church*, p. 169 as quoted in Helen M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴³ Appendix by James Rogers, included in *op. cit.*, *Experience of Hester Ann Rogers*, pp.221-222.

⁴⁴ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 75.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 77.

avenue for female leadership in the role of minister's wife that was an important one for Methodist women.

Other women also gained notoriety apart from becoming band and class leaders, sick visitors or minister's wives. Wesley was also interested in education. He saw the importance of children being able to read the Scriptures and grow in grace and the need for his preachers and the laity, who were often not educated to a high degree, to be able to read and understand his own writings and the Bible also. Wesley provided help and guidance for his ministers and lay people and prescribed courses of reading. He encouraged the provision of schools for children and women were heavily involved in these. One in particular received his high commendation. Mary Bosanquet settled in 'The Cedars' at Leytonstone and founded an orphanage-cum-school for 'destitute orphans' who had no one to care for them. Despite constant criticism concerning her methods of training the children to the strictest rule, she persevered with the venture and her success was acclaimed by Wesley who maintained support and encouragement of this ministry both in Leytonstone and later at Cross Hall in Yorkshire. There were other schools run by women, more or less run on the Leytonstone model, and which achieved varying levels of success. Mary Bosanquet worked successfully with the other women involved at Leytonstone and she proved her leadership capabilities in the oversight of such a well-planned and thorough organisation. She and Mrs Ryan, her able assistant, felt specifically called to this work of God.

Other women involved themselves in the founding of day-schools and as Sunday schools⁴⁶ were emerging in the last decades of the eighteenth

⁴⁶ Sunday Schools customarily are attributed to Richard Raikes who began such a school in Gloucester in 1780. It was instituted so that poverty-stricken children could learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as religious instruction.

century, Methodist women were pioneers in this movement also. Darcy, Lady Maxwell founded a day-school in Edinburgh in 1770 to provide education and Christian instruction for the poor children. Mary and John Fletcher had a school at Madeley by 1785 with over three hundred students, and five other schools were planned.⁴⁷ No doubt Mary's years of experience in educating children aided these ventures. Wesley looked with favour on such schools and he noted in the *Arminian Magazine* that the principles of religion were being instilled into the student minds.⁴⁸

Wesley had encouraged women to play a part in a variety of leadership roles in the Methodist revival. But what he was yet to recognise and consider was the fact that the roles of sick visitor, leader of band and class and the like, had a more abiding consequence in that they had provided an important training ground for woman preachers. But the later phenomenon of women preachers, while directly related to the conducive environment of the societies, must also be viewed within the context of Wesley's evolving conception of his own role in the revival, and his changing view of the ministry of the laity.⁴⁹ As Baker so succinctly puts it: "His practices modified his theology, and his changed theology led him to new practices."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 66.

⁴⁸ *Arminian Magazine*, Vol XI, 1788, p. 489-90.

⁴⁹ *op. cit.*, Chilcote, p. 75.

⁵⁰ Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 137 as quoted in Chilcote, p.75.

Chapter Three

Heeding the Call

"Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."⁵¹

Johnson's remark reflects the view of the time. In the early stages of the revival, Wesley would have agreed with Johnson's comment but his view changed as the third decade began.

During the first decades of the Wesleyan revival, women became involved in speaking in public. Women in early Methodism clearly felt themselves able to give public verbal expression to their conviction. This could take a number of forms. The most informal mode was casual conversation among acquaintances and every member would have participated in this. The second mode was through band and class involvement where salvation, pressing on towards perfection and their own experience were openly discussed. Women spoke freely in the band meeting and the mixed class meeting, and were encouraged to pray in public as well as give public testimony of their experience. On the occasion of a band meeting, Hester Roe reports in a letter to Wesley that "On Tuesday last, as I was repeating and enforcing some of the passages of your last Sermon, and a few parallel promises, another young woman... was by faith brought into liberty."⁵²

For many of the early Methodist women, praying in public was their first experience of public speaking. No doubt they felt a great amount of

⁵¹ Samuel Johnson made this remark to Boswell, July 31st, 1763, as noted in George Birkbeck Hill, ed., *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, 6 Vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1:463 as quoted in Chilcote, p. 117.

⁵² *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. XIII (1790), p. 329. April 7th, 1782.

freedom to pray in the small, family oriented groups within the societies. Many women became recognised as having a gift in the art of prayer.⁵³ But through experience, women became more adept at speaking in the public arena, and of course, they would always come under the threat of disapproval. The avenue of personal testimony was also open to women and was perhaps the commonest of women's public statements.⁵⁴ The love feast,⁵⁵ an extension of the class and band meeting which involved the symbolic act of eating and drinking together, offered the greatest opportunity for public expression. It would appear that though the common meal, prayer and singing were involved, the focal point was the 'testimony' of spiritual sharing which followed.⁵⁶ At the love feast in West Riding, Yorkshire, Wesley states that "the very design of a love-feast is a free and familiar conversation, in which every man, yea, and woman has liberty to speak whatever may be to the glory of God."⁵⁷ Wesley speaks of a love-feast at which "Mrs Fletcher simply declared her present experience. I know no one that is so changed for the better in a few years, even in her manner of speaking" which is "smooth, easy and natural, even when the sense was deep and strong."⁵⁸ For women, the love feast provided another public sphere where they could openly express their faith and Wesley emphasised that the benefit might be that others would be saved from sin.

For some women, speaking in any place at any time would have necessitated a great amount of courage and would not have been done

⁵³ Sarah Crosby and Ann Cutler (or 'Praying Nanny') were two such women. Ann Cutler believed that she had an authentic call to pray. cf Taft, *Holy Women*, Vol I, pp. 301-325 for details of Ann Cutler and Vol II, pp. 23-115 for Sarah Crosby.

⁵⁴ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 22.

⁵⁵ The institution of the love feast is accredited to women in the Bristol society on April 15th, 1739 and for men on May 29th, 1739. cf Wesley's *Journal*, (Oxford Edition), 25:635 and 2:186.

⁵⁶ cf Baker, *Methodism and the Love Feast*, p. 25 cf Chilcote, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁵⁷ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Vol III, p. 65. July 19th, 1761.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, Vol IV, p. 348. March 18th, 1787.

lightly. The pattern of preliminary apprehensiveness, eventual submission to the impulse to speak and the consequent sense of satisfaction and spiritual approbation could be said to exemplify the experience of early Methodist women.⁵⁹ Their testimonies came close to breaching the boundaries as far as the female sex is concerned but for the Methodist women, of primary importance was the satisfaction of keeping a good conscience before God.

One other form of public speaking in which women were involved was 'exhortation' which consisted of fervent entreaties for others to hear the gospel message, repent and be saved. Frequently it was accompanied by testimony of one's own experience. Wesley encouraged women to exhort their fellow Methodists in a variety of contexts, from casual conversation to the formal public (Methodist) services of worship. Exhortation was common in classes and bands⁶⁰ but most frequently followed the preaching of an itinerant. It was necessary to warn and exhort sinners and this was usually sufficient basis for women to overcome their inner struggle and the social and religious norms. Exhortation fell short of 'true preaching' but it was natural that it would only require a certain turn of events and Methodist women would be 'preaching'. Already, women had assumed roles within the Methodist societies that the Church of England had always reserved for men. Wesley would now be faced with the need to define what was acceptable practice for women who were perhaps going beyond the barriers of a 'technical exhorter'. There appears to have been a sharp distinction between giving a 'testimony' in a class meeting, a short 'exhortation' in a service and the preaching of a sermon.

⁵⁹ *op. cit.*, Chilcote, p. 99.

⁶⁰ *op. cit.*, Taft, Vol I, pp. 162-63.

It would be impossible to understand the phenomenon of women preachers in Methodism apart from the aforementioned roles and functions of women in the Methodist revival. The environment of the Methodist society with its band and class meetings and its distinctive services such as the love feast, proved to be a training ground for later women preachers.⁶¹ During the early and formative years prior to convening the first Methodist Conference of preachers in 1744, very little information is available concerning the question of women preachers per se. Wesley and his ministers were only "beginning to formulate a view of their peculiar mission and develop a sense of their particular identity, much less articulate answers to highly complex questions of ecclesiology and ministry."⁶²

The charge of 'enthusiasm' would have restricted the widening sphere for women as Wesley realised this was frequently associated with women.⁶³ There is no evidence that women had preached in the Methodist societies despite the allegations made by Reverend Bowman in 1740 that "it is lawful and expedient for mere laymen, for Women, and the meanest....to minister in the Church of Christ, to preach and expound the Word of God, and to offer up Prayers to the Congregation in public Assemblies."⁶⁴ Wesley was very much opposed to women taking such a step and was anxious to disprove the allegations. His letter of February, 1748, makes his position clear. He discusses the two classic Pauline texts, I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-12 which state that women should be silent in the church and that any such public teaching implies the usurpation of male authority.⁶⁵ He

⁶¹ *op. cit.*, Chilcote, p. 47.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶³ Methodism bore a resemblance to some older Non-conformist sects and to some newer radical movements such as the French Prophetesses. Wesley had already encountered French prophetesses at the Fetter Lane Society who had been successful in speaking to some of the women. cf *Journal*, June, 13th, 1739.

⁶⁴ William Bowman, *The Imposture of Methodism Displayed*, p. 27. cf. Chilcote, p. 56.

⁶⁵ Wesley, *Letters*, 2:119-20. cf Chilcote, p. 57.

employs the standard arguments and will not accept the preaching of women. In 1749, George Lavington, Bishop of Exeter, claims that women and boys are employed in the ministry of public preaching but Wesley dismisses the charge saying, "I know them not, nor ever heard of them before."⁶⁶

The phenomenon of women preachers must be viewed in the context of Wesley's evolving conception of his own role in the revival and his view of the ministry of the laity. Wesley recognised when he submitted to the practice of field preaching that he would have to explain his actions. In a letter to his brother, Charles, he explains that to "do this, I have both an ordinary call and an extraordinary... Perhaps this is better expressed in another way. God bears witness in an *extraordinary manner* that my *thus exercising* my ordinary call is well-pleasing in his sight."⁶⁷ As Baker suggests, for Wesley the ordinary call was conferred through ordination but the extraordinary call continued to be validated by the testimony of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ This whole new concept of ministry was to have far-reaching ramifications, not only on the practice of lay preaching which developed in the first two decades of the revival, but in also providing a rationale for including women in these activities in later years.

The incorporation of lay persons as leaders within the Methodist societies filled the gap of the obvious need of pastoral oversight of the growing movement. Wesley agreed to this without hesitation just as he had committed pastoral responsibility to laypersons in Georgia. The function of both men and women in this ministry aided the growth of the revival. Wesley's acceptance of lay preachers in the early stage of the revival is also

⁶⁶ Wesley, *Oxford Edition*, 11:406, cf Chilcote, p. 58.

⁶⁷ Wesley, *Oxford Edition*, 25:660, June 23rd, 1739 cf. Chilcote, p. 76.

⁶⁸ Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 64-65. cf Chilcote, p. 78.

important for "neither the spread of the Methodist societies nor their proliferation into a connected framework of evangelical pockets throughout the land would have been possible without the itinerant lay preachers."⁶⁹ The privilege of preaching given to the layman later extended to a limited number of women in the 1760's and onwards and Wesley's justification for his actions followed the same reasoning. His assent to the activities of lay preaching depended on a unique calling and the extraordinary nature of the revival. "The Ministerial Office" of the itinerant lay preachers of the 1740's was as "*extraordinary messengers*, raised up to provoke the *ordinary* one to jealousy."⁷⁰ These unordained preachers drew their authority directly from Wesley who acknowledged their calling and set them to function in the work.

Concern was expressed about the lay ministry at the Conference⁷¹ of 1746 and a three-fold test related to 'grace, gifts and fruit'⁷² was developed to determine who could function as a lay preacher. There would be a trial period of one year before such a person could be admitted into the full connection but he would be further examined by the conference.⁷³ The most essential qualification for lay preachers was a 'call'. Wesley spoke of the 'inward call', that which was from God, and the 'outward call' of the church which was characterised by ordination. He saw the inward call as essential

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, Baker as quoted in Chilcote, p. 81.

⁷⁰ *op. cit.*, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:277. Sermon (178)

⁷¹ At the top of the Methodist hierarchy was the Conference which was made up of delegates who were ordained ministers and eventually the itinerant preachers became delegates also. The administrative structure began with the classes; a number of classes made up a society; a number of neighbouring societies made up a circuit; and over the number of circuits, societies and classes was the annual meeting of Conference.

⁷² The person must believe that they were called of God to preach and moved by the Holy Ghost. A number of questions were asked. Briefly: 1. -relates to their faith, beliefs and their manner of conversation. 2. - relates to having *Gifts* and *Grace* for the work and their manner of speaking. 3.- relates to their success or *Fruit*. If all these things concur, there is sufficient evidence to satisfy the Conference. cf Chilcote, pp. 79-80 for further detail.

⁷³ *op. cit.*, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 8:325-26.

and he writes to Rev. Thomas Adams: "It is true that in *ordinary* cases both an *inward* and an *outward* call are requisite. But we apprehend there is something far from 'ordinary' in the present case... we think they who are only called of God, and not of man, have *more* right to preach than they who are only called of men, and not of God."⁷⁴ Wesley's position provided justification for the ministry of laymen. The Conference added the proviso that if the call was genuine, there would be fruit from the labours. In his sermon on the "Ministerial Office", Wesley added, "For in this respect God always asserted his *right* to send by whom he *would* send."⁷⁵

A general pattern began to emerge whereby a future lay preacher would progress through a process of moving up the levels of leadership in the Methodist society from band to class leader, from giving testimony in the society love feast to exhorting, and with encouragement of the others in the society, he would venture into preaching and the fruit would justify his call. The initial impression or call may have been received with reluctance but there would be a constraining of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to others. Given the large numbers of women in the societies, it is not surprising that the same general pattern would influence the lives of the women and the fine line between exhorting and preaching would be crossed.

Women were also progressing up the levels of leadership in the Methodist societies and the strength of their convictions would include the necessity to warn and exhort sinners to repent. In spite of Wesley's initial refusal to countenance the preaching of women, his attitude began to change. In his address to the Conference of 1755, he states: "Evangelists and deacons

⁷⁴ Wesley, *Oxford Edition*, 26:610-11, October 31st, 1755, cf Chilcote, p. 80.

