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## Female Piety in Eighteenth-Century Scotland

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Although more than half the population of early modern Scotland was female, and women predominated within the life of the Church in Scotland,<sup>1</sup> they were often ‘treated as peripheral and unimportant.’<sup>2</sup> Part of the problem that historians have encountered in examining female piety in this period however, has been the lack of primary evidence. Like laymen, women received scant attention from clerical writers. However, Houston is wrong in saying that there are ‘no surviving diaries or autobiographies written by lower-class females’.<sup>3</sup> The diaries of Mary Somervell<sup>4</sup> who died in 1762; Marion Laird,<sup>5</sup> born in 1722; Elizabeth West,<sup>6</sup> writing from 1694 to 1708, along with the testimonies of women converted during the Cambus-

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- 1 Female Cambuslang converts in 1742 outnumbered men by two to one. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1989), 26. Clive Field shows that Methodist membership lists reveal that Methodism contained an average proportion of 57.7 per cent female membership over the period 1759–1832 throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Clive Field, ‘The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: a membership analysis’ *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 76 (1) 1994, 153–69. David L. Wykes also demonstrates the high proportion (7:3) of females among Presbyterian members of the Great Meeting, Leicester, 1711–25. *Lay Religious beliefs: the spiritual testimonies of early eighteenth-century Presbyterian communicants*. See [www.le.ac.uk/hl/teaching/papers/wykes1.html](http://www.le.ac.uk/hl/teaching/papers/wykes1.html).
  - 2 R. A. Houston, ‘Women in the Economy and Society of Scotland, 1500–1800’ 118. Patricia Crawford notes that ‘not all historians of women have studied female religious beliefs.’ *Women and Religion 1500–1720* (London, Routledge, 1993), 4.
  - 3 *Ibid.* 119.
  - 4 *A Clear and Remarkable Display of the Condescension, Love, and Faithfulness of God in the Spiritual Experiences of Mary Somervell* (Paisley, 1789).
  - 5 *Memoirs of the Life and Experiences of Marion Laird, an unmarried woman in Greenock . . . to which is subjoined forty-seven Religious letters* (Glasgow, 1775).
  - 6 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West* (Edinburgh, ND).

lang revival of 1742,<sup>7</sup> provide strong evidence of a vibrant piety among women from lower-class backgrounds.

The Protestant Reformation both expanded and diminished women's opportunities. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers brought a note of egalitarianism that emphasized their spiritual equality before God. The rediscovery of justification by faith, encouraged women to seek the salvation of their souls and to engage in the life of the Christian community. Richard Sibbes, the Puritan preacher, once said that 'for the most part women have sweet affections to religion, and therein they oft go beyond men.'<sup>8</sup> However, the actual gender roles of men and women were generally unaltered by religion in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries<sup>9</sup> and the Reformation message did not promote a greater role for women in Church or society. The one possible exception to this was the Anabaptist movement, a community where women as well as men<sup>10</sup> were committed to lives of costly discipleship, at times 'contravening common societal restrictions on their gender' in both the Church and society of their times.<sup>11</sup> Goertz says that 'the notion of the priesthood of all believers' was 'enacted with particular zeal . . . . The laity, both men and women, began to take over priestly ministries, preaching, celebrating communion and baptising . . . . Women engaged in corner preaching and evangelism.'<sup>12</sup> Such a revolutionary message did not, how-

7 McCulloch Mss (New College, Edinburgh). In 1847, the Revd D MacFarlane, Free Church Minister in Renfrew, published a selection of the testimonies, although they underwent significant alteration as a result of his editing: *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1847). The original manuscripts are now housed in the New College Library in Edinburgh. For a fuller discussion on the Cambuslang Revival see Kenneth B. E. Roxburgh, *Thomas Gillespie and the Origins of the Relief Church in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Peter Lang, Bern, 1999).

