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EDITORIAL

I have just been reading the draft response of the American Baptist Churches to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Document of the W.C.C. It offers this confession about the ministry of women: 'We cannot claim that full equality for women is a reality in our denominational life. Nevertheless, we are experiencing the full ministry of women (i.e. at every level) as a matter of recognizing God's liberty, and our mutuality and equality in Christ, and not as something that is optional or indifferent for the Church as a whole or for its ministry. The whole of our life in Christ is impoverished when women's gifts are denied or marginalized as they are in B.E.M.'s treatment of women's ordination'. No punches are pulled in that particular Baptist confession, in deference to Orthodox and Anglican consciences. But may be it is a confession we need to address to ourselves as well. Reflecting on the story told in the last number of the *Quarterly*, I cannot help thinking that this is an aspect of our life together where much has still to be worked at. Is there any other issue on which we have shaped our minds so slowly. Perhaps too

slowly. When you reflect that Miss Gates began her pastorate at Little Tew in 1918, and that the Baptist Union Council offered its judgment on the legitimacy of ordaining women more than forty years ago, have we really built upon those pioneering decisions? Or have we, for example, been overtaken by the Methodists, who first ordained women as recently as 1974, in assimilating the making of a decision into part of the living experience of the Church?

The Church of Jesus Christ can never live outside of the human culture in which God has placed it, nor should those who follow an Incarnate Christ seek such a separation. Deborah Valenze, in her *Prophetic Sons and Daughters, Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial Society* (308pp Princeton University Press \$27.70) offers a fascinating study of how Wesley allowed women experiencing 'an extraordinary call' to speak publicly, of how his female preachers domesticated the pastoral office, enabling it to embrace all the concerns of cottage religion and neighbourhood evangelism, of how the Wesleyan body, seeking after Wesley's death a greater denominational respectability, finally decided in 1803 not to appoint any further women preachers. But what respectable Wesleyanism tried to phase out soon reappeared even more strongly amongst the sectarian Methodism of the Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians and other smaller groups, espousing a cottage-based popular faith, becoming both a significant mark of spiritual religion's refusal to be straight-jacketed by institutional prescription, as also a mechanism for attacking the everyday demands of hierarchical society, whether in areas of depressed upland agriculture or in emergent industrial villages. Although sometimes sociological modelling may tend to obscure the story Dr Valenze has to tell, the story is an important one too long neglected by historians. Quite naturally the tensions of the new sectarianism are construed as a reaction to the tightening ministerial control of the Wesleyan body, but one wonders what its impact was on Baptists of the period for whom the Bible Christian preacher, Anne Mason, seems to have had some sympathy. In due time, sectarian Methodism also turned away from female preaching: 'widespread chapel worship removed women from their central place in cottage religion while assigning them to a *domus* that was no longer a true centre of labouring life... Working-class sisters lost the power to speak - in both domestic and public spheres - that came through the pulpit!'

It seems that you cannot say something about ministry without, consistently, at the same time making a judgment on membership. Scrawled on the walls of an American seminary, it is said, were found these words from the hand of a frustrated female seminarian; 'If the church refuses to ordain us, it needs to stop baptizing us'. If we pride ourselves as standing for a churchmanship committed to the 'priesthood of all believers', the priesthood of all the baptised, we need to ask whether in practice we are in fact more sacerdotal than we dare admit, in the limitation put by many of our churches on ministry, divorcing it from the vocation of baptism? Or is it that we are quite happy to train and ordain women as long as *other* churches call them to be their pastors?