⁷⁵ *op. cit.*, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:274.

preached. Yea, and women when under extraordinary inspiration..... although in ordinary cases it was not permitted to 'a woman to speak in the church.'⁷⁶ Wesley began to modify his view when he came to recognise the gifts to be contributed by lay preachers and he went on to appreciate the part to be played by 'pious females' who were able to call sinners to repent.⁷⁷ It may have been unlikely that he would have contemplated the employment of female preachers had not the question arisen of its own accord but it appears that his earlier objection to women preachers disappeared as the result of their evident success. This could be said of the early male lay preachers also. In this, as in so much else that affected the work and life of the societies, new developments were judged to be right if they helped forward the work of evangelism.⁷⁸ Wesley's plea that certain women should preach and therefore had an 'extraordinary call' was not made as a result of any ideas about the equality of the sexes or emancipation of women, but simply because people were being converted by their preaching.⁷⁹

In the third decade of the Methodist revival, women's roles in Methodism continued to expand in a natural and logical progression and a small number of women began to emerge as the first women preachers.⁸⁰ Wesley's correspondence at the time indicates the large part played by women.⁸¹ Many women wrote to Wesley to ascertain whether they had transgressed the line between exhorting and preaching. Grace Murray and others had come close to preaching in the earlier decades but the first woman to write to Wesley concerning her peculiar circumstances and to whom Wesley's

⁷⁶ Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 333. cf Chilcote, p.106. The whole address is published in an Appendix in Baker, pp. 326-40.

⁷⁷ *op. cit.*, Taft, Vol I, ii.

⁷⁸ Thomas M. Morrow, *Early Methodist Women*, London:1967, p.14

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁰ *op. cit.*, Church, *The Early Methodist People*, pp. 55-56.

⁸¹ Wesley, *Letters*, 4:229-322. cf Chilcote, p. 117.

informal authorisation is given for such activities is Sarah Crosby. She followed the pattern of "being fully employed"⁸² as a band and class leader. While in prayer, "... he (Jesus) spoke these words to my heart, '*Feed my sheep*'" and she answered, "Lord, I will do as thou hast done; I will carry the lambs in my bosom,"⁸³ She seems to have had a strong sense of duty to exhort others to repentance and faith and "by gradual steps, she progressed from testimony in her class to the more public witness of preaching."⁸⁴ In a letter to Wesley, she relates what could be classed as a type of call:

"I felt my soul as a vessel emptied, but not filled. Day and night I was amazed at the blessed change my soul experienced:...though I always promised, if the Lord would but fully save me, I would declare his goodness although I believed it would expose me to various exercises, both from Ministers and people."⁸⁵

Sarah is invited to Derby where she held classes with great success. On Sunday evening, February 8th, 1761 when she expected to meet thirty people in class, the number who came was nearly two hundred. She stated:

"I found an awful loving sense of the Lord's presence. I was not sure whether it was right for me to exhort in so public a manner; and, yet, I saw it impracticable to meet all these people by way of speaking particularly to each individual. I therefore gave a hymn, and prayed, and told them part of what the Lord had done for myself,

⁸² *op. cit.*, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol XII, p. 329. This is mentioned in a letter from John Wesley to Mrs Crosby, June 14th, 1757.

⁸³ *Arminian Magazine*, Vol X IX, 1806, pp. 466-7

⁸⁴ Baker, 'Wesley and Crosby', p. 78. cf Chilcote, p.120.

⁸⁵ *Arminian Magazine*, Vol, XIX, 1806, pp. 472-73.

persuading them to flee from sin."⁸⁶

She wrote to Wesley expressing her concern about this turn of events and his reply affirms his previous position concerning women preachers but directs her as to the best way of handling this delicate situation:

"...I think you have not gone too far. You could not well do less. I apprehend all you can do more is, when you meet again, to tell them simply, 'You lay me under a great difficulty. The Methodists do not allow women preachers; neither do I take upon me such character. But I will just nakedly tell you what is in my heart'. This will, in great measure, obviate the grand objection and prepare the way for J. Hampson's (the appointed preacher to the circuit) coming. I do not see that you have broken any law. Go on calmly and steadily. If you have time, you may read to them the Notes on the chapter before you speak a few words; or one of the awakening sermons, as other women have done long ago."⁸⁷

In this advice, perhaps Wesley is remembering his mother's custom of reading such material in her meetings at Epworth. Whatever the case, Wesley had given approval to Sarah's actions and this marks the beginning of his acceptance of women speaking in this manner. He would not have termed this preaching, but rather, giving witness to God's work in the heart. However, it is highly suggestive of preaching in the sense that Sarah was

⁸⁶ *Arminian Magazine*, Vol XIX, p. 518. See also Tyerman, Vol 2:398-99. Stevens, pp. 79-

⁸⁵ Church, *More About the Early Methodist People*, pp. 149-52, Lawson, pp.176-77, Morrow, pp.13-14 and Earl Kent Brown, pp. 75-76.

⁸⁷ *op. cit.*, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol XII, p. 329. February 14th, 1761.

not just reading the notes but she was speaking a few words as well. Having been encouraged by Mr Wesley, she spoke again to a large congregation:

"My soul was much comforted in speaking to the people,
as my Lord has removed all my scruples respecting
the propriety of my acting thus publicly."⁸⁸

She continued to act upon Wesley's advice, reading sermons when there were large groups meeting together and praying and exhorting many sinners to turn to God.

Another letter in the same year is addressed to Grace Walton and Wesley's advice follows the usual pattern:

"If a few persons come in when you are meeting, either enlarge four or five minutes on the question you had, with a short exhortation (perhaps for five or six minutes, sing and pray). I think, and always, its meaning is this: I suffer not a woman to teach in a congregation, nor thereby to assert authority over the man..."⁸⁹

Among the questions at the Manchester Conference in 1765 was the concern over the Pauline prohibitions in I Corinthians 14:35 related to women 'speaking'. Wesley's reply was:

"I deny 1. That *speaking* here means any other speaking than speaking as a *public teacher*. This St Pual *suffered not*, because it implied the 'usurping of authority over the man'. Whereas *no authority* over man or woman is usurped, by the *speaking* now in question.
I deny 2. That *The Church* in that text, means any

⁸⁸ Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol XIX, p. 518.

⁸⁹ Wesley, *Letters*, 4:164, September 3th, 1761. cf Church, *More About the Early Methodist People*, p. 139.

other than the great congregation."⁹⁰

He is more explicit in his Sermon Notes that I Corinthians 14:34, 'Let a woman be silent in the churches' is true unless "they are under an extraordinary impulse of the spirit."⁹¹

Wesley has modified his view on the main Pauline verses which relate to woman speaking in the church. In 1769, he offers further advice to Sarah Crosby:

"I advise you as I did Grace Walton, formerly, (1) Pray in private or public as you can (2) Even in public you may properly enough intermix *short exhortations* with prayer: therefore, never take a text; never speak in a continued discourse without some break, about four to five minutes. Tell the people, 'We shall have another prayer meeting at such a time and place'."⁹²

Wesley defines clearly that women should avoid 'preaching' or 'speaking in a continued discourse'. He is not yet willing to give formal approval to women's preaching and is still attempting to differentiate between exhortation and formal preaching. There are an increasing number of aspiring women who sought to express their faith actively and openly. Wesley clearly has to clarify women's roles in this particular issue. He has proceeded cautiously in the case of Sarah Crosby and others but the decade of the 1770's sees him express an explicit opinion on the question of women's preaching. It is difficult to know when the exact change took place

⁹⁰ *Minutes of Conference*, 1:52 cf. Chilcote, p. 128.

⁹¹ Wesley, *Notes*, cf Chilcote, p. 123.

⁹² *op. cit.*, Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol XII, p. 331. March 18th, 1769.

but it does seem related to Mary Bosanquet and his wanting to accommodate the gifts of this exceptional woman.

Mary Bosanquet wrote to Wesley seeking his advice and direction concerning the work in which she and Sarah Crosby had become engaged. This lengthy letter represents the first serious defense of women's preaching in Methodism.⁹³ Mary argues that on the basis of her examination of the Scripture, women were occasionally called on by God to preach in extraordinary situations. She considers I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians and mentions six objections raised concerning their specific activities. Her final comment is "If I did not believe so, I would not act in an extraordinary manner. I do not believe every woman is called to speak publicly, no more than every man to be a Methodist preacher, but some have an extraordinary call to it, and woe be to them if they obey it not."⁹⁴ Wesley's letter in response is one of the most definitive statements defending the legitimate nature of her unique calling.

"I think the strength of the cause rests there - on your having an extraordinary call. So I am persuaded has every one of our lay preachers: otherwise I could not countenance his preaching at all. It is plain to me that the whole work of Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation of His providence. Therefore, I do not wonder if several things occur therein which do not fall under the ordinary rules of discipline. St Paul's ordinary rule was : 'I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation' yet in extraordinary

⁹³ The letter, simply dated 1771 from Cross Hall, near Leeds, is reproduced in its entirety in Appendix A. cf Chilcote's *John Wesley and the Female Preachers of Early Methodism*, pp. 299-304. Henry Moore was apparently unaware of this document, but Z. Taft did publish the text in his tract, *The Scripture Doctrine of Women's Preaching* (1820).

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 303.

cases he made a few exceptions; at Corinth, in particular."⁹⁵

He used the same basic rationale upon which he justified his own irregularities and those of the lay itinerants to allow and encourage similar activities among the women. In the accompanying letter to Sarah Crosby, Wesley advised that her discourses should be based on Scripture texts, "reading a chapter or part of one and making short observations may be as useful as any way of speaking."⁹⁶ Wesley gave specific direction as to how to use a text which assumes that the fine line to preaching has been crossed and that female preachers are now assimilated into the Methodist revival. Of course, each case would be taken on its own merits just as the lay preachers had been. The extraordinary cases were less isolated than many realised, including Wesley.

Throughout the course of the decade, the number of female preachers quickly increased and their influence began to be felt throughout the British Isles.⁹⁷ Mary Bosanquet continued her labours as did Sarah Crosby. A typical day for Sarah Crosby would begin with "a lively prayer meeting at five, a good band meeting at ten, and another at two; at five, Mrs C walked with me to Beeston; at seven, the house was full of people, and they obliged me to get into their little desk. I had great liberty in speaking..."⁹⁸ She records on the last day of 1777: "Thou hast enabled me, from the first of last January to the fourth of this month, to ride 960 miles, keep 220 public meetings at many of which hundreds of precious souls were present; about

⁹⁵ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Female Preachers of Methodism*, p. 143. Wesley's letter is dated June 13, 1771.

⁹⁶ Wesley, *Letters*, 5:257-58. cf Chilcote, p. 144.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, Chilcote, pp. 144-145. Chilcote includes a map of the distribution of female preachers.

⁹⁸ *op. cit.*, Taft, Vol II: 63. April 6th, 1774. Pulpits during the eighteenth century were generally large enough to stand in and were often called 'desks'. Sarah Crosby has broken with previous Methodist and Quaker convention for female preachers who stood alongside the pulpit rather than in it.

six hundred private meetings and to write 116 letters, many of them long ones; besides many conversations with souls in private...."⁹⁹ The success of many of the women preachers was unquestionable and many Methodist leaders were co-operative and even provided opportunities for some to exercise their exceptional talents. Opportunities for women were clearly not without external conflict and by 1775, there were rising tensions over the question.

Wesley continued to encourage women through his letters by emphasizing the value of their labours and in some cases, reiterating his view of their preaching as being an 'extraordinary call'. He does differentiate his opinion on the question of women preachers from that of the Society of Friends. "The difference between us and the Quakers in this respect is manifest. They flatly deny the rule itself; although it stands clear in the Bible. We allow the rule: only we believe it admits exceptions. At present I know of those, and no more... in the whole Methodist Connexion."¹⁰⁰

Wesley had changed his mind regarding women preachers and he had nominated that these gifted women were exceptions to the rule, 'extraordinary' not 'ordinary' instruments of God. He maintained strict control over their activities just as he did over the whole of the work of Methodism but he did not allow female preaching to become a general practice. In the final decade of Wesley's life the number of exceptional cases was greater than he or any other Methodist leaders anticipated. He continued to defend the practice of female preaching in extraordinary situations and his reason: "Because God owns them in the conversion of sinners and who am I that I should withstand God."¹⁰¹ Thomas Mitchell

⁹⁹ *Arminian Magazine*, XIX, 1806, p.567.

¹⁰⁰ Wesley, *Letters*, 6:290-91. cf Chilcote, p. 162. December 2nd, 1777.

¹⁰¹ *op. cit.*, Church, *More About the Early Methodist People*, p. 137.

reminded his colleagues at the 1784 Conference that "I know not what you would do with the good women, for all the fish they catch they put into our net."¹⁰² Eventually, the English Methodist Conference recognised officially a number of these exceptional women. At the 1787 Conference, Wesley wrote: "We give the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallett and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connection, so long as she preaches the Methodist Doctrines, and attends to our discipline."¹⁰³ Wesley offered Sarah technical advice about homiletical skills and the appropriate manner of conducting services. "Never continue the service above an hour at once, singing, preaching, prayer and all. You are not to judge by your own feeling but by the Word of God. Never scream. Never speak above the natural pitch of your voice..."¹⁰⁴

During the 1780's, the leadership roles of women reached their zenith in the realisation of female preaching as an integral part of the Methodist revival. The official authorisation of Sarah Mallett by the conference represented a remarkable step and the widespread support and encouragement of such women as Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher and others is indicative of this progress. But there were complications and protests that would come to the fore after Wesley's death that would see the eventual elimination of female preaching from Methodism.

In order to fully understand the outworkings of Methodism in the lives of some exceptional women, their story should be considered. Both Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher and Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers have been cited as particular examples of women to whom leadership roles were given. Both women were held up as examples for the next generation of Methodist

¹⁰² *op. cit.*, Taft, Vol. II. p. 27.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, Taft, Vol I. p.84.

¹⁰⁴ Wesley, *Letters*, 8:190. December 15th, 1789. cf. Chilcote, p.198.

women to imitate, and so, in order to reveal practically what 'experiential' religion meant in the individual's life and to show the way women followed the natural progression up the leadership ladder, particular profiles of these women are considered.

Part Two

Chapter One Methodist Women's Journals

The various leadership roles played by women in Methodism have already been discussed. Biographical details on many of the ladies simply do not survive. Some are only mentioned in an occasional letter to or from Mr Wesley or from a brief memoir published at their death. That being the case, I would like to consider two women who have substantive journal and/or correspondence records available for biographical treatment. These biographical details will deal specifically with the person's religious experience, and particularly their path into Methodism and subsequent involvement.

In the eighteenth century it would have been necessary to be able to write in order to maintain an extensive journal and the woman would need ample freedom from day-to-day labours to allow the time to do so. Nearly all of the journals are from educated middle and upper class women who had time to write, to be frequent at prayer or meeting, to think earnestly on their spiritual state and write at length their thought and experience.¹ Brown notes that some of the journals end within weeks of marriage when the responsibilities of running a household reduced the author's free time.² He also suggests that journal writing women were not necessarily typical of the

¹Earl Kent Brown, 'Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism', *Studies in Women and Religion*, Vol 11, New York and Toronto, 1983, p. xiii.

² *ibid.*, p. xiii.