8 Richard Sibbes, *Works* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1962-3), 2.520.

9 Martin Luther was traditional in his views on women, considering them as creatures to be inferior to men, with limited abilities. See Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell, 'The Matrix of Reform: Women in the Lutheran and Calvinist Movements' in Richard L. Greaves, ed., *Triumph over Silence* (London, Greenwood Press, 1985), 13-44. 'God has assigned to them the care of children and kitchen' cited by Clare Drury, 'Christianity', in Jean Holm and John Bowker, eds. *Women in Religion* (London, Pinter, 1994), 39. John Calvin did not think that women should assume any functions which were the domain of ministers, such as preaching, administering the sacraments or participating in congregational decision making. According to Ian Maclean women were 'the inferior of the male by nature, his equal by grace.' See *The Renaissance of Women: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, 1980), 1.

10 See C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Pandora Press, 1995) especially chapter 18 on 'Equality in the Community of Saints' 253ff.

11 *Ibid.*, 269.

12 Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists* (Routledge, 1997), 114-117.

ever, penetrate the Scottish Kirk.

In Scotland, John Knox wished that both women and men should receive a basic education in reading and writing, so that as many people as possible should be able to read the Bible.<sup>13</sup> The structure of parish schools was intended to promote literacy throughout society.<sup>14</sup> Although the actual literacy rates among women were lower than those of men, greater opportunities to read the scriptures encouraged the spiritual pilgrimage of both genders, even among females who were poor.<sup>15</sup> Mary Somervell, whose mother and father had both died when she was just ten years of age, speaks of her desire at that young age to 'learn and know the scriptures,' a longing which had its origins in 'family worship before breakfast'.<sup>16</sup> Marion Laird mentions reading the writings of Thomas Boston, Andrew Gray and John Owen,<sup>17</sup> while Elizabeth West refers to John's Bunyan's *Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Samuel Rutherford's *Letters* and other theological and devotional works.<sup>18</sup> The reading indicates a theology that was firmly linked to the Scottish Calvinism which prevailed in 17th and 18th century Scotland. Thus Mary Somervell speaks of her conversion as 'the Lord opened the door of my heart, and captivated my affections to himself.'<sup>19</sup> Yet their theological reflections were anything but mundane. Elizabeth West tells of how she 'got a new dis-

13 Kay Carmichael comments that 'literacy was linked with salvation.' 'Protestantism and Gender' in Graham Walker and Tom Gallagher, eds. *Sermons and Battle Hymns* (Edinburgh, John Donald, 1990), 218.

14 Lesley Macdonald indicates that 'the emphasis on literacy, and right to read Scriptures for oneself, was potentially revolutionary for females, who were not excluded from Knox's desire to bring education to all the people of Scotland.' Lesley Anne Orr Macdonald, *Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland c 1830 to c 1903*, (Edinburgh PhD thesis, 1995), 25. Michael Lynch estimates that 'There were probably at least 700 schools in early seventeenth-century Scotland'. The mounting evidence suggests quite widespread provision of a basic education, in reading if not in writing.' Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, Century, 1991), 259. Elizabeth West was educated at home by her mother and aunt 'who was a godly woman and took great pains on me.' *Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 1.

15 By the mid-sixteenth century women had drawn level with men in literacy, although a hundred years later they had fallen behind. Female illiteracy was reduced by a third between 1640 and 1770, while men's illiteracy was halved during the same period. See Houston, 'Women in the Economy and Society', 136. Rosalind Marshall believes that 'women were not long behind men in learning to write' Rosalind K. Marshall, *Virgins and Viragos* (London, Collins, 1983), 55. See also 125.

16 *A Clear and Remarkable Display* 8.

17 *Memoirs of the Life and Experiences of Marion Laird* 103, 125 and 245.

18 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 20, 70. She also mentions Andrew Gray's book on the 'Precious Promises' and Wedderburn on the 'Covenant' 68.

19 *A Clear and Remarkable Display*, 5.

covery of a Trinity of Persons, and yet an Unity in essence' during a time of meditation and prayer.<sup>20</sup>

The vast majority of these women were attached to the Established Church of Scotland, although at least two had connections to the Covenanting movement of the 17th century. In 1682/3 members of Mary Somervel's family were thrown out of their farm because of their associations with the Covenanting movement and although she never left the Church of Scotland, she 'favoured the covenanted work of reformation'.<sup>21</sup> Marion Laird, born in 1722, grew up within the Church of Scotland, although by the 1740s had joined the Secession movement and speaks of her grief at seeing 'so few owning a covenanted-work of reformation'.<sup>22</sup> In 1697 Elizabeth West, speaks of a friend complaining about the ministers of the Church of Scotland who 'were not like the Ministers in late Presbyterian Times' and although she attended some services in the Canongate-Tolbooth church, she remained unconvinced that they were 'righter than all the Ministers of the Church of Scotland'.<sup>23</sup> All three women, in their own way, demonstrated firm convictions that were based upon their own free choice.

Their religious experiences often began at a very early age. James Robe, parish minister of Kilsyth, writes of 'a child of six' who was asked 'what she would give to get Christ' and who answered 'with a great deal of composure, "I will part with my life to have him."' <sup>24</sup> Mary Somervel recalls one occasion of family worship, when she was only five years of age, and she had 'such joy and delight in the time of singing the psalms, that I said within myself "O that they would sing an hour", I felt such sweetness, joy and pleasure in the exercise of praise, that I had no desire for bodily food that day.'<sup>25</sup>

Often, the early expression of piety was formed within the context of family worship. Calvinistic piety stressed the importance of family devotions,<sup>26</sup> and viewed the family as 'a little church'.<sup>27</sup> Family worship was revived in eighteenth-century Evangelicalism and consisted of morning and evening scripture reading, prayer, and psalm

20 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 21.

21 *A Clear and Remarkable Display*, iv.

22 *Memoirs of the Life and Experiences of Marion Laird*, 25.

23 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 95-6.

24 *The Christian History for 1743* (Boston, 1744), Vol. 39, 304.

25 *A Clear and Remarkable Display*, 6.

26 Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Piety of Cotton Mather* (Christian University Press, 1979), 128.

27 Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety* (University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 144.

singing.<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth West was so concerned about the spiritual condition of her own family that she spoke to her father about the absence of 'the worship of God in his family and desired him to do it, but 'I did not prevail with him.'<sup>29</sup> Thomas Gillespie, founder of the Relief Church, followed this pattern and encouraged 'all Christian families, twice a day . . . to meet before the Throne of Grace and pray for one another . . . for the whole Church of Christ and every individual member of it.' The climax of a praying community will come 'every Lord's Day, when . . . the whole Church . . . are solemnly praying . . . and their prayers are of the greatest weight and efficacy for the good of the Church.'<sup>30</sup>

This corporate expression of spirituality had an impact upon individual piety. When she was ten years old, Mary Somervell 'engaged in my poor, weak prayers at night by the side of the house, when the rest were in bed and my soul was filled with the sweet impressions of the love of God.'<sup>31</sup> One of the features of the revival in Kilsyth, and elsewhere, was the way in which children, male and female, between the years of ten and sixteen, often met in their own prayer meetings, under the supervision of the minister.<sup>32</sup>

Another characteristic of popular piety in the 18th century was the resurgence of interest in societies of prayer, with an active female participation.<sup>33</sup> Religious societies, meeting for prayer, Bible reading and Christian fellowship, were encouraged by John Knox as early as 1557.<sup>34</sup> During the troubled years of the 'killing times' the Covenanters advocated the use of such house meetings as a means of strength-

28 John T. McNeill says that 'twice daily families were enjoined to observe periods of prayer' See *A History of the Cure of Souls* (London, 1952), 252. Lovelace makes the comment that within Moravian piety 'Francke . . . made the institution of family worship part of his reformation in the community at Halle.' *Cotton Mather*, 128.

29 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 35.

30 Thomas Gillespie, *Aberdeen Sermons*, Aberdeen University Library, MS159 145.

31 *A Clear and Remarkable Display*, 7.

32 Robe speaks of how he was 'informed that several young girls in the town of Kilsyth, from ten to sixteen years of age, had been observed meeting together for prayer.' James Robe, *A Short Narrative of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God at Cambuslang* (Glasgow, 1790), 72. George Murie from Edinburgh speaks of there being between twenty four and thirty societies in and around Edinburgh and of how among that number 'there are several meetings of boys and girls.' *The Christian History for 1743*, 271.

33 For a fuller description of Religious Societies and their impact on the Evangelical Awakening in Scotland see Kenneth B. E. Roxburgh, 'The Scottish Evangelical Awakening of 1742 and the Religious Societies' *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, Vol. 5 No. 5 (November 1994), 266-273.