Methodist female constituency as a whole.³ For the purposes of this thesis, the journals and other documents available on two particular women give some clarification as to what sort of life and experience a Methodist woman who is involved in a leadership role may be like. Anything close to a totally characteristic profile would be ludicrous considering the amounts of information available on Methodist women in the eighteenth century. Brown attempts a 'group portrait' from information related to a sample of 110 women whose active Methodist lives overlapped Mr Wesley's. He strongly emphasises the risks in such an undertaking and affirms that more knowledge is necessary to form such a picture.⁴

Several women did leave journals or diaries and some were published in various editions in the early nineteenth century. These published materials on Methodist women are obviously intended to hold the women up as models for the imitation of other women and men. Writing about "models" of faith, the author may find himself writing hagiography rather than biography or history. To a substantial degree, that is precisely what happened in the retrospective writings of the early Methodists.⁵ Previously, in the *Arminian Magazine*, Wesley had included obituaries of women who led exemplary lives and had a "good end". As they faced death, they did not waver.

He explains his reason for including obituaries: "Nothing is more animating to serious people than the dying Words and Behaviour of the Children of God."⁶ Basically, these obituaries were a summary of the person's life and a lengthy exposition of their last days and last words. From 1804-1821, the

³*ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁴ iEarl Kent Brown, 'Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism' p. 219.

⁵*ibid.*, p. 113.

⁶*Arminian Magazine*, V. iv, 1781, p. 153.

obituary section became 'The Grace of God Manifested' and centred even more on revealing the grace of God at the moment of death. This preoccupation with having a "good end" is evident in the journals of some Methodist women as they report frequent death-bed scenes which they have attended. Often, Hester Ann Roe Rogers was called upon to be present at these scenes and writes the details in her journal.⁷

The journals written by the Methodist women vary greatly in the quality and quantity of hard historical fact for they were not written as autobiography or to communicate to others but were written in general as a spiritual exercise to recall the grace of God working in the woman's life.⁸

Some, like those of Mrs Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher and Mrs Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers, included a great deal of narrative about day-to-day activity and concerns along with their spiritual meditations. The purpose in writing her journal, according to Frances Pawson, was that "It is profitable to review the dealings of God with my soul".⁹ Most of the women's journals are records of spiritual development rather than histories of life, times and action, although these may be mentioned. Hester Ann Roe mentions the earthquake in Macclesfield when the "new church rocked like a cradle and nearly threw some people then kneeling on their faces" but only to affirm that she "exhorted those around to be still and look unto God for grace and salvation."¹⁰

Journals of these early Methodist women show no uniform pattern of religious experience. However, there are comparisons that can be made

⁷ *Experience of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers, Consort and Relic of Rev. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Salop: Compiled from her Journal and Other Authentic documents.* New York: 1818, pp.52, 58, 67, 68, 313.....

⁸ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 115.

⁹ J. Sutcliffe, *The Experience of Frances Pawson*, March 12, 1801, as quoted in Earl Kent Brown, p. 99

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, *Experience of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers*, Sept. 14th, 1778, p.55.

between some. Both Mary Bosanquet and Hester Ann Roe have early childhood 'experiences' which they record and consider to be God's reaching out to them. Mary's experience at four years old is the "conviction that God heareth prayer" and at five years old, she began "to have much concern for her eternal welfare asking whether such and such things were sins."¹¹ A preoccupation with death and a guilty conscience about all kinds of diversions recur again and again in the Journals of many who played so great a part in the spread of Methodism.¹²

Hester, who as a child was required to recite the collect¹³ for the day, would often repeat this in secret with great sincerity before the Lord¹⁴ and until she was 15 years old, she "fell into all vain customs and pleasure...Yet ... in all this, I was not left without keen convictions and gentle drawings ... But O! How did I grieve and resist the Holy Ghost!"¹⁵ And thus, in the written "Experiences" or "Life" and in Journals these women reveal their turning towards God and go on to explain their move towards Methodism and involvement therein.

It is clear that the Methodist women who kept journals all knew their Bibles and that every changing need could be matched by some word that came from God. They knew hymns (mostly Methodist) which could give them comfort, challenge and hope. Throughout Mary Bosanquet's and Hester Roe's journals are various bible verses and hymns (in part or in full) written to show how they had helped the recorder. Mary Bosanquet, before her move to Leytonstone, had these words "powerfully applied", "Thou shalt call thy walls salvation and thy gates praise.... In returning rest shall ye be

¹¹Henry Moore, (ed), *The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, p. 17.

¹²*op. cit.*, Morrow, p. 10.

¹³The "collect" was the prayer appointed for use on a particular day.

¹⁴*op. cit.*, *Experience of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers*, p.6.

¹⁵*ibid.*, p.9.

saved; in quietness and confidence shall be thy strength."¹⁶ She often reiterates these verses in the years ahead. Or when Mary spent a night attending her sick friend, Mrs Ryan, she writes afterwards:

"O that my Lord would count me meet
To wash his dear disciples' feet;
After my lowly Lord to go,
And wait upon his saints below;
Enjoy the grace to angels given,
And serve the royal heirs of heaven."¹⁷

Recorded in some journals are sermon notes from various services attended and in the case of Mary Bosanquet, her own formulated points for "leading class" or what text from which she may have herself spoken.¹⁸ Although these journals were never intended for eyes other than the writer's, as the initial decision to keep a journal was to record their personal spiritual experience, those that have survived give insight into the 'ordinary' and extraordinary lives of Methodist women. But upon Wesley's recommendation many women had their journals published.

Upon receiving the papers of the late Mrs Fletcher, Moore states that "the venerable person whose life was recorded in them" had mentioned that he was "the one that she wished should prepare and publish her papers".¹⁹ It appears that by the early nineteenth century most of the women who were well-known in Methodism had their journals or 'experiences' published in some form. Moore continues to expound the virtues of this remarkable woman whose records would be received "not as a common religious

¹⁶*op. cit.*, Moore, pp. 45, and also pp.49,103.

¹⁷Moore, *The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, p. 50.

¹⁸*ibid.*, pp. 55, 89...

¹⁹*ibid.*, p.iii.

biography but as an uncommon work of God. ... I cannot therefore but greatly rejoice that these memoirs are given to the public, and especially to that community of which the writer was so long a highly honoured and useful member".²⁰ He continues, "The reader will find in them no paint, nothing to set the writer off; no extravagance, but plain life raised and sanctified by constant attention to the duties and sacrifices of the Gospel."²¹

Henry Moore's comments are full of praise for this extraordinary woman. No doubt they are tainted by Methodist bias. However, a non-Methodist's judgement affirms, "She (Mary Fletcher) was altogether an extraordinary person, endowed with a strong understanding, great decision of character and simplicity of mind, heroic zeal, and unbounded benevolence..."²²

²⁰ Moore, *The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, pp. iv and vii

²¹ *ibid.*, p. vii.

²² Burder, *Memoirs of Pious Women*, Vol. 3, p.366 as quoted in Morrow, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

Chapter Two

Life and Experience of Mrs Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher

Mary Bosanquet was born on September 12, 1739 at Leytonstone, Essex, into a family of French Huguenot extraction. Her father was apparently a wealthy London merchant and the family enjoyed a life of luxury and leisure. They frequented the stylish summer resorts of Bath and Scarborough - and during the London season, the family took a house in the city in order to enjoy the festivities to the full. The children were expected to take their places in 'society' in their turn.

In her early years, Mary remembered many a Sunday evening when her father trained the children in the Church (Anglican) catechism. Her home was a cultured and kindly one but there was no obvious place for religion beyond outward conformity and respectability.²³ In her autobiographical thoughts, she recalled pondering profound questions while still five or six years old. Does the Bible really mean what it says?

"It seemed to me that if it did, I was wrong and all about me were in danger; for there appeared to be a great difference between the description of a Christian given in the word of God, and those who walk under that name."²⁴

²³ Morrow, *Early Methodist Women*, p. 65.

²⁴ *op. cit.*, Moore, p. 14.

As a result of her contemplations, she found herself alternating between a "dislike to the word of God" and a fear that "I am not a Christian".²⁵ When Mary was baptised, the minister said that she was to be "Christ's faithful soldier and servant, and fight under his banner".²⁶ She frequently asked questions about these things, but they were 'treated lightly'.

Mary's first contact with the Methodists was through a servant girl who her parents discharged when they recognised her religious position. However, Mary and her older sister had learned that there are people somewhere who apparently have found resolution to the confusions they were experiencing. Mary states that when she was seven years old she thought that "if I became a Methodist, I should be sure of salvation".²⁷ It was not until six years later that Mary's contact with the Methodists was renewed.²⁸

During this time, Mary struggled with the whole way of salvation and felt that she would never know how to believe, but the words "Who on Jesus relies, without money or price, The pearl of forgiveness and holiness buys" came to remembrance and "...with joy I cried out, I do, I do rely on Jesus; yes, I do rely on Jesus, and God counts me righteous for what he hath done and suffered, and hath forgiven all my sins."²⁹ But in several days she had lost her confidence. She could remember many promises that were brought to her mind but afterwards she would "fall into uncommon lowness and weakness ...fear of sin, and accused of almost everything I said or did..."³⁰

²⁵Moore, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, p.18.

²⁶*ibid.*, p.18

²⁷*ibid.*, p.19.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p.23. Mary met Mrs LeFevre on a visit to her house in secret. Mary had opportunities of conversation with religious persons and was strengthened. Mrs LeFevre also gave Mary books to read that were helpful.

²⁹*ibid.*, p.20.

³⁰*ibid.*, p.21.

Mary's life seems "to oscillate between earnest hopes and occasional fulfilments on one hand and recurring discouragement and depression on the other".³¹ She has an almost rapturous joy at confirmation when she was fourteen³² but this was balanced by an inner doubting and questioning of her own condition regarding salvation. And there were many dark nights when even God's promise to make her worthy seemed insufficiently reassuring. While Mary had a "strong nervous fever..... and was very low.... could find no comfort of any kind either from God or outward things..... discerned and unusual brightness and voice came so powerfully -Thou shalt walk with me in white. I will make thee worthy".³³

As a teenager, Mary had times when she was quite insolent and disobedient and her parents found this distressing. But, she endeavoured to overcome these weaknesses. At sixteen, she began to question the values of the family and it was the issue of going to the theatre that she first publicly challenged her father. Her parents followed the customary pastimes or diversions of the wealthy in the eighteenth century- town for the 'season', fine dress and social activities such as balls and the theatre. To Mary these were major diversions which wasted time. She was torn between the habitual obedience to her father and the new demands of conscience and duty to God. At eighteen, Mary stayed in London for the winter and was able to make the acquaintance of Mrs Crosby. During this time, she was named a class leader by Mr Wesley.³⁴ This was quite a young age for such a responsibility. The next year she went to Bristol and spent a great deal of time with Mrs Ryan. On her return, she sought "renunciation of conformity to the spirit and fashions of the world." She made a rule to "be clean and neat, but in the plainest things,

³¹*op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 137

³²*op. cit.*, Moore, p. 23.

³³*ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁴*op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 50.

according to my station...For so the holy women of old adorned themselves".³⁵

Her divergence from her parents continued. At times her parents thought she was mad. They were furious at her 'fancies'. Mary had refused an offer of marriage to an eminently appropriate young man and they were appalled. There was genuine affection between Mary and her family but her father found it necessary for her to leave. She had her own income from an inheritance, so she moved into an apartment, an unusual venture in the eighteenth century. She broke with the polite custom of remaining in her father's house until she married.

In her new home at Hoxton Square, she drew up orderly rules for her life. There were to be "no visits from single men, an endeavour to lay out time by rule and what is to be done each hour, and to fix her mind on the example of Jesus Christ and lead a mortified life."³⁶ In the years 1761-1762, while Mary was in her 'lodgings', there was "a great revival among the societies both in London and many other places; an earnest desire was stirred up in many hearts after full salvationMr Wesley was in uncommon manner blest in his preaching".³⁷ Important for Mary was the fellowship of a group of Methodist women who became models for her. Sarah Crosby she had met earlier but now she was introduced to Mrs Ryan who would later join her in the venture of the orphan house at Leytonstone. Mary says of her relationship to Mrs Ryan, "Our hearts were united as David and Jonathan's."³⁸ Mary had no other thought but of devoting herself to God in a

³⁵*op. cit.*, Moore, 37.

³⁶*ibid.*, p.41.

³⁷*ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁸*ibid.*, p. 51.

single life but she "sometimes thought, were I to be married to Mr Fletcher³⁹... it would be a help not an hinderance to my soul."⁴⁰

For various reasons, the actual marriage to Mr Fletcher was not to occur until twenty-five years later. In Brown's portrait of the 110 women, he notes that the majority of women in Mr Wesley's England found their primary career in marriage.⁴¹ About two thirds of Brown's sample were married and about two-fifths of these had one or more children. He does mention that "the researcher is struck by the number of women in the group who either did not marry at all or married late in life, after the period of childbearing had passed.⁴² Mrs Fletcher is in the 'married but childless' classification and as she did have an active career before her marriage at the age of forty-two, she may have taken seriously Wesley's encouragement to ponder carefully whether she could 'do more good' if she married or if she remained single. Mary, of course, had already declined an offer from a suitor whilst living at home and would decline a further offer during her work at Cross Hall.⁴³ Certainly, Wesley may have conveyed the idea that it was "impossible to be as much devoted to God in a married as in a single life."⁴⁴ He was not married until he was fifty and his marriage was not an entirely happy one. In a letter to Sarah Crosby he discusses Hester Roe's marriage to Mr Rogers: "...it was not a sin for her to marry, but a duty; and to marry when she did. And never was any one woman so owned of God in Dublin as she has been already."⁴⁵

³⁹ John Fletcher was a Swiss of noble background named Jean de la Flechere. He was 10 years older than Mary. He joined the Methodists in 1755, was encouraged by Wesley to seek ordination, and from 1757 he was vicar of Madeley parish in Shropshire.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Moore, p.46.

⁴¹ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 223.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 224.

⁴³ *op. cit.*, Moore, p.99 and September 12th, 1777. p. 140.

⁴⁴ Letter to Sarah Crosby, in Burns, *Life of Mrs Fletcher*, p. 53 as quoted in Earl Kent Brown, p.142.

⁴⁵ Rev. J. Beecham and Rev. Thomas Jackson, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley. A.M.*, London: 1856, Letter from John Wesley to Mrs Crosby, November 7th, 1784, p. 333.

Whatever the exact reason for these women to marry later or not to marry at all, the proportion of single ladies in the Methodist group is far larger than would have been typical of a group of randomly chosen Englishwomen of the time.⁴⁶ Another argument suggests that "some women found in their conversion to Methodism and subsequent involvement in Methodist preaching, missionizing, or charitable work a way to delay or avoid marriage and to escape the confines of the household."⁴⁷ Mary certainly did leave her parent's house and take up a benevolent work in the orphanage and school but there is no evidence in her journal or writing to suggest that she was using this as escapism. She appears to have had the noblest intentions in mind. Other women were in a similar position.