34 D. Hay Fleming, 'The Praying Society of St. Andrews' *The Original Secession Magazine* XIV. (1879-80), 38-39. See *The Life of Knox*, ed. Thomas McCrie. (Edinburgh, 1855), 349-352.

ening the faith and spiritual resolve of their people. James Renwick, in his last speech and testimony, counselled his friends to 'be careful in keeping your societies'.<sup>35</sup> Many of these societies held their regular meetings in private houses on weekdays<sup>36</sup> for the purpose of scripture reading, prayer, fellowship, discussion of theological and practical subjects, and the sharing of spiritual experiences.<sup>37</sup> They were designed for the members' spiritual nourishment and discipline.

Marion Laird mentions that her 'societies' had appointed a 'day of fasting' in 1743 and Elizabeth West refers to the Saturday night prayer meeting of their Society.<sup>38</sup> Although it was certainly usual in smaller rural communities for men and women to meet together in these societies, it became the custom for the sexes to be segregated.<sup>39</sup> James Robe, minister of Kilsyth writes that he 'obliged men and women to meet in different societies' in one area of the parish although in another, the men and women met together because 'most of the men are aged and married.'<sup>40</sup> Robe was apparently concerned that younger men and women, meeting in such a context, would experience sexual temptations.

However, within the structure of Scottish piety, the high-light of the spirituality of women as well as men, was the communion season: not only for those who took the elements, but also for the hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of hearers who often attended several sacramental festivals during the summer months.<sup>41</sup> During 1701, Elizabeth West attended communion seasons in Ratho, Linlithgow, Lasswade, the West kirk and Tron kirk in Edinburgh, Dalkeith and Inverkeithing.<sup>42</sup> The connection between the sacrament and spiritual awakening, where the communion season became a 'converting ordinance' in the experience of many who attended, can be traced back to the 1630's and is best exemplified in the revival at Shotts.<sup>43</sup> Thus Thomas Boston, parish minister of Etrick in the Scottish Borders,

35 *The Life and Letters of James Renwick*, ed. W. H. Carlsaw. (Edinburgh, 1893), 261.

36 Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1971), 66.

37 John Hepburn, *Rules and Directions for Fellowship-Meetings* (Edinburgh, 1756), 3.

38 *Memoirs of the Life and Experiences of Marion Laird*, 26. *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 120-21, 174.

39 Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 66-68.

40 *The Christian History containing Accounts of the Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great Britain, America, etc. for the Year 1744* (Boston, 1745), 179.

41 See Leigh Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, 1989).

42 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 149, 152, 153, 156, 169, 171.

43 Robert Fleming recalls that 'near five hundred had at that time a discernible change wrought on them, of whom most proved lively Christians afterward.' *The Fulfilling of Scripture*, (Edinburgh, 1850), 1.355.

who regularly spoke of such occasions, described them as 'sweet gospel day[s],' 'great days[s] of the gospel,'<sup>44</sup> or 'sweet time[s] of the gospel'. Robert Wodrow speaks of the 'fair-days of the Gospel'<sup>45</sup> indicating that through the drama of the word and sacrament, many people were reborn and revived, as sinners were converted and believers were renewed in their faith.<sup>46</sup> Marion Laird speaks of how these 'Sacramental solemnities were, for the most part, very refreshing to her, sometimes like the suburbs of heaven.' Later in her memoirs she speaks of the anticipation she felt when she heard that the 'sacrament was to be dispensed at Stirling; at which I was very glad' I looked for a refreshing time at the sacrament.<sup>47</sup> Leigh Schmidt comments that 'the egalitarian potentialities of this love feast could affect women in particular' [they] did not have to serve men their food, wait upon them, and clean up after them; all were Christ's guests equally at his table.<sup>48</sup>

For evangelicals, the communion seasons focused the piety of the faithful, on the cross of Calvary. One young woman of nineteen, converted at Cambuslang, spoke of how the celebration of the Lord's Supper led her to see 'Jesus Christ in his bloody sweat in the garden, and suffering on the cross, and apprehended that all these sufferings were for me and my sins.'<sup>49</sup> For Marion Laird, the sacramental in Glasgow in 1754, enabled her to 'behold his love shining in a cup of red wine'.<sup>50</sup> Later on, when she was too ill to attend the Lord's Supper, she remembered 'the fair days of the Son of man that I had seen' and 'found a vehement desire in my soul to be at the ordinance again, to behold his glory there.'<sup>51</sup>

The communion seasons enabled many women, overwhelmed with the thought of the majesty and mystery of a sovereign God which so often dominated Scottish preaching, to become aware of the immanent closeness of Christ, their saviour, friend and lover. Indeed, many women used vivid, almost erotic language, to describe their relationship with Christ. The reason for this is undoubtedly because of the

44 Thomas Boston, *A General Account of my Life* ed. G. Low. (London, 1908), 46.

45 Robert Wodrow, *The Correspondence of the Rev. Robert Wodrow* (Edinburgh, Wodrow Society, 1842-3), 1.55.

46 George Wemyss in his Preface to John Spalding, *Synaxis Sacra* (Glasgow, 1750) speaks of 'Communion in Scotland' as being 'for the most part very solemn, and . . . many hundreds, yea thousands in this land, have dated their conversion from some of these occasions.' viii.

47 *Memoirs of the Life and Experiences of Marion Laird*, ii, 26.

48 Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 105.

49 McCulloch Manuscripts, Mss 1:230.

50 *Memoirs of the Life and Experiences of Marion Laird*, 38.

51 *Ibid.*, 102.

way in which the Song of Songs, and other scripture passages were used, both by the Seceders, Samuel Rutherford and ministers in the Cambuslang Revival, to describe the intimacy of fellowship between Christ and the believer.<sup>52</sup> For this reason, the love for Christ which Catherine Cameron experienced was expressed in terms of ravishing love in which she was willing to 'give up my whole soul and body to him . . . and my heart was in a flame of love to him . . . I came home from that Sacrament with Christ in my arms.'<sup>53</sup> For Elizabeth West, the communion season of 1696 in the College kirk in Edinburgh, led her to declare 'I this day take thee to be my husband and Lord, and I to be thy married spouse.'<sup>54</sup> Schmidt concludes that 'for women, the consummate experience in the sacrament, that of union with the Bridegroom or marriage to Christ, was indeed powerfully transformative, yet at the same time essentially continuous with their identity as women.'<sup>55</sup>

Richard Sibbes believed that 'religion is strongly seated in the affections; and women have sweet and strong affections.'<sup>56</sup> According to N. H. Keeble, this led Puritan spirituality to 'delight[s] in the amorous and sensory'<sup>57</sup> and allow women to express their spirituality in such intimate terms.

Along with other converts during the Cambuslang awakening, many women experienced and expressed their piety in unconventional ways. McCulloch's accounts of the testimonies of converts provides a wealth of material about the religious experiences of ordinary men and women who came under the influence of the revival.<sup>58</sup> The similarity of structure throughout the two volumes suggests that the converts were responding to a common set of questions regarding

52 See sermon by Ralph Erskine on 'The Best Match: The Incomparable Marriage between the Creator and the Creature' *The Practical Works of the Rev Ralph Erskine* (Glasgow, 1776), 1.145ff. Richard Sibbes, the Puritan preacher, often instructed his hearers to respond to Christ as their Bridegroom, with the hope that Christ would 'kiss her with the kisses of his mouth.' Sibbes, *Works* ed. A. B. Grossart, (Edinburgh, 1962-4), 2:203. Samuel Rutherford's writings contained language which the *Dictionary of National Biography* described as 'sometimes coarse and indelicate.'

53 McCulloch Mss 1: 327, 335, 343.

54 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 38.

55 Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 165.

56 Sibbes, *Works*, 6:520.

57 N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity* (Leicester, 1987), 213.

58 Several studies have examined the documents in some detail including Ned Landsman, 'Evangelists and their hearers: Popular Interpretation of Revivalist Preaching in 18th Century Scotland' in *Journal of British Studies* 28 (April 1989), 120-149; Stewart Mechie, 'The Psychology of the Cambuslang Revival' in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* X (1950), 171-185.

their education, religious upbringing, the circumstances of their conversion and the lasting effects of the revival on their lives.