Mary gladly devoted her means and energy to the course of active benevolence. The tenants of her grandmother's former home at Leytonstone vacated and the house became Mary's. To Mary and Mrs Ryan it seemed that God was calling them to a ministry with children. They had been wanting for some time to use their lives in service of the poor. The work began in 1763 at the 'Cedars' at Leytonstone which provided accommodation and education for destitute orphans over the next five years, and for a subsequent thirteen years at Cross Hall, in Yorkshire. Keeling aptly describes Mary as "A Sister to the Poor."⁴⁸ The house at Leytonstone became a refuge for orphan children and the poor, but it was also a Methodist preaching-house and a society meeting house.

⁴⁶ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 224.

⁴⁷ C. Cupples, 'Pious Ladies and Methodist Madams: Sex and Gender in Anti-Methodist Writings of Eighteenth Century England' in *Critical Matrix: Program for Women's Studies* Vol. 5, Spring/Summer, 1990, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Annie E. Keeling, *Eminent Methodist Women*, London: 1893, p. 56.

At twenty-three, Mary "felt she owed something to the souls of the people in Leytonstone"⁴⁹ but she was concerned about bringing preachers within a mile of her parent's house. She discussed the matter with her father who explained that he could not protect her if a mob attacked the house. Undaunted by criticisms and reproaches, she continued the task of caring for those under her charge and was ably aided by Mrs Ryan. Mary provided the money and most of the energy and Mrs Ryan brought a world of practical experience to the venture.⁵⁰

Both felt they were specifically called to this work by God. Mary states:

"We remembered there was a blessing promised to the training up of a child in the way he should go, and that a degree of knowledge, with the capacity of getting their bread in an honest way, has under God, rescued many from destitution."⁵¹

She gives an interesting account of the methods employed in educating the children and caring for those who were ill. Her success was extraordinary, and was attained by a system worth of Susanna Wesley herself, and administered with equal firmness.⁵² The household moved to the exactest rule; all its members wore the same modest dress, ate simple wholesome food; the day was carefully planned out, divided between instruction and recreation; and the education given included a thorough training in domestic arts, in housework and cooking, since it was designed to fit each child for earning her own living. Religion blended with everything.⁵³

⁴⁹*op. cit.*, Moore p. 53.

⁵⁰*op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 53.

⁵¹*op. cit.*, Moore, p. 56.

⁵²*op. cit.*, Keeling, p. 66.

⁵³*op. cit.*, Moore, p.56-65; see also Keeling, p.66; Earl Kent Brown, p. 53-57.

In his journal, Wesley comments of 'The Cedars', "Oh what a house of God is here! Not only for decency and order, but for the life and power of religion. I am afraid there are very few such."⁵⁴ Mary received thirty-five children and thirty-four adults into her household, but not all at the same time. Despite the reproaches, she affirmed, "I was called to walk wholly by faith, indeed it appeared a strange call, and humanly speaking, could end no way but prison.... I was permitted to have every kind of discouragement, that the faithfulness of God might shine more conspicuous."⁵⁵ Her undertaking was new and out of the ordinary. She fell into financial difficulties and even though she was bequeathed a considerable sum of money after the death of her parents which helped with running the home, this was not a final solution. In order to solve her monetary problems and for the sake of Mrs Ryan's health, she removed to Cross Hall, Yorkshire. During this time, she once again contemplated whether marriage to Mr Fletcher would be suitable, but the opportunity never presented itself.⁵⁶

One important impact of Mary's ministry at Leytonstone was the development of the Methodist society which grew initially out of the regular personal devotions of the ladies of the Cedars. A prayer meeting was held at 7 p.m. every Thursday night and the numbers attending increased. She noted that in the public meeting "we read a chapter, and sometimes I spoke from it."⁵⁷ Mary applied to Mr Wesley for a preacher. But she continued with her reading and exposition of the Scripture to the large assembly in spite of

⁵⁴ Entry for Feb. 12, 1767, *The Journal of the Rev John Wesley* Vol III, p. 259.

⁵⁵ *op. cit.*, Moore, p. 62.

⁵⁶ Mary Bosanquet met Mr Fletcher in 1756 or 57 when they were in the Foundery congregation. He feared proposal to an heiress would seem presumptuous and was deterred from marriage by Wesley's view that a single man could be more devoted to God. He had written to Charles Wesley concerning Miss Bosanquet as a marriage prospect but he took no further action. cf. Earl Kent Brown, pp.141-142.

⁵⁷ *op. cit.*, Moore, p. 55.

opposition. Mr Murlin arrived and within a fortnight there were twenty-five joined in society. Much opposition arose and one Thursday night her father's warning concerning the threat of a mob came true. However, no harm was done. Sometimes on Sundays a mob would collect at the gate, throw dirt on the people leaving or stand at the windows and roar and howl like wild beasts. It must have taken considerable courage on the part of these women, for the Methodist society went on undaunted, and the "meetings were quiet and comfortable, the number of hearers increased..."⁵⁸

Not long after the re-settlement at Cross Hall in Yorkshire, Mrs Ryan died. Mary was left with multiple duties. Previously, she had paid attention to the spiritual affairs of the family, took care of their 'sustenance', instructed the children, met each member of the family alone each week at a set time, superintended the public meetings of the society and nursed those who were sick. It was quite a reasonable workload already but now she also had to take care of the practical functioning of the household, something to which she was unaccustomed. During the thirteen years in Yorkshire, her capital dwindled slowly and by the 1780's, bankruptcy seemed to lie ahead. She was saved from that fate by her marriage to John Fletcher, the vicar of Madeley. Her new career would be a minister's wife.

Nevertheless, whilst at Cross Hall there had been a great increase and development in her activities. A similar pattern to Leytonstone occurred and Cross Hall became a vital centre of Methodist worship and witness. It was here that she articulated her rules and observations for forming good societies. These "reveal her wisdom and qualities as a leader and spiritual guide."⁵⁹ Even more important is the fact that Mary begins to receive

⁵⁸ iMoore, *The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, p. 78.

⁵⁹ *op. cit.*, Morrow, p. 83. A summary is provided in Morrow, and for the eight rules in full, cf, Moore, pp. 89-92. This is also provided also in Appendix C.

invitations to speak at various locations. Her journal records these occurrences as well as her concern that she not appear out of order. On February 2nd, 1773, there is the first explicit reference to a sermon text appropriated by a woman preacher. Mary notes that she has been "this day to A___ where she had a good time speaking from -'O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter'." ⁶⁰ Three weeks later, she went to the coal pit at R___ where she "saw deep poverty, dirt and cold - but the Lord gave me freedom of speech, and some seemed to have an ear to hear." ⁶¹ Several weeks later she addressed a gathering at a public inn and at a large house the following morning. "This was a trial indeed! It appeared to me that I should seem in their eyes as a bad woman, a stage-player; and I feared that they only sought an opportunity to behave rudely." ⁶²

Despite the overwhelming approbation that she received and support from Methodist leadership, Mary still was reluctant to give offence and was concerned over the propriety of her actions. "Oh, how much I suffer for every meeting I propose!" ⁶³ "Yesterday it was given out for me to be at _____. For a whole month it lay on my mind. None, O my God, but Thyself, knows what I go through for every public meeting. I am often quite ill with the prospect." ⁶⁴ Obviously speaking in the public forum gave her great anxiety but the fruit of her labour, however, proved to be a constant confirmation of her calling and in the midst of her struggle she could proclaim, "I had a clear conviction, God brought me to Yorkshire, and that I had a message to this people.... I was at present where God would have me." ⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *op. cit.*, Moore, *Journal of Mary Fletcher*, Feb, 2nd, 1773. p. 112.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 114 (Pannel) Further references ...p. 123, 129, 132, 133 etc.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 119. Dec 7th, 1773.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 132, Aug 30th, 1776.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 124, Sept 10th, 1775.

One of the most significant days in Mary's life must have been September 17, 1776 when she preached to several thousand people at Goker and Huddersfield. Her journal account gives a vivid description of the whole day and provides details of the circumstances from which the event arose, the setting and nature of the audience, the texts and outline of the sermon preached and Mary's feelings concerning her experience that day.⁶⁶ Mary was in some distress in Goker not only from the heat but also from the possibility of between two and three thousand people coming to hear her speak. "When they were a little settled, I found some liberty in speaking to them." At the house they asked when she would come again. In Huddersfield, the crowd was "very great" so she went out of doors, stood on the horse-block and addressed the people. She "gave out a hymn and was led to enlarge on the words - 'The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our lawgiver....He will save us. Deep solemnity sat on every face...My voice was clear enough to reach them all.'"⁶⁷ After she had spoken to the great number gathered, she also spoke to each of the women joined in society until 10 p.m. and was in bed at midnight. This was quite a long day of travelling, speaking and conversing.

Despite her travelling, she never neglected the care and oversight of the community at Cross Hall which she considered to be her first priority in ministry. In her journal, Mary often gives articulate defense for her actions, answering various questions from critics.

I know the power of God which I felt when standing
on the horse-block in the street of Huddersfield; but
at the same time I am conscious how ridiculous I

⁶⁶ Moore, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, pp. 133-136. Sept 17th, 1776.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp.133-136.

must appear in the eyes of many for so doing. It is not my call to take a round as a preacher. I have more duties to attend to, and many cases which you know nothing about.... Why do I not give out when I am to preach? Why call it a meeting? I answer: It suits my design better, leaves me at liberty to speak more or less as I feel myself led and gives less offence to those who watch it Besides I do nothing but what Mr Wesley approves, and *I will still be more vile,* if my Lord requires it. Indeed for none but thee, my Lord, would I take up this sore cross. "⁶⁸

She found her financial difficulties very taxing but expected that there would be some solution. There were opportunities for marriage but these were obliterated from her mind by the great opportunity to serve God and grow in grace. In the difficult late years at Cross Hall, thoughts of marriage began to rise again. The man in question was John Fletcher whom Mary had considered spasmodically over the years as a possible partner.

"I find Mr Fletcher sometimes brought before me... His eminent piety, and the remembrance of some little acts of friendship in our acquaintance look to me sometimes like a pointing finger of providence...this I resolve on, to strive against the thought; and never to do the least thing towards a renewal of our correspondence."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Moore, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, Oct 8th, 1776, pp. 137-138.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 116. November 6, 1773.

In 1776, she was concerned for Mr Fletcher's health. In 1778 when she was anxious about Cross Hall finances she wondered if marriage to Mr Fletcher would be an easy out. Mary was thirty-nine years old. For sixteen years, she has been caring for the poor and orphaned out of her own income and resources as well as leading bands, classes and speaking to various societies upon invitation. Finally, in her 14th year in Yorkshire, she received a letter from Mr Fletcher who spoke of a growing admiration and secret affection for her. This was their first direct contact for fifteen years. They corresponded regularly for eight weeks, spent a month in Yorkshire together and were married on Nov 12, 1781, five months after the letter. In that period Mary had managed to sell Cross Hall and settle all the children from the orphanage in suitable places and allow £55 a year to the more needy members of her dispersed household. Even in this, she was still giving of her means to support others.

Marriage was singularly happy for them both. Her journal abounds with expressions of fulfilment, joy and delight.

"I have such a husband as is in everything suited to me. He bears with all my faults and failings, in a manner which continually reminds me of that word, "Love your wives as Christ loved the church." His constant endeavour is to make me happy: his strongest desire, my spiritual growth. He is in every sense of the word, the man my highest reason chooses to obey."⁷⁰

Fletcher, about a year later says, "I can tell you Providence has reserved a prize for me, and that my wife is far better to me than the Church of Christ;

⁷⁰ iMoore, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, p. 163.

so that if the parallel fail, it will be on my side."⁷¹ This is quite amazing considering he had said to Mary, "My dear, when you marry me, you must marry my parish"⁷² and speaking at the service on their first Sunday in Madeley after their marriage, "I have not married this wife for myself only, but for your sakes also."⁷³ In fact, in their residence at Madeley they were both more active than ever. For all intents and purposes they conducted a joint ministry. They opened new places of worship in Madeley, and in the surrounding hamlets. Mary accompanied Fletcher when he preached. On their visit to Dublin, John preached and Mary frequently met members in their classes and "a great revival of pure religion followed in that society."⁷⁴ On their return to Madeley, Mary was fully occupied with a multitude of activities including nursing in the village, calling regularly in the parish, meeting classes and bands, and entertaining a steady stream of itinerating ministers. It would appear that the townspeople were extremely receptive to Mary's ministry. "My call is also so clear, and I have such liberty in the work, and such sweet encouragement among the people" and she found "great liberty in public and private meetings."⁷⁵ Neither Fletcher nor Mary spared themselves and it is no wonder that the work in Madeley continued to grow.

However, their time together was short-lived as Fletcher died on the 14th August, 1785. Mary's anguish is poured out in her journal: "The dreadful moment came! The sun of my earthly joys forever set, and a cloud arose which casts a sable on all my future life! At half-past ten that Sabbath night, I

⁷¹ Letter from John Fletcher to Charles Wesley, about 14 months after his marriage to Mary as quoted in Stevens, *op. cit.*, p.66.

⁷² *op.cit.*, Morrow, p. 91.

⁷³ Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor*, p. 503 as quoted in Chilcote, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁷⁴ *op.cit.*, Moore, pp. 171-174

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 176, 178.

closed the eyes of my beloved!"⁷⁶ Her method of dealing with grief was to force herself to do daily duties in the service of others.

"I saw that I must act among them [the people of the parish] and meet the people the same as before; and though very ill and filled with sorrow, the Lord enabled me to do so, showing me the only way to bear the cross profitably was to carry it as if I carried it not."⁷⁷

Mary stayed in Madeley upon the deathbed wish of husband. Her other considerations included the fact that the area agreed with her health, she had many 'sweet and lovely souls' to converse with and she sensed a call to minister in this place.

"I was never in any situation in which I had so much opportunity of doing good (according to my small abilities) as in this place, and that in various ways, public and private; ... if I choose for the work of God, here I must abide and fix my home."⁷⁸

Mary lived in Madeley as the 'widow Fletcher'. She continued regular preaching services within the boundaries of the parish but extended her influence to Coalbrookdale, Coalport and the surrounding villages. The church folk and Methodists in Madeley continued to blend into one fellowship during those troubled years when most Methodists elsewhere in

⁷⁶ Moore, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, p. 181. A complete letter to John Wesley regarding the 'good end' of her husband is in her Journal. pp. 184-195.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.199.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.204.