There were several 'means of grace' which brought relief and comfort to those under spiritual distress. One young woman of eighteen, testified to the way in which a verse from scripture appeared to come into her mind 'with greater power and light than almost any word ever I had met with,' which brought a conviction that 'it was from the Spirit of the Lord'.<sup>59</sup> On other occasions the singing of Psalms<sup>60</sup> not only played a part in convicting some people of their sins,<sup>61</sup> but also was a vehicle of spiritual joy.<sup>62</sup> Although most of the narrators neither experienced visions nor heard voices, there were several who found comfort from this source, some even believing that they heard the voice of Christ speaking to them.<sup>63</sup> It was a sight of the crucified Christ 'standing with outstretched arms of mercy, ready to receive' which brought comfort to Catherine Cameron.<sup>64</sup> Passages which referred to visions or fainting spells were regularly excised, including the passage in which a convert had declared 'I never fainted or swarfed, nor did I ever see any visions.'<sup>65</sup> Four parish ministers, Alexander Webster, John Willison, Thomas Gillespie and James Ogilvie, to whom McCulloch sent the manuscripts for their comments and suggestions, carefully marked most references to superstitious and sensational experiences for deletion prior to any possible publication.<sup>66</sup> In this way, the clergy, all male, were able to censor the spirituality of the laity, especially, it appears, those who were female.

Thomas Gillespie, one of the most incisive editors of the testimonies, was afraid that scripture, which he believed was the only 'object and ground of all divine faith' would be displaced by 'immediate revelations,' which he was convinced were nothing more than 'human fancy'.<sup>67</sup> Gillespie was aware that the issue of voices and

59 *Ibid.*, 1: 323.

60 John Willison had encouraged this because it 'helps excite and accentuate the graces; it is the breath of love or joy; it is the eternal work of heaven' *A Sacramental Directory* (Edinburgh, 1716), 100.

61 McCulloch Mss 2:9-15 (Janet Barry); 2:447 (Margaret Clark).

62 *Ibid.*, 2:351ff. (Mary Colquhoun) 2:480-81 (Jean Wark).

63 *Ibid.*, 1:325; 1:339;

64 *Ibid.*, 1:320.

65 McCulloch Mss 1:283.

66 Arthur Fawcett suggests the order of Webster, Gillespie, Willison and Ogilvie *Cambuslang Revival*, 7. However the order in which the marginal editorial marking occurs is consistent with the above order. See especially 1: 514 where there is an indication that Webster, Willison and Gillespie edited the Mss and then Webster once again read them over before finally handing them on to Ogilvie.

67 Gillespie, *An Essay on the Continuance of Immediate Revelations of Fact and Future Events in the Christian Church* (Edinburgh, 1771), 5.

visions was not new to Scottish Presbyterians. The days of the Covenantors had been filled with tales of supernatural signs. In answering the argument from history, Gillespie believed that it was entirely possible for the devil to be active in these impressions, or that they may well have their origins in the human imagination.<sup>68</sup>

Many women testified to an overwhelming sense of joy which they experienced as they became assured of God's love towards them, despite their sense of unworthiness due to sin. Mary Somervel speaks of how 'an extraordinary gale of the Spirit from on high came upon me with power and life, and filled every corner of my heart, and awakened and moved all my affections heavenward.'<sup>69</sup> One woman, from Cambuslang, aged twenty, noted that 'my heart was now so overcharged with joy, that I could no longer contain, but got up on my feet and cried out aloud.'<sup>70</sup> Another women of nineteen speaks of how she 'was made to cry out with joy'. This frame continued about a day and a half.<sup>71</sup> James Robe, one of the leaders of the revival, never claimed that such expressions of joy were infallible marks of the work of the Spirit. Rather, he simply maintained that 'they are not inconsistent with a Work of the Spirit of God upon the Soul' and even flow naturally from it.<sup>72</sup>

The question of dreams was raised by testimonies such as one given by a girl of fourteen who spoke of 'a dream, in my sleep, when I thought I saw, as it had been a coal-pit before me, and a beast drawing me into that pit, and a great darkness round about me.'<sup>73</sup> Mary Somervel 'dreamed a dream, and thought I saw a woman going through the streets, in the most vile and loathsome condition imaginable'. for many days the impression of this woman went not from my mind and many sweet meditations got I from it . . . what I was by nature . . . [and] what Christ had done for me.'<sup>74</sup> Thomas Gillespie expressed an opinion that 'most dreams are the vain rovings of the imaginations occasioned by our thoughts and pursuits when awake', although they could also be 'the effect of the agency of good or evil spirits'.<sup>75</sup> Gillespie was concerned that the devil was using these means to deceive men and women into a false sense of assurance, based upon their feelings rather than faith in the promises of Christ.