England felt forced out of established churches. This remained the case until 1815 when the division occurred and Mary herself was refused communion by the curate of the church in which her husband had been minister.⁷⁹

Mary's thirty years at Madeley after her husband's death were spent in further service to those in need (the sick, orphan or widow), in advice for those who wanted counsel and in speaking at the various preaching houses. The primary thrust of her vocation was as speaker or preacher of the Word.⁸⁰ Her ministry of public speaking had begun in London in the class meeting, was more formally like preaching at Cross Hall and eventually she spoke at the 'tythe barn' two to five nights a week. The 'tythe barn' became a place where she could speak and also the Methodist itinerants who were unordained. This room became her special place. The normal programme for a Sunday for Methodists began at about 5 a.m. before regular services. Here, Mary would pray first and then speak for 15 minutes, invite the visitors present to express their experience, to which she would add occasional cautions and interjections. When the church bell tolled, the whole group adjourned to the parish church. At noon, the visitors ate with her and at 1:00 p.m. their meeting resumed. In the afternoon, attendance at the parish church service was followed by the 7:00 p.m. meeting in the 'tythe barn' or in one of the nearby chapels where the service was led by an itinerant (if one was present) or by Mrs Fletcher.

Mary generally expounded some passage from scripture. Her style of speaking varied according to the situation and her own inspiration. Sometimes it was primarily testimony. Or she would take a text, divide it, analyse and apply it. Her favourite kind of preaching was apparently

⁷⁹ *op. cit.*, Morrow, p. 103.

⁸⁰ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 149.

"expounding--taking a part or whole of a chapter and speaking on it."⁸¹ At other times catechesis would be used. Moore includes the text of her sermon 'They cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day '(Acts xxviii:29).⁸² Noteworthy is the fact that at the time when Mary's Journal and related documents would have been published, the whole attitude to female preaching had changed and the Methodist Conference had more or less squashed the whole idea. It is no wonder that Moore says of her preaching:

"She never, in her more public efforts, meddled with the government of the church, 'usurped authority over the man' or made any display of a regular or authoritative commission.... [She] merely strove to 'win souls by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering.....by the power of God" while she was herself 'the least and the servant of all."⁸³

She grew old but continued a busy schedule of meetings. When the Taft's visited her in July 1810, at seventy years old she was still attending six meetings a week and preaching at two of them. Her diary entries, particularly those on her wedding anniversary, or anniversaries of Mr Fletcher's death or Miss Lawrences's death, or her own birthday, often contain summaries of these activities. Mary reflects, "I have been reading over some of my old diary, and found it much blest me. It brought to my mind many past scenes which increased faith and thankfulness; also it cast clearer light on my present state".⁸⁴ The Journal entries tend to reveal a sort

⁸¹ *op. cit.*, Letter of Mrs Fletcher, in Taft, *Holy Women*, Vol 2, p.20)

⁸² *op. cit.*, Moore, (1819 edition), Vol II, pp292-302. The complete text is found in Appendix B.

⁸³ *ibid.*, Moore, p. 421.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, (1819 edition), Jan 7th, 1789, Vol II, p. 51.

of spiritual stocktaking. She speaks less and less about events and focusses more and more on her spiritual growth. Her comment on Jan 7, 1790 is typical:

"I seem to be surrounded with blessings, and see
such a care of the Almighty over all that concerns
me, as I cannot express... My house is a sweet rest,
and a secret place in the wilderness to hide me
in...I seem hid from all the evils of which my
letters inform me. I have peace within ...
I have communion with my friends above."⁸⁵

Mary preached her last sermon on July 25, 1815, in the seventy-sixth year of her life. She continued to meet classes until mid-October and died shortly before Christmas. Her journal was published almost at once. It had gone through twenty reprints before the middle of the century.⁸⁶

In his funeral sermon, Mr Hodson acknowledges the abilities of this extraordinary woman: "...On these subjects, she was not only pleasing, but instructive. Some of her discourses were remarkable for ingenuity and originality. Had she been a woman of feeble mind, she could not have retained her influence and popularity for so many years in the same place; for her congregations were full as large, after thirty years' labour, as when she first opened her commission on them."⁸⁷ Miss Tooth, Mary's companion during her last years, noted that the "expense on her person for a whole year was not even £5 but the amount she donated to the poor was £115."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Moore, *Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, p. 269.

⁸⁶ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p.152.

⁸⁷ *op. cit.*, Stevens, pp. 61-62.

⁸⁸ *op.cit.*, Morrow, p. 101.

The Journal of Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher reveals the inner musings of a person who found in Mr Wesley and the Methodists the answers to her childhood struggles related to spirituality. The extracts reveal something of Mary's failures but also her courage and complete disregard for her own needs or comfort and her total commitment to serve others and actively provide for the needs of the poor and destitute. Despite the criticisms of her 'speaking' in public, she willingly involves herself in band, classes and 'exhorting'. She is an extraordinary woman with an 'extraordinary' call.

Chapter Three

Life and Experience of Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers

The life of Mrs Rogers provides an outstanding example of two major types of religious lifestyles typical of women in Mr Wesley's Methodism. Initially, after her conversion, she sat in the pew and listened to the preaching of Mr Simpson, but as is the case of many women in early Methodism, she began to involve herself as a 'sick visitor' with its concomitant 'death bed' scene, calling on backsliders and leading bands and classes. Thus, her life is a prime example of piety lived and practised by the overwhelming majority of Methodist women who were active participants but who never preached as did Mrs Mary Fletcher or founded a school or travelled.⁸⁹ Hester constantly referred to herself being "drawn out to secret prayer"⁹⁰ which began in her childhood years and became a characteristic of her life. Her married years find her living in a style appropriate to an itinerant minister's wife. It is during this time that her skill as a class leader came into its own.⁹¹ In Dublin, she would regularly meet three classes of thirty members. Mr Rogers estimated that over two thousand of those who joined the Dublin society during their three year ministry were brought to Christ through Mrs Rogers' labours.

Hester was born in Macclesfield in Cheshire, on January 31st, 1756. Her father was the vicar of the local parish, a man of strict morals and real piety. Hester was raised to observe fully outward religious duties and avoid time-

⁸⁹ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 199.

⁹⁰ *op. cit.*, *Experience of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers*, pp. 5, 6, 11, 49, 288....

⁹¹ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p. 49.

wasting diversions. The sabbath was dutifully kept, and she was expected to behave appropriately. As a child she was taught to pray about the needs and concerns of her day-to-day life. She read the bible regularly and every Sunday evening she was expected to give an account to her parents of the sermons and lessons she had heard in church that day. At family prayers, she read the collect for the day which she recited as proof of her progress in catechism. It was early impressed on her that prayers at bedtime were an important matter in God's eyes. One night when she was six years old, she forgot her prayers. She awoke later absolutely terrified lest the God of vengeance might take her in the night and punish her severely for this oversight. She roused the whole house with her screams and could not be consoled until she knelt, trembling, to confess her childish 'sins' to God and petition for His forgiveness.

Her father seems to have been the primary source of this strictness about pious practices. He also warned her against the reading of novels and romances, which he was sure would lead her astray. He would not let her learn to dance, or even spend much time with her playmates. Her father died when she was nine years old, but she never forgot a solemn time at his deathbed when the rector of Macclesfield commended his daughter to the care of the Almighty: "My dear Hetty, you look dejected.... God hath cared for me, and he will take care of mine....Unto God's gracious mercy and protection I commit thee....in the hope that you will be a good child, and then you will be happy."⁹²

Hester felt her father's passing very deeply. Her grief was so strong that her mother and "Uncle Roe", her father's brother, became concerned for her health. Seeking to divert the serious-minded girl from her recent loss, they

⁹² *op. cit.*, *Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 8.

encouraged her to enter activities which had previously been limited or forbidden. She was encouraged to visit acquaintances of her own age. This was not a happy experiment, for her peers found her much too serious and made fun of her. She had not learned the skills of socialisation. She did not know how to dance and when her mother arranged for her to be taught, it seemed a great release and joy to the girl. She was later critical of the decision and wrote:

"This was a fatal stab to my seriousness and divine impression; it paved the way to lightness, trifling, love of pleasure, and various evils.I delighted much in this ensnaring folly. My pride was fed by being admired...I now aimed to excel my companions not in piety, but in parties of pleasure... I also obtained all the novels and romances I possibly could, and spent some time every day in reading them... After this I attended the plays also."⁹³

Despite what she later saw as a disastrous fall into the snare of "diversions", there continued to be a serious side to her life as well. She would later see this as evidence that God had tried to draw her to him even in these troubled times.

At thirteen years old, she experienced a religious crisis which related to her Confirmation, and another, later the same year, when she fell so ill she feared she might not recover. She began to keep a close record of her good and bad deeds. She was quite distressed to find that the latter outnumbered the former, even when she did not count dancing and reading frivolous novels as sin. Unfortunately the book found its way into the hands of one of her

⁹³ *Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 9.

playmates, and she was ridiculed for it. These records of childhood experiences are common to much of the published material in relation to both sexes, and not just in relation to Hester and Mary. There seems to be a pattern whereby God's drawing is seen from the early stages of a person's life.

By her mid-teens Hester had resolved the anxieties over her sense of guilt for sin which were unresolved since her father's death. She examined the conduct of others around her and found them "more trifling, more wicked than myself...I began to conclude if I lived a tolerably moral life...he would pardon the rest and accept me through the merits of Christ in the hour of death; or at least, I had as good a chance as others."⁹⁴ At fifteen, "I was then, in some measure, given up to my foolish, rebellious heart."⁹⁵

Her life in these years was largely dominated by her mother, her "Uncle Roe" and her godmother. The latter woman was a wealthy and generous lady, who recognised that the widow Roe and her daughter had relatively little income. She took Hester into her home in Adlington each summer for several years and introduced her to 'polite' society. She gave her money for clothes and to enable her to keep up with her peers. But she also kept up religious appearances as well, attending church and morning and evening prayers.

In the summer of 1773, when Hester was seventeen, she was again at Adlington. Upon her return home, there was a new curate at the local Anglican parish. Mr. Simpson had no direct contact with Mr Wesley but he was thought to be a Methodist. He was an evangelical and placed a definite emphasis on appropriate behaviour. Hester's first reaction was negative. She "was fully persuaded that to be a Methodist was to be all that is vile under

⁹⁴ *Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 15.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.15.

the mask of piety."⁹⁶ Her opinions were due to false stories from her father when she was seven or eight years old and from her mother up to the present time. She writes:

"I believed the Methodists were: teachers who were false prophets spoke of in the Scriptures; they deceived the illiterate, and were little better than common pickpockets;....that filled some hearers with presumption, and drove others to despair; and with respect to their doctrines, they enforced chiefly, that whosoever embraced their tenets, which they called faith, might live as they pleased in all sin, and be sure of salvation, and that all the world besides must be damned without remedy; they had dark meetings, and pretended to cast out devils; with many other things equally false and absurd."⁹⁷

She had heard that Mr Simpson preached against all her favourite diversions such as plays, reading novels, attending balls, assemblies and card-tables. She did not like what he was saying, but she found his arguments forced her to think seriously about dancing as a pastime. Hester realised what "fruits this delusive pleasure had wrought in my mind... I found cause to be deeply ashamed. Can I give it up? My vile heart replied, I cannot, I will not!"⁹⁸

Through the winter of 1773-1774, Hester sat under Mr Simpson's preaching. She became aware that, despite her pious practices, she was separated from God and in danger of falling deeper into sin. On January 1st, 1774 she "felt as miserable as a creature could be with a sense of guilt, and fears of death and

⁹⁶ *Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 16.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 19.

hell."⁹⁹ The Sunday before Easter, 1774, she was challenged by Mr Simpson's words: "Now, what think you of the state of your souls before God?" Hester felt herself indeed a lost, perishing, undone sinner.... I wept aloud, so that all around me were amazed; nor was I any longer ashamed to own the cause."¹⁰⁰ She arose early the next morning and took all her fine caps and clothes and ripped them all up. She cut her hair short and vowed never to dance again. Her mother was appalled and thought the girl was losing her senses. But the action eventuated in at least a partial sense of release even if this was short lived. She had none to instruct her and she did not know the Methodists. When she did finally attend the Methodist society meetings, it was at 5:00 a.m., when neither her mother nor her social friends were likely to see her. The preacher, Mr Samuel Bardsley preached from Isaiah 40--"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God". Hester thought "every word was for me. He spoke to my heart as if he had known all the secret workings there....I received a full and clear conviction, "These are the people of God, and show, in truth, the way of salvation...I knew if I persisted in hearing the Methodists, I must literally give up all."¹⁰¹

Hester dated her conversion from Nov 11, 1774. She wanted to spend the night in prayer but her mother would not allow it. However, she did wake at 4 a.m. and eventually she effused:

"I will, I do believe: I now venture my whole salvation upon thee as God, I put my guilty soul into thy hands, thy blood is sufficient. Then he did appear to be my salvation. In that moment my fetters were broken, my bands were loosed, and my soul set at liberty..... I was

⁹⁹ *Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 25.

truly a new creature; and seemed to be in a new world." ¹⁰²

Hester read extensively, particularly from Mr Wesley's writings on perfection or sanctification. She continued to hear Mr Simpson's preaching, as well as the itinerants. She was finding no support at all at home. Mrs Roe was almost ready to disown the girl and turn her out of home but "Uncle Roe" intervened. Hester was virtually imprisoned in the home and forbidden to go to Methodist meetings. Family members and others attempted to dissuade her from following the Methodists. Hester offered to work as a 'servant' to her mother in order to be free to attend the Methodist meetings. Her mother agreed thinking that the labour of housekeeping and cooking would change Hester's mind. Her mother was astonished at the change which appeared in Hester's countenance and whole deportment. Hester joyfully underwent the most servile of all her employments. "The amazing depths of grace which had plucked me as a brand from the burning, quite overcame me."¹⁰³

The work at home was hard, and her health suffered, partly because she insisted on fasting regularly. In the Methodist meetings, her religious experience led to a full assurance of God's forgiveness. This arrangement lasted about eight months, and during that time her mother was ill and needed constant nursing. Intercession was made on Hester's behalf by her uncle and cousin for some concession as Hester's health was failing. Hester did not accept release from her servant's role until she was assured she would be left to associate with whomever she wished.

¹⁰²*Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 31.

¹⁰³*ibid.*, p.32. The terminology here used is the same which Wesley uses of himself in his journal. She does occasionally use this turn of phrase in later journal entries. cf. p. 55. June 18th, 1780.

Hester continued to use self-denial of all kinds, more fasting and prayer; "for I hoped by these means to mortify and starve the evil tempers and propensities of my nature, till they exist no more; and if my body expired in the combat, I would be certain of endless life."¹⁰⁴ Her health continued to decline but she was rebuked by her cousin that "by not taking proper medicines, you are a murderer!" She took this to heart and began to recover.

It is from this period that the earliest entries in her manuscript journal date. The tone of the journal is established by repeated expression of joy and gratitude to God for his work in her and around her. The first page of the manuscript volumes contains a paragraph recounting the cause and consequence of the plan Hester so early adopted, to record the occurrences of each day in connection with her state of mind.

"I have even found it an unspeakable blessing
to look back on the rock from which I was hewn,
and to the hole from whence I was digged. To
recount the wonder of redeeming love is a
pleasing and profitable task. I have even proved
my strength hereby renewed, my faith increased,
my mercies and blessings redoubled.... and every
recounted deliverance is written more deeply on
my heart.....And how am I humbled with the
view of unbounded love and the tender mercies
of my God, contrasted with my unworthiness...
I am a brand plucked from the burning! - a sinner
saved by grace! - I am nothing! and Christ is all in

¹⁰⁴ *Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 35.

all!"¹⁰⁵

Hester was in her 20th year when she began her journal on September, 22nd, 1775. The entry for February 25th, 1776 is typical: "Glory be to God for the best Sabbath I ever knew." With these points of praise out of the way, the entry may go on to discuss her day, the needs of others, going to the meeting of the society, who preached on what, class and band meetings, visiting the sick or attending death-bed scenes. She does, at times, discuss spiritual growth.

"I am now fully convinced.. that the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin and that it may be done in a moment. This I never saw before; for I believed the work must be gradual, and perhaps not fully completed till death.... He hath made me experimentally feel, I am freely saved by grace alone. ... Yes and even me he will make pure in heart."¹⁰⁶

Hester continues to discuss her times of prayer and visiting the sick or dying.

"My soul is kept in sweet, solemn peace... I found it is a great blessing to spend some time in wrestling prayer for immortal souls; and afterwards, in visiting the sick, I found also his peculiar presence."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, *Extracts from the Journal of Mrs H.A. Rogers*, p. 271.

¹⁰⁶ *Experience of Mrs Rogers*, p. 279. November, 13th, 1775.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 302. April 15th, 1780.

Hester felt particularly called to the ministry of visiting the sick. She affirms that 'sick visiting' and calling on a few that were departing from the Lord was 'profitable employment'. Such calling was often not a matter of casual comfort and/or cheer. Her reports of sick calls tell of many opportunities she had to try to awaken the person religiously. She offered comfort and help as well but the purpose of many calls was evangelistic. She benefitted also as she was often uplifted by conversations with those whose faith is strong even in suffering. There were many whose bed she did not leave until they had met with a 'good end' such as Sarah Oldham who "fled to glory... Blessed be God for another dying witness of his grace and faithfulness!"¹⁰⁸ It is no empty phrase when it was said of the early Methodists that they died well!¹⁰⁹ Hester tells of families and friends of the ill coming into the sick room to hear her words and prayers, and at times, there were beneficial results of a 'solemn, melting waiting on God'. Of course, she was not always successful on her visits and records these examples also.

Her journal entries reveal constant activity in fulfilling her role of sick visiting as well as attending not only the Church of England services but also the various early morning preaching services, band and class meetings. She spent much time in 'private prayer' as the journal entries acknowledge for in "communion with my beloved, every trial is sweetened with his presence."¹¹⁰ Private prayer is where "I can pour out my desires into the bosom of the faithful God; ...it is there I leave all my sorrows, and receive all the rich draughts of living water my thirsty soul requires... Jesus there unfolds his dying love; the Father owns his worthless child; the Holy Spirit claims his meanest temple."¹¹¹ Both Mary Fletcher and Hester Rogers discussed openly

¹⁰⁸ *op. cit.*, *Journal of H.A. Rogers*, p. 328.

¹⁰⁹ *op. cit.*, *Morrow*, p. 94.

¹¹⁰ *op. cit.*, *Journal of Mrs H.A. Rogers*, p. 313. February 2nd, 1780.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 358. January 23rd, 1781.

and honestly their anxieties and spiritual concerns through the avenue of their journals. They discussed the frequent need of prayer and who or what will be the object of their prayers. They also mentioned personal needs and improvements in their own character as points for prayer. This is no doubt typical of many Methodist women even though journal or diaries were not kept by each individual.

Another recurring theme in Hester's journal is life with her mother. On March 1st, 1776, she writes, "... a day of trial... me willing to be treated as the off-scouring of the earth, and have my name cast out as evil, though without cause." She does not go into details as to actual events but discusses her own failings or that she will pray. She continued to live with her mother until her marriage in 1784. Only once in her journal does Hester admit a time when her mother was affectionate and loving. The remainder of the time the relationship appears strained. Her mother continued to bring people to try and convince Hester to keep away from the Methodists. Hester found being an obedient daughter and a loyal Methodist had its difficulties.

In 1780, her mother suggests that all Hester's illnesses were owing "to my going among the Methodists."¹¹² Basically, Hester is dependent financially on her mother until 1782 when Cousin Robert died and made her his heir. Mrs Roe appeared to be a bit of an ogre. She was the manipulator who used her wealth as a weapon. She interrupted Hester's religious conversations, demanded special care and was often rude and unkind in return. However, her life was probably not easy either. She had been a vicar's wife and had lived the good life, as she understood it. It was amazing that she never put the girl out of her house as she threatened and as Mary Bosanquet's father did. When Hester came of age in 1777, her mother could have simply

¹¹² *Journal Extracts of H.A. Rogers*, p.331. September 9th, 1780.

renounced responsibility. Perhaps Mrs Roe recognised her need of Hester as a nurse and a help in the home, although one wonders when Hester would have had time for these duties besides the ones she already fulfilled in the Methodist society. Hester always concerned herself with her mother's health. She always fulfills her required duty in this regard. Certain complaints were made against Methodist women regarding their fulfilment of familial and household responsibilities. The charges of course were refuted, and in some of the writings concerning Methodist women, their husband or older children report that these duties were always suitably fulfilled as well as the responsibilities of leadership roles within the local society. In Hester's case, "Her maternal care and affection shone equally bright. Though she devoted much of her time to religious duties in public and private, yet nothing seemed to be left undone which could make her children comfortable and happy."¹¹³

Hester records Wesley's first visit to Macclesfield when he conversed with her. She was twenty and he was seventy-three.

"He behaved to me with parental tenderness, and greatly rejoiced in the Lord's goodness to my soul; he encouraged me to hold fast, and declare what the Lord had wrought. He thinks me consumptive; but I welcome life, or welcome death, for Christ is mine."¹¹⁴

Five months later he wrote to her:

¹¹³ *Journal of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers*, Rev. Coke's sermon, p. 206.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 50. April 1st, 1776.

"Everything relating to you nearly concerns me.

I once thought I could not be well acquainted with any one till many years had elapsed. And yet I am as well acquainted with you as if I had known you from your infancy. You are now my comfort and joy! And I hope to be far longer than this little span of life, my dear Hetty, Yours in tender affection."¹¹⁵

He tended to tone down her excesses particularly in relation to taking care of herself. They began a correspondence that would last until his death. He urged moderation upon her, and she came to have a close personal concern for him. In a sense, he was a father figure to her.

Four years later, she wrote on March 21st, 1780:

" Mr Wesley arrived and seems more filled with the Spirit of the Lord than I ever knew him to be. I spent an hour with him and soon after, he came and it was a season of blessings... and the Lord's dear servant rejoiced with me and over me with parental affection."¹¹⁶

Two days later, Hester and Wesley had a 'profitable season' visiting the sick and two precious souls 'proved the feet of our Master was behind us.'

Hester's involvement thus far and in the remaining years of her life are of interest precisely because they are not entirely unusual. She was an unusual

¹¹⁵ *op. cit.*, Beecham and Jackson, Vol XIII, p. 74. Letter dated September 16, 1776.

¹¹⁶ *op. cit.*, *Journal Extracts of H.A. Rogers*, p. 299.

woman and no doubt fulfilled her various ministries unusually well. But the activities themselves are the typical behaviour of a Methodist woman in a local society. Dr Coke's funeral spoke of her talents and praised her for many things; "As a public person... she never assumed the authority of teaching in church; but she visited the fatherless and widows in their affliction ... and was as a leader of classes and bands."¹¹⁷ Her journal contains repeated examples of reports of such meetings. Hester led class "with a hymn and prayer and then the words given me to speak were not my own."¹¹⁸ In 1781, Hester travels to Yorkshire. She meets not only Mr Fletcher but also Miss Mary Bosanquet. Hester listens to Mary speak from Ezekiel. She comments, "If ever a woman were called to exhort or to preach, she surely is."¹¹⁹ On visiting Newcastle on 9th April, 1783, Hester spoke to three classes which were assembled. "My heart was enlarged; my tongue set at liberty... four received a sense of pardon."¹²⁰ Wesley also recognised her talent as a class leader as early as 1781, when he named her primary calling. "My Hetty, you are... to watch over the new-born babes. Although they have much love, they have not yet either much light or much strength."¹²¹ Class and band leadership was not just a matter of meeting the group at a particular time. The leader must be alert to each individual member's needs. On June 25th, 1783, Hester had a 'profitable season' at her class but noticed that Ann Byron was not present. She promptly went to call, found her on the edge of despair, counselled her, persuaded her to meet with another member of the group and finally resolved the woman's doubts. She seems to have given counsel and advice to many, for in the pages of her journal it is evident that she was often called upon for help in this regard.

¹¹⁷ *Journal of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers*, Rev. Coke's sermon, p. 207.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 394. August 30th, 1781.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 400. September 6th, 1781. Mary Bosanquet preached from the 36th Chapter of Ezekiel.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 476.

¹²¹ *op. cit.*, Beecham and Jackson, Vol XIII, p.78. December 9th, 1781.

One of Hester's other talents was writing letters of counsel and advice. The series of letters between herself and her cousin, Robert, from 1775-80 concerned the theological meaning of 'justification' and 'sanctification'.¹²² Her answers reflect a woman well read in the Bible and theology, who holds her own quite easily with the Oxford student. She was instrumental in Robert's conversion and attendance at Methodist meetings. His Methodism stood as a barrier to his ordination but he settled in Macclesfield and preached regularly at Methodist chapels round about. Hester and her mother moved into his house in August, 1782 and one month later, he died.

In the following months she supported her future husband both in his plans to break up the unwieldy Macclesfield circuit, and in the nursing of his first wife, Martha Rogers who died of consumption in 1784. Hester records in detail this death bed scene. But Hester was in for a shock. Mrs Rogers expressed a 'strong desire' that on her death, Hester would marry Mr Rogers. Hester was 'astonished....speechless' but upon praying and discussing the matter with her mother and Mr Wesley, who heartily approved, they were married on August 19th, 1784. Nine days later they left for Dublin to follow up the work that the Fletcher's had begun.

The Rogers remained in Ireland until the conference of 1790, spending about two thirds of the time in Dublin and one third in Cork. Their joint ministry was very successful. Mrs Rogers health deteriorated and at the 1790 Conference, Wesley brought them back to London. Hester was present at Wesley's death but it was not long before her own health deteriorated. In April 1793, she bore a daughter, the fifth child in nine years of marriage. She

¹²² *op. cit.*, *Spiritual Letter of Mrs. H.A. Rogers*, pp. 77-166. See Appendix D for an example of one of her letters.

never recovered from the difficulties of the pregnancy and died on October, 10, 1794.

She had been heavily involved in her role as band and class leader as well as calling on the sick. She cared for her ever-growing family; the children from Mr Roger's previous marriage plus her own. Her involvement seems to have escalated since marriage and it is only when her health began to fail that some duties were relinquished. The last words in her journal reflect her confidence and comfort in her God: "My body is very poorly, ... Yet, I am kept in a praying, depending, resigned frame, determined to trust my God and my all."¹²³ On her death-bed, her husband asks if Jesus is still precious and if He still is her all-in-all, and her reply is in the affirmative.

Keeling describes Hester's life as one "hidden with God" who by "means of her widely-read journal and letters, exercised an influence equal to Mrs Fletcher's over the women in Methodism"¹²⁴ and in the nineteenth century "...her abilities and attainments were not so remarkable as to make it seem impossible to emulate her." ¹²⁵ Her life and experience do exemplify the types of leadership roles a woman in the eighteenth century Methodist revival could assume. Through her 'secret prayer' life she could be held up as a pious woman. But of more significance is her constant service to others in visiting and leading band and class meetings. Her spiritual letters influence those to whom she could not speak, and in certain circumstances she addressed public meetings, her discourses "marked by good sense and quiet moral power."¹²⁶

¹²³ *Experience of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers*, Rev. Coke's sermon, p. 202. Date of entry unclear.

¹²⁴ *op. cit.*, Keeling, p. 103.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 103.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 114.

Conclusion

"We owe a great and unacknowledged debt to many of the women of early Methodism who played their vital and distinctive part in creating and sustaining the Methodist societies."¹²⁷ There is no doubt that Wesley's evolving view of women's ministry in Methodism opened up a 'new world' of roles for women. Just the fact that he encouraged women in their various endeavours would be sufficient but his countenancing of their involvement in leadership positions and in preaching allowed for an almost 'equal opportunity' for them in the spiritual life of the Methodist societies. This was a religion in which women could get involved, whether it involved leading a band or class, visiting the sick and dying, holding a prayer meeting, testifying in casual conversation or at the love feast, exhorting or preaching.

This focus on the leadership roles and participation of the early Methodist women in the Methodist revival of the eighteenth century shows conclusively that some women were outstanding leaders. This thesis has dealt specifically with only a small number of women but there were many others. Of course, not every woman found her way into the limelight. Some women led quiet lives in their village and society and were known only by their close friends, and to these no doubt the Methodist revival is also indebted. But to those women who were pioneers in schools and orphanages, in setting up Methodist societies, in holding prayer meetings and to the many others who attained to leadership positions, and for whom there is no journal, letter or record of their lives, Methodism owes much gratitude.

¹²⁷ Morrow, *Early Methodist Women*, London:1967, p. 7.

Wesley's concept of the 'extraordinary call' to explain his own itinerant ministry, developed into a substantial theology which eventually not only was invoked in relation to the lay preachers but also to those women whose gifting was to speak in public. It would appear that Wesley's pragmatism overcame his earlier theological objections and limitations imposed by eighteenth century society and what emerged was that a woman with an extraordinary call would be acknowledged as a preacher. Women became acceptable as preachers because they were a means of converting sinners. In one sense Wesley did not encourage women to preach, but, when faced with the exceptional cases, and the clear call of God on those women's lives, he laid aside his own prejudice and permitted them to preach in the orbit of the Methodist societies. He never appointed a woman preacher to a circuit or as an itinerant but many of them were itinerants in all but name.