68 *Ibid.*, 14.

69 *A Clear and Remarkable Display*, 33.

70 McCulloch Mss. 1:185.

71 McCulloch Mss. 1:232.

72 James Robe, *Third Letter to Mr James Fisher* (Edinburgh, 1743), 4-5, 14;

73 McCulloch Mss. 1:368.

74 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 77.

75 *Ibid.*, 15.

He was concerned that some people, who might have been awakened to their sinfulness, would draw false comfort from these impressions and thus 'fall short of real conversion'.<sup>76</sup> Gillespie was writing out of his own experience as a pastor, with a real concern for people like Elizabeth Jackson, when he commented on her testimony as someone who was taking comfort 'without believing in Christ' and thinking that 'the impressions of scripture on the mind . . . is the intimation of his love, a mistake others appear to fall into.'<sup>77</sup>

The leaders of the revival, while not denying the presence of such phenomena, tried to play down their significance by implying that the numbers of those affected were not as great as was claimed.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, they argued that the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting men and women of their sin was not limited to the mind and will, but also included the emotions. It was to be expected that these convictions would 'produce fears and sorrows' which would 'in some constitutions naturally produce such outward effects as are now objected to.'<sup>79</sup>

While the general attitude of these women towards the clergy was generally positive, they expressed criticism of ministers who were not faithful in their preaching. Marion Laird condemned ministers who supported 'the Act of Parliament concerning Capt. John Porteus. I cannot see it my duty to hear them [preach]'.<sup>80</sup> They gladly followed the spiritual direction of their ministers but also looked for spiritual counselling from other women. Marion Laird speaks of a 'a young woman of my acquaintance' who visited her 'in my trouble. I told her something of my case. She exhorted me to essay believing on the Son of God.'<sup>81</sup> In a similar way, Elizabeth West, tells of 'a godly comrade . . . we prayed frequently together.'<sup>82</sup> At Cambuslang, Janet Jackson, a young unmarried woman, often went to Jean Galbraith, whom she calls 'my experienced acquaintance', for help and advice.<sup>83</sup>

The evidence from these intimate accounts of the spiritual pilgrimage of ordinary women in the early eighteenth century indicates a vital piety, marked by a deep devotion to Christ. They fully shared in the experiences of the revival movement, although their numbers indicate that the revival affected females more than males. However,

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76 *Ibid.*

77 McCulloch Mss 1: 106

78 James Robe, *Third Letter*, 7.

79 Robe, *Ibid.*, 15.

80 *Memoirs of the Life and Experiences of Marion Laird*, 17-18.

81 *Ibid.*, 16.

82 *The Exercises of Elizabeth West*, 47.

83 McCulloch Mss. 1:32-3.

because of the patriarchal society in which they lived, their contribution to the overall spirituality of the Christian Church in Scotland was not often appreciated at the time and has not always been recognised in Christian history. Their chief responsibility was expected to be within the home and family, although the evidence suggests that several women were breaking out of this mould and discovering a role within the wider community of church and society.

### **Abstract**

Evidence from intimate accounts of the spiritual pilgrimage of ordinary women in the early eighteenth century indicates a vital piety, marked by a deep devotion to Christ. They fully shared in the experiences of the revival movement, although their numbers indicate that the revival affected females more than males. However, because of the patriarchal society in which they lived, their contribution to the overall spirituality of the Christian Church in Scotland was not often appreciated at the time and has not always been recognised in Christian history. Their chief responsibility was expected to be within the home and family, although the evidence suggests that several women were breaking out of this mould and discovering a role within the wider community of church and society.

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