Of course, the acceptance of women as preachers may have been stronger in some places than others and not all Methodist leaders were in agreement concerning the part women should play in the revival. This becomes more apparent after Wesley's death and during the period when Wesleyan Methodism moved from being a society of people within the Church of England to a Church in its own right. It was inevitable that the whole concept of ministry would be assessed and the role of female preachers would come under close examination. The stirrings of this move were seen in the Conference in Manchester in 1803 where the question of whether women should be permitted to preach was discussed. A resolution was passed which had long-term ramifications. The opinion of the Conference was that the "vast majority of our people are opposed to it and their (women's) preaching does not at all seem necessary, there being sufficiency of Preachers, whom God has accredited, to supply all the places in our

Connexion with regular preaching."¹²⁸ Women "who think they have an extraordinary call from God to speak in public... should address their own sex and those only" and conditions were set by which she may preach in a circuit.¹²⁹ In effect, the restrictions were designed to deter women from aspiring to preaching and for all practical purposes, female preaching had received official condemnation in less than a decade after Wesley's death.

Wesley's view that extraordinary situations demanded extraordinary actions led him by a series of events to embrace the ministry of exceptional women into the Methodist societies. The Methodist societies provided a conducive environment to empower women for public ministry which began with their usefulness in prayer and testimony and ended with their 'call' to formal preaching.

Both Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher and Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers show through their lives and ministry the leadership roles in which Methodist women could participate. Mary moved through the various levels in the Methodist society to eventually become a woman preacher of notoriety. She had displayed her ability as a band and class leader and as a pioneer in the setting up and directing of an orphanage and school. She went on to become a female preacher, and even after her marriage, she continued to participate in various roles. Never once did she go against the dictums of John Wesley, but she did challenge his views concerning women preachers and elicited from him a clear directive for her to continue in the work for

¹²⁸ *Minutes of Conference*, 1803. p.187 as quoted in Wesley F. Swift, 'The Itinerant Preachers of Early Methodism' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. XXXVIII, Part 5, March 1952, p. 89.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 89. There would be no authorising of preaching unless the woman had an extraordinary call. To be able to preach in any part of the Connexion the women 1. ...shall not preach in the Circuit where they reside, until they have obtained the approbation of the Superintendent and a Quarterly Meeting. 2 Before they go into any other Circuit to preach, they shall have a *written* invitation from the Superintendent of such a circuit, and a recommendatory note from the Superintendent of their own Circuit.

which she had received an 'extraordinary call'. In a sense, women such as Mary forced Wesley to rethink his position concerning the roles of women in the Church.

Hester, like Mary, progressed up the ladder of leadership. She was a capable band and class leader in her own right as well as fulfilling responsibly the ministry of sick visitor. As a minister's wife, she was called upon to take her part in these roles, and in her case, to an even greater degree. Wesley and her husband highly commend her for the results. One could speculate that she too may have become a woman preacher if she had lived longer. Nevertheless, she exemplifies the types of leadership roles to which a Methodist woman could aspire. Both Mary and Hester lived busy lives which were totally dedicated to Mr Wesley and his Methodism.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the typical Methodist woman was not only a member of the Church of England where attendance at Sunday services was required, but also, in addition to this Anglican piety, the Methodist woman attended society meetings one or more times weekly, where she heard the preaching of the itinerant and/or local preachers, some of whom were women. She sang the hymns of Charles Wesley and Watts, prayed with her fellow Methodists and socialized with the whole community. She attended special services each month or quarter, such as the love feast. In most societies there was a 5:00 a.m. prayer and preaching service daily, which women would attend as frequently as possible. She was a member of a class of twelve or more members where her own faith was nurtured in a free exchange of ideas with other Methodists, and in which she helped to nurture the faith of others. In addition, if she was spiritually advanced, she was a member of a weekly band or class meeting of three or more who sought to intensify their religious experience by

meditation, prayer, and sharing spiritual conversation and experience. It would appear that the religious practices of the typical Methodist woman described above would be ample. But many Methodist women did far more! The previous list may be described as the *ordinary piety* of the Methodist woman. But there were those women who assumed leadership roles or had experiences and practices which were not typical of, or expected of, all persons and these women we could describe as *extraordinary*.¹³⁰

The women considered in this thesis were in a sense 'out of the ordinary'. Their contribution to the growth of Methodism and their willingness to face opposition and continue to do what they believed God had called them to do is extraordinary. And even more extraordinary was John Wesley who provided them with the 'out of the ordinary' opportunities for leadership in the Methodist revival.

¹³⁰ *op. cit.*, Earl Kent Brown, p.236.

APPENDIX : A**MARY BOSANQUET - LETTER TO JOHN WESLEY, JUNE 1771**

Cross Hall, near Leeds, 1771

Very dear and Honoured Sir,

Various have been my hindrances in writing, but none sufficient to have kept me so long silent from you, had I not been at a loss on one particular subject. I wanted your advice and direction in an important point, viz to know if you approved my light in it. Yet I have been toss'd between the temptations of Satan and the arguments of men, that I really could not tell what I thought myself nor how to state the case fairly at all: but at present I think, both outward and inward circumstances tend to bring me to a crisis, and my light been [being] clearer, I will now open all my mind: and I feel a faith God will make you my Director in this thing, so as to remove my scruples one way of the other.

My soul desires peace & would follow after it with all, especially with God's children, and more particularly with those that act as heads among us. I would hold up their hands in every point that lays within the short limits of my power, and perhaps can say more strongly than many, I honour them for their works' sake. Yet that word of the prophets has oft come to my mind, "Woe is me that my mother has borne me a man of contention"; how painful is it to be forced to contend with those with whom one desires above all things to live in peace, is well known to you, Sir, by experience. My present situation is very peculiar--

When we first settled at Leytonstone, Sr. Ryan & I began with little kind of prayer meetings, and they were productive of a blessing. Afterwards, on coming to Yorkshire, Sr. Crosby, Br. S & I did the same now and then, till the people desiring us to come to such and such of their houses the number of these meetings increased so as to return sometimes three or four times a week; the numbers of persons that came to them increased also, hundreds of carnal persons coming to them, who would not go near a preaching-house; and it is enough to say God was with us and made it known by the effects in many places.

However, about a month ago, one of our preachers began to express great dislike to it in many ways. We conversed on it in a friendly manner and I asked him, if my abstaining from any more meetings in a particular place would satisfy him (tho' Mr. O had desired me to come there). He said no. He thought it quite unscriptural for a women to speak in the Church & his conscience constrained him to prevent it. We had a good deal more conversation but got no nearer, tho' were very friendly. Afterwards some others conversed with me on the same point, alledging the same objections and Satan strongly persuaded me to swallow them down altogether, and I found it very comfortable and easy to nature. However, on weighing the thing before the Lord, I think it appears to me thus: I believe I am called to do all I can for God, and in order thereto, when I am asked to go with Br. T. to a prayer meeting, I may both sing and converse with them, either particularly, or in general, according to the numbers.

Likewise when Br. T. goes to preach in little country places, after he has done, I believe I may speak a few words to the people and pray with them. Twice it has happened, thro' the zeal of the people, that they gave out a meeting in a preaching house, because they had no private house that

would hold the people, nor one quarter of them. When we came I was sorry, but could not tell what to do; hundreds of unawakened persons were there, & my heart yearned over them. I feared my Master should say, "Their blood will require of you." So after Br. T. had preached I spoke to them. I believe I may go as far as I have mentioned above. But several object to this in our own round, & out of it, saying, "A woman ought not to teach, nor take authority over the man." I understand that text to mean no more than that a woman shall not take authority over her husband, but be in subjection, neither shall she teach at all by using authority, she shall not meddle in Church discipline, neither order nor regulate anything in which men are concerned in the matter of the Church; but I do not apprehend it means she shall not entreat sinners to come to Jesus, nor say, Come, and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul.

Ob:--But the Apostle says, I suffer not a woman to speak in the Church--but learn at home. I answer--was not that spoke in reference to a time of dispute and contention, when many were striving to be heads and leaders, so that his saying, She is not to speak, here seems to me to imply no more than the other, she is not to meddle with Church Government.

Ob:--Nay, but it meant literally, not to speak by way of Edification, while in the Church, or company of promiscuous worshippers.

An:--Then why is it said, Let the woman prophesy with her head covered, or can she prophesy without speaking? or ought she to speak but not to edification?

Ob:--She may now and then, if under a peculiar impulse, but never else.

An:--But how often is she to feel this impulse? Perhaps you will say, two or three times in her life; perhaps *God* will say two or three time in a week, or day--and where shall we find the Rule for this? But the consequences (here I acknowledge is my own objection, that all I do is *lawful*, I have not doubt, but is it expedient? that, my dear Sir, I want your light in) but what are the consequences feared?

Ob:--Why, for forty that comes to hear the preaching, one hundred & fifty will come to your meetings. Will not this cause their hands to hang down?

An:--That only forty comes to preaching, I am sorry for, but that perhaps a hundred careless carnal sinners comes to our meetings (who would not otherwise hear at all) I am not sorry for, neither should I think this would make the hands of any sensible, gracious man hang down. He must know tis no excellence in us that draws them, but the novelty of the thing; and does it not bring many to preaching, let any impartial person judge.

Ob:--But a worse consequence than this is to be feared: will not some improper woman follow your example?

An:--This I acknowledge I have feared; but the same might be said of preachers that come out, will not some improper man follow them?

Ob:--But if an improper man comes out, the Church has power to stop his mouth, but you will not let yours be stopped.

An:--Yes, on the same condition I will. You would not say to him, no *man* must speak, therefore be silent; but only, *You* are not the proper man. Now

allowing women may speak, prove to me, it is not my personal call, and I will both lovingly and cheerfully obey.

Ob:--But is it safe to trust women to teach? Does not the Apostle say, She was first in the transgression, therefore let her take no authority, and does not Mr. Wesley observe, She is more easily deceived, and more easily deceives?

An:--He does, and there is much in it. On this supposition, the man's understanding is stronger, and his passions harder, consequently not so easily wrought on; and on the other hand, supposing the woman's understanding weaker, & her passions more tender, she is certainly more liable to be deceived; and probably speaking more to the affections than to the understanding, she is more likely to deceive; so far I allow. But may not all this objection be removed by this single caution: Let no woman be allowed to speak among the people any longer than she speaks and acts according to the Oracles of God; and while she speaks according to the truth she cannot lead the people into an error.

Ob:--Well, but is it consistent with that modesty the Christian religion requires in a woman professing godliness?

An:--It may be, and is, painful to it, but I do not see it inconsistent with it, and that for this reason: does not Christian modesty stand in these two particulars, Purity and Humility? 1st I apprehend it consists in cutting off every act, word or thought that in the least infringes on the purity God delights in. 2ndly in cutting off every act, word, and thought, which in the least infringes on *humility*, knowing thoroughly our own place, and rendering to every one their due. Endeavouring to be little, and unknown,

as far as the order of God will permit, and simply following that order, leaving the event to God. Now I do not apprehend Mary sinned against either of these heads, or could in the least be accused of immodesty, when she carried the joyful news of her Lord's Resurrection and in that sense taught the Teachers of Mankind. Neither was the woman of Samaria to be accused of immodesty when she invited the whole city to come to Christ. Neither do I think the woman mentioned in the 20th chapter of the 2nd Samuel could be said to sin against modesty, tho' she called the General of the opposite army to converse with her, and then (verse the 22nd) went to all the people, both Heads and others, to give them her advice and by it the City was saved. Neither do I suppose Deborah did wrong in publicly declaring the message of the Lord, and afterwards accompanying Barak to war, because his hands hung down at going without her.

Ob:--But all these were extraordinary calls; sure you will not say yours is an extraordinary call?

An:--If I did not believe so, I would not act in an extraordinary manner. I do not believe every woman is called to speak publicly, no more that every man to be a Methodist preacher, yet some have an extraordinary call to it, and woe to them if they obey it not.

Ob:--But do you believe you have this public call?

An:--Not as absolute as others, nevertheless, I feel a part of it, and what little I see to be my call, I dare not leave undone.

Ob:--But if the people are continually coming to your Meetings, they will not have time to attend the stated ones.

An:--That I have often thought of, and therefore, I know no place except home where I meet more than once a month, and sometimes not that, as there is so many places to go to, and that caution, not to multiply meetings, I see very necessary.

Now, my dear Sir, I have told you all my mind on this head, and taken the freedom to incroach a deal on your time and I find a liberty to say, I believe your exact direction I shall be enabled to follow, and shall be greatly obliged to you for the same.

Mr. Oliver is very desirous of our doing all the good we can; and indeed I am pained for the trouble he has had on our account. But it is not only on ours, for various difficulties have, I believe, interrupted some of his comfort this year; if he stays another year with us, I hope he will see more fruit of his labours: the Lord gives him a patient, loving spirit, and his preaching is very animating and profitable.

I praise my God I feel Him very near, and I prove His faithfulness every day, but I want to live as I do not, and to feel every moment that word, My God is my all. I am &c.

M.B.

According to Chilcote, the location of the original manuscript is unknown. Sarah Crosby copied her colleague's letter along with Wesley's response in her MS LETTERBOOK which is held at Duke University. A transcript was first published in Taft, *Scripture Doctrine of Women's Preaching* (1820), pp. 19-21. It would appear that Moore was unaware of this document.¹

¹ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, p. 172, footnote 4.

APPENDIX: B

TEXT OF A SERMON BY MARY FLETCHER

ACTS xxvii. 29.

They cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

The situation of the ship wherein Paul and his companions were, seems to me to illustrate the state and situation of many of us here.--We are told,--"There arose a tempestuous wind called, in that country, Euroclydon;"--a kind of hurricane, not carrying the ship any one way, but driving her backwards and forwards with great violence. So it is in general with those who enter on the voyage of life. Satan, who is called "the Prince of the power of the air, and who ruleth in the hearts of the children of disobedience," keeps the mind in a continual agitation. Sometimes they are sunk, and almost crushed, under a weight of care; and again raised high in the waves of some expected pleasure. One while they are filled with resentment, on account of some slight from a neighbour, or an unjust accusation from an enemy: while the mind is harassed with the imagination, how it shall be cleared. Sometime they are sunk, and almost crushed, under a weight of care; and again raised high in the waves of some expected pleasure. Sometimes the most idle and extravagant fancies so deeply involve it, that no message from heaven could find any more entertainment than the Saviour could find in the Inn at Bethlehem. By all this, the soul becomes restless, and knows not where it is, nor which way it is going. It does feel that it is in a state of probation, and that this trial is to fix its eternal lot. Dear souls, is not this the case with some of you? You do not know where you are,--you do not consider this may be your last night,

perhaps your last hour. Your eternal state will then be fixed for ever. If the Lord should call you this hour, are you ready? O, remember it is the word of Jehovah himself,--"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know,--my people do not consider." Again, do you know where you are going? Why, you are going "the broad way" that leads to heaven, and you do not know one step of it. You have not begun to walk therein, nor perhaps to think about it. "O that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end!" It may be you find a great many things to divert and take up your mind; it is employed by Satan from hour to hour. You are like the disobedient prophet, "asleep in the ship when a great storm lay upon them." You neither see nor know your danger. Are you the safer for this? Would not those who are awake cry out to such, "Awake, thou sleeper, and call upon thy God." Thou are on the very brink of destruction. Well then, permit me so to call upon you, lest when we meet at the great day, you should upbraid me, that I had once an opportunity of warning you, and that I did it but by halves; and so the blood of your souls shall be found in my skirts. I fear for many in this Parish. My soul oft weeps in secret for them, lest the word which to others proves "the savour of life," should to them become "the savour of death," and rise up in judgment against them.

But I hope you who are this night within the reach of my voice, are in a degree awakened, and most of you earnestly longing to be brought out of the storm into the quiet harbour of Jesu's breast. To these I chiefly feel my message to be, though I was not willing to leave the sleepers wholly disregarded. Well, let us see what they did in this great danger, that we may do likewise. Paul says,--"As we were exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day we lightened the ship, and the third day we cast out with our hands of the tackling of the ship. And as neither sun nor stars

appeared for many days, (which was the more terrible, the use of the compass not being discovered) and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was taken away." Observe, first, they lightened the ship;--lighten your hearts! There is too much of the world in them.--They cast out their merchandise,--cast away your idols! You will say, perhaps, "I cannot." True, I know you cannot yourselves; but if you will "call on the Lord in the time of trouble," He hath said, "I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me." If you will begin to pray in good earnest, and persevere therein, as the Lord is true, you shall know "the liberty of his children." and have power to "cast all your idols to the moles and to the bats." Well, but "on the third day they cast out the tackling of the ship;"-- the very thing which we might think they would have kept, in order to manage the vessel.--No, all must go! Cast away your false confidence in any thing of your own; despair of any help but from the Lord Jesus. Yet obey his word; "Look," remember he says, "Look unto me, and be saved," yea, "look unto him as the author and finisher of your faith." "Wait upon him;" and remember the mind is the mouth of the soul,--therefore, according as you feed your mind with thoughts, so will the state of your soul be discovered. "Look," I say, "unto him," and your soul shall ride out the storm.

And now a gleam of hope appear. Paul stood up and said, "Be of good courage,--for there shall be no loss of any life among you. The Angel of that God, whose I am, and whom I serve, stood by me this night, and said, Fear not, Paul, thou must be presented before Caesar, and, lo, I have given thee all them that sail with thee."--So may hope spring up to thee this present moment, whether thou art a backslider, or one of the ship's company, who till this very hour hast been fast asleep; but if now awake, if now in earnest, and willing to be saved,--come a step further yet, and observe what they did next.--"They cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for day.

"There is no day to the soul till Christ manifests his cheering presence. In order to wait for that, follow their example,--"they cast our four anchors."--Let us do so this night. Remember it is your part to "believe," and it is the Lord's to give the "peace and joy" consequent on believing. Let us then make repeated acts of faith, so "casting our anchor" further and further within the veil, and we shall draw up our souls nearer and nearer to God.

Well, let us try to cast out one anchor now. I am sensible your cable is short; therefore we must seek for some ground as *near* you as we can. We will try, if we can, to find it in the "Creating love of God," surrounding us on every side. Look through the creation,--observe the tender love of the birds towards their young, yea, even the most savage beasts! From whence does this spring? It is from God. It is a shadow of that infinite compassion which reigns in His heart. Rise a little higher. Fix your eye on man. How does he love a stubborn son who will neither serve God nor him? True, he frowns on him, and corrects him, lest it should be said to him as to Eli, "Thou preferrest thy son before me."--But if that son shed but a tear of sorrow,--raise but a sigh of repentance,--if he but come a few steps, how do the father's bowels yearn towards him! How doth he run to meet him! Now carry the idea a little higher;--are ye not the offspring of God? Has he not said, "I have created thee for my glory, I have formed thee for my praise?" Is not "his mercy over all his works?" Believe, then, "this Author of all love is more ready to give the Holy Spirit to you, than you are to give good gifts to your children." Will not this anchor take? Does it still come home? Well, the ground is good, but your cable is too short. Let us try another anchor;--and we will drop it on "Redeeming love."

Lift up your eyes of faith,--behold your bleeding Saviour! See all your sins laid on his sacred head! Behold him as your surety before the Throne, and

hear him plead,--"I have tasted death for every man. Thou, Father, wast in me, reconciling the world to thyself, not imputing their trespasses to them." I stood before thee charged with them all. If this poor soul, who cries for mercy, is deeply in debt to thee, "place it to my account; I will repay." Now venture on him! Venture freely. He hath drunk all the bitter cup for *you*, and he offers this night to take you into fellowship and communion with himself. "He was delivered for your offences!" He hath cancelled all the charge against you; yea, "He was raised again for your justification." Your surety is exalted, in proof that your debt is paid. Come, let me hear some voice among you giving praise, and saying with the Christian Poet,--

Now I have found the ground, wherein
Sure my soul's anchor may remain;
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin,
Before the world's foundation slain.

Methinks this anchor will hold.--Is there not an increase of hope? Harken! You shall hear his voice. Himself hath said, "Hear, O my people, and I will speak!" Heaven is never dumb, but when man hardens his heart. But, perhaps, there are some poor trembling souls still left behind. For the sake of such we will try to find firm ground a little nearer yet. We will drop the third anchor on the *Promises*. Here are some quite within your reach: "He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out. Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."--Yes,--"He came to seek and to save that which is lost." Are *you* lost? Lost in your own estimation? Then he came to *save you*. Yes, and to *seek* you too;--and he seeks you this night as diligently as ever shepherd sought his lost sheep. Will you be found of him? Yes, if you will believe in his love. Remember he "willeth not the death of a sinner; but had rather he

would turn from his wickedness and live." And though it should appear to thee as if a mountain stood in the way, yet this is the word of truth,--"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. Thou shalt say to this mountain, Depart; and it shall be done." There is no getting one step forward in the heavenly road without courage, or, in other words, faith; and I trust there are here many whose anchor has held in the first ground, "Creating love;" more in the second, "Redeeming love;" and surely trembling sinners have found some hold in the *Promises*. The "Word of God" is full of them, and they are all for *you*. All belong to a wounded conscience,--to sinners seeking the power of faith, to conquer their sins, and fling them to God. But yet I fear there may be a feeble-minded one who is still left behind, and I am unwilling any should remain in darkness, when Christ offers them light. But, perhaps, such will say,--"O, I am an ungrateful sinner. I have turned away my eyes from Jesus. The world, and the wild imaginations of my polluted affections have stolen between me and the Saviour. Once 'the candle of the Lord did shine upon my head.' But now he is gone; 'my beloved hath withdrawn himself; and I am again 'shorn of my strength,' and feeble as another man." Well, do not despair. Thy soul shall yet ride the storm. There is yet one anchor more, but it is possible you will not all admire it. Some will cry out, Is that all? O, it is too low. But let me tell you, low as you esteem it, because it seems within your reach, it will rise to the highest mansion in Heaven. It is, I own, a little dark at the first view, but the more you look upon it, the brighter it will grow. Remember it was the "sound of a ram's horn, and the shout of human voices," that shook the "mighty walls of Jericho." God delights to do things by little means.

The name then of my fourth anchor is *Resignation*, and there is a motto engraved thereon: "In quietness and confidence shall thy strength be." You that are asleep have nothing to do with this: but you who are awake, and

groaning for the salvation you have forfeited,--you are invited, nay, *commanded* to cast it out. You have fallen by a worldly spirit, and by indulging a busy and idolatrous imagination. Come, then, let this be the moment! Now cast your whole soul,--your everlasting concerns, on the free unmerited love of the Saviour, and live upon,--"Thy will be done!" Let your soul cry out, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Abandon yourself, as a victim, into his hand, and there lie as "clay before the potter." If you are tempted because you cannot pray, let this be your prayer,--let the constant cry of your heart be,--"Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven." And take knowledge, while you are so doing, your prayer is echoed by the highest Archangel in heaven, for the glory of that bright abode is a perfect resignation, fully consistent with the most faithful activity. You are permitted to pray,--"Father, let this cup pass from me;"--Yet, while you add, "Not my will, but Thy will be done," you join in spirit with the "Saviour and Captain of your salvation." I have often found, in an hour of temptation, when no other anchor seemed to hold, that thought, "The Lord reigneth,"--his will and glory shall be accomplished, and in that I will rejoice,--has brought peace, and laid the storm. Lie down at his dear feet, and remember, "Whom he loveth, he chasteneth, and correcteth every son whom he receiveth." He brings your sins to your remembrance, that your soul may be brought to know its misery and wants, and in order that he may burn them up with the purifying fire of his love. Take courage then, and, with one voice, let us all unite in the cry,--"Thy will be done! Thy will be done!" Here then drop the anchor. It is sound ground, and it will not come home. With this patient faith, therefore, be found in all the means of grace, walking humbly, while you do his will. "And pleading the promises, which are yea and amen in Christ. Blessed are all they who wait for him."

We read of Paul's company,--That "they cast out four anchors, and wished for the day." Do you the same, for that is a wish very pleasing to the Lord. I observed before,--That it is not day-light with the soul till that promise is accomplished: "I will manifest myself unto him." Here is the great design of the wonderful plan of salvation,--to restore man to his original communion with God; and he who hath said, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely,"--now waits to make your soul his loved abode, the temple of indwelling God. There is a rest which remains for the people of God; and you who love the Lord, remember, "He came not only that you might have life," but that "you may have it more abundantly." Cry, my beloved friends, day and night, that you may "enter into the land of uprightness, on which the eyes of the Lord are continually" from the beginning of the year to the end. But when the people of Israel slighted the rest of Canaan, and had lost that courage by which alone they could enter,--how greatly did it offend the Lord! And will he approve lazy, dull seekers of that spiritual Canaan, that "Baptism of the Spirit" to which every believer is expressly called? We often talk of the time when "righteousness is to overspread the earth," but this millennium must overspread our own hearts, if we would see the face of God with joy. For the very end of our creation is, that we may become "the habitation of God through the Spirit."

This text has been copied from Moore, *The Life of Mary Fletcher*, pp. 292-302 and is the only extant sermon of its type.²

² iA copy of Mary Fletcher's sermon is also found in Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Female Preachers of Early Methodism*, pp. 321-327.

APPENDIX: C

Rules and Observations for Forming Good Societies

-- MARY FLETCHER

Firstly, I recommend you be very careful whom you admit to your meeting. Consider no one as a member thereof who is not steadily seeking Christian perfection; that is, a heart simplified by love divine, and kept each moment, by faith, from the pollution of sin. Whoever agrees not with you on this point will greatly interrupt your design.

Secondly, See that you fix on your minds, - We come together to get our faith increased; and expect as much that our souls should be refreshed by our meeting as we do our bodies to be refreshed by God. Come with a lively expectation; and that your expectation may not be cut off, keep your spirit all the time in continual prayer; united prayer can never go unanswered. To use Mr Fletcher's example- many hands on the pump are like many hearts at prayer and the fountains of the great deep are opened.

Thirdly, Bear with each other's mistakes or infirmities in love. consider the members as if they were your own children. Satan will leave not one stone unturned to disunite you:-- but O remember, the characteristic of evangelical dispensation is,--

"Thy love that turns the other cheek;
The love inviolably meek,
Which bears, but conquers all."

Fourthly, Be well aware of that deadly poison, so frequent among professors, I mean evil speaking. It will cover itself under a thousand forms; and alas! how many sincere hearts swallow this gilded bait, before they know what they are about. Never repeat the fault of an absent person...speak not evil of dignities; neither king, nor yet any authority under him. Neither...spiritual teachers.

Fifthly, Hold fast the truth in pure conscience. Let not one spark of your light be put out. Though all teachers and the whole church turn against the truth, let nothing make you forget, *The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin*; and that he keeps that soul ever clear, who day and night hangs on him by simple faith.

Sixthly, "Be always ready to give an account to those that ask you a reason of the hope that is in you." --Let us pray for clear ideas of what we seek, and what we possess. Bear in mind, that to *perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord*, is no more that you have already promised (in baptism, confirmation and whenever you renew covenant by coming to the Lord's table). You have engaged to renounce the devil and all his work, pomps and vanities and this wicked world, and sinful lusts of the flesh, to believe all the articles of the Christian faith; to keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the day of your life.. Again, *to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves*" weigh the depth of these two expressions. Do they not imply *love made perfect*, or....Christian perfection?

Seventhly, Let your eye of faith be steadily fixed on your Living Head ...Abide then every moment in the living vine from whom you constantly draw your life.

Eightly, Consider yourselves as united by a holy covenant to God and to each other; aiming to advance the glory of God all you possibly can...let no one be discouraged from seeking Christian holiness, by anything they see in your life and conversation.

These rules are taken from

H. Moore. *The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher*, pp. 89-92

APPENDIX: D

Spiritual Letter of Hester Ann Roe

- Letter to Miss R., before she received sanctification

Last Thursday evening I was pleasingly surprised by a letter from my dear Miss R., who, I sometimes feared, had forgotten all her purposes and promises; and also all the blessings she so often received when we met in our Lord's name. I was glad to find my fears groundless; but much more pleased and thankful was I to find by the contents of your last, that your precious soul was still labouring up the hill of holiness. Go on, and prosper. Many are the trials we meet with on the way; yea, our Lord hath foretold us, that in the world we shall have tribulation, but in him, peace, which is the seal of cancelled sin.

I hope you keep a sense, yea, a clear sense, of pardon, at the worst of times, This is your privilege, and I am thankful you discern such beauty in holiness. O how sweet are those words, "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord!" You have cause to praise God for the knowledge he has given you of nature's depravity. It is very good and profitable to know our sinful tendencies. O my dear, be very watchful against little things, and "keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life and death." Let God have your first thoughts; let him be first in your affections; so shall your words and works please him" for, what are all our works to him, unless they spring from love? Daily entreat him to take away all opposition that remains in your will to his providential order; so shall you find rest in those circumstances which otherwise would give you much

uneasiness. The meditations of your heart leading to him; the affections of your soul cleaving to Jesus; your will sinking into his will: — here is the rest of the saints! while all that is within you calls your Jesus King. "Whatsoever ye ask in my name," saith your adorable Redeemer, "you shall receive." Ask then, my dear friend, for a greater power of faith; for, as you believe, so will you increase in every grace of his Spirit; and your soul will more and more centre in God, till you become one spirit with him, who is the life of all living; yea, the very essence of heaven itself!

"To his meritorious passion
All our happiness we owe;
Pardon, uttermost salvation,
Heaven above, and heaven below;
Grace and glory from that open fountain flow."

To the bosom of our Almighty Jesus I commend you. O May his face always shine upon you, and his loving Spirit fill your soul! Pray much, and you shall attain all the salvation you desire.

I am yours, in bonds of divine love,

H.A. Roe

This text has been copied from *The Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers*, pp. 123 - 124.

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